

A Glimpse of the Past

December 23, 1916

General Harrison Gray Otis, *L.A. Times* publisher, donates his spacious Wilshire Boulevard home, known as the Bivouac, to Los Angeles County to be used "continuously and perpetually for the Arts and advancement of the Arts." [The Otis Art Institute of the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science, and Art](#)

September 1918

Otis opens its doors as the first independent professional school of art in Southern California, with a three-year course in drawing and painting, a two-year course in illustration, and another two-year course in design and applied arts. Tuition is \$80 a year. Life drawing classes are separate for men and women, but by 1919, the restriction is abandoned.

From the beginning, Otis had outstanding faculty. E. Roscoe Shrader was with the school from 1918 until he retired in 1949 as Director.

1922

Otis, as the largest art school west of Chicago, with 350 students, begins to chart the course of art in Southern California.

1928

Students publish *El Dorado*, a book of California's history, with illustrations by Benji Okubo, John Hench, Charles Morimoto, and Hideo Date.

1930s

During the Great Depression, many students are forced to drop out. [Otis Art Institute](#)

1940s

Throughout the '40s, Norman Rockwell spends his winters as an artist-in-residence, painting many of his famed *Saturday Evening Post* covers, and occasionally using Otisians as models.





December 7, 1941

Pearl Harbor. 30 students drafted within a month.

February 1942

An auction of student art work benefits servicemen. Early in the war, all West Coast Japanese-Americans are ordered to internment camps. Among them are Benji Okubo and Hideo Date, who teach art classes at the Heart Mountain Camp.

1943

In 1943, tuition for 12 weeks is \$60. The Alumni Association establishes a scholarship fund for students who served in the war.

1954

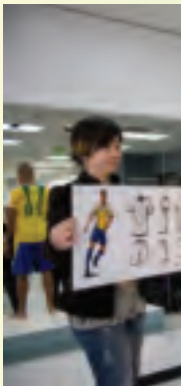
A new name, **Los Angeles County Art Institute**, is adopted. Students and alumni still consider it Otis. Millard Sheets becomes Director, and during the '50s, he restructures the academic programs to offer BFA and MFA degrees. The curriculum is designed primarily to train college-and university-level art teachers. (Otis' Library was named for Sheets in 1997.) Otis becomes home to the California ceramics revolution

when Peter Voulkos joins the faculty in 1957. "Peter Voulkos was already legendary, but he was also coming out of recent encounters at Black Mountain College with John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg and Merce Cunningham, and meetings with a lot of Abstract Expressionist painters," observes art dealer Frank Lloyd. "He brought that exposure to avant-garde ideas of the time to Otis, where a vigorous group of students was attracted to work with him."

1957

New campus facilities, including studios, a gallery, and ceramics studio replace the Bivouac. The Ferus Gallery in Venice becomes a magnet for aspiring L.A. artists who attract national attention. Director Walter Hopps selects Otis students Ken Price, Billy Al Bengston, John Altoon, John Mason, and Robert Irwin—all students of Peter Voulkos—to exhibit.





1978

In 1978, the County of Los Angeles discontinues public support of the College as a result of Proposition 13. The County Board of Supervisors votes to merge Otis with Parsons School of Design in New York, creating a private institution, **Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design**.

Fashion Design, Communication Arts, and Environmental Design majors are added, and Continuing Education evening classes are offered.

1983

The first scholarship benefit fashion show of student designs is held at the Hard Rock Café.

1984

Adolfo Nodal, writer and curator, becomes director of the Otis Art Gallery. He strengthens Otis' relationship with the city by renovating MacArthur Park's band shell, commissioning art, and establishing a variety of community programs. Alumnus Kent Twitchell, working with Otis students, creates freeway murals for The Olympic Games.

1985

Brook17n, later known as Otis Design Group (ODG), an in-house design studio, is started by seven faculty members and students, spearheaded by Sheila deBretteville and Ave Pildas. More than 200 students join this studio during its 22 years. Their non-profit clients include the Lulu Washington Dance Company, L.A. Dept. of Cultural Affairs, Plaza de la Raza, and the Chinese Cultural and Community Center.

1988

Otis awarded a Presidential "private sector initiative commendation" for its MacArthur Park work.

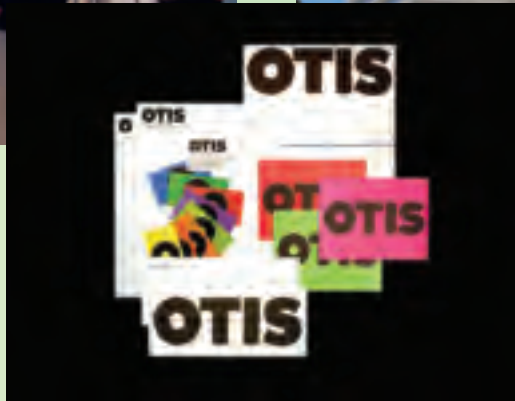
1991

Otis becomes independent of Parsons as **Otis School of Art and Design**. In 1993, it changes its name to **Otis College of Art and Design**. Neil Hoffman becomes President.

Otis Leaders

1918	Channing P. Townsley, Director
1922-1949	E. Roscoe Shrader, Director
1949-1952	Gaylord Richmond, Director
1954-1962	Millard Sheets, Director
1962-1974	Andreas S. Andersen, Director
1974-1976	Gurdon Woods, Director
1976-1979	Peter Clothier, Acting Director
1979-1983	Neil Hoffman, Director
1985-1993	Roger Workman (President, 1991)
1993-2000	Neil Hoffman, President
2000-present	Samuel Hoi, President

More historical images can be found at otis.edu/archives



The Present

1997

Otis relocates to Westchester to an IBM research facility designed by Eliot Noyes. The renovated building, named Kathleen Ahmanson Hall, is the central facility of the Elaine and Bram Goldsmith Campus. Toy Design and Digital Media majors launched. Fashion Design occupies one floor of the California Market Center in downtown's fashion district and Graduate Fine Arts studios are in nearby El Segundo. Degree student enrollment is 726.

2000

Samuel Hoi becomes President.
Graduate Writing Program launched.

2001

The Bronya and Andy Galef Center for Fine Arts opens with studios for fine arts students and a professional exhibition space, the Ben Maltz Gallery.

2003

The U.S. Dept. of Education awards a five-year, \$1.8 million grant to develop two new degree programs: Interactive Product Design and Advertising Design, and a new area of emphasis in teacher training: The Artists, Community and Teaching Program.

2004

John S. Gordon is appointed the College's first Provost. Student Learning Resource Center opens to provide tutoring, ESL assistance, counseling and workshops. "Mexican Otis" exhibition at the Mexican Consulate, near the original campus, includes work that spans seven decades by alumni artists of Mexican heritage.

2005

Interactive Product Design major established. *Otis Speaks* public lecture and programs series launches.

2006

New identity introduced.

Integrated Learning multidisciplinary site-based curriculum initiated. Partners include Watts Labor Community Action Committee, Westchester Senior Center, Friends of Ballona Wetlands, and Homeboy Industries.

Otis: Nine Decades of Los Angeles Art exhibition and catalogue showcase the work of more than 80 fine arts alumni.

The Scholarship Benefit Fashion Show breaks the \$1 million mark in scholarship funds.

2007

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching designates Otis among the inaugural group of 76 colleges and universities cited for their commitment to "Curricular Engagement and Outreach & Partnerships."

MFA in Public Practice begins.

Otis commissions and releases a report on the L.A. region's creative economy from the Los Angeles Economic Development Corp.

More than 6,000 visitors, including representatives of design firms and arts institutions, to attend the Class of 2007 Exhibition.

The New Media Consortium awards the Otis Library a Center of Excellence Award for its achievement in applying technology to learning, as in its podcast channels on YouTube and iTunesU.

2008

MFA in Graphic Design enrolls its first class.

Nike/Hurley team up to create a \$1 million scholarship endowment for fashion design students.

Student enrollment reaches 1200.

Otis celebrates its 90th anniversary.