

By Hector Tobar  
*August 27, 2010*

Christopher Slatoff makes art that's meant to last an eternity — bronze sculptures that grace churches and museums across L.A. and beyond.

Hector Calderon makes art that can disappear from one day to the next — frenetic creations from a spray can that shine on walls until someone comes to paint them over.

Both are celebrities, but in very different L.A. cultures.

Slatoff gives lectures at the Getty Museum and the Huntington Library. Calderon is a pioneer of an art form now famous the world over but still raw enough to inspire both anger and admiration at home. On certain L.A. streets, his non-de-graffiti can cause people to gasp in recognition.

"You're Shandu One? *The Shandu One?*"

They share a workspace, these two very different artists, in what might look to a passerby like just another windowless building in a grim industrial district along Glendale Boulevard, just north of Sunset.

Slatoff is new to the neighborhood, but he senses something special in the very old, curved wooden roof of his studio building, a converted warehouse, and in the surrounding streetscapes of bungalows and hillside cabins.

"Everything about this place smells of the real L.A.," he said. "You've got Silver Lake groovesters, graffiti artists, music videos."

In fact, throughout the city's history, many odd, unexpected and creative happenings have unfolded in that corner of L.A., which was once known as Edendale. So it's not entirely surprising to find Slatoff and Calderon working there, in an arts collective that was the dream of Daniel Serfaty, the French-born manager of an art foundry.

"Art is a sort of madness," said Serfaty, who established the studio with Slatoff earlier this year. They dreamt of a place where various mad men and mad women, artists and artisans, would work alongside one another.

As it happens, they chose L.A.'s original bohemian enclave to bring this bohemian dream to life.

[Charlie Chaplin](#) got his start in the movies on that stretch of Glendale Boulevard almost 100 years ago. Various artists followed the early film industry there, building homes in the surrounding hillsides.

Centered in a narrow valley where a streetcar line once ran, Edendale was synonymous with the arts and activism in L.A. long before the advent of hip-hop, rock 'n' roll or even the beatniks.

In the 1930s and '40s, the painter Millard Sheets lived there, as did Harry Hay, one of the founders of the U.S. gay-rights movement. Nearby is the home of one of the most important graphic artists L.A. has ever produced, Paul Landacre.

Today, Edendale is divided between Echo Park and Silver Lake. Landacre's old cabin, though declared a city monument, has fallen into disrepair since he committed suicide there in 1963.

My [column last month](#) was a remembrance of that largely forgotten era, and it carried the headline "Paradise Lost." A few readers who live there now were offended.

"You make Edendale sound dead," [Mark Johnson](#), a set decorator, wrote in an e-mail. "Actually, it is still a thriving and ever-changing community of artists, gays, political reactionaries and various sundry, fabulous lefties."

Cheryll Roberts lives a few hundred feet from Landacre's former home. She said her neighbors include a filmmaker, members of a successful rock band, an Emmy-winning makeup artist and an antique art dealer.

"This neighborhood is still very bohemian," she wrote. "There's rustic cabins, gated estates, beautiful gardens, and the people are just as hip and creative as they always were."

L.A. is supposed to be a city that celebrates its forgetfulness. Outsiders say we don't care to know who was here before us. And we routinely prove them right by wiping out some of our most precious buildings and by neglecting others until they fall into disrepair.

And yet, in Edendale, as in other corners of the city, we Angelenos have managed to keep alive creative traditions that span many generations. The spirit of the neighborhood has been nurtured by one wave of newcomers after another, for nearly a century.

Several new studios have popped up on Glendale Boulevard in recent years, moving into former auto-repair shops and old factories.

The workspace shared by Slatoff, Calderon and Serfaty goes by the name La Fonderie.

In all, 10 artists work there, including a filmmaker and several painters. Serfaty occupies the largest space — he makes the casts and pours the molten metal that transforms a sculptor's clay creation into bronze.

"I get so inspired, I so love what artists do, and I try to think about how it happens and where it comes from," said Serfaty, who was born in France but became a foundry worker after a brief career as a New York City bike messenger.

On the day I visited La Fonderie, Calderon wandered into Slatoff's work space and quickly sketched one of Slatoff's works in progress, a sculpture of a woman's torso.

Calderon, 44, was one of the leaders of the group of graffiti artists who gathered at the nearby Belmont Tunnel in the 1980s, covering the walls of the abandoned tunnel and adjacent power station with their creations.

"To me, this is like Disneyland," Calderon said of La Fonderie. "Everything I need is his here." And by that he meant not just tools of his trade, and room to create, but also the inspiration that comes from working among a community of artists.

He moved from Slatoff's work space to a large canvas and began to produce a painting of the torso, using various cans of spray paint. With a series of ovals and intersecting curves, a woman came to life, showing the clear influence of a certain Spanish master.

Slatoff admired the painting in progress. Soon he and Calderon were involved in a discussion about Picasso, Cubism, and the work of Braque and Gris.

Artists always look to create community, Slatoff said. "This is like Van Gogh and Gauguin. We're feeding off each other."

Outside, hundreds of cars sped past on their way to the Glendale Freeway, filled with commuters unaware of the mad artistic creation and discussions taking place inside.

*hector.tobar@latimes.com*