



Metro Art Docent Susan Zagha, foreground, leads tour at the Metro Red Line Vermont Sunset Station.

PHOTOS BY GAYLE ANDERSON



## Art in Motion: Training for new Metro Art docents begins April 21. Guests of docent-guided art tours rediscover L.A. through the art and architecture of the Metro Rail stations.

By GAYLE ANDERSON

(Feb. 12) The Metro Art Docent Council is offering an 11-week training and apprenticeship program to increase its ranks with art and community enthusiasts from the myriad of communities served by Metro Rail.

The apprenticeship program begins April 21 and will meet once a week for four-hour sessions. The training takes the volunteer behind the scenes of the broad range of art in the Metro Rail system and provides insights into the artists who created the artworks and the communities that inspired them.

No experience is necessary to become a Metro Art Docent. The only requirements are an enjoyment of public speaking and the physical stamina to conduct a two-hour walking tour. Docents will have the opportunity to conduct at least 12

tours a year.

MTA employees are encouraged to apply for the program as an outside activity.

### What docents do

Since the program's inception in August 1999, the council's 13 docents have led 125 tours of various segments of Metro Rail. "That translates into approximately 3,500 people," said Barbara Lashenick, president of the Metro Art Docent Council.

Metro Art docent Susan Zagha vies for tour assignments among the small band of volunteers who staff the program. "I don't want anybody to miss this. It is a thrill for me to see people rediscover the city where they live or experience the city they're visiting."

Zagha, a native of Argentina who now lives in Hollywood, had never led tours of any sort before becoming a Metro Art docent. She was recruited to the council by Lashenick, who is also a Los Angeles County Museum of Art docent.

"The docents are dedicated, involved individuals who love Los Angeles and who love art," says Lashenick. "Being a Metro Art Docent is an opportunity to be part of something that doesn't exist anywhere else. It's

exciting for docents to get to know their city intimately from the perspective of the arts and then share that knowledge with people here and from around the world. "

Currently, the demand for the popular tours is greater than the number of docents. "We need more docents in order to give the public a greater opportunity to discover and enjoy Metro Rail, " said Lashenick.

### **Not just another pretty subway**

While docent programs are commonly found at museums around the world, the MTA is believed to be the first transit agency to benefit from such a program.

The docents lead groups of fifteen or more on informative two-hour tours of several stations. The tours introduce the individual artists and the concepts behind their wide variety of works, as well as outline the artist selection process and the particular challenges of creating art for public environments. Participants not only learn more about contemporary art but also explore Los Angeles' growing Metro Rail system and the different communities along the way.

The MTA's public art program was described as "one of the most imaginative public art programs in the country" by the *New York Times* and has received extensive international media coverage and several significant design awards. The stations are an extraordinary blend of art, architecture, landscape, and engineering and are the result of the MTA's interdisciplinary approach of adding artists to the traditional mix of architects and engineers.

Passengers on the Blue Line from Long Beach to Downtown and on the Metro Green Line from Norwalk to Redondo Beach view a vast collection of Metro Rail stations transformed by tandem teams of artists and architects into works of art designed to comfort, soothe and sometimes exhilarate the weary traveler. And when the trains seemingly morph into sleek subway cars somewhere under downtown Los Angeles, the experience goes underground through the belly of Hollywood and emerges into a cornucopia of California history in the San Fernando Valley.

For more information on becoming a docent, call Robin Izon, 922.2738 or visit Metro Art on [www.mta.net/metroart](http://www.mta.net/metroart).

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