My 5 Favorite Places for Art in Los Angeles

Our critic Jason Farago shares what you shouldn't miss in a city with as much culture off the silver screen as on it.

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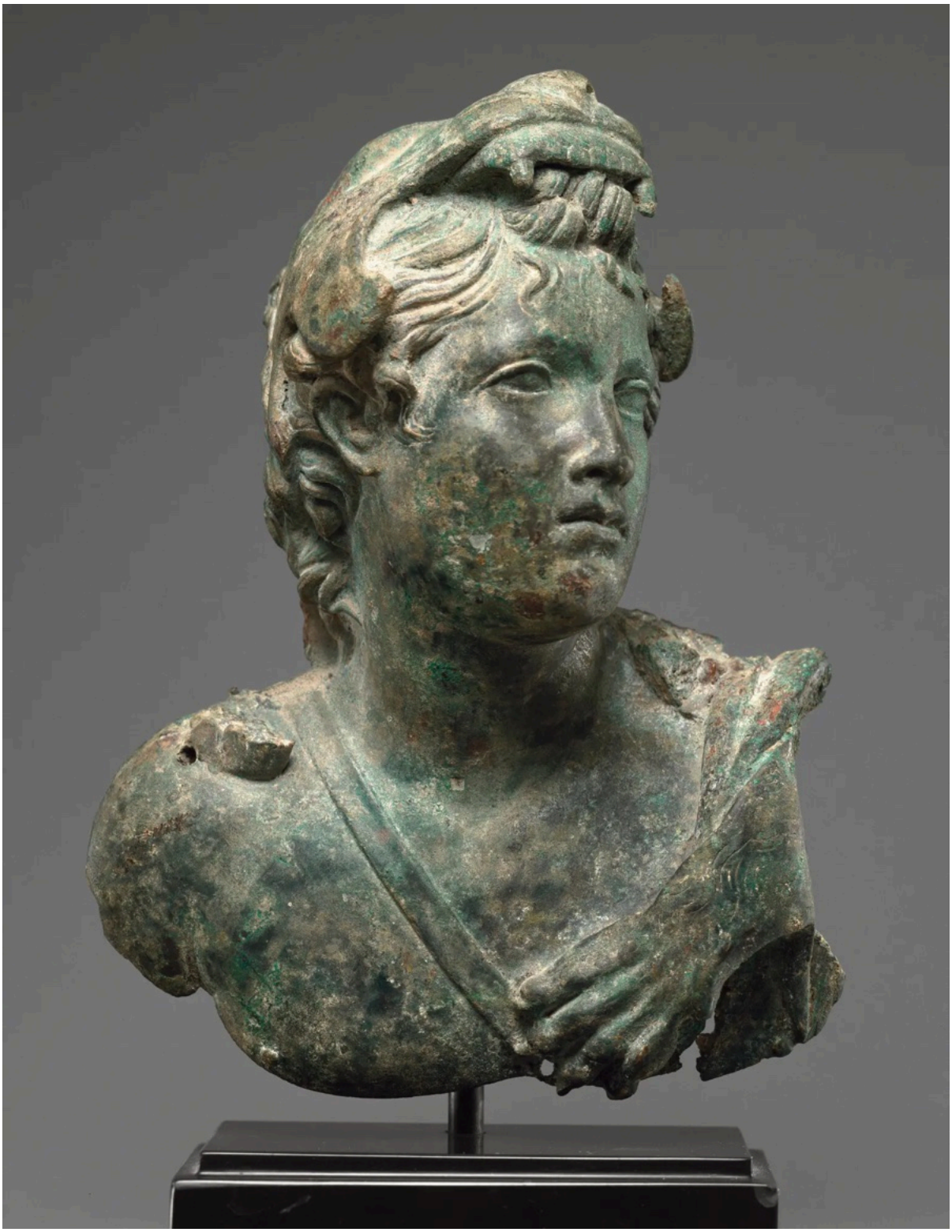
You never really believed, did you, that the second-largest city in the United States was some kind of cultural vacuum? Los Angeles loves to tell tales about itself, and for a long time it has indulged a self-deprecating fiction that the movie and television industries — and maybe the good weather, too — have crowded out anything too erudite. (In "L.A. Story," when Steve Martin proposes "a kind of cultural tour of L.A.", his British love interest responds, "That's the first 15 minutes, then what?")

In fact, Los Angeles is home to the country's best orchestra, its foremost art schools and a brilliant book review, and it's been nourished by perpetual arrivals, written across the émigré modernism of Pacific Palisades and the Chicano murals of Boyle Heights. I adore the place as only a New Yorker can. And on my last two visits, watching the city re-emerge from last winter's fires, I felt again that no American city has quite so much to offer.

Find these five and discover more art on our Google map of Los Angeles.

1. The god of love, undercover by the ocean



A thinly hammered piece of bronze appears to depict Eros dressed in a disguise — the disguise of Herakles. via Getty Museum; Photo by Bruce White

He appears at first to be just another pretty boy — the sort of tousled-hair fair youth idealized in ancient Greece, or for that matter here in modern Malibu. But the looker in this little bronze bust, which I think might be my favorite work of art in Los Angeles, has a sneaky secret. Down from his right shoulder we see the thick raised line: the leather strap of a quiver. Capping his curls is the head of a lion's skin, whose paw wraps down to cover his left breast. This thinly hammered piece of bronze appears to depict Eros dressed in a disguise — the disguise of Herakles, who after his first labor wore the skin of the Nemean lion as a coat of impervious armor. He is so young, so beautiful; but Love is ready to fight.

The Getty Villa is the concrete replica of an ancient Neapolitan country house that the oilman J. Paul Getty built in 1974. Christina House/Los Angeles Times via Getty Images

There are grander and finer works of Greek art at the Getty Villa, the concrete replica of an ancient Neapolitan country house that the oilman J. Paul Getty built in 1974. The so-called Getty Bronze, a five-foot statue of a victorious nude athlete

dredged from the ocean that you'll find in the same room, is much more famous and much rarer. But this bronze appliqué of Eros undercover draws me back every time. Here, in careful high relief, an unknown (and possibly enslaved) artist saw that beauty could be made synonymous with might or fortitude.

Getty Villa, 17985 Pacific Coast Highway, Pacific Palisades.

2. Vibrant textiles that map a world on the move

The vitrines of the Fowler Museum are home to one of the world's richest collections of textiles, like this bridal vest. via Fowler Museum

Some of Los Angeles's most reliably eye-popping outfits are found far from Rodeo Drive, in the vitrines of the Fowler Museum — the home of one of the world's richest collections of textiles, especially from Indonesia and other parts of Southeast Asia. The displays are rotated often, but on a recent visit I found myself struggling to look away from two magnificent batik skirts, one from Sumatra and one from Java, with densely printed surfaces and fringes of elongated triangles. Whichever textiles they have on display, one matter is certain: These textiles were not meant to stay put. Richly decorated cloths like these were exchanged as diplomatic gifts throughout the archipelago. And the flora and fauna that festoon them are travelers too: local flowers and birds, but also more fantastic creatures drawn from the art of nearby China or, eventually, the faraway Netherlands.

In a city with so many great museums, the one that most frequently surprises me is the Fowler, on the campus of the University of California, Los Angeles, whose collection display is also dense with Yoruba woodcarvings, Alaskan headdresses and Haitian ceramics. It began as a modest basement display of "ethnic arts and technology," but successive donations, above all a copious gift in the 1960s of African and Oceanic objects amassed by the pharmaceutical baron Henry Wellcome, have made it one of America's foremost institutions of non-Western culture.

A mask from Cameroon takes on new functions and meanings in the hands of African makers, European collectors and American scholars via Fowler Museum

One of the exciting things about the Fowler is how it pushes past old ethnographic impulses to make one object stand for one people, and increasingly treats its textiles, instruments and adornments as forms on the move. A mask from

Cameroon takes on new functions and meanings in the hands of African makers, European collectors and American scholars. A wooden statue from Congo can be both a work of fine art and a repository of religious knowledge. And the Indonesian textiles are literal interweavings of commerce, diplomacy and decoration, across oceanic distances.

Fowler Museum, 308 Charles E. Young Drive North, Westwood.

3. A silent garden, primped to impossible standards

One of the country's finest collections of bonsai, or Japanese ornamental trees, resides at the Huntington. via The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens; Photo by Max Tepper

Some masterpieces cannot stay indoors; they need sun and water. In the botanical collections of the Huntington, out in San Marino, a hushed and exquisite display is ensconced behind a series of slatted fences: one of the country's finest collections

of bonsai, or Japanese ornamental trees. A California juniper, leaves trimmed back and trunk gently spiraling. A suite of miniature Italian cypresses, like a grove for a pixie. A little crab apple tree, flowering with tiny red fruit. Each of these potted wonders sits on a simple wooden platform; a few stand straight up, but more grow in gnarled vectors, and a couple of the bonsai droop down dramatically, like flamingos having a drink. They are towering in elegance, if not in height.

The Huntington is really three institutions in one; each is special, but all three united make for an institution worth braving the traffic on the Ventura Freeway. (Its founders were the railroad tycoon Henry E. Huntington, and Arabella Huntington, his canny second wife.) There is the Huntington Library, 12 million items strong, which displays a copy of the Gutenberg Bible and strong holdings of Californiana. There is the Huntington Art Gallery, which contains one of the two best collections of British art in America (the other's at Yale), and most famous for Thomas Gainsborough's "Blue Boy," a dishy full-length portrait from around 1770 depicting a young aristocrat in shimmering blue satin.

The botanical collections at the Huntington make it one of the most serene places in Los Angeles for our critic. via The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens; Photo by Max Tepper

But I come, above all, for the botanical collections, — a world tour in the middle of the suburbs. Cactuses and succulents in the Desert Garden; peach blossoms and scholar's rocks in the Chinese Garden: towering eucalyptus trees and purple-blooming mint bushes in a miniature Australia. The gardens are a heterotopia in full blossom, and these days (for the first time in decades) the state is drought-free. The Huntington is one of the most serene places in Los Angeles, though you will want to put on sunscreen if you're staying a while.

The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, 1151 Oxford Road, San Marino.

4. The L.A. painter who became another's massive icon

Kent Twitchell's homage to Ed Ruscha looms 70 feet high on the side of a downtown building in Los Angeles. Kent Twitchell via Craig Krull Gallery; Photo by Gary Leonard

I wouldn't want to reduce this city's art scene to one painter, but if it had to have a mascot I suppose it could be Ed Ruscha: the bard of the Sunset Strip, whose deadpan text-based paintings and coolly forensic photo books treat Los Angeles as both muse and medium. He was certainly a role model for Kent Twitchell, a mural painter who wanted to offer him a homage — a 70-foot homage, on the side of a downtown building. Twitchell completed his "Ed Ruscha Monument" in 1987, after nine years of painting on a boom lift. For two decades Ruscha gazed down at a parking lot, but in 2006 the mural was suddenly whitewashed. Los Angeles loves a comeback, though, and in 2017 this muralist got a chance to paint Ruscha a second time — older, I suppose wiser, but no less iconic.

Los Angeles has no shortage of murals, and not only because it is the ideal artistic medium to be appreciated from the car. In the rotunda of the Los Angeles Public Library, Dean Cornwell's Depression-era epics of Californian settlement picture the state as a crowded carnival. In the San Fernando Valley, Judith F. Baca's "Great Wall of Los Angeles" offers a half-mile excursus in migration, assimilation and civil rights, done in the 1970s alongside hundreds of young painters.

But I have a special affection for the Ed Ruscha mural on the side of a hotel in the Arts District. That's not just because I'm a fan of its model, but because it harmonizes the sometimes elitist fine art I care for and the populist methods of muralism. In the new mural Ruscha is older, with a full head of white hair; his hands are folded in front of him, as if he has taken a break from painting and needs to tell us something. The flatness and matter-of-factness of Ruscha's pose, and the skill with which Twitchell translates a living person into a sign, bespeaks a Southern Californian understanding that facades and surfaces matter as much as the things behind them. Both of these artists reimagined classical painting for the open road, or more accurately the traffic jam.

Ed Ruscha Mural, 303 South Hewitt Street, Arts District.

5. A pantheon of the famous, or what's left of them

The Hollywood Forever cemetery is the resting place of actors and directors, as well as studio heads, city social leaders and the occasional mobster. Ronaldo Bolaños/Los Angeles Times via Getty Images

"More stars than there are in heaven," promised the trailers of MGM Studios in the golden age of Hollywood. Whether those Golden Age actors went to the sweet hereafter or the other place, their earthly remains can be sought out in one of Los Angeles's densest V.I.P. areas.

The Hollywood Forever cemetery, abutting the Paramount lot, is the resting place not only of countless actors and directors, but also of studio heads, city social leaders and the occasional mobster. Cecil B. DeMille is interred in a suitably epic marble tomb. Johnny Ramone lies beneath a rebarbative stone monument of himself mid-riff on a guitar. The great and the good since Roman times have known that Death loves a bon mot, and several stars here have taken close care of their

last words. David Lynch, who died in 2025, is buried under the pithy legend “Night Blooming Jasmine.” Mel Blanc, the voice of Bugs Bunny and other Looney Tunes characters, has a headstone engraved, “That’s All Folks.”

Among those buried at Hollywood Forever is Mel Blanc, the voice of Bugs Bunny and numerous other cartoon characters. Ken Lubas/Los Angeles Times, via Getty Images

This cemetery is almost the same age as cinema itself, founded in 1899. Neglected and eventually closed at the end of the last century, it was resurrected at the start of the 21st century — and walking among its A-list silent stars and B-list television actors, it feels to me like this country's sillier but equally venerable version of Europe's national necropolises. This is a social and cultural destination, and not just a final one. Hollywood Forever hosts movie screenings throughout the summer, projected on the side of a mausoleum. There's also a big Día de los Muertos celebration, if you're in town on Nov. 2.

The stars of the present will end up here, and those of the past are actually still coming. Judy Garland only showed up in 2017, after Liza Minnelli and her other children had her remains flown across the country and reinterred in a custom pavilion. (There is even a little cenotaph to Toto outside.) Cryogenics, peptides, C.G.I. touch-ups: This is not a city that likes to age. But at least there's somewhere suitable when you finally go off the air.

Hollywood Forever, 6000 Santa Monica Boulevard.

More Art to Discover

Find all of these on our Google map of Los Angeles.

- **Hollyhock House**, East Hollywood: the first and weirdest of Frank Lloyd Wright's Los Angeles houses, a "California romanza," in the architect's phrase, of stone and wood and glass. Looks more like a Maya archaeological site than a Bel Air McMansion
- **Schindler House**, West Hollywood: low-slung, open plan 1920s bungalow, with sliding wood doors and slanted concrete walls, where two couples lived together and slept outdoors. Now home to a strong art-and-architecture nonprofit, affiliated with Vienna's design museum.

- **Eames House**, Pacific Palisades: landmark home of the midcentury designers Charles and Ray Eames, made of prefab steel and colored panels. Smoke damage from last year's wildfires forced it to close for maintenance and preservation; you can now enter the designers' working studio.
- **Wende Museum**, Culver City: rare and impressive collection of Eastern European and Soviet art, posters, consumer products and tchotchkes, opened in 2002 in a former armory. (Pronounce it "venda"; it's German for "turning point.")
- **Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels**, Downtown: angular, freeway-adjacent mother church of the Los Angeles archdiocese, completed in 2002 by the Spanish architect Rafael Moneo. Its sandy walls look like warm stone but are actually a specially colored concrete.
- **Chiat/Day building**, Venice: know as the "Binoculars Building," a former ad agency headquarters by Frank Gehry, entered by walking underneath Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen's 45-foot-tall field glasses.
- **Japanese American Culture and Community Center**, Little Tokyo: theater, gallery, archive devoted to both Japan and its emigrants. Its Brutalist home is by Kazumi Adachi and other Japanese American architects; the sculpture plaza, by Isamu Noguchi, hosts a good Japanese farmers' market, too.
- **California Museum of Photography**, Riverside: the area's most interesting photo arts institution, on a University of California campus in the Inland Empire. Its half-million objects fuel shows of 19th-century stereographs and 1960s mail art.
- **Arcana**, Culver City: warehouse-scaled bookstore stocking all your out-of-print fashion bibles and recherché photo tomes, with talks and signings to match. Prepare to spend hours rifling through the stacks; its stock is not online.

A correction was made on Feb. 3, 2026*: An earlier version of this article misidentified the muralist whose work is in the rotunda of the Los Angeles Public Library. It is Dean Cornwell, not Cromwell.*

A correction was made on Feb. 4, 2026*: An earlier version of this article misstated the age difference between Arabella Huntington and her husband, Henry. She was roughly the same age as Henry, not much younger than him.*

When we learn of a mistake, we acknowledge it with a correction. If you spot an error, please let us know at corrections@nytimes.com. Learn more

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