



Four Under-the-Radar Exhibits in Downtown

By Sean P. Thomas

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Downtown Los Angeles is celebrated for, among other things, its collection of notable museums with heavyweight shows. Just glance across the community and you'll see, for instance, The Broad's lauded *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power 1963-1983* or the Museum of Contemporary Art's just-opened *The Foundation of the Museum: MOCA's Collection*, which shows masterworks from the last 40 years. It continues all summer at MOCA's Little Tokyo outpost.

Perhaps the only downside of the big shows is that they threaten to overwhelm some of the "smaller" exhibits on display in other locations in Downtown. But don't let the big names or prominent institutions fool you, as other exhibits, some in unexpected places, pack quite a visual, cultural and emotional punch.

Below, Los Angeles Downtown News runs down a quartet of exhibits that, while they may lack a high profile, still offer plenty to see and think about. Each is proof that being under-the-radar is different than being overlooked.

Linda Vallejo: Brown Belongings

Through Jan. 13 at La Plaza de Cultura y Artes

For nearly a decade, Chicana artist Linda Vallejo has explored the meaning behind the color brown. She has addressed the hue numerous times, including in the attention-grabbing collection “The Brown Oscars,” which recast famous Hollywood figures in brown skin. The 2016 project included actors like Ben Affleck, Matt Damon, Audrey Hepburn and Cate Blanchet.

Now, some of Vallejo’s work, including never-before-seen pieces, is on display at La Plaza de Cultura y Artes. Brown Belongings opened June 1 at the facility near Olvera Street and is the museum’s first solo exhibit for a female artist.

Featuring 135 paintings, drawings and sculptures from the Los Angeles-based Vallejo, the exhibit examines race and color, and its impact on our perception of cultures. It also asks the viewers to resist stereotypes and assumptions of Latinx people.

Former senior curator Erin M. Curtis, associate curator Mariah Berlanga-Shevchuk, and assistant curator Esperanza Sanchez curated the exhibit. Berlanga-Shevchuk said that she hopes attendees pick up on the themes of inclusivity in Vallejo’s work.

“We have a long way to go,” Berlanga-Shevchuk said. “There has been a lot of work done, but there is still a long way to go.”

The museum will hold a series of public programs around the exhibit, including a walkthrough led by Vallejo and panel discussions. On July 18, Vallejo will lead guests through the exhibit while she discusses the themes and process behind her work.

At 501 N. Main St. or lapca.org.

At First Light: The Dawning of Asian Pacific America

Through Oct. 20 at the Japanese American National Museum

Throughout most of American history, the word “Oriental” was a widely accepted term for an entire group of people. In the 1970s, Asian Pacific Americans said no more.

Utilizing more than 100 archival videos and hundreds of thousands of images documented by Visual Communications, the first Asian Pacific American media organization in the United States, At First Light explores the rise of Asian Pacific American political identity in Los Angeles. In the process, it demonstrates how people rose up and recast the description “Oriental” as decidedly un-American.

The show is documentarian in nature, and includes 30 short videos documenting landmark events in the community. This includes a video showing the first Asian American march in the country against the Vietnam War, along with a sculpture displaying never-before-seen photographs of life in World War II internment camps.

At 100 N. Central Ave. or janm.org.

Fantasy World: Italian Americans in Animation

Through Jan. 26 at the Italian American Museum of Los Angeles

People rarely think of ethnicity when watching kids' cartoons, but a new exhibit at the Italian American Museum shines a light on the role that Italian Americans have played in the field for decades.

Fantasy World celebrates the achievements of individuals including Joseph Barbera, the son of Italian American immigrants who settled in the Little Italy neighborhood of Manhattan. If the name sounds familiar, it should: Alongside William Hanna, he founded the animation studio Hanna-Barbera, which would go on to create and produce programs groundbreaking cartoons such as "The Flintstones," "Scooby-Doo" and "The Jetsons."

The exhibit also shines a light on Italian American women who paved the way for females working in the animation field. That includes Bianca Majolie, Disney's first female story artist, Grace Godino, who worked on the 1938 *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and Adriana Caselotti, who voiced Snow White in the film.

Additionally, the exhibit explores Italian Americans in the comic book field. It mentions Carmine Infantino, who co-created the second version of the Flash, and John Romita Sr., who worked alongside Stan Lee on Spider-Man. The exhibit includes artifacts such as storyboards, rare comics and original scripts.

Marianna Gatto, executive director at IAMLA, said that the number of Italian Americans who figured prominently in the animation world struck her as she was doing research for the exhibit.

"There were a lot of immigrants that were a part of the early history of these studios," Gatto said. "To be able to shed a light on how immigrants impacted these industries was really a story worth telling and provides us with an understanding of the various talents that made Hollywood what it is today."

At 644 N. Main St. or iamla.org.

On Assignment: Ansel Adams in Los Angeles

Through Oct. 20 at the Central Library's Annenberg Gallery

People normally go the Central Library to pick up a book. But the Financial District landmark also has a revolving series of thoughtful art exhibits. That includes Ansel Adams in Los Angeles, which opened April 25.

Adams, of course, is known as perhaps the world's premier landscape and nature photographer, and from the 1920s-'50s he shot unforgettable images of Half Dome at Yosemite National Park, the Rocky Mountains and Old Faithful Geyser at Yellowstone National Park, among other.

What many people don't know is that, in order to pay his bills, Adams took up assignments outside of his natural wheelhouse. That included a trip through burgeoning Los Angeles in 1940 for *Fortune Magazine*. The library was given the collection as a gift in 1962, and is currently displaying 51 of the photographs in the Annenberg Gallery on the second floor.

The exhibit is mostly centered around Los Angeles' growing aerospace industry during the lead-up to the United States' entry into World War II, including old amusement parks, now-defunct airplane factories and the workers who came to Los Angeles to work in the new industry.

At 630 W. Fifth St., (213) 228-7000 or lapl.org.