

# Cultural Wonder Barnsdall Art Park Offers Unique and Acclaimed Youth Arts Programs, and So Much More

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Friday wine tastings draw a crowd in the summer.

Meg Quinn/Courtesy Barnsdall Art Park

[Lisa Beebe](#) | August 9, 2018 | 6:50am

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About 100 years ago, Aline Barnsdall, a radical feminist and experimental theater producer, had an idea. She wanted to create an arts colony with a theater, gallery, artists' studios and a school for young people. Barnsdall was the daughter of a wealthy oil baron, so in 1919, she bought a plot of land in East Hollywood and put her plan into action.

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Jeffrey Herr, curator of the Hollyhock House, which was later built on that land, says, "Aline Barnsdall was a sort of Renaissance woman of her time. Her interests were wide, at least in the terms of her cultural intelligence and her political awareness. You have someone who wanted to produce avant-garde theater connecting with Frank Lloyd Wright and commissioning a cultural performing arts complex in Los Angeles."

While Barnsdall was never able to fully realize her dream — Herr says "artistic differences and egos are part of the issue why that didn't happen" — she wanted to provide the people of Los Angeles with a way to better themselves artistically.

"She had a whole idea for how she wanted this park to function, and it was very progressive and really forward-thinking," says Isabelle Lutterodt, director of Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery and Barnsdall Park. In 1927, Barnsdall gave the 11.5-acre park, including the Hollyhock House and Residence A, both designed for her by Wright, to the city in memory of her father, Theodore Barnsdall. In her bequest, she stipulated that the park be kept open to the public, and that "no buildings be erected except for art purposes."



The Gallery Theatre in Barnsdall Art Park

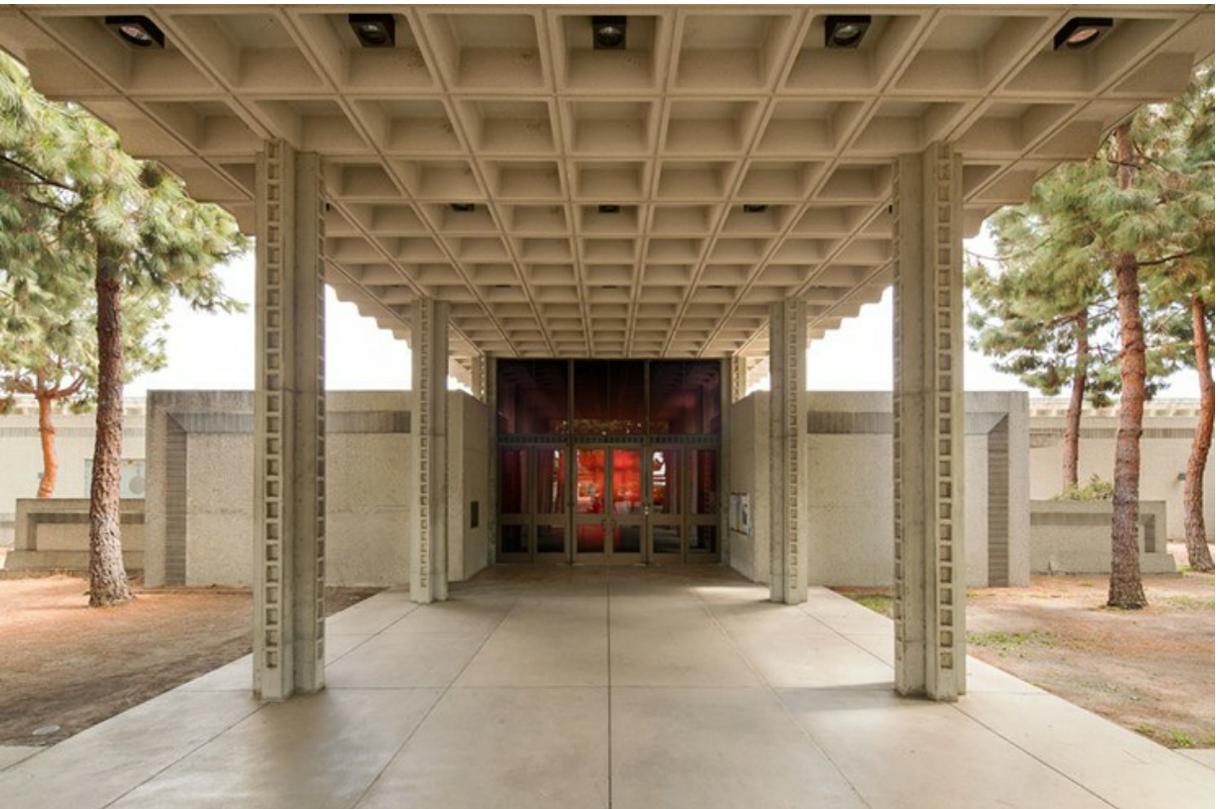
Courtesy Barnsdall Art Park

Ninety-one years later, the park is still open to the public — but if you've never been there, it's easy to pass it by without noticing. From the entrance at 4800 Hollywood Blvd., you can see a small parking lot but not much else. Drive up the winding road or climb a long flight of stairs and you'll discover welcoming greenery, a cultural center that hosts events year-round and world-famous architecture.

"When individuals get up there and they see what's up there, with the gallery and the theater and the Art Center, the Hollyhock House, they are just blown away — and everybody's blown away with the scenery. It has one of the best panoramic views in all of L.A.," says Leslie A. Thomas, community arts director with the City of L.A. Department of Cultural Affairs.

DCA is one of several city departments that work together to manage Barnsdall. Thomas says, "The Department of Cultural Affairs, of which I'm a part, is responsible for programming in the park. That agreement goes all the way back to 1980, when the Department of Cultural Affairs came into existence."

Two nonprofit organizations, the Barnsdall Art Park Foundation and Barnsdall Arts/Friends of the Junior Arts Center, support cultural events in the park, including the free family-friendly arts and craft classes held on Sundays from 10 a.m. to noon. The Barnsdall Art Park Foundation works closely with the city to address the needs of the park and gather public support, from raising funds for large projects to organizing community outreach events such as the annual wine-tasting fundraisers. Community organizations often rent the 299-seat Barnsdall Gallery Theatre, and the park itself is available for everything from festivals to film shoots. In 2017, it played a background role in the hit HBO series *Big Little Lies*.



The Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, or LAMAG, is currently showing its 2018 juried exhibition.

Courtesy Barnsdall Art Park

The Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, a 10,000-square-foot art venue in the park, hosts four exhibitions a year. Currently on display is the 2018 Juried Exhibition, a large-scale group show introducing new L.A. artists, which runs through Sept. 16. Lutterodt says, "The gallery is free for people to enter, and all of the programming attached to the gallery is free."

The gallery regularly hosts events offering useful information for up-and-coming artists. Lutterodt says, "One of the things that I think is really important when we do a show like the juried show is to offer how-to programs." During the current exhibition, the gallery plans to hold a free event on how to get represented by a gallery.



Youngsters can learn all kinds of art techniques in Barnsdall's classes.

Courtesy Barnsdall Art Park

Barnsdall Art Park offers seasonal art classes for adults through the Barnsdall Art Center, and classes for kids ages 3 to 17 through the Junior Art Center, which currently share space. Among the budding artists who took classes at the Junior Art Center as kids are Anjelica

Huston, Leonardo DiCaprio and L.A. mayor Eric Garcetti.

Thomas sees community arts education as a way to combine fine arts training and social issues. He says, "What we want to be able to do is sponsor and continue that fine arts training, but we also want to be receptive to the needs of the neighborhoods and communities where our centers are. I like to characterize it as, we always want to keep one ear opened to the community so that we're able to hear their concerns and able to provide things that address some of the concerns they're bringing up."

As an example, he describes a recent Junior Art Center exhibition with the general theme of California. "The purpose of that was getting students to really focus in on the things that are happening in California, and things that are happening here in L.A. Part of that exhibition featured drawings that depicted the life of our homeless population in L.A."



Picnickers outside Hollyhock House

Meg Quinn/Courtesy Barnsdall Art Park

During Aline Barnsdall's lifetime, many of the art education and community activities were held in Residence A, a former guest house. The structure is currently under renovation, and because it is relatively small, the park hasn't determined how it will be used in the future. Herr says only one thing is for sure. "It will be a sort of welcoming gateway to the park in whatever iteration that comes about, because it's the first structure that's visible as you come up the hill, and it's obviously a Frank Lloyd Wright structure. When it's completed, it will be visually spectacular in its own way, just as Hollyhock House is, but very different."

The Hollyhock House, which Frank Lloyd Wright originally designed as a private residence for Aline Barnsdall, soon will become vastly more accessible. The house is already open to the public, offering docent-led tours on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and self-guided "Walk Wright in" tours Thursday through Sunday (admission is \$7).

This fall, the park will launch 360-degree virtual tours of Hollyhock House to allow even more visitors to explore the space. Herr says, "We're doing this not just for the cutting-edge technological aspect, but it's designed to be used in conjunction with a live docent who can engage with that person the way they might engage with any visitor in order to enhance the experience." Much of Wright's work involves architectural details, and Herr says the virtual tour addresses that: "The tour is so incredibly high-resolution that you can see texture in concrete or defining wood grain and even the way things are constructed."



Students of the Barnsdall art classes

Courtesy Barnsdall Art Park

While Barnsdall Art Park isn't exactly what Aline Barnsdall envisioned in 1919, it has become a valuable cultural resource, even beyond Los Angeles. In 2007, it was named a National Historic Landmark, and in 2015, the Hollyhock House was nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. "In spite of all the urbanization and the development around it, it still is almost the same oasis that it was in 1921, and that's pretty amazing," Herr says. Thinking about the park reminds him of a quote from Wright, so he repeats it: "Tip the world over on its side and everything loose will land in Los Angeles."

Herr adds, "Here at Barnsdall Park, we have this great assortment of diversity that's really sort of loose. It all congregates and is right there in one 12-acre parcel — and it just needs to be celebrated."

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