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Images and More Information: www.madeintheportola.org

***Crossing the Street:
Tales of the Portola***

**Artists Oscar Melara and Kate Connell Explore San Francisco's
Portola Neighborhood through the Art of Social Engagement**

WHO: Visual artists Oscar Melara and Kate Connell have collaborated to produce a community-interactive exhibition of artists' books inspired by the layered life of San Francisco's Portola Neighborhood. The project was created in collaboration with the artists' Portola District friends and neighbors and the San Francisco Public Library over the last four years.

WHAT: *Crossing the Street* — a project of seven distinct artists' book installations, on exhibit throughout San Francisco's Portola Library — *Looking Up: Portola Skies*; *Tracing the Portola: A Neighborhood Atlas*; *Side by Side Stories*; *Portola Cognito* (a giant book with give-away pages); *Bonnie: Up at the Park / Shirley: Down on the Avenue* (paired graphic novels); *Drawing our Neighborhood*; and *Following the Pictures*, a 3D book. *Crossing the Street* is produced with support from the Creative Work Fund. The project can also be experienced online at www.madeintheportola.org

WHERE: Portola Branch Library, 380 Bacon St. at Goettingen, San Francisco — the neighborhood's first permanent library, inaugurated in 2009.

WHEN: October 2, 2010–February 25, 2011
Special event: Portola Community Room, Saturday, October 2, 2010, 3 pm – 5:30 pm.
Includes special publication, a giant book, free giveaway pages.

HOW MUCH: The exhibition and event are FREE, and include activities for all ages.

INFO: www.madeintheportola.org

MORE: The Portola District of San Francisco is a little-known working class district at the southeast rim of the city — a dynamic neighborhood that even native San Franciscans can't locate on a map, or pronounce the way that Portola locals do. Within living memory the Portola was filled with stables, windmills, nurseries, and farms. The

Portola District has also been the location of the U.S. Immigration Station, homes for unwed mothers, missionary colleges, and has been a first home to many new arrivals to the City. Though not marked on most City maps, the Portola District is nestled between the Excelsior, Hunter's Point, and Visitacion Valley, and encompasses a large portion of the City's McLaren Park.

Wooed by stories of an earlier, simpler neighborhood where families helped each other paint houses and celebrated holidays together, churched together, swam off Hunters Point on Sundays, shared bootleg stills, and joyfully poured out into the street at the end of World War II, visual artists Oscar Melara and Kate Connell have been seeking a closer relationship with the people they share fences with in the neighborhood.

Through a series of engagements on one city block in the Portola — story gathering, block parties, portraiture — the artists are collaborating with their immediate neighbors to produce a social sculpture, and as a result of this experience, a collection of handmade books that describe the Portola and its history. These books will become part of the new Portola Branch Library's reference collection.

This is the second presentation of Melara's and Connell's two-part project, *Made in the Portola*, created collaboratively with Portola friends and neighbors and the library staff. The first part, *Portola at Play*, presented film, music, games, and events to coincide with the 2009 opening of the Portola's new branch library. The *Made in the Portola* projects are rooted in the artists' deep engagement with neighborhood residents in their exploration of the Portola District and its nearly undocumented history.

Kate Connell and Oscar Melara have collaborated for fifteen years on storytelling projects that take the form of installations, murals, exhibitions and events. Their work makes use of a variety of media, from digital to ceramic. Their other collaborations include a labor history mural installed inside public commuter buses, *Our Work Life*. As collaborating artists who also work as a bus driver and a librarian, they see their artwork as a kind of public service with the same goal as their day jobs — to work together with their community. Connell and Melara's roots go back thirty years in the arts community of San Francisco's Mission District. Individually, their works have been exhibited at the Alternative Museum, Berkeley Art Museum, Capp Street Project, and the Smithsonian Institution. Their projects have received support from the Creative Work Fund, California Arts Council, Zellerbach Family Fund and Peninsula Community Foundation, among others.

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