

## About the Skirball Cultural Center

Inspired by the intersection between Jewish values and American democratic ideals, the Skirball Cultural Center engages diverse communities with an array of permanent and changing exhibitions, music, film, theater, dance, lectures, family, adult education, seminars and conferences, and programs for families, schools, and teachers. The Skirball was the first Jewish cultural institution in the United States to define itself by its commitment to pluralism, inclusivity, and cross-cultural exchange. The Skirball's positive impact within and beyond the Jewish community has informed the institution's mission throughout its history. In its dedication to the Jewish value of hospitality, the Skirball welcomes individuals from all ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds.

### History and Impact

Thirty years ago, Uri D. Herscher, then Executive Vice President of Hebrew Union College, philanthropist Jack Skirball (1896–1985), and architect Moshe Safdie stood at the base of a barren hill in Los Angeles and envisioned an institution that would explore the connections between Jewish heritage and American democratic ideals. Since opening in 1996, the Skirball Cultural Center has become a vital fixture of Southern California's cultural landscape, serving a multigenerational and culturally diverse audience through programs designed to celebrate ancestral Jewish values—among them justice, equality, freedom, hospitality, and respect for human dignity—as relevant to contemporary American life.

The founding of the Skirball has had a significant impact on Los Angeles, transforming an underutilized plot of land into a dynamic community resource that today serves more than 600,000 visitors each year. Over the course of its history, the Skirball has also established strong ties with the Los Angeles school system, engaging more than 80,000 schoolchildren each year from across the socioeconomic spectrum. Reflecting the continued support of its community—which includes more than 7,000 sustaining members—the Skirball has more than doubled its endowment over the past decade to \$150 million.

In April 1996, the Skirball opened its first phase, which encompassed museum galleries and collection storage, an auditorium, conference rooms and classrooms, an archaeology discovery center, a library and resource center, courtyards, educational and programmatic staff offices, a café, and a store. Following overwhelmingly positive public response in its first year—during which the Skirball welcomed more than 280,000 visitors, far surpassing initial projections of 60,000—the campus continued to expand. In 2001, the Skirball dedicated Ahmanson Hall, a multipurpose facility designed

to accommodate growing interest in the Skirball's performing and literary arts programs. Three years later, the Skirball opened Winnick Hall on the south end of the campus, featuring two major galleries, an art studio, administrative offices, and an amphitheater that seats up to 350. Winnick Hall is home to *Noah's Ark at the Skirball*<sup>™</sup>, a permanent, interactive destination for children and families that invites visitors to climb aboard a floor-to-ceiling wooden ark filled with handcrafted animals made from repurposed materials. With the opening of Herscher Hall and Guerin Pavilion in October 2013, the Skirball completed its thirty-year campus plan, adding flexible new spaces for large-scale gatherings, such as conferences, symposia, performances, classes, and social events.

### **Exhibitions and Programs**

Consistent with its commitment to uniting Jewish values and American democratic ideals, the Skirball's exhibitions explore themes relating to ancestral heritage, cultural history, immigration, civic engagement, creative expression, and social justice. The Skirball is home to two permanent exhibitions: *Visions and Values: Jewish Life from Antiquity to America* and *Noah's Ark at the Skirball*<sup>™</sup>.

*Visions and Values* traces the values and accomplishments of the Jewish diaspora over the course of 4,000 years through multimedia installations, rare artifacts, historical documents and photographs, interactive computer stations, and sound recordings that provide an interactive overview of Jewish history, with emphasis on the story of Jews in America.

Since opening in 2007, *Noah's Ark* has become one of the Skirball's most popular attractions. The ark is an expression of the Skirball's mission of welcome, inviting children and families from all backgrounds to come together in a safe and hospitable setting. The exhibition inspires visitors, no matter their age, to reflect upon the universal themes of the ancient flood tale, which has parallels in hundreds of world cultures. Inside the gallery, the creative re-use of everyday objects—from violin cases for crocodile heads to keyboards for zebras manes—encourages dialogue and engagement between visitors of all ages.

In addition to its permanent and changing exhibitions, the Skirball also presents a slate of public programming including live music, theater and dance, readings and talks, and film screenings that foster learning and exchange across cultural and generational divides. These activities range in scope from the popular Sunset Concerts at the Skirball—a free world music series that attracts thousands of attendees each summer—to the intimate classroom discussions of the *Great Decisions* series, which engages community members in conversations about current events.