

Sadow Birk

artillery



LOS ANGELES AREA SCENE PAINTINGS

by [Annabel Osberg](#) ·

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“Los Angeles is a city without a past,” urban geographer Michael Dear once declared, referring to the city’s penchant for effacing its own history. Yet an enthralling exhibition at the **Hilbert Museum** attests that LA does, indeed, have a past, one recorded in vibrant detail by local artists. In “Los Angeles Area Scene Paintings,” over 70 works from the

1880s onward present a sprawling survey of LA in all its diverse districts and essences across time, offering a valuable opportunity for contemporary viewers to gain a better perspective on how the city has changed. Bringing to life previous eras, paintings of jazz clubs, Chinatowns, oil fields, restaurants, overpasses, Catalina Island, skyscrapers, beaches, mountains, ranches, homes, and parks speak to our area's diverse flair. Frozen in bygone times, glimpses of rural roadside citrus stands and now-defunct amusement parks spark contemplation of how little we know about what preceded current landmarks. Many of these painters foresaw their familiar settings' imminent disappearance and sought to preserve them in paint. For instance, **Ralph Hulett's** 1940s-60s paintings of Victorian homes slated for demolition in the Bunker Hill neighborhood evoke a sense of feeling and color that no photograph could echo. **Millard Sheets' *Sunday Morning (Chavez Ravine)*** (1929) re-vivifies a Mexican community where Dodger Stadium now stands. Depicting despondent laborers dwarfed by factory buildings, the gloom of **Ben Norris' *Discouraged Workers*** (1939, pictured above) contrasts with the sunniness of *A Grand Place to Work* (1941), **Emil Kosa Jr.'s** mysterious farmhouse idyll nearby. More avant-garde compositions include modernist freeway abstractions by **Edward Biberman** and **Roger Kuntz**. Most of the work falls into the larger regional genre of California Scene Painting that flourished from 1920s to the 60s, but several more recent works by artists such as **Sadow Birk** provide a sense of continuity. One contemporary painting of a deserted diner, *Eagle Rock Winter* (2014) by **Suong Yangchareon**, might have looked old-fashioned a few weeks ago; but now its desolation seems acutely timely.

<https://www.artillerymag.com/los-angeles-area-scene-paintings/>