

Summer Sights

Watts Towers: Stop By This Summer

■ The South L.A. landmark is all about culture, City history and arts education. Center Director Rosie Lee Hooks welcomes you.

Photos by Alive! Staff

CULTURAL AFFAIRS — The Watts Towers Art Center in South Los Angeles captures culture, history, art and current events like no other venue



Center Director Rosie Lee Hooks stands in front of the iconic Watts Towers.

About Rosie Lee Hooks, Cultural Director, Watts Towers Art Center:

Rosie Lee Hooks has returned to Watts Towers Arts Center as Center Director and Director of the Tour Program for the Watts Towers after having served as Acting Director of the Center in 1993. She supervises, conceptualizes, designs, develops, administers and implements all activities for exhibitions, the Neighborhood School Program, the Visiting Schools Program, the Senior and Special Needs Program and all activities of the Charles Mingus Youth Arts Center. She was the Cultural Affairs Department Director of Festivals and Gallery Theatre. While there, she developed the Jazz Mentorship Program, which exposes young people to America's indigenous art form.

An accomplished actress and singer for more than 30 years, she began her career in theatre at the D.C. Black Repertory Theatre Company in Washington D.C., where she was a founding member, resident actor and training coordinator for five years. She is a former member of the renowned Sweet Honey in the Rock musical

in the City. When's the last time you visited? Think about taking your family there this summer, and learning about the great culture of the City. *Nuestro Pueblo*, commonly called the Watts Towers, is a collection of 17 interconnected structures, two of which reach heights of more than 99 feet. The Towers were built by Italian immigrant construction worker Sabato (Simon) Rodia in his spare time from 1921 to 1954. The work is a superb example of nontraditional vernacular architecture. The Towers are a wondrous expression of one's man creativity, yet they symbolize what is possi-

ble from the often forgotten common man or woman. The Towers are the creation of a visionary individual, and yet they have come to symbolize the capability of all those in the community of Watts and is inspiration to all those who experience it. Rodia built his towers without scaffolding, renderings or architectural plans. He assembled most of the parts of his sculptures on the ground and then carry them up with his tools and all the cement mortar, steel, wire, mesh and ornaments in a bucket. His building method can be compared to the growth of a tree, with one ring developing after the other. The tree might become hollow but will not lose strength, as the surface provides the strength. Rodia began by digging a trench the width of his shovel and less than 60 centimeters (2 feet) deep. He started with the ship of Marco Polo at the easternmost apex of the triangular property and, over the next thirty-four years worked building the towers. The tallest structure, the West Tower, is approximately ten stories high, and the foundation for a ten-story building can legally be only as shallow as 7.3 meters (24 feet). The foundation for the West Tower is only 46 centimeters (18 inches) deep, completely unacceptable to Building and safety Department inspectors. Yet this depth has proven adequate for the ten-story structure, as have the depths of foundations for all the other towers on the site. Perhaps the Towers' greatest tests are time and nature in Southern California, and the social ups



Immigrant Simon Rodia spent 33 years building the Towers, which are both large-scale and highly detailed.

and downs of the community and society at large. The towers have withstood earthquakes, the Watts Rebellion and the weather, wear and tear. The Towers are adjacent to the Watts Towers Arts Center at 1727 East 107th St. and are visible from the outside. Visitors are allowed entry under the guidance of a trained tour guide Fridays through Sunday. Tour start times are 11 a.m. Friday, 10:30 a.m. Saturday and 12:30 p.m. Sunday. The last tour begins at 3 p.m. each of the three days. Tickets are adults: \$7; seniors: \$3; teens and children under 13, \$3.



Don't Miss the Drums, Jazz

■ Day of the Drum/Simon Rodia Jazz Fest coming up Sept. 29-30.

CULTURAL AFFAIRS — The Watts Towers Art Center's annual two-day music festival – Day of the Drum Festival, and Simon Rodia Watts Towers Jazz Festival – are scheduled for Sept. 29 and 30. Both events are free. The 26th annual Day of the Drum Festival is a daylong celebration featuring international percussion: Latin, Japanese, African, jazz, Native American and other drummers. Ongoing tours of the Watts Towers are



available. The music is planned for 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. The 31st Annual Simon Rodia Watts Towers Jazz Festival, the City's first jazz festival, features performances from both established and emerging musicians from the area. The festival pays tribute to the roots of jazz in Gospel and blues, and takes it to the *avant garde* and the Latin Jazz scene. Ongoing tours of the Watts Towers are available. The music is planned for 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Watch for specific schedules and bands in next month's *Alive!* Information: (213) 847-4646, or www.wattstowers.net

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