

**OAKLAND MUSEUM OF CALIFORNIA PRESENTS  
LANDMARK EXHIBITION OF THE ARTS OF THE  
MISSIONS OF NORTHERN NEW SPAIN**

**FIRST EXHIBITION OF ITS KIND FEATURES  
STUNNING ARTWORKS NEVER SEEN OUTSIDE  
THEIR ORIGINAL LOCATIONS**

***Splendors of Faith/Scars of Conquest sheds light on the tensions, traditions,  
and talents behind the mission enterprise***

(OAKLAND, CA) January 24, 2011—The Oakland Museum of California (OMCA) presents *Splendors of Faith/Scars of Conquest: The Arts of the Missions of Northern New Spain, 1600-1821*, the first exhibition of its kind to explore the rich artistic legacy of the Franciscan and Jesuit mission churches in what is now Northern Mexico, Southwestern United States, and California. On view **February 26 through May 29, 2011**, this extraordinary exhibition, which originated at the Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso (Mexico City), features approximately 110 objects from collections in Mexico, the United States, and Europe—including masterpieces from the missions themselves—shown together for the first time. OMCA is the only California venue for this internationally traveling exhibition and one of only two venues in the United States.

The exhibition features many objects that have never been seen outside of their original locations, including stunning altarpieces, sculptures, paintings, maps and books, as well as lavishly decorated liturgical objects and vestments. A comprehensive exploration of the art in the Catholic missions and its role in the evangelization and conversion of Native inhabitants, *Splendors of Faith/Scars of Conquest* illuminates the tensions, traditions, and talents behind the mission enterprise. Although the missions have been studied extensively from historical, ethnographic, and economic perspectives, the works of art created for them have not received particular attention. Through original scholarship, *Splendors of Faith/Scars of Conquest* bridges a missing piece in the history of the Spanish mission period, and explores the larger cultural and historical context in

which the arts of the missions developed.

“Although many aspects of the history of the missions have been studied, very little attention had been paid to the paintings, sculptures, and other objects that were sent to missions or made there during the Spanish period,” says exhibition curator Clara Bargellini, who spent more than ten years planning the exhibition with U.S. curator Michael Komanecky. “Art is about how individuals express themselves within cultural traditions—for themselves and for others,” says Bargellini. “The missions were contested ground in many different ways, and the art produced in or for them can help us understand what different people—missionaries, colonists, and indigenous groups—may have been feeling and thinking at the time the missions were established and functioning.”

Exclusive to the OMCA presentation is the painting *The Last Judgment*, from Mission San Luis Rey de Francia—recently conserved at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. Other highlights include a 19 foot-high altarpiece from Chihuahua featuring the Virgin of Guadalupe; a large crucifix from Durango made of cornstalk paste that is supposed to have bled miraculously in 1616; a tabernacle inset with abalone, made by Chumash artisans at Mission Santa Barbara; and a painting of the Virgin of Light from Mission San Diego, depicting the Virgin lifting an Indian into Heaven. The exhibition presents many California-specific artifacts including paintings, liturgical objects, and sculpture from Missions San Diego, San Luis Rey, Santa Barbara, and Solano. In addition, a short film depicting Mission San Javier in Baja California on the feast day of their patron saint—showcasing the mission church as a living and vital part of a contemporary Mexican village—will be part of the in-gallery exhibition experience.

Through the exploration of themes such as sacred space, indigenous societies, colonial systems, art, architecture, and artifacts, *Splendors of Faith/Scars of Conquest* addresses the immense cultural impact the missions had on California’s first peoples. Visitors will gain insight into the mindset and world view of the missionaries, including why they believed the conversion of Native people was necessary; how they prepared for this arduous task; the power that they believed artwork would have on achieving their goals; and their own expectations of martyrdom. Native-made pieces featured in the exhibition showcase the Native voice during this time as well as demonstrate Native sensibilities and skills.

“The Spanish conquest is not a simple history,” says OMCA Chief Curator of History Louise Pubols. “This exhibition brings an untold part of that rich yet complicated story forward—shown for the first time through the artwork that resided in and traveled with the missions as they developed throughout this region. Visitors will see lavish paintings and exuberantly decorated artifacts, including some works that will stir emotions and challenge perspectives.”

### **ABOUT MISSION ARTWORK**

The process of starting a mission included not only the construction of new buildings (church, monastery, granaries, etc.) but also the adornment of their interior. Dynamic, emotional paintings, sculptures, silver, and other artifacts were part of the original decorations of almost every mission church in northern New Spain. It was these objects and the ideas they represented that inspired and sustained the missions as they developed over time. Through these masterpieces used to decorate the missions it is possible to appreciate the intense work of evangelization of the first Spanish missionaries in the territories of Northern New Spain, and to realize the many effects this process had on the Native peoples.

### **CONSERVATION EFFORTS IN THE EXHIBITION**

Approximately 70 percent of the objects featured in the exhibition underwent major conservation in order to be included in the exhibition. Through extensive and highly sophisticated conservation techniques on these objects—many of which incurred significant wear and damages over the last 200 years— they have been restored to conditions reminiscent of their original states.

### **CONTEMPORARY CODA—COMPANION EXHIBITION**

Illuminating contemporary perspectives on the Spanish conquest of California, OMCA presents a companion installation to *Splendors of Faith/Scars of Conquest*, on view in the exhibition. Offering relevant view points on age-old themes, legacies, and iconographies, approximately 17 works by living artists address the issues of immigration and regional connections across the current border, religion and contemporary Chicano identity, and the cultural survival of the Native peoples of California. Featuring images from the OMCA collection augmented by select loans, highlights include Ester Hernandez’s *Virgin de Guadalupe Wanted*, Carmen Lomas

Garza's *Heaven and Hell III*, and Harry Fonseca's *The Discovery of Gold and Souls in California*. The contemporary companion exhibition to *Splendors of Faith/Scars of Conquest* is curated by Associate Curator of Photography Drew Johnson.

**CALENDAR EDITORS PLEASE LIST:**

**WHO:** *Splendors of Faith/Scars of Conquest*

**WHAT:** Explore the Arts of the Missions of Northern New Spain in this stunning exhibition exploring the rich artistic legacy of the Franciscan and Jesuit mission churches in northern Mexico and the American Southwest. For the first time, this exhibition brings together these sacred and ceremonial artworks from collections throughout Mexico, the U.S., and Europe.

**WHEN:** February 26 – May 29, 2011

**WHERE:** Oakland Museum of California, 1000 Oak Street, Oakland, CA

**ABOUT THE OAKLAND MUSEUM OF CALIFORNIA**

On May 1, 2010, the Oakland Museum of California welcomed back the public with a dramatically different presentation of its renowned collections of California art and history. Created in 1969 as a "museum for the people," OMCA has revived its founding vision by introducing innovative exhibitions and programming, setting a new paradigm for the way a museum engages the public. OMCA's transformation is enhanced by the renovation and expansion of its iconic building. Renovation and reopening of the Natural Sciences Gallery is scheduled for 2012.

OMCA's groundbreaking exhibits tell the many stories that comprise California with many voices, often drawing on first-person accounts by people who have shaped California's cultural heritage. Visitors are invited to actively participate in the Museum as they learn about the natural, artistic, and social forces that affect the state and investigate their own role in both its history and its future.

## **VISITOR INFORMATION**

Museum admission is \$12 general; \$9 seniors and students with valid ID, \$6 youth ages 9 to 17, and free for Members and children 8 and under. OMCA offers onsite underground parking and is conveniently located one block from the Lake Merritt BART station, on the corner of 10th Street and Oak Street. The accessibility ramp is located at the new 1000 Oak Street main entrance.

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### **For more information and visuals, please contact:**

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*\*This exhibition was originally organized by the Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso. The Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso receives financial support from, and is a part of, the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), the Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (CNCA), and the Gobierno del Distrito Federal (GDF). The organizers and museum participants express their deepest appreciation to the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA), and to the Dirección General de Sitios y Monumentos del Patrimonio Cultural del CNCA, for their generous collaboration and loan of collections. Furthermore, the organizers recognize the valuable support provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art, which is dedicated to promoting the exploration, understanding, and enjoyment of the visual arts of the United States for national and international audiences. By recognizing the importance of experiencing original works of art, the foundation provides opportunities for interaction and study, beginning with the display and growth of its own art collection in Chicago. To continue the cross-cultural dialogue over American Art, the foundation supports and collaborates on innovative exhibitions, as well as research and educational programs. Inherent in these activities is the conviction that art has the potential as much to distinguish as to unite cultures. Additional support for the project came from the United States Embassy in Mexico, and the UNAM Programa de apoyos a proyectos de investigación e innovación tecnológica (PAPIIT).*

*The Oakland Museum of California presentation is made possible in part by generous support from the Oakland Museum Women's Board, the OMCA History Guild, and the Academy of American Franciscan History.*

*A 371-page, fully illustrated catalogue (available in both Spanish and English) featuring essays by prominent historians, anthropologists, archaeologists, and art historians accompanies the exhibition.*