

STATUS REPORT

February 11, 2009

TO: Mechelle Lawrence-Adams, Executive Director

FROM: Catherine Hayes, Museum Conservator

SUBJECT: Artifact and Exhibit Report – Mission San Juan Capistrano

The following report is a status on museum related projects since the Board's last meeting on October 29, 2008.

Serra Chapel Sacristy

The Museum Department was requested to relocate a large crucifixion painting from the Blessed Sacrament Chapel from the Basilica to the newly upgraded Sacristy of the Serra Chapel. While the painting had been previously conserved, it had never been backed with archival board to prevent dust infiltration, the rabbet had not been lined to prevent paint loss from abrasive frame members, nor had any of the hardware been upgraded. Furthermore, the frame required cleaning to remove adherent dust accumulations and the four redundant holes created to hang the artwork in the Basilica needed to be filled and in-painted. Conservation work entailed facing the back of the painting with Foamcor archival board, lining the rabbet with cushioning polyester felt and removing inferior eye screws and installing heavy-duty "D-Hook" picture hangers. Seismic resistant hardware of large eye screws anchored into the adobe wall and threaded locking carabiners were used to hang the painting.



Above Photos: (Left) A close-up of the painting showing white colored fill material prior to in-painting. (Center) A close-up of the earthquake resistant hardware used to suspend the painting on the north wall of the Sacristy. (Right) The painting, titled "The Crucifixion," installed within the newly upgraded Serra Chapel Sacristy.

Conservation of Historic Silver Processional Cross and Candlesticks

The processional silver candlesticks and cross on display in the Serra Chapel are currently undergoing much need repair and conservation. These items date to the late 1700s and were brought to the Mission by the founding padres as part of the original liturgical inventory establishing this mission. If left untreated, they will ultimately fall into permanent disrepair. Regular use and poor handling over the past 230 plus years have taken a toll on the two candlesticks and cross, and all have numerous scratches, dents, tears, and bent components.



Above Photos: At left, an image of the processional cross displaying a darkened tarnished surface and severely bent lid. Due to sustained stresses, a center section of the lip to the lid is missing. Pictured on the right is a conditional photograph documenting the numerous dents present in one of the two candlesticks. Deformations resulting from past impacts have distorted the urn components so that they no longer interlock to immobilize the urn and keep the bobèche vertical.

Conservation work will involve gentle manipulation by hand to align deformed components, repair torn metal, and the insertion of inert forms into the interiors of the urns to arrest component movement on their post. Additionally, all will be cleaned and mildly polished to restore a soft luster to the silver. The conservation work is being performed by Griswold Conservation Associates, the same conservation firm that restored the Serra Chapel retablo pulpit, and central altar. Conservation work is scheduled to be completed by mid-February.

Father Serra Memorial Conservation Treatment

Treatment of the Serra Statue has progressed well. All coatings have been removed successfully to expose the original 1913 surface. During the process of mechanically stripping off the 1995 paint layers, it became apparent that other restorations to the statue had been performed. Evidence of gesso, lacquer, and red bole indicated that at one time the statue had been painted gold. It is unclear when this restoration took place, but pictorial information indicates this work may have been done after the statue was relocated to its current location in the 1930s.



Above Photos: (Left) Before treatment photography shows flaking and losses in the 1995 paint application. (Right) Museum Assistant, Christine Shook peers through a gap in the sculpture to inspect newly cleaned surfaces. In the foreground, areas of paint remain on the arm of the boy.



Above Photos: During treatment photography, left and right, captures the statue in various stages of paint removal.



Above Photos: This after treatment photo on the left shows the newly exposed original surface. Currently, the statue displays a deeper brown color as seen in this image on the right. This is contributed to the application of a penetrating, clear consolidant to all surfaces of the figural component. After the consolidate cures, the original color of the statue will return.

As the consolidant requires 28 days to cure, filling of cracks with a conservation grade cementitious mortar will not take place until mid-February. Previous restorations to the arm of the boy and ear of the Father will be patched over with the same cementitious mortar material to blend these areas with the rest of the sculpture, at this time as well. This work will be documented for future conservators and necessary treatments years from now.

Plans are currently being devised to fabricate and install a cross that will replicate the missing original circa 1913 cross. This will help balance out the figures on the base and return context to the statue. The cross should be installed by Swallow's Day, Thursday, March 19, 2009.

Museum Basketry Exhibit

The display period for the temporary educational exhibition on basketry installed in the Mission Model room within the South Wing has been extended until the end of June to coordinate with school tours and student curriculum needs. The exhibit, which focuses on basketry methods, materials, and tools, displays several baskets from museum storage. To refresh the exhibit, baskets that had been on display since September were removed and other baskets from storage were installed. Text information reflective of the newly installed baskets was also updated and installed.



Above Photos: (Left) A picture showing the newly configured display as viewed by the visitor. (Right) The close-up photo of the display shows the newly installed baskets have replaced de-installed basketry.

Irvine Museum's Joseph Kleitsch Painting Returned

The Mission Preservation Department was recently contacted by the Irvine Museum regarding a loaned painting created by artist Joseph Kleitsch titled "*The Altar Boy*." After the "Romance of the Bells" exhibit hosted in the mid-1990s, the painting had remained at the Mission on display in the Pastoral Center through an agreement with the former Mission Administrator, Gerald Miller, and Irvine Museum Director, Jean Stern. As the Irvine Museum intends to auction the painting off in the near future, no option to re-negotiate a loan agreement to allow for the continued display of the painting was available. The painting was retrieved by Irvine Museum representative Merika Gopaul, Assistant Director, on Tuesday January 20, 2009.



Above Photos: "The Altar Boy," pictured on the left, portrays an altar server dressing in albs carrying a processional candlestick in the foreground with women in the background walking amongst Mission San Juan Capistrano architecture. The subject of this portrait is unknown. A detailed photo of the painting at right shows the artist's signature and bold brush strokes.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Hayes
Museum Conservator