

Reviews (Exhibitions)

The Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art and Culture.

Riverside Art Museum, Riverside, California.
June 18, 2022, to present.

What is Chicana/o art? And why can the city of Riverside in California claim to answer this question? The new *Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art and Culture* of the Riverside Art Museum—better known as *The Cheech*—is a one-of-a-kind experience for art enthusiasts interested in a type of art that has long been marginalized in mainstream national and international art venues; it calls attention to scholars studying Chicanx and Latinx traditions and paradigms; and it situates its artwork within the rich history of these respective communities. While *The Cheech*—named for actor-activist Richard Anthony “Cheech” Marin—is designed as an art museum, the themes depicted in its artwork and their curation cut across topics of culture and history. Additionally, it is the only and largest Chicanx-centered art and cultural institution in the world. With diverse types of mediums and a variety of artists, styles, and themes, *The Cheech* is now home to the ineffable artistic expressions of the Chicanx community.

The Cheech opened its doors on June 18, 2022. Housed in the city of Riverside in Southern California, *The Cheech* represents a cultural patrimony in the region with critical implications. First, Chicanx art—and Latinx art in general—has suffered from a history of marginalization and has been relegated to the periphery of the art world. This cultural hegemonic practice runs parallel to the social structures that Latinx communities face both nationally and internationally. Second, Southern California’s “Inland Empire” has generally been seen as a region on the periphery of the Greater Los Angeles area. Taking into consideration that this area is known more for its transportation-distribution infrastructure to accommodate the logistics industry than as a cultural hub, it is fitting that *The Cheech*, with all its symbolic and institutional weight for a marginalized community, has found its home on this periphery.

Viewed from the outside, the two-story structure is imposing, proudly displaying the art museum’s nickname, *The Cheech*, as well as “Chicano Art and Culture,” in bold white letters to all passersby on foot or on wheels as an opportunity to validate a historically marginalized community. Entering through the southside entrance, the museum’s semi-open floor plan consumes the visitor in an embrace of artistic intrigue. It is recommended by the staff to begin the art-viewing experience “clockwise,” but one can hardly refrain from looking the other way, counterclockwise, up toward the staircase, and toward the other rooms, with art pieces visible from a distance. However, for a first-time visitor, the staff knows best.

So, heeding the staff’s recommendation, the visitor simply pivots toward the west side of *The Cheech*. Immediately one is greeted by an initial round of art pieces which range in medium from “mixed” via acrylic and oil paint to lenticular

printing and more. The first room, the Altura Credit Union Community Gallery, is of special significance because it focuses on art and its curation by artists and curators from the Inland Empire. In this way, *The Cheech* reaffirms the importance of the Inland Empire in shaping and being shaped by Chicax artists and professionals in fields like public history. The artwork itself depicts a wide range of characters and themes, such as Mesoamerican Indigenous warriors, Indigenous femininity, religion, and more. The visitor is informed of the Chicax community's diversity and inclusion through these artworks which serve as a prelude to the rest of *The Cheech*.

As visitors continue to make their way clockwise, they are transported to *The Cheech's* foundational mainstay, Cheech Marin's own collection of Chicax art. Comprising the remainder of the first floor, Cheech Marin's collection is organized into several sections. According to the marker that initially introduces the visitors to Marin's collection, the first section centers on "neighborhoods and communities that are deeply, artistically meaningful but have rarely been represented as such within mainstream museum spaces. These works deploy memory, creating a sense of recognition—a coming home." Indeed, this first gallery displays paintings by Jacinto Guevara that portray the façades of houses with cultural markers of the Chicax community. Artwork depicting the quintessential urban landscape of the Chicax neighborhood on the southside wall includes creations by Roberto Guitérrez, such as his large *City Terrace*. Margaret García and Joe Pena share the west side of the room with their scenes of nightlife, including street vendors, customarily seen and felt from the perspective of the Chicax community. The visitor is also introduced to a contemporary feature of the art-viewing experience at *The Cheech*, namely, utilizing QR codes that link to videos of Cheech Marin commenting on these respective artists' works and how he came to collect them. Located throughout Marin's collection, these QR codes can be found above Roberto Gutierrez's and Joe Pena's nameplates, offering visitors a shared resonance of the artwork with Cheech Marin himself.

The gallery then transitions into an L-shaped corridor, as the artwork transports the visitor into scenes of violence situated in the history and experiences of the Chicax community. Featuring Frank Romero's *The Arrest of the Paleteros* and various scenes by Adán Hernández and John M. Valadez, including Hernández's mesmerizing *Kill the Pachuco Bastard*, the gallery confronts the historical memory of the Chicax community's collective experiences. Femicides and the criminalization of the Chicax population—structural processes that have historically pushed the community to the margins of mainstream society—are portrayed in the artwork, reminding the public of the legacy of these historical practices.

After exploring the fraught histories and contemporary realities of the Chicax community and landscape, the remainder of the collection showcases the versatility of Chicax portraiture. Through diverse artistic styles and mediums, these works of Cheech Marin's collection display the inclusivity and plurality of

the Chicana community, countering mainstream depictions of a monolithic abstraction of Chicana identity. Benito Huerta's *Exile off Main Street* exemplifies this intentional curation throughout the first floor of *The Cheech*, portraying nude bodies, each with varying hues of pigmentation and degrees of gender ambiguity. Chaz Bojorquez's *Chino Latino* also addresses how racial and ethnic subjectivities are formed in relation to other groups, reminding visitors of the history, space, and conceptualization of encounters between the Chinese and Chicana communities.

Common tropes of Chicana culture are noticeable throughout Marin's collection, such as the *pachuco*, the *pistolero*, desert flora/landscapes, lowrider culture, and much more. Yet, the star of Cheech's collection is the gigantic two-story lenticular *Coatlicue* by brothers Elinar and Jamex de la Torre. Greeting visitors from the moment they enter the art museum and situated in the heart of the edifice, this monumental work portrays a hybrid interpretation of *Coatlicue*, a Nahua deity that symbolizes mother earth. Depicted as a lowrider "transformer," it bridges the Chicana communities from East L.A. to Riverside through an interstate map in the background that connects the two cities. Centering indigeneity and connecting it with the environmental issues that impact Chicana communities in the Inland Empire today, the *Coatlicue*-transformer hybrid conveys the importance of balance and energy renewability. In capturing the diversity that constitutes the Chicana community and its varied experiences, Cheech Marin's collection illuminates his awareness as a Chicana collector and the centrality of situating such dynamics in a historical context with relevance to today's realities.

The *Coatlicue* lenticular is the perfect segue for transitioning up the flight of stairs or through an elevator ride, both on the east side of the art museum, toward the second floor. Here, one encounters the Education Center, a space dedicated to engaging visitors of all ages and abilities in exploring and creating art. Committing to the clockwise navigation on the second floor, the visitor enters a four-part exhibition dedicated to the de la Torre brothers and titled *Collidoscope: De la Torre Brothers Retro-Perspective*. Influenced by their transnational experiences, the brothers' Chicana/borderland artworks range in techniques from glass blowing and lenticular printing to incorporating video and audio. Adding to the visitors' experience, every compartment of the exhibition displays art installations that escape the confines of the museum walls, occupying spaces either on the floor or ceiling.

The thematic scheme for the first room deals with systems and cycles that encapsulate the body as a mode of communication and spiritual connection between nature and technology. Perhaps the most exemplary and outstanding of these artworks is the kinetic installation *La Bella Epoch*. As visitors rotate around the installation, they may notice that the artwork resembles a Mexican ten-peso coin, with the Aztec sun stone on one side and the Mexican coat of arms on the other. Through a historical lens, this installation depicts the false promises of order

and progress of the Porfirian era, of European optimism and colonial expansion, that coalesced before the outbreak of World War I and the 1910 Mexican Revolution. The legacy of this historical correlation is reflected by references to contemporary allusions of time, consumerism, and nationalism.

In addition, the visitor has the opportunity to visit the U.S. Bank Video Gallery located in the first room. Created by students, emerging filmmakers, and digital-media artists from the Inland Empire, this video gallery features interviews with Cheech Marin and a compilation of videos on Chicana/o/x art and artists, all pertaining to the meanings of Chicana/o/x art. This video gallery further solidifies *The Cheech* as a community-centered institution.

The second room examines hybridization in place and time. Its central installation, *Colonial Atmosphere*, encapsulates this theme by portraying an Olmec head reconfigured into a spacecraft against the backdrop of a lunar landscape dotted with *saguaro* cacti, resembling the desert landscape of the U.S./Mexican borderlands. By depicting a time warp between futuristic space travel and pre-Columbian Mesoamerican culture, this installation conveys that hybridity may also imply a dislocation of time and space. The curation allows visitors to weave through the art piece as they witness the array of mixed media on display in and around the installation.

Visitors conclude their art-viewing experience at *The Cheech* with a masterfully curated theme that directly refers to the unfortunate moments of a broader perspective of Chicana/o/x art and art history with the satirical style of a vignette. Colonialism, globalism, syncretism, and other significant topics are bravely depicted and made relevant through a contemporary decolonial framework. This final portion of the exhibition is divided into two rooms, yet these are closely related. For example, *Exporting Democracy*, in the initial room, is a cartographic installation that depicts the global consequences of modernity in the form of religion and democracy to justify war. Stemming from the global map portrayed in the installation are winged crucifixes resembling monarch butterflies. Tied to the ceiling, they lead a path into the second room and connect to a second art piece, *Soy Beaner*. This second art piece depicts the fluidity of culture, identity, and language, portrayed by a massive video and mixed-media Aztec sun stone. However, as the butterfly crucifixes approach *Soy Beaner*, they begin to take the shape of fighter jets. *Soy Beaner* thus conveys the simultaneous political attacks on the Chicana/o/x community and the commodification of Chicana/o/x culture for capitalist profiteering. These final two parts of the exhibition are intended to engage the visitor in a process of healing by confronting these historical moments with a degree of humor and reflection.

The Cheech is “one of a kind” in both experience and content. However, other museums dedicated to ethnic communities that have been making a welcome difference include the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., as well as the Museum of Latin American Art in Long Beach, California. *The Cheech* is of interest to all who wish to appreciate the artistic caliber

of the Chicana community. Those with a background in the field of History may want to pay special attention. Many of the artists featured at *The Cheech* were present during the mid-century Chicana/o movement. Thus, their artwork acts as undiscovered primary sources of the Chicana experience, enabling dialogues between eyewitnesses, historians, and casual visitors. As Cheech Marin asserts during an interview shown in the video gallery, “You cannot love or hate Chicano art unless you see it.”

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Dress Codes [exhibition].

Curated by Carolyn Brucken.

Autry Museum of the American West, Los Angeles, California.

May 21, 2022, to January 8, 2023.

“What does your clothing say about you?” “Have you ever broken a dress code?” “What’s been passed down to you?” These questions, emblazoned in white vinyl letters on button-up shirts and blue jeans, greet the visitors who enter *Dress Codes*, a new exhibition on display at the Autry Museum of the American West in Los Angeles, California, from May 21, 2022, through January 8, 2023. The exhibition is curated by Autry chief curator Carolyn Brucken who has been responsible for numerous exhibitions at the museum, including *California Style: Art and Fashion from the California Historical Society* (2007), *Home Lands: How Women Made the West* (2010), and *Investigating Griffith Park* (in development and currently on display for visitors in the museum’s lower level). Just past the museum’s entrance, a bright turquoise wall announces the entrance to *Dress Codes* in the George Montgomery Gallery. Recounting the stories of several iconic clothing styles associated with the American West, *Dress Codes* traces the various meanings associated with these articles of clothing throughout the region’s history and seeks to educate visitors on not only Western fashions, but the cultural implications of clothing more broadly.

The exhibition begins by exploring the history of one of the most ubiquitous articles of clothing in American wardrobes, past and present: blue jeans. Tracing these iconic denim pants from their origins as workwear in the West to a business casual staple, this display emphasizes the varied meanings that jeans have held for Westerners for more than 100 years. A mannequin in a glass case models the oldest pair on display: dark-wash jeans from 1890 along with a shabby denim jacket from 1903, both left behind by workers in Nevada mines. A nearby display case holds two more pairs of working men’s jeans, sold by Levi Strauss & Co. in the 1930s and 1940s. Aside from some rough stitches and patches and a few possible paint

splatters, all three pairs of jeans are in remarkably good condition – a testament to the durability that made them appealing to manual laborers. Upon closer inspection of details – such as the seams, riveted pockets, front zippers, and metal buttons – visitors may be taken aback at how little the basic structure of a pair of jeans has changed over the last century. Jeans eventually transitioned from practical to fashionable as “cowboy” jeans and button-up shirts became the standard uniform for rodeo performers and other entertainers looking to evoke the American West. Several such outfits are displayed, including a pair of boot-cut Wrangler jeans and a silky salmon-colored shirt from country singer Tex Owens, alongside 1950s catalogs advertising rodeo-style clothing. A nearby wall features photographic portraits of modern rodeo performers, highlighting women and people of color who challenge perceptions of the rodeo as an exclusively white and male arena.

Another display walks visitors through women’s subversive adoption of jeans, underscored by a large, printed quote from an 1863 municipal law that prohibited cross-dressing. Placards explain that, despite legal and cultural restrictions forbidding women from wearing pants, Western women borrowed jeans from male friends and family members for years until Levi Strauss & Co. eventually introduced women’s styles. Mannequins modeling high-waisted, wide-legged “Lady Levi’s” from the 1940s and 1950s show off the side zippers that were used in women’s jeans in lieu of the “masculine” front-button fly. But a large pillar next to the mannequins points out that women continued to flout gendered expectations. A large sign accompanied by a short video presentation tells of lesbian women at a bar in 1960s Texas who resisted prescribed dress standards in order to express their sexuality and identity, defiantly wearing front-fly jeans despite frequent police raids predicated on the still common anti-cross-dressing laws. Nearby, a pair of denim overalls, a pair of flared-leg jeans adorned with vibrant fabric patches, and black-and-white photographs of the 1960s continue to explore jeans as rebellion, this time among Civil Rights activists and hippies. *Dress Codes’* inquiry into jeans concludes with a look at modern denim, including several pamphlets published by Levi Strauss & Co. in the 1990s encouraging employers to adopt jeans as standard “business casual” wear. Mannequins display styles as recent as 2020, rounding out the iconic blue jeans’ journey from Western workwear to wardrobe staple.

Venturing further into the exhibition, visitors encounter several displays devoted to plaid. Although not exclusive to the American West, plaid flannel shirts developed particular significance for some Westerners. A cozy button-up shirt made from thick, red-plaid wool invites visitors to leave behind sunny Southern California for the Pacific Northwest, where Oregon’s Pendleton Woolen Mills, famous for their blankets, began manufacturing shirts in 1924. Visitors are then transported to a rugged plain, where a black-and-white mural of cowboys silhouetted against a herd of cattle serves as a backdrop for mannequins modeling plaid shirts in warm oranges and browns, often worn by Western workers and

performers alike throughout the twentieth century. Nearby, another wall features a watercolor painting and several black-and-white photographs documenting plaid in Los Angeles, where groups ranging from surfers to dock workers have incorporated plaid shirts into their typical style of dress. An adjacent wall plastered with album covers and band stickers considers plaid's significance among musical artists based in the Western U.S., while speakers hanging overhead play "The Sound of Plaid," a mix of songs by artists from The Beach Boys to Kendrick Lamar. On a small screen, visitors can watch a video presentation about Greenspan's, a California clothing store operating from 1928 to the present that has played an integral role in incorporating plaid into lowrider culture, even influencing Pendleton to produce plaid shirts in a wider range of sizes. A final display of photographs considers plaid in relation to LGBTQ+ identity, from the lesbian women in the 1940s who encoded covert meanings into the fabric that allowed them to recognize one another in public, to the gay men who embraced plaid in the 1970s as an adaptation of typical masculine attire.

The exhibition then transports visitors across the Pacific Ocean to paradise—a beach with white sands, lush palm trees, and bright blue waters to match the clear blue sky, all projected onto a wall serving as a backdrop for colorful displays of *aloha* wear. In the center of the space, mannequins model resort wear, dresses adorned with Hawaiian flowers made by California companies from the 1930s through the 1960s. Another display includes a black and pink *kimono* from 1920s Japan alongside a checkered *palaka* shirt worn by sailors and Hawai'i's plantation workers in the twentieth century, while signage discusses the Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino influences that eventually begat the iconic *aloha* shirt. A veritable rainbow of these breezy Hawaiian-style shirts dating from the 1960s to the present lines the nearby wall. Each short-sleeved button-up merits a closer inspection, as some surprising designs hide within the familiar floral patterns, from illustrations of guitars to a California high school campus. Captions identifying the origins of each shirt, primarily collected from Autry staff members, reflect personal and family histories as varied as the fabrics themselves: "Grandfather's shirt, passed on to Josh G."; "Western *aloha* shirt. Thrifted in Albuquerque, NM. Circa 2010"; "Husband's *aloha* shirt, worn for parents' anniversary in Hawai'i." Nearby, a display delves deep into the history of one family's Hawaiian roots, featuring photographs of family members wearing floral prints from the 1960s to the present, an empty sugar bag from the Honolulu Plantation Company where a grandfather worked and went on strike in the 1920s, a shadowbox displaying a son's 2016 graduation shirt adorned with flowers and palm trees, and a quilt made by a grandmother in 1992 from pink, blue, and red fabrics leftover from handsewn clothing. Visitors may be surprised by Hawai'i's inclusion in the museum, as the lush islands do not fit with the dusty brown desert or rocky arid mountains often associated with the West. But lying approximately 2,000 miles further west than the United States' West Coast, Hawai'i represents a significant milepost in the nation's westward expansion.

In a far corner of the gallery, visitors are invited to ponder cultural appropriation compared to cultural exchange while learning about another trend often associated with the Western United States: fringe. Mannequins model several jackets in warm leather tones, some embellished with intricate floral embroidery, and all adorned with leather fringe on the shoulders and sleeves. These jackets, crafted by Cree, Dakota, and Cherokee makers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, represent a long history of fringe used as “sustainable fashion” among Native people to avoid wasting material. Nearby, a glass display case holds a black dance shawl, created by a Blackfeet artisan in 1972, ornamented with turquoise and red geometric patterns and red and white ribbons, while a quote written on the wall above explains the significance of fringe’s dynamic movements within Native dance traditions. The exhibition then considers the incorporation of fringe into the myth of the American West. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western dime novels are displayed alongside photographs of fringed outfits worn by “Wild West” performers” and an actual circa-1900 jacket belonging to William “Buffalo Bill” Cody, covered with embroidery fusing the stars and stripes of the U.S. flag with buffalo skulls and arrow patterns. Next to a fringed leather shirt worn by Mohawk actor Jay Silverheels as Tonto in *The Lone Ranger*, a plaque explains that fringed costumes in American popular culture often functioned as “a visual stereotype that erased real, contemporary Native people.” The display concludes with a few final fringed leather jackets and a vest alongside a photo of Jimi Hendrix, representing the adoption of fringe by counterculture movements in the later part of the twentieth century.

The exhibition then takes visitors out of the gallery and down a hallway, where a small display of cowboy boots and accompanying plaque outline the style’s origins as nineteenth-century workwear and its eventual adoption by Western performers as a regional symbol. Visitors subsequently enter the Norman F. Sprague, Jr. Gallery, where a final display models the distinctive *china poblana* dress. Catholic artifacts and paintings from as early as the seventeenth century tell of the style’s mythologized origins with an enslaved woman from India who became a Mexican folk saint. Consisting of a simple blouse, a sash or belt, and a full skirt in patterned, embroidered, or beaded fabric, *china poblana* developed and spread throughout eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Mexico, combining styles and fabrics from India, Europe, China, and Indigenous Mexican cultures. Today, the style remains closely tied to Mexican and Mexican American identities. An early twentieth-century outfit on display consists of a white blouse embroidered with flowers, a striped sash, and a skirt featuring a horse and rider formed with intricate beadwork. A black and red ballgown worn at a 2017 *quinceañera* in Dallas, Texas, adorned with sequined florals and a Mexican eagle, represents a modern manifestation of the style.

Throughout *Dress Codes*, the displays are detailed and exceptionally well done, with varied artifacts, from photographs to pamphlets, perfectly complementing the displayed clothing. The accompanying placards and infographics are not only

informative but visually engaging, with a cohesive visual style throughout. Additionally, an interactive portion of the exhibition invites visitor participation, including an electronic poll asking if style is the same as fashion, walls covered in sticky notes recording visitors' stories about suffering for fashion, and rows of clothespins where visitors have displayed drawings of their favorite articles of clothing. The exhibition even continues into the museum gift shop with an impressive display of books about fashion within and beyond the West. Informative, energetic, and inviting, *Dress Codes* provides an engaging—even fun—visitor experience.

Overall, *Dress Codes* views its subject matter through a distinctively cultural-studies lens, considering questions of identity, rebellion, and ongoing imbalances of power while inviting visitors into the hidden histories behind the very clothes they are wearing. The exhibition's treatment of *china poblana* unfortunately suffers from its lack of proximity to the main exhibition; although well curated, this display of Mexican American culture and identity feels a bit underwhelming compared to the larger gallery. Additionally, the exhibition's textual descriptions of artifacts may not contain enough detail to satisfy the serious fashion historian. But *Dress Codes'* strength lies in its accessibility, and its focus on the everyday people who wear and use fashion to establish and maintain identity offers a refreshing departure from the many fashion exhibitions that center on prestigious designers and artists, such as *Lee Alexander McQueen: Mind, Mythos, Muse* at the LACMA (Los Angeles County Museum of Art) or *Art of Costume Design in Television* at the FIDM (Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising) Museum. An engaging exploration of the meaning of everyday articles often taken for granted, *Dress Codes* is a standout addition to the Autry Museum. Like all of the Autry's exhibitions, *Dress Codes* undoubtedly deserves the attention of scholars studying the American West—but this exhibition proves that the Museum can be enjoyed by anyone with even a passing interest in not only the American West but American history and culture more broadly.

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The Fantasy of the Middle Ages [exhibition].

Curated by Larisa Grollemond and Bryan C. Keene.
The Getty Center, Los Angeles, California.
June 21 to September 11, 2022.

At some point in our lives, perhaps while reading the nostalgic childhood book series *Harry Potter* or while watching HBO's pop-cultural mainstream fantasy drama *Game of Thrones*, we all must have wondered what life in a medieval fantasy would be like. As all things medieval have been reinterpreted and reimagined in creative outlets like books, films, TV shows, and games, the era itself has become a historical and cultural reference to the imagination. Capturing the fantastical

elements that have found their way into the expressive arts and storytelling, the J. Paul Getty Museum's exhibition *The Fantasy of the Middle Ages* intertwines the historical context of iconic medieval artistic pieces with the mythical icons of folk legends that have inspired fantasy writers paying homage to the era.

The Getty, residing in the hills above Santa Monica, is known as one of the premier educational centers of Los Angeles. It showcases works of art of outstanding quality and historical importance to the curious audience. The journey to our exhibition begins with a long and winding trip on their tram, followed by climbing the solid travertine limestone steps toward the welcoming museum entrance hall. Past that, the courtyard's glistening paved floors guide you to the museum's various pavilions, as well as other admirable attractions and places of interest. To your left, in the North Pavilion, our exhibition awaits you, as you are greeted by the studio lighting and mysterious pieces of art carefully arranged in its rooms. As all stories start, we begin at the beginning of the exhibition and time-travel back to the Middle Ages.

The exhibition's first section, "The Medieval Imagination," dissects the relevance and relationship of medieval historical works in fashion trends, architectural designs, and other cultural settings. One of the most eye-catching exhibits in this section is the manuscript illumination "St. George and the Dragon" by Master Guillebert de Mets, contained in a 1450-1455 prayer book (Ms. 2 [84.ML.67], fol. 18v). On one single page, it depicts the classic chivalrous tale of a knight in shining armor (St. George) saving a damsel in distress in her locked tower. The illumination's hints of golden hues creates a fantastical impression. As the imaginative world of medieval affairs aligns with romanticism, adventure, and chivalry, the desire to be a hero manifests itself in our dreams. This section's collection of manuscript illuminations also presents "King Haldin Accusing the Sultan's Daughter Gracienne of Dishonorable Behavior," attributed to Levian van Lanthem and David Aubert (1464), a homogenous blend of fantasy and history in their *Roman de Gillion de Trazegnies* (Ms. 111 [2013.46], fol. 150v). This exaggerated account of the travels of a medieval nobleman to Egypt is embellished with fictional settings inspired by European architectural designs and costumes. This particular image presents colorfully dressed nobles alongside their king inside a majestic castle. The beautiful designs continue in the folio's border which is filled with intricately designed animals, plants, and mythical beasts.

And what would a fantasy story be without mythological creatures and monsters to complement the world-building of our favorite stories? The exhibition's section "A Magical Middle Ages" does a wonderful job of presenting iconic creatures of fantastical origins, from the dwarves of *Lord of the Rings* to the wizards of *Harry Potter*, showcasing these beings as complementary to the Middle Ages via their association with medieval culture. Magical creatures in these settings include fabled dragons, witches, fairies, trolls, and other beings that have become associated with the Middle Ages as lore that brings a mystical element to this time period. An oil-on-canvas painting, *Fairies in a Bird's Nest* by John Anster

Fitzgerald (circa 1860; on loan for this exhibition from the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco), captures the mystical aura in its rendition of woodland fairies mischievously frolicking around an abandoned nest. Arguably the epitome of medieval monsters is the fire-breathing dragon that a knight must slay in many a fabled legend. A reference to this fantastic being, the illumination “A Dragon” (1270), included in a bestiary featuring treatises by Hugo de Fouilloy (Ms. Ludwig XV 3 [83.MR.173], fol. 89) captivates an unknown medieval artist’s interpretation of a horned legendary beast with feathered wings attached to a reptile’s body, immortalizing the creature in all its oddity. Reimagined into more recent media, Smaug, the dragon, becomes the respective antagonistic character in J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* who will ultimately be slain by Bard the Bowman in a heroic feat.

A perfect example of history intermingling with folklore is the tale of King Arthur, a legend pervasive as an inspirational cornerstone for fabled knights. The exhibition’s section “King Arthur and Camelot” juxtaposes what is known about the “historical” King Arthur against the stuff of legends. As myths create grandiose illusions—for reimagined tales are always greater than their original inspirations—the question arises: What is the “real” story of King Arthur and his Round Table? To address this question, the exhibition introduces a collection of well-preserved manuscripts that feature the adventures of Arthur and the knights of his Round Table, for example, the fourteenth-century illumination “Tristan Rescuing King Arthur” (1320) by an unknown artist, included in the *Roman du Bon Chevalier Tristan, Fils au Bon Roy Meliadus de Leonois* (Ms. Ludwig XV 5 [83.MR.175], fol. 148). Arthur’s fantastical medieval world is reflected in more recent media, such as the 1949 Paramount film based on Mark Twain’s eponymous 1889 novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, in which the main character, Hank Morgan, time-travels to Camelot and interacts with the knights of the Round Table.

The following section, “Staging the Middle Ages,” turns to the dramatic world of knightly tournaments attended by noble ladies in fantastical dresses. This room explores the gendered lifestyles of iconic knights and ladies via fashion and presentation. As women in medieval paintings are adorned in textile garments of flamboyant colors, their dresses have inspired costume designs all the way into the modern era. To illustrate this, the exhibition features a dress created by French fashion designer Paul Poiret in 1925 (on loan from New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art) that takes its cues from the silhouetted gowns of medieval ladies with their modest cut, various layers, and beautiful embroidery. In addition, this section exhibits Mary Kay Dodson’s 1948 costume sketch of Virginia Field as Morgan Le Fay in the film *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (on loan from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art). This particular sketch features an elegant white gown with decorative patterns affixed to its bodice, contrasted by a majestic black cape that curtains the gown. Juxtaposed with the feminine icons of medieval fashion are the period’s knights who often participated in showcases of

spectator sports, including jousting, fencing, and the like. The exhibition emphasizes this by displaying the *Il Fior di Battaglia* manuscript (circa 1340/1350–1450; Ms. Ludwig XV 13 [83.MR.183]), a fencing and fighting manual originally written by Fiore Fulran di Liberi da Premariacco in the late 1300s. It is a “how-to” manual of the art of combat, both on horseback and on foot, and it explains how to wield swords, axes, lances, and daggers.

The exhibition’s final section, “The Middle Ages on Location,” presents set references in popular culture that are embedded in famous projects and easily recognizable. These sets have become timeless as they blend reality and fiction. A classic example is the HBO series *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019) which used the picturesque Croatian city of Dubrovnik as the setting for Westeros’s King’s Landing. Other art projects captivate the majestic grandeur of towering castles as settings for their fantasy stories to enchant the audience. Thus, the concept art of *Sleeping Beauty* (Walt Disney Productions, 1958) by Eyvind Earle could be considered a fantastical representation of the medieval world in art and animation. As its vibrant hues welcome viewers into the world of *Sleeping Beauty*, Eyvind Earle’s castle builds a bridge to a time and place far, far, away to begin the story. While this alleged medieval castle has become a signature feature of the Disney franchise (as evidenced by its physical manifestations in Anaheim, Orlando, and all around the world), it was inspired by the architectural design of Neuschwanstein Castle in Germany, a magnificent neo-medieval structure that was itself a take on numerous original medieval buildings (including the Château de Pierrefonds in France).

As you step away from your time-travel and return to reality by exiting the main exhibition, you will come across the atrium which showcases modern items of medieval designs. Here, the Getty has curated a personal collection of staff memorabilia that displays pop culture’s homages to the Middle Ages. Truly wonderful in their presentation, royal purple banners surround these items to evoke nostalgia, as we ourselves might have some of these very items in our homes. For example, there are board- and role-playing games, including *Dungeons and Dragons*, *HeroQuest*, and *Magic: The Gathering*. Believers in the mystical elements of magic may relate to *Tarot* cards with their medieval illustrations. Geeks of popular fandoms will recognize famous collections like *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, the *Dragonlance* novels, *Warhammer 40K*, and even *Star Wars* (after all, the Jedi Order echoes the medieval Templar Knights). These collections show how widespread the ideas of medieval culture have become in our society. History may not repeat itself, but it sure does rhyme.

To anyone seeking to connect to a historical era, I highly recommend the Getty’s *The Fantasy of the Middle Ages*, and while this exhibition will have run its course by the time this review is published, a brilliant and beautifully illustrated catalog (144 pages), *The Fantasy of the Middle Ages: An Epic Journey through Imaginary Medieval Worlds* by Larisa Grollemond and Bryan C. Keene (2022), is bound to keep it alive for years to come. This exhibition creates a magnificent

dialogue between medieval artifacts and modern media, and it stimulates a conversation on how impactful the Middle Ages continue to be in our modern society.

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USS Midway Museum

[built as an aircraft carrier 1945; museum since 2004].

910 North Harbor Drive, San Diego, California 92101, at Navy Pier.
Permanent exhibition.

A weapon built for war turned into an instrument of knowledge ... In 1945, the USS [United States Ship] *Midway* was commissioned as the largest ship in the world, a title this aircraft carrier would hold during the first decade of its service for the U.S. Navy. Between 1945 and 1992, it participated in numerous operations, including “Operation Frequent Wind” (1975), when it housed refugees after the evacuation of Saigon, and its designation as flagship during “Operation Desert Storm” (1991). The USS *Midway* was decommissioned in San Diego in 1992, subsequently moved to storage in Washington, and returned to San Diego in 2004 for its opening as a naval aviation history museum.

The USS *Midway* Museum experience begins as soon as you arrive since the museum’s primary parking area is located on a pier directly adjacent to the ship itself. There is no building to traverse prior to entering the USS *Midway*; rather, there are exterior stairs and a bridge that bring visitors directly into the aircraft carrier’s hangar deck. From there, the museum provides audio-tour devices that offer additional information (e.g., context, background, and anecdotes) on many of the ship’s rooms and displays. A QR code can also be scanned to bring up these audio files on a personal device, allowing visitors to use their own cellphones and earbuds rather than the equipment provided by the museum. However, there are areas of the carrier where the cellular signal is weak or – in my case – completely lost, rendering the audio files temporarily inaccessible. Nevertheless, it is highly recommended to listen to the audio information as one explores the museum.

Upon entering the hangar deck, “The Battle of Midway Theater” is situated to the right of the entrance. Every 30 minutes, the theater plays a 15-minute film, *Voices of Midway*, that focuses on the 1942 Battle of Midway during World War II’s Pacific naval campaign, the aircraft carrier’s namesake. This film combines historical footage and reenactments to tell its story with an emphasis on Ensign George H. Gay Jr. (1917–1994), the only surviving member of Torpedo Squadron 8’s attack on the Japanese aircraft carriers. Having the story primarily revolve around one individual makes this significant, large-scale event appear more personal since it connects the audience with a name and a face. While it is a fairly short film, *Voices of Midway* provides plenty of information regarding the naval battle’s importance, the events that transpired during the engagement, and its

outcome. The film is suitable for an audience of all ages and a wide range of historical knowledge, and I would recommend it to all visitors.

Moving beyond the hangar deck, visitors can explore the carrier's living quarters and naval operations areas (e.g., navigation and communication) that are adjacent to the hangar deck. This area housed the crew of the USS *Midway* during its decades of active service; now there are mannequins in their stead. The bedrooms are reminiscent of college dorms: there is just enough room to sleep and store some belongings, but not much space to move about or for privacy. Visitors then have the opportunity to visit "ready rooms" that served multiple purposes for a squadron's officers (e.g., as offices or briefing rooms). The seats in these rooms are arranged in rows and columns that face a screen and a whiteboard, which contributes to the sense of order and organization throughout the museum. Traversing this area of the carrier takes visitors to office areas where crew members would type and file reports, messages, orders, and the like, and to areas with consoles, screens, and various electronic equipment. Essentially, this section of the ship was responsible for carrying out the orders of the USS *Midway*. Walking through this deck offers visitors insights into the complex system of operating an aircraft carrier.

Meanwhile, the lower deck was responsible for sustaining the crew while the USS *Midway* was deployed. Visitors are allowed to walk through the galley and take a closer look at the enormous cooking pots required to prepare the 13,000 daily meals. The dining area for the enlisted men was nothing out of the ordinary (i.e., barren tables and chairs in a large room), but the (much smaller) dining area for the officers featured cloth covers for the tables and chairs. The carrier was equipped with industrial-sized washers and dryers, as well as large clothing irons, to clean and press 2 million pounds of laundry each year. All this clean laundry went well with the clean haircut and shaven face provided by the onboard barbershop that provided 80,000 haircuts per year. Due to its services and role in creating a sense of familiarity similar to living on land in a typical town or city, this deck is aptly titled "City at Sea."

The area that removes one from this familiarity is the flight deck with its display of a wide range of fighters, bombers, and helicopters from different decades. Each aircraft is accompanied by an information sign that contains its official name, role (e.g., attack or cargo transport), brief history, manufacturer, crew size, dimensions, gross weight, powerplant, and performance. Two areas on the flight deck are designated for talks given by volunteers, utilizing a screen to display footage and diagrams. One talk is focused on launching (catapult), the other on landing (trap). While visitors can admire and take photographs of the flight deck at their own pace, there is the opportunity for a guided tour of the island on the flight deck which takes visitors to the bridge and the captain's seat. This section of the carrier is the most crowded area, yet there is a sense of wonder because this tour offers the unique perspective to walk, quite literally, in the footsteps of the ship's leaders.

One detail that adds to this unique museum experience is that many of the volunteers are U.S. Navy veterans, and a handful of them actually served on the USS *Midway*. These veterans serve in a wide range of capacities, providing the aforementioned talks, directing foot traffic in the lower decks, or giving tours in specific areas (e.g., the bridge). Since there are numerous fighters, bombers, and helicopters from different decades on the flight deck, a few of the volunteers are able to point out the aircraft they piloted during their service, which makes the visit to the USS *Midway* Museum feel even more immersive.

This immersion is further enhanced by interactive experiences throughout the site. Firstly, there are two flight simulators in the hangar deck that visitors can pay to ride. One simulator is a two-seater, allowing visitors to act as pilot and co-pilot, while the other is intended for large groups as passengers. Secondly, there are various recreated cockpits that visitors can access for photo opportunities or to play with the equipment. Thirdly, there are numerous areas on the aircraft carrier for visitors to sit down at a console, view a navigation or targeting screen, flip switches, and pretend to work on the carrier. Lastly, there is equipment displayed in various rooms, ranging from pilot helmets to the muzzle of an aircraft's onboard gun. Other rooms contain timelines that walk visitors through the evolution of airplanes, helicopters, aircraft carriers, and the roles they played during warfare, rescue, and relief operations. These different components of the museum complement one another and bring naval aviation history to life.

Since it is, after all, an aircraft carrier, the USS *Midway* Museum does have shortcomings. With the exception of the "Battle of Midway Theater," there is no air conditioning throughout the museum. During my visit, I noticed (and this was confirmed to me by the staff) that there were not many visitors on that particular day. Despite this fact, though, it did not take long for the heat and humidity to set in when moving through the narrow inner decks. The staff did place fans throughout the decks, but these can only do so much to alleviate the situation. While this may seem like a mere nuisance at first glance, it can quickly lead to health and safety issues during California heatwaves. There was at least one individual during my time aboard who became lightheaded and required a checkup by the health staff before continuing their visit.

Furthermore, certain areas of the carrier are inaccessible or difficult to navigate for visitors with physical disabilities. The museum has put two measures in place to tackle this issue. Firstly, elevators have been installed where possible to allow for expanded access. Secondly, in areas where the installation of elevators is not feasible, the museum has set up video tours as an alternative to walking through the carrier. These two issues (i.e., the lack of air conditioning and the limited accessibility throughout the carrier) are unsurprising since the USS *Midway* was built toward the end of World War II and served as a fully-functioning, active aircraft carrier for several decades. Thus, visitors should forgive these faults since the USS *Midway* was not intended to be a museum, and the staff has taken steps to address these issues.

While it has been renovated to accommodate museum visitors rather than a naval crew, the USS *Midway* Museum still retains many of the details that bring history to life, such as tools and equipment, aircraft on the hangar deck, and passionate volunteers who are more than willing to share their service history. Those who have visited other aircraft carrier museums, such as the Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum (in Charleston, South Carolina) with the USS *Yorktown*, those who are interested in military history, or those who have a rekindled interest in aircraft after watching *Top Gun: Maverick* (2022) will certainly enjoy a visit to this museum in the beautiful city of San Diego. The USS *Midway* Museum is an awesome example of a living relic, and it excels at paying tribute to World War II, naval aviation history, and the USS *Midway* proper.

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