

Market Street tribute to historic bandit/poet

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

STRAPPED to the streetlight in front of 1051 Market is an aluminum plaque, a foot wide and two feet high, screen-printed white with a red rule around these words, also in red:

SPLendor & DEATH

Underneath, in much smaller type: In memory of Victor Jara. Below that, even smaller: Pedestrian Contemplation Plaque.

It looks so much like nearby No Parking and No Stopping signs, it almost melts into the environment. And that's its purpose — sort of.

Reached by e-mail, Los Angeles artist David D. Maupin wrote, "The intention was to assume an 'official' kind of aesthetic, so people would trust the information's source as objective. Of course, it's not."

The 20 plaques Maupin has mounted elsewhere in San Francisco and in Oakland and Los Angeles commemorate people and events that appeal to him personally. They also push pedestrians to — well — contemplate the plaques. Perhaps not a lot do, as the Jara plaque went up months ago without fanfare. But once you notice it, it gets you thinking.

Victor Jara — Víctor Lidio Jara Martínez — was a singer, educator and political activist who was murdered in Chile right after Salvador Allende in the September 1973 coup.

Is there a Jara connection to 1051 Market? The Extra asked Maupin.

"Sort of indirectly," he wrote. "That plaque is where a museum of curiosities once was located; part of the museum's collection included what they claimed to be the decapitated head of Joaquin Murieta. Murieta was a famed bandit, according to some a Californian Robin Hood. 'Splendor and



PHOTO BY LENNY LIMJOCO

This low-key sign, put up by an L.A. artist, is supposed to look sort of official and make pedestrians stop, look and think about it.

Death' by Pablo Neruda is the most well-known account of Murieta's story/myth, and has been interpreted in song by many, including Victor Jara. Jara is as Murieta is, both a hero and a victim, thus the plaque's dedication to him."

Some Maupin plaques are tied more closely to their location.

One in San Francisco, at Justin Herman Plaza at the Embarcadero, reads "1986/1993, Mark Gonzalez vs. Justin Herman."

According to a 2003 posting in the online Skateboarder Magazine, "In '86, Mark Gonzalez ollied from the top of the wave [in the Vaillancourt Fountain] down to the big stage. Thus, The Gonz Gap was born. It instantly became a benchmark gap for the next decade, and in '93 Gonzalez became the first person to kickflip it."

Maupin's five Bay Area plaques, including the Jara dedication, were installed as

part of "International Waters," an exhibition mounted last summer by Steven Wolf Fine Arts at 49 Geary.

Maupin, who manufactures and installs all the plaques himself, hasn't had any complaints from authorities, he says, though he's had to replace a few that were taken or damaged.

"As a former graffiti writer, I understand how to be rather inconspicuous."

George's Gourmet Deli faces the Splendor & Death plaque, but owner Marvin Billatora, standing behind the counter making sandwiches and pouring coffee, pretty much ignores it.

"One day it was just there," he said. "I have no idea what it means. Sometimes customers ask and I just say, 'I don't know.'"

Maupin's other plaques can be seen at www.pedestriancontemplationplaque.com/main.html. ■

Each passenger trip costs Muni \$1.75, study shows

► CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

day in San Francisco, according to a 2004 County Transportation Authority survey. But only 17%, or 765,000 trips, are on public transit — 92% of those are on Muni, 8% on BART. Among the other 3.7 million travels, 2.8 million or 62% are by car; 892,000 or 20% are by foot; and 40,000 or 1% are on bikes.

"The Transit Effectiveness Project includes market research," Straus said. "We've already done a random phone survey of 575 S.F. residents asking whether they ride Muni and, if they don't, why they don't."

The project, which is analyzing Muni service and operations, has a \$2.4 million budget, Straus said, with funding from Prop E, which passed in 1999.

Straus gave good news and bad about Muni: It's a well-used system, with 205 annual rides per San Franciscan, almost double that of New York City residents, according to a 2004 National Transit Database. And Muni buses' cost-effectiveness — the operating cost per passenger trip — is lower than that of buses in New York, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Seattle or AC Transit in the East Bay. Muni's is \$1.75 per passenger trip; Seattle's is more than double, at \$3.58.

The bad is dismal: We may outshine those other areas, but since 1991 the cost per trip is up 30%; system productivity is down 19%; the cost per hour to run the system is up 12%. The average speed of all Muni vehicles hovers around 8 mph, just a fraction faster than in 1999.

Reliability — waiting time, trip time, dependability of schedules — is tanking. Late pull-outs from the terminal are way up. When Prop E passed, Muni met its schedules only 65% of the time. The goal was to push that to 85% by 2004. Last year, it still

was under 70%. Muni also was aiming at 85% headway adherence — the percentage of vehicles keeping consistent intervals, thus avoiding bunching and big gaps. But from 2001 to 2006, headway adherence rose only from 65% to 69%.

"This spring, when all the data are in, we'll have the second series of public workshops on the project," Straus said. Because the last major evaluation of Muni took place 25 years ago, he encouraged people who care about the transit system to attend meetings, contact the project with concerns, ask for presentations at neighborhood group meetings and check out the project Web site, www.sftep.com/files/TEPBriefingBookHighlights.pdf.

NEW IN THE 'HOOD

At the December Collaborative meeting, members were introduced to three new Tenderloin businesses: L.A. Café, 7x7 Deli & Market, and Chop It Up Barbershop. Bailey Williams of Ventura Partners, a real estate consulting firm that helps owners find tenants and incubates new businesses, made the introductions. It has offices at 456 Ellis and in Santa Cruz, and handles both TNDC and A.F. Evans portfolios, Williams later told The Extra.

Farhad Saiyed is the owner of Chop It Up at 141 Taylor, which opened Sept. 9 in a TNDC-owned building.

"This is my first business and all's going very well," he said, "except for all the people hanging out in front." He has three full-time employees and plans to hire three more for the combo barbershop-beauty salon.

L.A. Café opened Sept. 30 at 201 Turk, a building developed by A.F. Evans, which also holds the master lease. Anh Troung, who owns the cafe with husband Lien — hence the "L.A." — said she has one employee and family members help out

when things get busy. Her ambitious menu has 44 items, from omelets to grilled pork sandwiches to pho, plus an array of beverages and side orders.

The 7x7, at 476 Eddy, another TNDC building, is still being rehabbed and isn't open yet, Williams said.

"The business owner had a thrift store and then another deli at this same site," Williams said. "But he's changing the focus to provide halal meats to the Muslim community." ■

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