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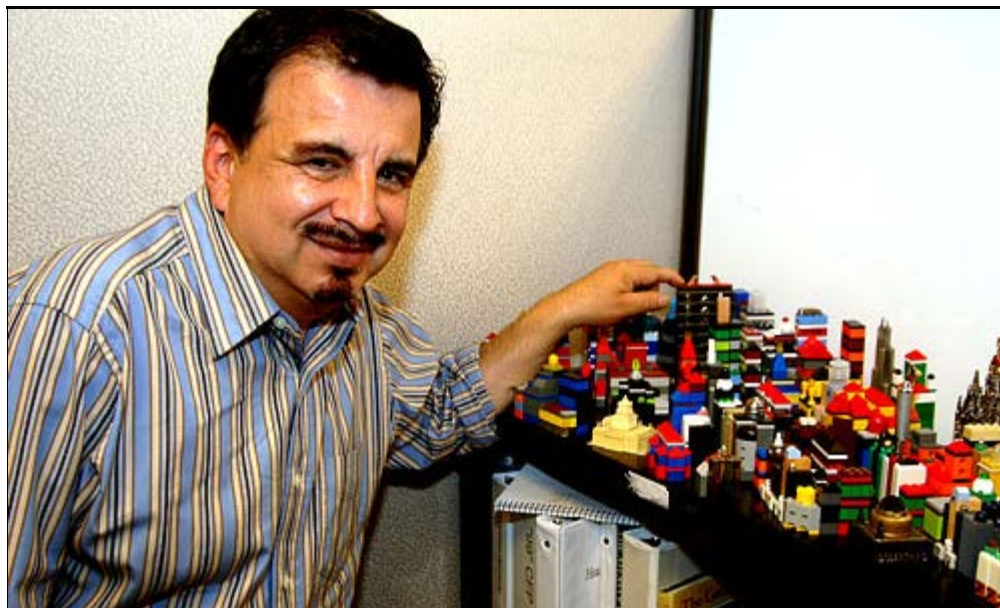
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James Rojas, a transportation planning manager, examines a collection of model buildings he keeps in his Metro office. As with his model of Downtown Los Angeles, Rojas used everyday items to create his buildings. *Photo by Ned Racine.*

## Planning Manager's Model Childhood Leads to Model Cities

- Metro planner uses bottle tops and game pieces to build Downtown Los Angeles

By NED RACINE, Editor

(June 11, 2008) A model maker since he was six, James Rojas, a transportation planning manager, has graduated to complex modeling, such as a 2,000-piece model of Downtown Los Angeles.

Rojas' latest model, downtown from Los Angeles Street on the east to Figueroa Street on the west to 11th Street on the south and Temple Street on the north, can be viewed at The Art Space within the shopping plaza on 7th and Figueroa streets.

The creation will be on display through June 20 (12 to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday). Admission is free.



Sim City: James Rojas uses found objects to create a model of downtown Los Angeles.

As is downtown Los Angeles, Rojas' model consists of many building materials. There are Lego building blocks, bottle tops, game pieces, dominoes, mahjong tiles and jewelry pieces. Lapel pins are used as flags and Metro signage.

Rojas, who has worked for Metro for 10 years, believes "It's good that people see that cities are three dimensional. The problem with planning is we are always describing things on paper, in two dimensions."

Linda Pollack, the art space curator, asked Rojas to create the model for the Habeas Index exhibition. "I loved the premise of [his] visualizing downtown," Pollack said.

Not that Rojas represented downtown precisely. On top of a cathedral is a pair of shoes, and two elephants can be found in Pershing Square. There are no cars, and all the parking lots have become parks.

Nor did he want to copy notable buildings. "You could spend your whole life trying to reproduce City Hall," Rojas said. "That's not much fun."

Instead, he was trying to show options for using space in an urban environment—what Downtown Los Angeles could be. And his vision isn't the model's final shape. Viewers are encouraged to move pieces to reflect their vision.

"The hardest thing was to get the whole scale right," Rojas said. "You want it to have some relationship to how people recognize the city."

Although the buildings were assembled offsite over two days, Rojas still had to assemble the model at the Habeas Index exhibit.

Rojas was aided in his play by a handful of friends, including some working for Cal Trans, the Los Angeles County Planning Department and the Urban Design Studio.

What happens to the Downtown Los Angeles model when the exhibit closes? "It will probably morph into Hollywood," he said.

Rojas will next create a model of Hollywood for the American Planning Association's state convention in Hollywood in September.

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