

Grant Proposal: Inventory of the Collections of Mission San Gabriel

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Introduction:

Founded in 1771, Mission San Gabriel is among the most important historical structures and repositories of Spanish colonial art in California and the American Southwest. The mission was the seed from which the pueblo of Los Angeles emerged in 1781, and it was the center of Catholicism and Spanish art in Los Angeles during the colonial period. Today Mission San Gabriel is a vibrant parish that serves a diverse population. Every year it is visited by thousands of tourists, many of whom are children on school field trips who learn about the Mission Period. While the work of the Franciscans who sought to convert the Native inhabitants of California to Catholicism has been an unending source of controversy, the historical importance of the holdings of Mission San Gabriel have never been in doubt. Unfortunately, however, the mission's books, paintings, sculpture, textiles, Native American baskets, and other related materials have never been adequately catalogued, conserved, or interpreted. These shortcomings have become even more notable in the wake of a tragic fire that damaged much of Mission San Gabriel in July 2020. This project, "The Historic Art and Book Collection of Mission San Gabriel," will produce a comprehensive and professional inventory of the mission's holdings thereby providing a road map for its conservation and display in a renovated mission museum and establishing a foundation for the broader study of the art and books of all of California's 21 missions.

Significance:

Like many California missions, over the centuries San Gabriel became the repository of a significant number of books, paintings and sculptures from Europe, Mexico, and South America. Many of these were requested directly by the first Franciscans who came to San Gabriel. Others were given to the mission by local residents over the years. Notably, the mission is home to a unique set of twelve paintings of the Stations of the Cross that has been traditionally attributed to a Native artist but whose authorship requires more in-depth study. A recent count of the mission's art objects reveals that it has nearly a hundred paintings and two dozen sculptures, most of which date to the 18th century. Further, the mission is home to scores of books, many of which date to the 16th and 17th centuries; later editions often carry the signatures of the Franciscans who worked at Mission San Gabriel.

These treasures are irreplaceable and constitute the unique cultural patrimony of Los Angeles. But, in recent years, even before the fire, it had become increasingly clear that San Gabriel's rich legacy suffered from neglect and unstable conditions. Further, these important holdings have

never been analyzed or exhibited in terms of their artistic value or the role they played in the Franciscans' attempts to indoctrinate Native Californians into Catholicism. Items of lesser value have been displayed in a jumble alongside the mission's most significant books and artworks and none of these objects has been properly identified or interpreted for the public. And until recently, many of the mission's larger books and works of art were scattered across the mission with some stored in the attic, others lodged in the basement, and a select few hung haphazardly in the museum or the mission chapel.

The fire that consumed much of the church of Mission San Gabriel offered an unprecedented opportunity to study the collection and to correct many existing problems. In the wake of the fire, we have had to transfer all of the art to a secure facility.

The first step to lay the groundwork for the complete study and restoration of this important collection is to produce an expert and comprehensive inventory of the mission's holdings. The inventory will be crucial to prioritizing works for conservation, and it will also allow us to begin to plan an exhibition of the mission's holdings and conceptualize a publication of the collection. (Note: the conservation of the books and the art will be funded by other sources.)

A grant of \$31,350 will allow us to reach our funding goal of \$60,000 and complete this complicated and multi-faceted work over several phases in the next 12 months. As director of the mission's museum committee and an expert on the California missions, I will be responsible for the administration of this project as its lead investigator.

What we need most at this point is funding that will allow us to carry out Phase I of this project, the creation of a complete photographic record of the art and material culture of the mission, the incorporation of those photos into the existing inventory list, and the completion of the initial work to lay the foundation for a publication of the masterworks of the collection.

Plan of Work:

If we can secure funding, during the Winter of 2021-22, in Phase I of this project, a professional photographer will be commissioned to photograph the collection. John Sullivan, Head of Imaging Services at the Huntington Library, will carry out the photography. He will do so in coordination with Cooke's Art Storage, the firm that has stored the collection since its removal from the museum in the wake of the fire. All Native American materials will be handled by a Tongva art handler designated by Tongva Chief, Anthony Morales. Our Curatorial Assistant will then integrate the photos into an existing general inventory of the mission's artworks. Sullivan will also prepare images of publication quality and we will begin to work on a catalog of the mission's masterworks that might be sold in the renovated mission gift shop.

In Phase II of this project during Spring of 2022, the inventory of the collection will be shared with a group of art historians and conservators, who will examine the photos of the collection. In the second part of Phase II, we plan to convene in Los Angeles a working group to view the art

in person and to assess the collection more thoroughly in consultation with Tongva leadership. Over a minimum of three days that team will rank the collection in terms of its historical value, prioritize its conservation, and determine which works should be displayed in the mission's reconfigured gallery. In the months following this workshop, the group will continue its work by selecting objects to include in a catalog of the mission's history and holdings. In a related part of Phase II, we would complete our inventory of the books in the collection, and we would work with a conservator and a librarian to decide which volumes merit conservation and display.

Request for Funding:

We are seeking additional funding to complete Phase I of this project, as we have to date raised \$30,000 towards our goal of \$60,000. Hackel has received a grant of \$10,000 to support this project from the Thomas and Dorothy Leavy Foundation. Mission San Gabriel has pledged \$10,000 towards this project, and we expect to garner another \$10,000 from the Catholic Communication Collaboration (C3) to support education at the mission.

Budget:

We are specifically requesting \$31,350 for funding to allow us to complete Phase I of this project. We would engage a professional photographer; employ art handlers at Cooke's; hire a Tongva representative to handle the Native baskets during the photography; engage a curatorial assistant to manage the photographs; and begin to lay the foundation for a published catalog in the year after commencing our work.

Cost/Compensation	Comment		Amount
Project Manager, Steven Hackel, UC Riverside	Stipend for Course Release to manage the project		\$8,050
2 Art Handlers at Cooke's Art Storage Facility	Per Cooke's flat rate of \$1200 per day for 2 workers for six days		\$7,200
1 Curatorial Assistant	Will integrate the photographs into existing database		\$1,500
1 Professional photographer, John Sullivan, Dir. Of Photog, Huntington Library	@ \$1,350/day x 6 days		\$8,100
1 Tongva/Gabrielino Art Handler	Will handle all Native American materials during photography		\$1,000
Catalog preparation/development	Will begin preparation of publishable catalog highlighting the treasures of the mission		\$5,500
Total			\$31,350

Impact:

This project would facilitate the preservation, interpretation, conservation and exhibition of the art and books of Mission San Gabriel. Further, the inventory of the art and books at the mission that will result from this project will serve as a model not only for similar work at other missions in Southern California but also for all of the California missions. This is crucial because the same problems that have long endangered the collection at Mission San Gabriel are present at nearly all of the other twenty missions. Moreover, each mission's art has been examined outside of the context of the other California missions as well as the dozens of other 17th and 18th century missions of Northern New Spain. We intend that the creation of this inventory of Mission San Gabriel, therefore, would be the first step in the building of a union catalogue of all of the art and books and Native American material culture at California's twenty-one missions. We further believe that this project will reinvigorate the reinterpretation of these materials in the larger context of the history of the visual arts and libraries of colonial New Spain. Seen in this way, this work is desperately important and will have a large scholarly and public impact far beyond Mission San Gabriel.

Incredibly, there are no current, professional, or comprehensive inventories of the books or art of Mission San Gabriel or any of the other California missions. There are coffee table books and pictorial displays of the California missions but nothing scholarly or academic has been attempted in generations. The most closely related academic project would be Bargellini's 2009 publication, *The Arts of the Missions of New Spain, 1600-1821*, but this extraordinary volume highlights the greatest works of art related to the Catholic missions of New Spain and is not focused on the collection of Mission San Gabriel or any other California mission.

We bring to this project a proven record of accomplishment. In recent years we have restored many art objects at the mission and are now working on an inventory of the historic books of Mission San Gabriel with an eye towards their conservation and study. Like the art inventory we propose, this book project has relied upon the expertise of leaders in the field: Laura Stalker, former Associate Director of the Huntington Library, and Holly Moore, Director of Conservation at the Huntington Library.

Audience Engagement at Mission San Gabriel:

Our project is a prerequisite to the engagement of new audiences, both local and regional, community based as well as academic. For generations, the museum at Mission San Gabriel has not been able to present mission collections in a way that reaches a broad audience who might visit the mission. There has been no clear order to the display of the art, and many items have been displayed in ways that have damaged their condition. Others are in too poor condition for display. Once our inventory is complete and we have ranked the objects in terms of their importance to the history of the mission and its many constituents, we will work with Mission San Gabriel leadership to conserve the art and to renovate the mission museum. Once the conserved and curated collection is on display, the Mission San Gabriel Museum will be a place where numerous audiences can engage directly with the art.

In the period before the fire and the pandemic and the closure of the mission to the public, the audiences that frequented the mission museum were school-age children and tourists. We envision that the restored collection and renovated museum will invite the engagement not only of children and tourists but also the Tongva, Gabrielino, and Kizh peoples, whose ancestors lived at the mission, as well as others who trace their ancestry to colonial California. Further, we envision reaching out to others interested in how the art of the mission intersects with the history of Los Angeles and speaks more broadly about the role of Catholicism in daily life in early California.

In addition, our project will engage art and book historians and students of the missions far beyond those who can actually visit Mission San Gabriel in person. We envision this project, with its inventory of the art of Mission San Gabriel, as the first step in the creation of a comprehensive inventory of the books and art of all of California's 21 Franciscan missions. Thus, we see our project as reaching out to engage experts and aficionados of colonial art in Mexico, Spain, and throughout California as well.

Covid-19 Contingency Plans:

Given the prevalence of Covid-19, it is quite likely that we won't be able to hold in-person meetings and discussions even though all of the trends are showing positive right now. Specifically, it is not at all certain that the art experts will be able to convene in Los Angeles in winter or spring of 2022 to examine the art in person and to discuss it collectively. Therefore, the project has been designed to allow for us to do this important work remotely. If we receive the grant, our first step will be to photograph the collection in its entirety. The photography will be done to match the exacting specifications of the art experts, and the photographer, John Sullivan, Head of Imaging Services at the Huntington Library, Art Museum and Botanical Gardens, will bring decades of experience to this project. While there is no substitute for seeing the art in person, Sullivan will produce high resolution images that will allow the experts to examine in detail the works of art. We have budgeted seven days to photograph the collection. Once that work is done, the images will be shared with the group, and in the event that we cannot convene in person, we will carry out our conversations and deliberations via zoom. The art conservator may need to examine the works in person, and that can be done safely at the art storage facility given that he or she can work alone in a large, ventilated space. The remainder of our work—the study of the objects and their origin and historical importance, the prioritization of the artworks for conservation and display, the writing up of the descriptions of the individual pieces of art, the collation of all of this information into the inventory database, and the beginning work on a catalog—can be done remotely via zoom. In terms of access to the collection during storage, there will be no barriers to the team and this project has the complete approval and endorsement of the authorities at Mission San Gabriel and the Archdiocese of Los Angeles