

## **STATUS REPORT**

August 19, 2009

**TO:** Mechelle Lawrence-Adams, Executive Director

**FROM:** Catherine Hayes, Museum Conservator

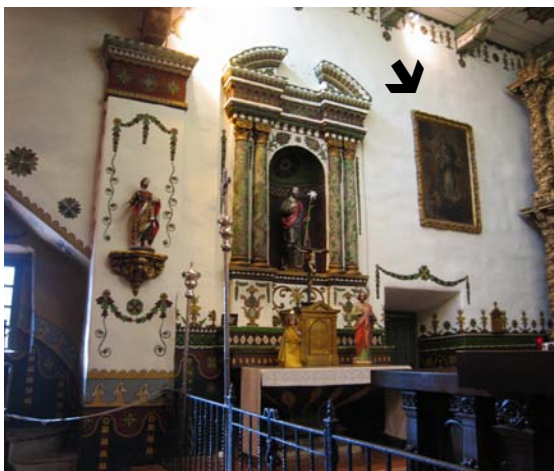
**SUBJECT:** Museum Status Report

The following report is a status on museum related projects since the Board's last update.

### **1) Historic Painting and Frame Undergo Conservation**

With the guidance of a condition assessment performed by paintings conservator Aneta Zebala and the generous support of donors, the Preservation Department has been able to proceed with a much need conservation treatment of the painting "The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary." The large, symbolic painting embedded within an ornate gold frame in the west wall of the Sanctuary is viewable from the altar rails and depicts the Virgin Mary surrounded by numerous angels.

Dating to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the painting is believed to have been acquired by the Mission during the founding period between 1776 and 1821, and is part of the site's museum historic collection. It was during the 1920s restoration of the Serra Chapel that the image was installed within an ornate plaster frame and both were then permanently embedded within the west wall of the Serra Chapel.



*The "left" photo shows the painting and frame. The photo at "right" shows the results of a cleaning test.*

Over eighty years of display without cleaning had affected the stability of the artwork. Paint losses and holes were found throughout the artwork and the entire painting was discolored and dulled by accumulations of dust and soot. Debris had been crumbling off the unfinished wall collected behind the painting for many years. Pressure from the debris created bulges along the bottom of the painting and promoted paint loss and started to cause stretching of the thin canvas. After inspection, it was evident that the painting needed to be conserved.



*The "left" image shows the "Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary" recessed within the historic, plaster frame. The top "right" image shows how the pressure from accumulated debris behind the canvas caused bulges in the painting. The image lower "right" shows associated paint loss due to flexing of the canvas from the debris behind the artwork.*

It became clear to staff that in order to access the artwork for treatment, the entire frame would have to be removed from the Chapel's west wall. In May, the 85-pound frame was removed leaving a gaping hole in the wall which would require further repairs.



*(Left) The frame and painting was accessed and braced during the de-installation process. A wooden support casing was constructed around the plaster frame to immobilize it and prevent breakage during de-installation. (Right) Staff carries the painting and frame into storage for treatment.*



*The image on the “left” shows the painting removed from its frame in anticipation for transport to the studio for treatment. The “right” image shows the frame awaiting within a special handling crate built to immobilize it for transportation to the conservation studio.*

Paintings conservator Aneta Zebala, who also conserved the Stations of the Cross paintings within the Serra Chapel, is currently performing the treatment. The frame will be conserved and prepared for re-installation by preservation staff in September, 2009.



The photo on the “left” shows the lower portion of the unframed painting prior to conservation treatment. The photo on the “right” shows the painting as it undergoes treatment revealing a partially cleaned surface.

## 2) Museum Improvements to the South Wing Building:

Over the past few months, Preservation and Education staff have been developing improved interpretation for five rooms located within the South Wing. The Kitchen, Sitting room, Bedroom, Dining room, and Model room will all have new interpretative signage installed. Some rooms will have artifacts, props, and interactives on display to enrich the experience.

By developing these improvements the museum’s interpretation will better meet the State of California’s educational curriculum standard for social studies learning objectives. Universal Exhibits and artist David Rickman have also been contracted to provide design support. The completion of this project is scheduled for September.



The image on the “left” shows a sampling of artifacts and props to be placed on display. The photo on the “right” shows one of the rails being returned for reinstatement by Universal Exhibits after repairs.

**3) Preparations Underway to Receive the Mission's First Traveling Exhibit-  
Gold Fever**

After a successful application process, Mission San Juan Capistrano is now an associate level member of the California Exhibition Resources Alliance (CERA). Membership with CERA will enable the Mission to host a variety of engaging, museum quality traveling exhibitions that all members of the public will enjoy.

"Gold Fever! Untold Stories of the California Gold Rush" is the first exhibit to be hosted and is scheduled for October 15, 2009 to March 30, 2010. The Education Department will develop supporting educational material and interactive activities for students 5.

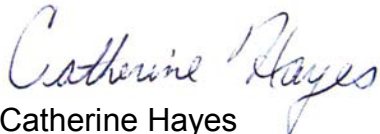
Preparations for the new exhibit are underway. The Rancho Room in the West Wing is being cleared out, cleaned, and lighting upgrading planned. The clearing of this room will provide the Mission with 933 square feet and 124 linear feet of available exhibit space. Juve Creative Inc. is managing the marketing of the new Exhibit through various media outlets.

**4) Proposed Museum Policies**

Proposed museum policies and guidelines have been included in this Board packet for consideration. The draft policies address museum artifact accessions and de-accessions, artifact handling, museum housekeeping, integrated pest management, and a photography policy. They are museum standard policies found in all creditable museums and are required for hosting travelling exhibits or assuming loaned art or artifacts. (Attachment 1)

This concludes the artifact and exhibition report at this time.

Respectfully submitted,



Catherine Hayes  
Museum Conservator

Attachments:

1. Proposed Museum Policies and Guidelines