

Focus on... Valencia

CalArts Show Living Conversation

■ Student posters depict their thoughts on the community; residents respond on opposite wall.



By Jessica Marks
SIGNAL STAFF WRITER

“What is one thing worth knowing about Valencia?”

That question was posed to both California Institute of the Arts’ graphic arts students and the Valencia community at large — and answers were displayed Thursday night at a small gallery at the school.

“We knew we wanted the piece to be a living conversation between the Institute and the community,” said show co-organizer and graduate student Florencio Zavala.

What they didn’t know was how split the responses would be.

CalArts students, seen by many to be counter-cultural, artistic types who don’t fit the suburbia stereotype, surprised many by showing a majority of the artists had kind feelings toward the community that they genuinely feel a part of.

Student Roman Jaster’s poster depicted something he thought people should know about Valencia: Johnson Park, a small portion of Mentryville that’s a place he felt at home.

“I’m interested in the city and the little things that are unique to it,” Jaster said. “(Johnson Park) is just cool to stumble upon.”

“Pretentious — illusion of society, good place to raise a family, but no family values.”

— JOE, a comment from the resident wall



Another poster noted the fun of being able to go to a garage sale all year long in this town — something that is just not practical in areas with cold, bitter winters.

Other posters depicted Valencia as a beautiful place with paseos, big old trees and nice places to walk around.

“I spend a lot of time outdoors,” student Kristen Coogan said. “I love running in the parks and on the trails.”

Her art’s message: Save the open spaces.

Not all posters were posi-

tive, however.

There was controversial artwork as well — one specifically pertained to the racial ruckus that was raised when Vallarta Market began its plans to build a store in Newhall.

Artist Ahm Mingus mounted pictures of delicious-looking fruit together with newspaper clippings of how much some local residents opposed having a Hispanic-oriented store in the neighborhood.

“Intolerance Possibly Abounds,” the poster read.

But that was nothing compared to the community responses that were posted on the opposite wall.

Students asked approximately 100 Valencia residents the same question — “What’s one

thing worth knowing about Valencia?” — and their responses proved people were willing to be very honest.

People of all races and all ages wrote their answers down, and many replies were very split, with nearly half describing Valencia as a place where only the very rich live or a town that does not appreciate diversity, and the other half wrote about how there are fabulous restaurants in the area and how it had wonderful schools.

“Pretentious — illusion of society, good place to raise a family, but no family values. Joe, 43,” was a message left on the wall.

Very close by, another one read: “I love the paseos, parks and recreation centers. You can

Photos by WILL DAVISON/The Signal

(Above) From left, fourth-year fine arts student Jennifer Richardson and fourth-year photography student Varlara Love look over posters CalArts students designed.

(Left) The show featured designs expressing students’ feelings about their community with an opposing wall reserved for residents’ responses.

walk, run, skateboard, rollerblade and swim here. Fabulous! — Rhonda.”

Through it all, it was a sincere local person’s interpretation of the town, gallery visitor Katie Hanburger said.

In fact, it reminded her of days past when she was a student in Valencia — many of the statements in the posters rang true to her, she said.

The project took approximately 18 months to put together, but in the end, event organizers felt they truly got a feel for how both students and Valencia residents feel about where they live.

Though the exhibit is no longer open to the public, every bit of the experience is available online at <http://alum.calarts.edu/~design/revalencia>.