

Los Angeles Times CALENDAR weekend

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GALLERIES



Finding it on a map

"Los Angeles Mapped" reveals the city through changing times and political and artistic views.

By Brenda Rees
Special to The Times

Where have we been? Where are we now? Where are we going?

The answers to these soul-searching questions might be summed up simply: Get a map.

Documenting the history, culture and geography of Southern California through the centuries, mapmakers have run the gamut from the first explorers who drew California as an island to the techno-geeks responsible for the satellite images found on Google Earth.

"Los Angeles Mapped," a new exhibition at the Ira Gershwin Gallery on the second floor of the Walt Disney Concert Hall, features about two dozen maps from 1639 to 1991 (and a video loop of Google Earth in action) that serve as historical timelines and storybooks. It will be on display through January at the gallery, which is just 74 square feet and open only to performance ticket-holders before show time and those on guided tours. An online version of the exhibition is available at www.loc.gov/exhibits/lamapped.

"These maps tell us what was important to people at a certain time in history," says exhibition curator Sam Brylawski, who adds that maps also provide glimpses of forgotten elements of our past.

For example, the 1912 map labeled "Ghost Suburbs" is a diagram of the various real estate communities that were planned to feed into private commuter railroad lines. Look closer and discover you might be living in what was once known as Shakespeare Beach, Strawberry Park or Gayland.

Other relics of the vanished past include detailed maps of the red and yellow streetcar systems, diagrams of oil well locations, early road maps published by the Automobile Club of Southern California and a 1937 souvenir guide to homes of Hollywood stars, complete with caricatures.

In general, maps take on a wide range of subject matter, Brylawski says, explaining that in addition to being merely functional, they can also be artistic, political and militaristic.

"We have a Cold War relic on display, a map made by the Soviet Union, which depicts reservoirs, airports, railway stations and schools" of the L.A. area, Brylawski says. "It's sort of creepy when you think why it was created and how it was possibly used."

On the flip side, Brylawski calls artist Jo Mora's elaborate 1942 depiction of Los Angeles history "playful and with a great sense of humor." The colored map shows people reenacting famous historical moments as well enjoying tourist attractions of the day.

And Brylawski is particularly glad that someone at the Library of Congress saw value in a map that most people in the 1930s probably tossed away: a paper placemat from the Bullocks Tea Room.

The map depicts posh locations such as country clubs, private social clubs and nightclubs alongside more curious landmarks, such as the public alligator and ostrich attractions of Lincoln Heights and oil tank farms in El Segundo.

"This map has been very well preserved," Brylawski says. "Where else can we see this map in prime condition, without the stains of a tuna fish sandwich from some ladies' luncheon? It is remarkable."

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Los Angeles Mapped

Where: Walt Disney Concert Hall, 111 S. Grand Ave., L.A.

When: Before performances and on guided tours of the concert hall

Cost: Free with admission to a performance; tours, \$10 to \$15

Info: (213) 972-4399 or www.musiccenter.org for tours, www.loc.gov/exhibits/lamapped