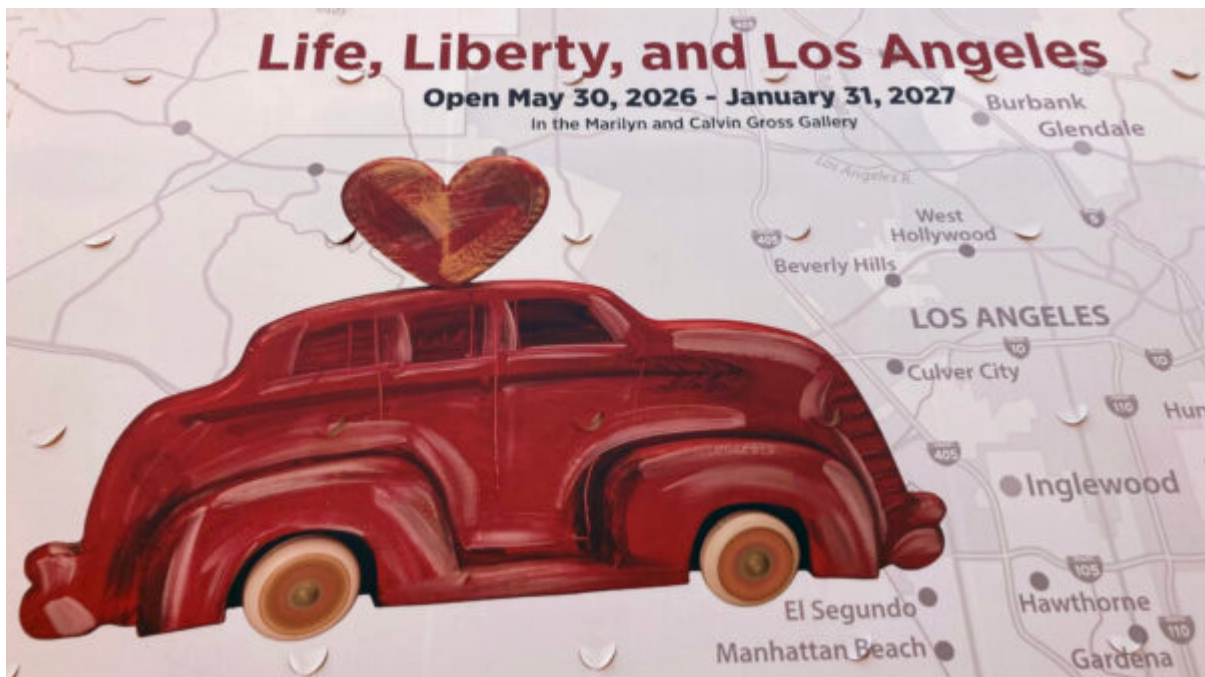


Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

LA History at the Autry

Elisa Leonelli · Friday, July 3rd, 2026



Autry LA billboard, photo by Elisa Leonelli

It had been several years since I visited the [Autry Museum](#) of the American West in Griffith Park, so when I read that they opened a new exhibition, *Life, Liberty, and Los Angeles* (May 30, 2026-January 31, 2027), I decided to drive there to explore it.

The image chosen to best represent L.A. culture and lifestyle is a red automobile (actually a foldable toy), *Carro con Corazon (Rojo)*, designed by [Frank Romero](#) in 1987.



“Going to the Olympics” by Frank Romero, photo by Elisa Leonelli 1984

I remember photographing Romero’s mural, “Going to the Olympics,” in 1984. It’s a lineup of cars with a heart on top, symbolizing the artist’s love for driving. [Read here](#) my article “Olympic Murals at the Hammer”



Norm’s print, 2025

I learned that the Googie architecture of the first Norm's coffee shop, built in 1949, was inspired by the car dealership that founder [Norm Roybark](#) used to own, with its floor plan open to the street and pennants flying. Several Norm's are still operating in Southern California. The one on LA Cienega was the setting for the dystopian movie *Good Luck, Have Fun, Don't Die* by Gore Verbinski.



“Norm's, La Cienega, on Fire,” by Ed Ruscha, 1964

LA artist Ed Ruscha used Norm's facade in this painting, with the flags in flame. [See my article](#) about his 2024 LACMA Retrospective



Autopia. Photo by Elisa Leonelli

Autopia is the only still existing Tomorrowland attraction from the original Disneyland that opened in Anaheim in 1955.

This is how it's represented at the Autry.



“Our Lady Queen of Angels,” 1700s (c) Autry Museum

The city of Los Angeles was founded in 1781 by [Los Pobladores](#), forty-four settlers from Mexico, of various ethnic origins. It was named after Our Lady Queen of the Angels. See above a delicate statuette from the 1700s, representing this revered Catholic icon.



Seal of Tovaangar

This is a 2022 drawing of the Seal of [Tovaangar](#), the land of the [Tongva](#) indigenous people of Southern California.



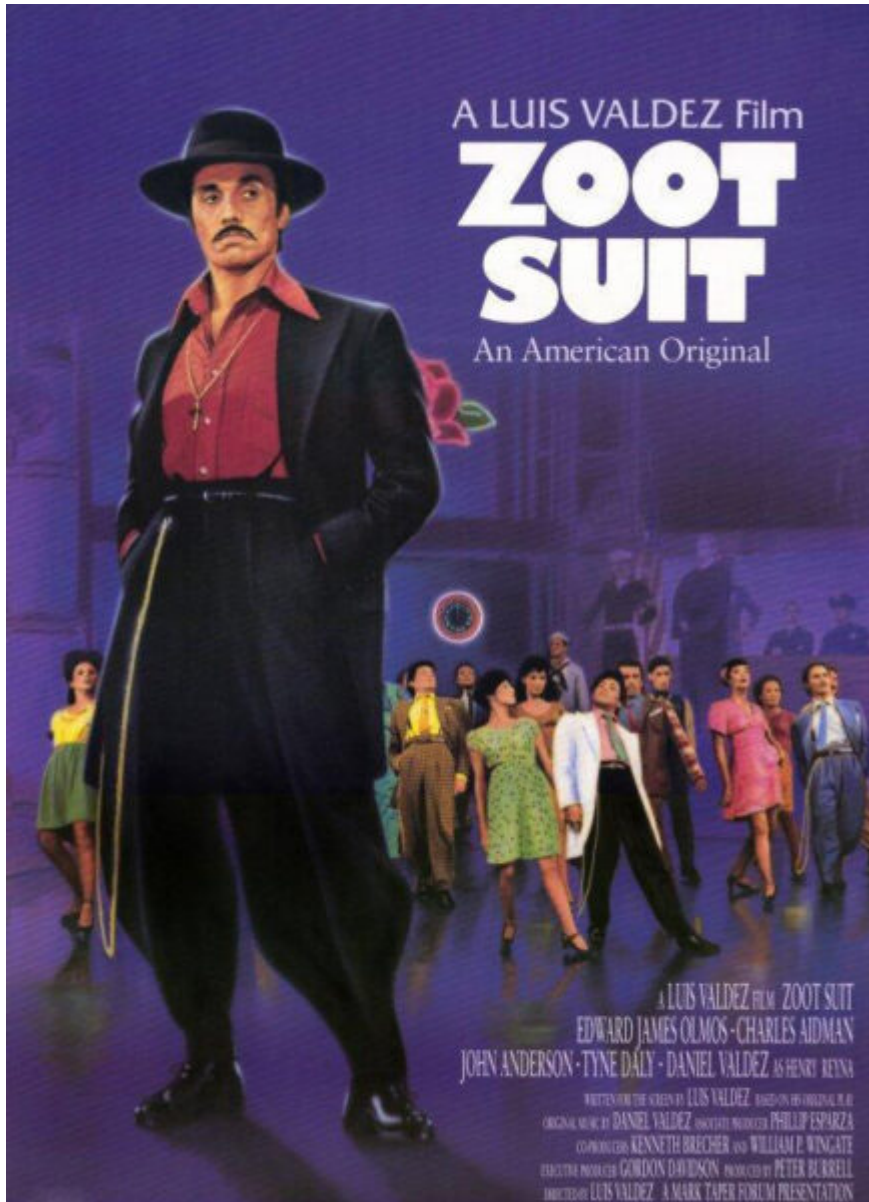
In the 1880s the Union Pacific Railroad promoted the warm California sunshine to Easterners with posters like this one.

I recommend you visit the extensive permanent exhibit *Becoming Los Angeles* that opened at the Natural History Museum in 2013.



"The Creator," 2002

"The Creator" is a plexiglass statue conceived by the students of [Sherman Indian High School](#) for the 2001-2002 public art project *A Community of Angels*. I remember seeing quite a few of these Angels all over Los Angeles years ago. Click on this [photo book](#).



In 1981, I had seen the movie *Zoot Suit* directed by Luis Valdez from his play. At the Autry, a contemporary designer, Vanesa Estrella, presents her interpretation of the 1940s style *El Pachuco Zoot Suits* “that honor identity, resilience, and pride within Mexican American and other communities.”



Zoot Suit. Photo by Elisa Leonelli

Artist Liliana Castro immigrated to L.A. from El Salvador in 1989. This 2026 art piece on sequoia bark depicts her grandmother Narcisa, her aunt Teresa and herself. Titled “[Liberation](#),” it symbolized the quest for freedom of three generations of women.



“Liberation,” by Liliana Castro. Photo by Elisa Leonelli

P.S. I went to see at the *Royal American Pachuco: The Legend of Luis Valdez*. Valdez is alive and working at 86.

This entry was posted on Friday, July 3rd, 2026 at 6:48 am and is filed under [Education](#), [Visual Art](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [Comments \(RSS\)](#) feed. You can leave a response, or [trackback](#) from your own site.