

# DESCANSO



Fall 2021 – Winter 2022

**Cultivating  
Our Future:  
Descanso Gets  
a New Nursery**

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# Introducing the New and Welcoming Back Old Favorites

by Juliann Rooke, Executive Director



As I write this, a new nursery is being built on the edge of the garden. Soon enough you will be able to sneak a peek of it when you are up by the lake. About six years ago we had a fire in the area above the lake and moved the nursery to its current place near the main parking lot. The move was supposed to be temporary, but Descanso is such a busy location it was never high on our list to move it back.

Work on our new Master Plan changed that. It turns out that the early propagators on the property knew what they were doing. The old site was a better place for light and weather, so we decided to move it back up the hill. The new nursery will include plenty of space for plant propagation, materials storage, and educational opportunities.

The nursery is possible only because we received a generous gift from the Anna and Harry Borun Foundation. With this gift, we can build the Ruth Borun Nursery and Propagation Center, which you can read more about in the pages of this magazine. I can say that Ruth Borun's love of growing plants and sharing that love with others is in good hands here at Descanso.

I could not be more excited to welcome back Carved and Enchanted Forest of Light. For many of you this is a tradition, and we can't wait to tell you about the new things we have in store. At Carved, we have reimagined the event. We will have fan-favorites like the pumpkin house and hay maze, but have new things in store including oversized sculptures made of sticks and other natural materials, hundreds of jack-o-lanterns in the Camellia Forest and a giant moon that will rise over the Oak Grove.

For Enchanted, we will be welcoming new works from Tom Fruin. His *Camouflage House* was at Enchanted in 2019, but this year he will create an entire "village" in the Rose Garden. Fruin's artworks, which you can read about in the magazine, are a kaleidoscope of color and fantasy. The popular spinning geometric works of HYBYCOZO, which have been in the Rose Garden in years past, will move to the Main Lawn. This display will showcase new sculptures including a large 15-foot design that visitors can walk in and experience HYBYCOZO from the inside.

We hope you will celebrate the end of the year with us.

*Thank you for being  
part of Descanso Gardens.*

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### Our Mission

Descanso Gardens is a unique Southern California landscape distinguished by its specialized botanic collections, historical significance, and rare natural beauty. Our mission is to practice exemplary stewardship of Descanso's distinctive character and assets; offer people an experience close to nature; and cultivate understanding of the natural world and people's place in it through inspiration, education and example.

### Visit us online:

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# Giving the Treasures of Descanso a Place to Grow

by David Bare, Director of Horticulture and Garden Operations

It is one of those cool crisp and clear California mornings as I lift the latch and walk into Descanso Gardens' shoebox of a greenhouse. Designed for an enthusiastic home gardener, it is draped with shade cloth and painted with whitewash. The ceiling is hung with a plastic drape, an effort to contain some humidity and redirect some heat downward toward an ever-burgeoning population of propagations.

Tents of clear and milky white plastic cover cuttings of sages, passion flowers, and a variety of native plants. Greenhouse benches hold milkweeds, drumstick flowers, and leadplant, all butterfly attractants meant for a Center Circle replanting. The floor path is reduced by half with trays of plants shrinking the pass to a narrow corridor lined with colorful coleus, purple hyacinth beans, and the thorny-leaved porcupine tomato. Dahlias, coneflowers, poppies, and elephant ears mingle with orchids, lilac cuttings, and balloon flowers. The sink is lined with carnivorous sundews and the dangling jewel-flowered queen's tears bromeliad live underneath. The tiny space is packed with diversity and purpose, every inch occupied to its fullest.

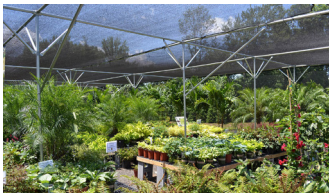
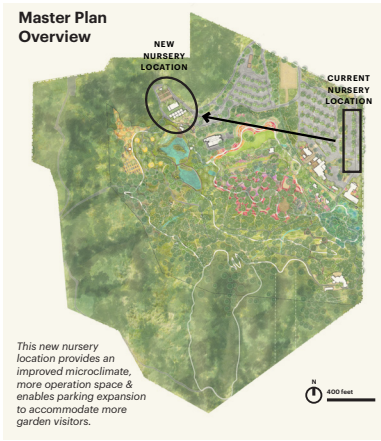
The same story continues out in the nursery yard with four nursery benches and substantial path space dedicated to the Descanso chrysanthemum collection. Various nets, shade cloths, and agricultural fabrics make a meager attempt at thwarting the ever-present and increasing population of ground squirrels. They along with a healthy rabbit population and even an occasional deer are a constant concern here.

A quarter of the shaded area is dedicated to camellia propagation while another three benches are occupied with succulents that boost the summer courtyard display when few other plants perform in the blistering summer sun. There are natives waiting for a home including Matilija poppies, red-flowered currants, and the beautiful filigree flowers of St. Catherine's lace. Large pots with trees and shrubs that rotate in and out of display when they are in their flowery prime occupy sunny floor space. Three benches of newly sprouted acorns represent our fledgling efforts at oak restoration.

All this leads to our need for improvement and expansion. Nursery operations, the backbone of the garden, are stressing under the weight of too few resources, too little space, and too many operational issues. Soon all of these will be addressed in one sweeping motion as we break ground on the Ruth Borun Nursery and Propagation Center. Through the generous donation of the Anna and Harry Borun Foundation, we will more than triple our nursery square footage from 7,000 square feet to 25,000. Our greenhouse space will jump from 528 square feet to 6,000.



**Images:** (Left) Everything from succulents to California Natives to chrysanthemums will be grown at the nursery. (Top) The new nursery will allow us to expand our propagation. (Bottom) Dr. E Raymond (Ray) Borun and Juliann Rooke, Descanso Garden executive director, look at a drawing of the new site.



## Ruth Borun Nursery & Propagation Center

Descanso Gardens **RIOS**

A multitude of operational inefficiencies will be addressed with our new facility, things as simple as heating and cooling and the ability to get a delivery truck up to the door. The new nursery site has excellent downhill airflow while the present site is the coldest on the property. We will have terraced areas to hold an array of shade plants. We will have the space to divide plants according to their needs and better supply them with the cultural conditions that bring them to their optimum potential (no more lilacs growing with orchids).

We will be able to efficiently propagate the treasures of Descanso, and ensure their genetic heritage is preserved. Among them is the Yoshimura camellia varieties, so hard if not impossible to locate in the trade and the Lammert hybrid lilacs, bred and developed here at Descanso to perform in the warmer temperatures of Southern California. Uncommon native treasures such as the

California peony and sticky monkeyflower found in our hills could be propagated. Our oak restoration project will gain ground and we will expand our efforts at propagating and planting more milkweed and other pollinator and wildlife supportive plants.

We will be able to raise the seasonal plants that we use for display ourselves, greatly expanding our choices and assuring the plants we introduce into the landscape are pesticide-free. We will be able to support, preserve and increase the plans and plants needed for our master plan projects.

In short, I think the new Ruth Borun Nursery and Propagation Center will change the way Descanso horticulture operates. It will be a welcome and overdue change and will be immediately reflected in the visitor experience. I could not ask for a more exciting beginning to all the good things coming to Descanso.



# Ruth's Garden Continues to Flourish

by **Jennifer Errico**, Marketing Manager

In Mrs. Borun's garden, the garden is not only a place where plants flourish, but a place where urban wildlife makes a home. The seedlings and "fragile" plants have a special nursery spot where they are tended to. In Ruth's garden, everything looks like it naturally grew in its place even though thought and care went into each and every plant.

Ruth's love of plants and nature will continue at the new nursery being built in her honor at Descanso Gardens. The Ruth Borun Nursery and Propagation Center is possible because of a generous gift from the Anna and Harry Borun Foundation and will open in the coming months. It will be a place not only where the horticulture staff will be able to grow and nurture plants for the garden, but where children and volunteers will be invited to learn.

"The nursery is exactly what she would have wanted," said Dr. E. Raymond (Ray) Borun, Ruth's husband. "Watching things grow and getting other people interested in the garden."

Ray and Ruth Borun met in 1949 while they were both assigned to the same medical ward, she as a nurse and he as a resident. They married three years later in 1952 and established themselves in Southern California, where they raised their three children Nancy, Barbara, and Amy. Sadly, Ruth passed away in 2018.

Ruth began gardening with her mother, who strongly influenced her love of plants. On frequent walks her mother would collect a slip of this plant or that. She would then bring it home to nurse the cutting into a full-sized plant. This was the beginning of her passion for propagation.



“She believed in the miracle of growing,” said daughter Nancy. “She would come out every morning in her slippers with her coffee and see what surprise had happened in the night - What seed had come up or what bloom had opened.”

The Borun’s Brentwood home is a spectacular mid-century modern designed by architects D. Wallace Benton and Donald G. Park. It has been featured in many publications and was recently named Historic-Cultural Monument by the city of Los Angeles. The architecture is designed to bring the outside in. A perfect backdrop for the beauty are the gardens surrounding the house. They are a tribute to Ruth’s attention to detail and her passion went into the placement of every rock, path, water feature, and flowers which include her favorite cream-colored poppies and love-in-a-mist.

Ruth was influenced by Japanese and English gardens. Both influences are seen at her home. It is an English-style

garden that was appropriate in Southern California with touches of Asian influences. Ruth describes her garden as “a wild look in a civilized framework... I get so tired of neat, neat. A little chaos is exciting.”

She was also interested in California natives and wildflowers. If Ruth saw a field of flowers on the side of the road, she would yell at her husband to “pull over!” Her family says she threatened to write a book called: “How to Identify Wildflowers at 60 mph.”

The garden in Brentwood was a place where Ruth’s children had fun growing vegetables and learning about nature. Ray said that the educational programs that will take part at the new nursery would have been Ruth’s favorite part.

“I remember visiting a garden and a school bus pulled up and children poured out,” he said. “She loved it. She would want the children to visit. To learn to love plants.”







# What's in a Name? The plants are trying to tell you something

by **Autumn Ayres**, Plant Records Coordinator

In the field of psychology, there is a concept called “linguistic relativity” which hypothesizes that language influences and shapes the way we think. That is to say, having a word for something helps us to create a mental concept of it, and giving a name to something allows our brains to categorize it so we can think about it more fully and deeply.

This theory forms the basis for how I think about labeling plants. Without knowing the names of plants, we can be susceptible to “plant blindness,” a term coined to describe the tendency people have to not notice the plants that surround us. Without a way for us to conceptualize them, plants become a monolith of green: ever-present, but rarely truly perceived. Learning to recognize plants can make them stand out as individuals to be observed and interacted with rather than just being the background paint of the natural world. Learning a plant’s name can open the door to noticing it growing in other locations and establishing a richer connection to it.

Proper labeling at public gardens is instrumental in helping people open this door to plant recognition. Labels give us names to help cement plants in our memories and provide a jumping-off point for further interest. Here at Descanso, our labels include a plant’s common name and scientific name, and either a plant family and native range for naturally-occurring plants, or for plants hybridized by humans, information on who created the plant and when.

Many people in plant-related fields come down heavily in favor of either scientific names or common names to describe plants. Since my goal is to establish plant recognition, I’m in favor of using both. While common names will never be as exact and distinctive as scientific names, botanical Latin might prove incomprehensible to many people, slipping right through our minds and defeating the purpose. For some, learning botanical Latin can be invigorating, like decoding a secret message to gain plant knowledge hidden in plain sight. The point of this article is to share my metaphorical decoder ring with you so you too can read those messages.



The widespread use of the binomial nomenclature system we use today is due in large part to 18th-century Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus. Known as the father of taxonomy, Linnaeus condensed the complicated Latin descriptions of plants that were common during his time into two-part names that were unique for each species. This system derives its name from this attribute; “bi” means two, and “nomen” means name. Although there are special cases such as varieties and subspecies, the majority of botanical names you see will be composed of two words: A genus and a specific epithet. A genus (plural genera) is a grouping of species within a family.

For instance, *Quercus*, the Latin name for oak, is a genus of trees in the beech family, and you may be able to

recognize trees in this genus by their general features like producing acorns. Within the genus *Quercus* there are many different species, each with their own more specific characteristics, like acorn shape. “Genus” shares the same root as the word “general” while “species” shares its root with “specific.” The part of the name following the genus, the specific epithet, is a word that describes the plant in question, like an adjective. Together, these two parts make up the species name. Take the scientific name for our native coast live oak trees: *Quercus agrifolia*. *Quercus* is the genus, taken from the original Latin word for oak, and the specific epithet *agrifolia* means “rough-leaved,” so in addition to being a unique identifier the Latin name tells us something about the plant.



## Tree:



## Plant label:



## Information on label:

Common name  
Botanical name  
Family name (Common | Scientific)  
Native range

## Flower:



## Plant label:



## Information on label:

Scientific name  
Trade name  
Hybridizer | Year of introduction | Flower class

Through centuries of tending plants, humans have manipulated their genetics to better suit our whims and needs. To distinguish these human-hybridized plants from naturally occurring variations, we call them “cultivars,” a portmanteau of “cultivated” and “variety.” You can think of a cultivar as being like a dog breed. Although all dog breeds are the same species, there are certain characteristics that make each breed different from the others, and you can recognize them on sight. Most of the plants we buy in nurseries and the fruits and vegetables we eat are cultivars, bred for their desirable characteristics.

Many of the plants at Descanso, such as our roses and camellias, are cultivars as well. The name in single quotation marks after the botanical Latin on the plant label is the cultivar name or cultivar epithet. Like the specific epithet, it describes the part of the name that comes before it and, when added to the rest of the name, creates a unique identifier. Many cultivars are given poetic names describing one of their attributes, like *Rosa* ‘Perfume Delight,’ or are named after people, like *Camellia japonica* ‘Mrs. Tingley.’ On the label of a cultivar at Descanso, you will see the name of the person who is credited with naming and registering that cultivar as well as the year that they did so. You may also see *Camellia* cultivars around the garden that have special red labels with a star on them. These labels are part of an effort to give recognition to F.M. Uyematsu, a Japanese nurseryman who spent years of his life breeding and

importing camellias, but whose work was misattributed to the growers at Descanso who bought his stock of plants during Japanese Internment.

More recently in the nursery business, plants are given trade names in addition to cultivar names. Although a plant can be patented under its cultivar name, according to the nomenclature rules, a cultivar name must be freely available for use and thus, cannot contain a trademark. This poses a problem for companies that want to market their plants with catchy, exclusive names. Since, unlike patents, trademarks do not have to describe a single, specific plant, companies often re-use them, selling different plants under the same name in different years. This goes the other way as well; one plant may be sold under multiple trade names. Since cultivar names are unique, but sometimes dropped from the nursery tag in favor of snappier trade names, our labels at Descanso include both in order to be botanically accurate and assist people in finding the plants they like from the garden in nurseries.

So, would a rose by any other name smell as sweet? Of course. But would you be able to find that rose again without having a name to remember it by? Plant names can be confusing, and some may wonder if all that information we put on the label is actually useful, but now you can see how all the little pieces fit together. Hopefully, this introductory guide will help you read the labels in our garden and other places, and make those deeper plant connections.



# Tom Fruin's Enchanted Village

by **Jennifer Errico**, Marketing Manager

The light coming from the Rose Garden this fall will be a little more joyful, a little more exuberant. For Enchanted Forest of Light, a small village of what appears to be "stained glass" houses will dot the landscape. During the day, the sculptures will be illuminated by the sun, and at night they will become a kaleidoscope of motion and light.

Artist Tom Fruin, whose *Camouflage House* made an appearance on the Mulberry Pond during previous Enchanted nights, is creating the fantastical village for the event this year.

"(The sculptures) are lit from inside so they draw you to them – like a moth to a flame. It's like you are in a kaleidoscope," the artist said. "In a way the houses are meant to be a celebration of all our differences. They are made of disparate parts, but they are symbols of family, home, security... Things we all recognize "

Fruin, a Southern California native and UCSB alum, has shown his work around the world. His works are created using pieces of salvaged plastics, and steel. The colorful plastic pieces are from old signs, warehouses and manufacturers that Fruin gathers from all over the New York City area.

For Enchanted, Fruin is working on half-a-dozen sculptures, many of which are designed specifically for Descanso. It will be the largest congregation of outdoor work Fruin has ever shown. Much of his work is exhibited in urban settings, but he said he has really embraced the outdoor setting that is Descanso.

"The art feels unnatural in a way, so having it in the garden makes me appreciate the garden and the art in a new way," Fruin said. "The hard edges mixed with the natural, help visitors see things differently."



Fruin works from a warehouse in Brooklyn, N.Y. It is there he constructs mini versions of each piece. They hang on the wall like a mini-sized housing development. For *Enchanted*, Fruin is working on four “camp” houses which will be the size of tents. He intends for these works to be playful and each has a unique architectural addition like a chimney or porch, as well as color scheme. Medium size pieces, about the same size as *Camouflage House*, will also be sprinkled about. Hovering above them all will be a 15-foot-tall house. Inspired by the colorful bracelets that someone might wear to a concert or festival, this work of art will use strips of neon and very bold colors.

“It will be fun, It will be exuberant. It will be like you have an all-access pass,” Fruin said.

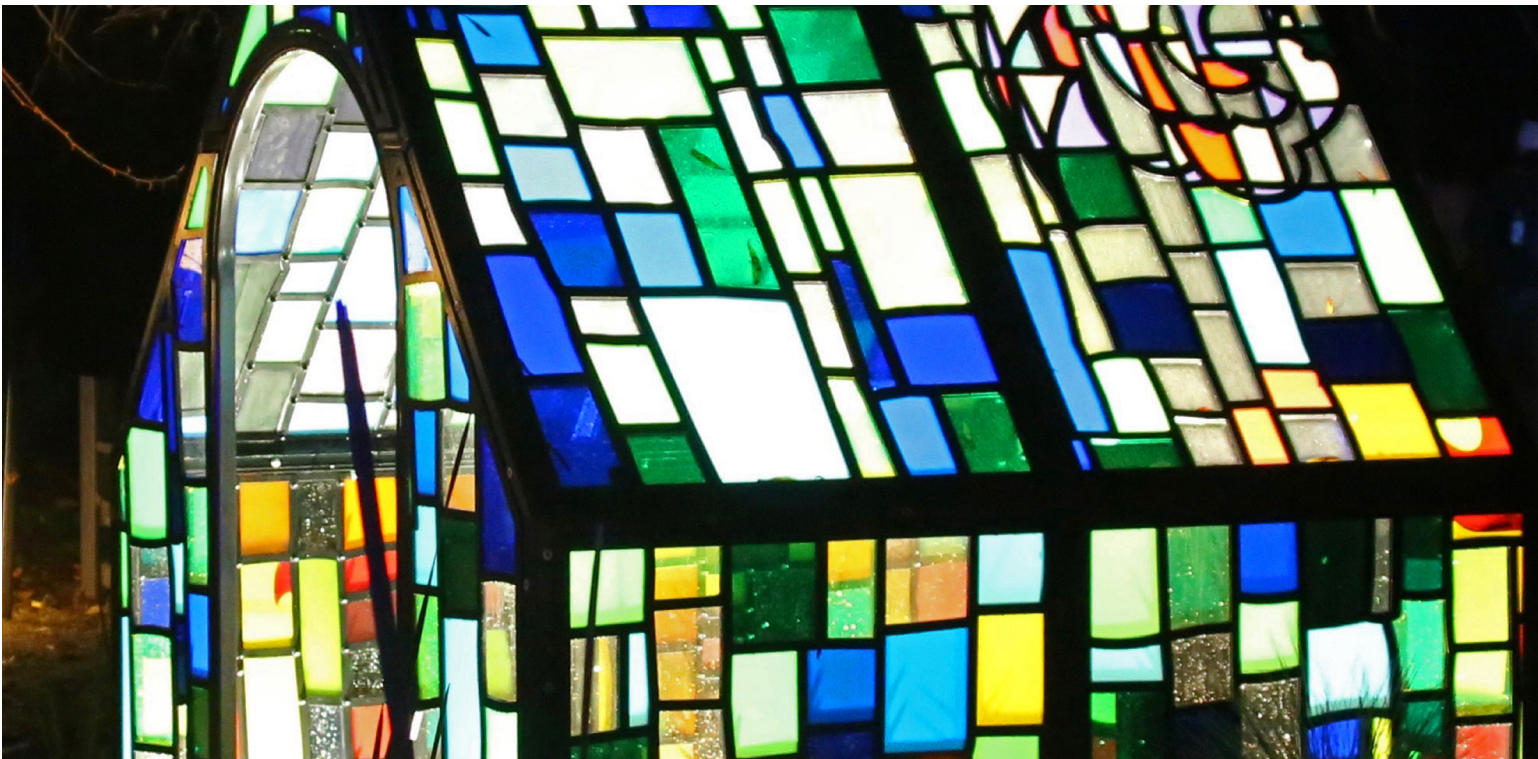
*Enchanted* is an interactive, nighttime experience unlike anything else in Los Angeles, featuring a one-mile walk through unique lighting experiences in some of the most beloved areas of Descanso.

### ***Enchanted Forest of Light***

**Nov. 21 – Jan. 9 | 5:30pm – 10pm**

Tickets go on sale to members on Sept. 1  
and non-members Oct. 1.

Find out more at [descansogardens.org](http://descansogardens.org)



# Welcoming an Icon into the Garden

by **David Bare**,  
Director of Horticulture  
and Garden Operations

The orange and black monarch is perhaps the most iconic butterfly in North America. Found in both east and west coast populations, these butterflies are known for their epic and mystery-laden migrations from Mexico to Canada. The Western population of monarchs migrates to the coast of California, overwintering in eucalyptus, Monterey pine, and Monterey cypress groves. In 2020, according to the Xerces Society, the population had dropped to less than 0.01% of its historic size. Volunteers involved in an annual count of the western monarch population recorded less than 2,000 individuals, a count that had yielded 4.5 million individuals in the 1980s.

Several factors have contributed to this decline, including habitat loss, herbicide, and pesticide use, particularly the use of persistent, systemic neonicotinoids. Herbicide use in agricultural and roadside settings has contributed to the loss of milkweed (*Asclepias* sp.), the plant the monarch is solely dependent on as its larval host.

Finally, research has found that the natural occurrence of the protozoan parasite called *Ophryocystis elektroscirrha* may have been inadvertently exacerbated by the planting of tropical milkweed. This tropical milkweed, *Asclepias currasavica*, tends to persist later in the season in warm climates, encouraging the persistence of the parasite. It is for this reason that gardeners are encouraged to plant milkweed native to our area or to cut back milkweed by late fall.

Native milkweed can be hard to find though. Tropical milkweed has become the butterfly lovers go-to plant for a reason. It is easy to grow, matures quickly to flowering size, and is very showy. Other, more perennial species take their time.

It is encouraging that milkweed is hard to find in the trade these days, the obvious result of caring citizens wanting to do their part to support efforts to boost the monarch population. At Descanso, we feel the same way. We



currently have three species of *Asclepias* under cultivation in our nursery and we are working toward introducing more. Part of our summer exhibits are geared toward butterflies, particularly the California sister, anise swallowtail, gulf fritillary, orange sulphur, and of course monarchs. As we develop the landscape surrounding our new nursery (see accompanying article), plant choices to support bird, butterfly, and insect conservation will play an important role.

Each species has its preferred larval and nectar plants and we have dedicated sections of Nature's Table and Center Circle to displaying them. This summer, artists Karina White and Leslie Kitashima-Gray have created butterfly installations in these areas and the Rose Garden to celebrate the beauty and diversity of these beautiful summer visitors. Kitashima-Gray's acrylic butterflies were inspired by several Southern California species and created specifically to adorn the rose garden trellis. White, a Los Angeles-based artist and exhibition designer, produced the Center Circle and Nature's Table butterfly information. We hope you will visit and adapt some of our suggestions to your own home gardens.

## How to Help

- **Plant native milkweed.** That means *Asclepias fascicularis* narrow leaved milkweed, *Asclepias eriocarpa*, woolly pod or Kotolo milkweed and *Asclepias californica*, California milkweed. They can be hard to find but try Theodore Payne foundation nursery, California Botanic garden nursery, and Hahamongna Nursery.
- **Plant nectar plants** including: purple coneflower, blanket flower, black-eyed Susan, yarrow, goldenrod and asters.
- **Encourage your local nursery** to supply bee safe plants. Plants treated with systemic insecticides can be fatal to all insects.



# Coming Full Circle: Looking to the Past to Find the Way Forward

by **Lynn LaBate**, *Full Circle: a Return to the Land*, Curator

*Full Circle: A Return to the Land*, which will be on display at the Sturt Haaga Gallery from Nov 15, 2021 to March 13, 2022, chronicles human interaction with the land including and surrounding Descanso Gardens.

The gardens grew out of a purchase of 165 acres of undeveloped land by Los Angeles newspaper publisher Elias Manchester Boddy in the late 1930s. The title to the land can be traced back to a 1784 land grant of 36,403 acres from the King of Spain to José María Verdugo. But even before this the Tongva, the first peoples of Los Angeles, managed an ecosystem that was mutually beneficial to the land and its inhabitants. Telling their story is necessary to give a full history of the land.

In the exhibition, each of the new cultures that arrived in Southern California – Spanish, Mexican and Anglo-American – will be examined by the effect they have had on the existing land and/or culture. Wherever possible, historical events are looked at from a Native American or marginalized perspective, to explore beyond the traditional narrative written by white chroniclers and historians. History can be seen in the history of Toyupurina, a Tongva woman who took a leadership role in the 1785 revolt against the San Gabriel Mission. The interweaving of history, art, and ethnobotany from largely unheard perspectives fosters a deeper understanding of how Descanso Gardens and much of Southern California evolved from pre-European contact to the present time.

By comparing the Descanso Gardens landscape with contemporary urban Los Angeles, our detachment from nature could hardly be more dramatic. No longer are we sheltered by the live oaks, the waterways no longer flow freely, nor are the natural fauna able to thrive. Looking to traditional Tongva ecological knowledge, we find models of how to realign with nature to achieve a reciprocal relationship with the land on a personal, cultural and societal level. In coming full circle, we return to the awareness of the land that has existed before us and that we want to leave intact and improved for future generations.

*Full Circle* consists of photographs, maps, works of art, contemporary Tongva artifacts, landscape plans and video components. Artists featured in the exhibition include Judith F. Baca, Jesus Barraza, Maynard Dixon, Mercedes Dorame, River Garza, Graham I. Hayes, Nancy Pili Hernandez, iris yirie hu, William Henry Jackson, Sandra de la Loza, Sheila Pinkel, Craig Torres, J. Michael Walker, and Carleton Watkins.

*Full Circle: A Return to the Land* is organized by Lynn LaBate, an award-winning curator whose multi-disciplinary exhibitions have included *The Virgin of Guadalupe: Interpreting Devotion*; *Siqueiros in Los Angeles: Censorship Defied*; and *Breaking Ground: 20th Century Latin American Art from the Norton Simon Collection*.

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