



Painting the towns

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San Bernardino has launched a Sputnik!

That's what raced through my mind as I listened to a Kathy Allavie message that reminded me of the Cold War.

Allavie, a long-time Riversider, holds the important, if obscure, title of grove supervisor. Grove Supe Allavie is up to her leaves in the Giant Orange ARTventure: Next spring, 30 fiberglass "oranges" will be scattered around downtown Riverside.

The 4-foot diameter, 90-pound synthetic citrus will be painted by handpicked artists. Businesses will pay \$5K to sponsor each "orange." All but one has now been bought. The Riverside Art Museum reaps the benefits of this fundraiser.



If outbreaks of public art sound familiar, you've probably heard of the painted cows of Chicago, the painted apples of New York. Even Temecula painted the town with ponies.

But nothing prepared Grove Supe Allavie for what she heard. That's what triggered the "Sputnik" message.

"I heard San Bernardino is going to do their own version, except they are not doing oranges but giant spheres, as in spheres of influence. And they're doing it very quickly because they wanted their figures out before ours. I thought, 'Oh my gosh, here come the fiberglass wars.' But oranges will always be tastier than spheres of influence."

Bollards. They're called *bollards*, not Sputniks. But it's true! San Bernardino has passed Riverside in the art-in-public-space race.

In a campaign to add more art and color to its downtown, S'Berdoo has begun to roll out 10 concrete spheres, painted by Cal State artists who received \$500 commissions from homebuilder Watson & Associates. The city paid \$4,000 for these 2-foot diameter, quarter-ton "bollards," which are often employed for other purposes.

"The Target in Redlands uses them to keep people from driving into the front window," notes Jim Ruester, San Bernardino's director of cultural affairs, and the city's top authority on painted bollards.

"We wanted designs that would be associated with arts and entertainment. One is an abstract dancer. There's a girl boxer. One looks like a melted ice cream cone."

I took a quick SB bollard cruise and spotted a beautiful lotus blossom, polka dots and high-fashion shoes, and a black-on-white abstract that looks like a Rorschach test. I also saw a painted bollard that had already been

vandalized. Culture Chief Ruester says a tag-proof coating protects the spheres. (He hopes it works.)

At just over knee-cap high, the bollards don't have a commanding presence. But sitting right out there on broad sidewalks, they add some pop to a downtown that Ruester describes as "a lot of grays and efficiency green buildings."

I felt it my duty to ask Ruester the Sputnik question, but he denied this was a hurry-up job intended to beat Riverside to the cultcha punch.

"We just wanted to bring color into San Bernardino. We have our own city to be concerned about."

In fact, Ruester praises any Empirian city (even Riverside) that attempts to beautify itself. After all, a rising tide lifts all bollards. I'll take Ruester at his word, and hope Grove Supe Allavie (who dismisses the bollards as "kumquats") will, too. Otherwise, Riversiders are doomed to believe that the only thing we have to fear is sphere itself.

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