

## Crafting the Past: Mission Models and the Curation of California Heritage

Elizabeth Kryder-Reid

Indiana University School of Liberal Arts, IUPUI, Indianapolis

**Abstract:** Small scale representations of the California missions in the form of mission models and miniatures have circulated in public and private display contexts for close to a century.

Produced by students, hobbyists, preservationists, and artists, this material culture constructs in specific and codified ways an ideal mission materiality. For almost a century the mission models have been consumed through the distinct discursive practices of crafting, collecting, displaying, and buying. The models allow me, therefore, to trace the production of cultural memory in daily life through the materialization of heritage constituted through formal and informal practices, across personal and public spheres, and over multiple generations. In their representation of landscape, labor, and Native Americans, these discursive cultural artifacts contribute to the construction of a highly politicized past that reinforces a romanticized and valorized presentation of colonialism. A postcolonial critique of the models also raises questions regarding the roles of heritage professionals in mediating community-curated history.

**Keywords:**

**Resumen:** Durante casi un siglo, las reproducciones a pequeña escala de las misiones de California en forma de maquetas y miniaturas han circulado en contextos de exposición tanto públicos como privados. Realizadas por estudiantes, aficionados, conservacionistas y artistas, la cultura material construye de formas específicas y codificadas una materialidad de la misión ideal. Durante casi un siglo, las maquetas de las misiones se han consumido a través de las distintas prácticas discursivas de las artesanías, las colecciones, las exhibiciones y las compras.

Por lo tanto, las maquetas nos permiten rastrear la producción de la memoria cultural en la vida diaria a través de la materialización del patrimonio constituida mediante prácticas formales e informales, en la esfera personal y la pública, y a lo largo de múltiples generaciones. En su representación del paisaje, el trabajo, y los nativos americanos, estos artefactos culturales discursivos contribuyen a la construcción de un pasado sumamente politizado que refuerza una presentación idealizada y valorizada del colonialismo. Una crítica poscolonial de las maquetas también plantea preguntas con respecto a los roles que desempeñan los profesionales del patrimonio a la hora de mediar la historia curada por la comunidad.

Résumé: Des représentations à petite échelle de missions californiennes sous la forme de maquettes de missions et de miniatures ont été présentées de manière publique et privée depuis près d'un siècle. Produites par des étudiants, des passionnés, des écologistes et des artistes, la culture matérielle construit de manière spécifique et codifiée une matérialité idéale de la mission. Depuis presque un siècle, les maquettes de missions ont été consommées à travers les pratiques discursives de la fabrication, de la collection, de l'exposition et de l'achat. Les maquettes nous permettent, de ce fait, de retracer la production de la mémoire culturelle dans la vie quotidienne à travers la matérialisation du patrimoine constituée par des pratiques formelles et informelles, dans des sphères à la fois privées et publiques, et au cours de générations multiples. Dans leur représentation du paysage, du travail, et des Amérindiens, ces artefacts culturels discursifs contribuent à la construction d'un passé hautement politisé qui renforce une présentation idéalisée et valorisée du colonialisme. Une critique postcoloniale des maquettes soulève également des questions quant aux rôles des professionnels du patrimoine dans leur médiation d'une histoire dont le conservateur est la communauté.

## Modeling Intimate History

Nine- and ten-year-olds across California spend their fourth grade year learning about the state's history, and they often undertake research on one of the twenty-one missions as a way to explore the colonial era. The students present their research in written reports, PowerPoint presentations, and—most visibly—mission models. These models are handcrafted from various found materials or store-bought prefabricated kits. They are typically constructed on rectangular bases 2-3 feet on each side and include the main mission buildings and a small portion of the mission landscape, such as the courtyard, forecourt, and adjacent cemetery (Figure 1). These fourth graders' models, along with similar small scale representations of the missions produced in other contexts, offer a collection of artifacts through which to explore how materialization of heritage operates in distributed networks and is implicated in the politics of cultural memory. Tracing the history of these discursive objects provides an opportunity, as Rodney Harrison (2013:197) has put it, to “give heritage a past” and to examine the “work it does in the present as an ensemble or assemblage of places, objects, and practices.”

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

The fourth grade mission model projects, while never mandated by state educational standards, have been a tradition in classrooms since at least the 1960s.<sup>1</sup> They are such a formative part of the California elementary school experience that they have been described as "rites of passage" (Walker and Gonzalez 2010) and the "highlight of every California student's fourth grade experience" (Quinio 2008). The California Missions Foundation cites the models in its case for support, arguing that the missions have "become synonymous with the state's fourth

grade curriculum [when] students famously build mission models" (California Missions Foundation), and the mission models have even been cited in Congressional debate (Farr 2004).

In addition to being produced in classroom contexts, mission models have been commissioned for expositions, amusement parks, and museums, produced by artists for sale, and crafted by hobbyists for personal pleasure. They have been rendered as cast porcelain miniature collectibles by Cameo Guild Studios as the "Mission de Oro" series. Even the U.S. Capitol's National Statuary Hall includes as one of the two sculptures representing California the figure of Junípero Serra, founder of the first missions, holding a model of the Carmel Mission. These cultural artifacts are not direct transcriptions of the sites; instead they translate the missions into a simplified emblem that can be possessed, visually and materially. Crafted and displayed as collections, the models function as a system of objects. As Jean Baudrillard (1996:73) has argued, historical objects, such as antiques, exotics, and folkloric objects, "run counter to the requirements of functional calculation, and answer to other kinds of demands such as witness, memory, nostalgia or escapism." The widespread circulation of the models as signifiers of California's origins mean that they operate as part of a wide and diffuse network of heritage production "where history is transformed into space, into property...[and] itself appears as a commodity" (Stewart 1993: xii-xiii). In sum, over the past century the mission models have become cultural productions (Bourdieu 1993) and operate as "memory symbols" (Bodnar 1992).

Like the heritage sites and tourist destinations they represent, the mission models reposition California's colonial history by reimagining the landscape, the nature of labor, and the presence of Native Americans. They present the sites in a codified format that emphasizes the missions' beauty and sanctity and that subtly elides their past and present in order to reinforce the "authorized heritage discourse" of a triumphalist mission narrative (Smith 2006). Given that 19

of the 21 missions remain the property of the Catholic Church, and that they are venerated by some and decried as sites of genocide by others, the models are open to the same critiques of the politics of representation at other contested heritage sites, particularly those in post-colonial contexts (Benton 2010; Dearborn and Stallmeyer 2010; Foote 2003; Harrison 2013; Mitterhofer 2013; Silverman and Ruggles 2007). They are an example within the larger realm of memory practices of the discursive power of small-scale representations. The mission models create a phenomenological engagement, predicated on the disparity of size between the human observer and the diminutive scale of the objects, has been found to be formative in constructing notions of the "other" and of the past through miniatures and souvenirs (Stewart 1993) and dioramas and models (Eco 1986; King 1996; Sandberg 2003; Witz 2006). Much as critical cartography has explored the social relations of the production and consumption of maps (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Hill 2004; Crampton 2001; Harvey 1980; Harley 1988), mission models can be read as objects that reconfigure relationships inscribed in representations of space.

The models are also significant in the ways they problematize community-based curatorial practices, such as those Rosensweig and Thelen (1998:18) described in their study of popular uses of history in which Americans "make the past part of their everyday routines and turn to it as a way of grappling with profound questions about how to live." This "intimate history," as Tammy Gordon (2010) has described it, often has its own epistemologies. Intimate histories involve "blending ideas from history, the oral tradition, folklore, popular culture and personal preference, [and] they represent an utterance that is culturally and politically situated in the present" (Gordon 2010:7). Eric Gable and Richard Handler's (2000) exploration of the relationship between the official history purveyed at Colonial Williamsburg and the private memories of visitors highlights the productive entanglement of the two. "Official history," they

argue, "erases messy or unpleasant truths in order to make useful propaganda out of the past." In contrast, visitor memory "contests and resists official history." This user-generated meaning, they suggest, is a kind of subversive resistance to centralized authority, like "the joke people tell behind the bureaucrat's back or while the politician is making his speech." It is this kind of memory, they suggest, that we must "recover in order to give voice to the disenfranchised, the oppressed, and the silenced" (Gable and Handler 2000:250). The potential of community curation and shared authority has been embraced by some museums (Filene, and Koloski, eds. 2011; Fred and Ferrell 2008; Frisch 1990), but in contrast to professionally curated, institutionally sponsored exhibits, the mission models are produced in highly dispersed educational and informal contexts that embrace experiential learning and encourage the incorporation of personal meaning making. The mission models present a compelling case, therefore, for scholars of cultural heritage to pay attention to discursive objects operating in distributed networks and in the largely ephemeral practices of community curation of the mission past.

Attention to the intersection of formal and informal heritage practices also complicates the scales of "community" at which these models operate. The history of curation of these simple objects illustrates the ways in which claims of historical authority and authenticity are appropriated in a variety of contexts, including state sponsored expositions, private commercial ventures, museums, and the mission sites themselves. The models are examples of what Sherry Turkle (2007) has called "evocative objects." Their appeal stems in part from the objects' repositioning of time, space, and scale and in part from the accrued significance of mission model-making practices across generations. The models exemplify the intricacies and persistence

of an informal heritage practice whose seeming innocence and charming aesthetics belies its ideological origins as it also deflects critique. Turkle (2007:311) notes that when [EXT] the objects of disciplinary society come to seem natural, what is most important is that what seems natural comes to seem right. We forget that objects have a history. They come to shape us in particular ways. We forget why or how they came to be. Yet “naturalized” objects are historically specific. [EXT]

The history of mission model production is instructive, therefore, as an example of the materialization of heritage through codification of the conceptual metaphors, hegemonic discourse, and habitus that circulate more broadly in dominant cultural narratives (Bourdieu 1993; Gramsci 1971; Lakoff and Johnson 1980). The models provide examples of the complex intersections of formal and informal heritage practices that operate at the edges of institutional sponsorship but generally outside the formal curatorship of heritage professionals. They also raise issues for heritage professionals regarding community curated objects and how to balance the rights of people to "manage the story of one's past" (Gordon 2010: 8) with the desire to promote an inclusive, reflective, and relevant stewardship of heritage (Harrison 2010; Schon 1983; Ševčenko 2010).

### Historicizing Mission Models

The models represent the twenty-one missions located along the coast from San Diego to Sonoma that, beginning in 1769, were established by the Franciscan Order in the name of the Spanish crown to convert the indigenous people of California and to claim the land for Spain. They were secularized in 1833, ten years after Mexico gained its independence and eventually restored to the Catholic Church by American courts in 1865 when many of the missions were

returned to service as parish churches for their local communities (Hackel 2005; Kimbro and Costello 2009). During the second half of the nineteenth century, most of the missions fell into disrepair until, with a renewed interest in the colonial era around the turn of the twentieth century, parishioners and preservation groups such as the Landmarks Club and the Native Sons of California repaired roofs and stabilized the crumbling adobe (Hackling 1989; Starr 1973, 1985; Vaz 1949; Weinberg 1974). Over the course of the twentieth century the missions were developed to become prominent sites in the state's tourism industry and have figured significantly in California dominant historical narratives and visual culture (Deverell 2004; Gebhard 1980; Kropp 2006; McClung 2000; Panich 2005; Sagarena 2002; Starr 1985; Thomas 1991; Walden 2006).

The contemporary conventions of making, displaying, and consuming mission models have a long history that is embedded in the complex construction of California heritage, specifically the romanticization of what has been called the "Spanish fantasy past" (McWilliams 1946; Kropp 2006). While this romanticized colonial past has been materially manifested in forms as diverse as orange crate labels, roadside markers, and mission gardens (Delyser 2005, Kropp 2006; Kryder-Reid 2010; Lamb 2005; McClung 2000:72-102; Rawls 1992; Stern et al. 1995), the underlying narrative is fairly simple. The story valorizes Spanish colonization, casting the Franciscan friars as selfless purveyors of salvation, the military as brave conquistadors, and the dons and señoritas as emissaries of a Mediterranean culture ideally suited to the idyllic climate of California's "new Eden." The era of Mexican governance and the presence of immigrants from non-Anglo cultures are downplayed or ignored altogether. Native peoples are registered mainly in the "pre-contact" past and interpreted in "essentialized homogenous notions of Indianness which inadvertently contribute to the invisibility of coastal Native peoples" (Dart-



Newton 2009:v, 2011). To the extent that their presence at the missions as "neophytes" is visible at all, it is generally construed as a symbolic transformation from wild to civilized, manifested through the acquisition by Native people of the Spanish-introduced arts of agriculture, animal husbandry, industry, literacy, and music. It is also evident in the spatial organization of the sites reflecting the Franciscans' expectations for conduct including sexual behavior and labor (Haas 1997, 2014; Kryder-Reid 2007; Rawls 1992; Schneider and Panich 2014; Silliman 2001; Voss 2000).

An aspect of the mission models' potency, therefore, is derived from the fact that their codified representations reinforce the reception of the missions as peaceful, sacred, and beautiful places within the broader construct of civilization signified by order and reason and personified by markers of western culture such as Christianity and ornamental gardens. These tropes are exemplified in one of the first mission models displays at the 1911 Panama-California International Exposition groundbreaking celebration. The final day of a four-day festival of demonstrations, banquets, balls, and speeches included a parade along the streets of San Diego in what was to become Balboa Park (Amero 1990; Bokovoy 2002, 2005; Kropp 2006; Montes 1982). Thousands lined the parade route to see a procession that included reduced-scale replicas of the missions, simplified in form, but with enough distinctive architectural features to identify each one. Gliding down the parade route, the missions were flanked by costumed representatives of California's past. Leading each mission was a volunteer dressed as the saint after whom each mission was named, accompanied by a boy holding a canopy over his or her head and girls scattering flowers. Other historical characters were personified by nearly one thousand volunteers costumed as Franciscan friars, Native Americans, soldiers, and settlers who marched alongside the floats. Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, writing in 1916, described the spectacle as

one designed "to recall to mind the glamour and mystery and poetry of the old Spanish days" (Goodhue 1916:6). In imagery consistent with the popular literature and pageantry of the day, costumed actors portrayed the stereotypical dress and demeanor signifying their historical roles: the frocked friar, the Indian in minimal leather loin coverings, and the lace draped Spanish señoritas (Thomas 1991; DeLyser 2005). The missions on the floats were similarly decorated with palm fronds and greens to suggest their verdant setting in California's new Eden.

Mission models have been produced in a variety of public and private contexts since the 1911 San Diego parade. For example, Harry Downie (1903-1980), who worked during his lifetime on the restoration of several missions including Mission San Carlos in Carmel, made mission models as a hobby when he was a boy (Anonymous 1970; Pagliarulo 2005). The Downie Museum at San Carlos displays a number of his models including one depicting the facade of the Carmel mission made when Downie was twelve. Norman Neuerberg, an architectural historian who studied the missions extensively, has written about visiting another mission scholar and enthusiast, Edith Webb, in her backyard in 1941 to view her meticulously researched model of Mission San Diego (Neuerberg 1987). Archaeologist Rubén Mendoza credits a field trip to Mission San Juan Bautista and his subsequent construction of a model of the plaza out of tomato boxes as the catalyst for his life-long vocation studying and excavating the missions (Dunton-Downer 2012). The extent of the practice is difficult to document, but hobbyists and artists continue to make mission models for personal pleasure and for sale (Howser 2000).

Not only does the cultural practice of making mission models date to the early twentieth century, but their display has been an important part of disseminating an idealized mission materiality for decades. Many mission museums display architectural models as part of their

permanent exhibitions, such as the extensive layout at San Luis Rey and Mission San Gabriel's "Court of Missions" built by Claretian seminarians in the early 1930s. Mission models are in the collections of historical societies and local history museums. For example, The Santa Barbara Historical Museum includes a model of Mission Santa Barbara constructed c.1940 by Christian Mueller, Sr. that was made of molded Plaster of Paris as part of the Federal Art Project (FAP) of the Works Progress Administration (Santa Barbara Historical Museum). Mission models were also part of public spectacles. A San Gabriel Mission float won third prize in the historical division of the 1924 Rose Parade through Pasadena (*Los Angeles Times*, January 2, 1924). Mission models were displayed in the garden outside the San Gabriel Mission Playhouse in San Gabriel during performances of John Steven McGroarty's "Mission Play" in the 1911-1913 (Vroman 1911). At the Knott's Berry Farm amusement park, a set of mission models created by a Hollywood set designer in 1956 were mounted behind glass and set into an adobe wall where they visitors as they walked from "Calico Square" to the "Fiesta Village" along "El Camino Real" (Merritt and Lynxwiler 2010; Neuerberg 1987; Stratton 2001). According to Chris Jepson who works on the history of the Knott's Berry Farm, the models were removed gradually during the 1980s and 1990s as the area was renovated with the last taken down in 2003, but park employees are currently restoring them (Jepson, personal communication, 2015).

### Discursive Objects

One particularly well-documented set of mission models exemplifies the discursive significance of these objects across multiple contexts. This set of models was commissioned for the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition in San Francisco. It was purchased by a businessman and displayed in a popular San Francisco restaurant from 1954 to 1971. After a time in storage, the

models were sold at auction in 1998 to a woman who established a museum where the models are exhibited today. The path from the 1939 Exposition to the present day California Missions Museum offers an opportunity to interrogate more closely the connection between these discursive objects and the construction of heritage, particularly through the models' public display in an "exhibitionary complex" (Bennett 1988). Michael Baxandall's (1991) model of exhibits as a coalescence of three spheres—the original makers and users of the object, the visitors or viewers who bring their own subjectivities to the experience, and the curator who has made the myriad choices of object selection, design, and interpretation to produce the exhibit—is useful for decoding the ideology of the mission models and for tracing their role in the formal and informal heritage practices that have helped shape the social constitution of the California past.

In the first realm—the makers of the objects—that the models were clearly commissioned for didactic purposes. They were intended to instruct, intrigue, entertain, and inspire pride in California's heritage as part of the broader Expositions celebration of the opening of the Golden Gate and Bay Bridges (James and Weller 1941; Pipes 2007; Rubens 2004). Opening in February 1939 to a populace still grappling with the Depression, the fair was an oasis of promise and prosperity with just enough promiscuity to attract a paying audience of 17 million during its two year run (Rubens 2004:193). Sleek, streamlined buildings designed by leading architects and demonstrations of revolutionary technology celebrated an emerging modernism and optimism for the future (Pipes 2007:87). In addition to looking forward, the Exposition, with its theme "Pageant of the Pacific," included exhibits on the history and cultures of the western United States and around the Pacific Rim.

While not a central focus of the Exposition, the missions were used rhetorically and visually throughout the fair to signal a distinctly California heritage. For example, "Old Mission Fawn" was one of the 18 colors approved in the Exposition palette (Rubens 2004:37). The parade route for an opening "Fiesta" was called the "Mission Trail" (*SFC* 1939b:1), and a "fair inspired song" broadcast by Jimmie Davis on a national radio network was called "The Old Mission Trail" (*SFC* 1939a:12). Even the three-level 1,000 lb. fruitcake that told "the whole story of California from the days of the first Spanish town to the completion of the Exposition itself" had around its base "in true scale, models of all of California's 19 missions" (*SFC* 1939e: 3E). In one of the more sacramental examples, the California Building dedication included the ceremonial laying of a bronze plaque set in cement that had been mixed with "sands from every country, [and] water from each of the State's ancient missions" (*SFC* 1939d:1E). These allusions to the mission legacy were familiar enough to the Exposition audience that the references had to be neither literal nor literary. By 1939, the missions had become a condensed symbol of California's origin story.

Tucked into the Fair's massive 400-acre layout was the "Mission Trails Building" devoted to the seven coastal counties through which the colonial road (El Camino Real) ran. The building housed an "authentic exhibit" of meticulously crafted mission models displayed on long skirted tables. The models had been commissioned by the building's architects Harold A. Edmondson and Robert Stanton from designer Leon Bayard de Volo and were constructed by "German cabinet makers" from a mix of wood, clay, "molded paperboard", and other materials. Purportedly based on historical research, Bayard de Volo's design replicated the representational conventions of contemporaneous mission visual culture (Kryder-Reid 2010). While the handcrafted models necessarily simplify the representations of the built environment, they also

register time, portray the purpose of the spaces, and represent historical actors in ways that reinforce the romanticized mission narrative. For example, the time period being depicted is ambiguous. Some mission models, such as Santa Clara, portray the original colonial period buildings despite the fact the original buildings had been destroyed and rebuilt in the twentieth century with significant alterations. Others include evidence of the passage of time, such as the San Juan Capistrano model that depicts the ruined nave damaged in an 1812 earthquake. Most of the models represent the mission church and adjacent convento with their arched corridors as they appeared in the 1930s, but they remove downspouts, lightening rods, garden sheds, parking lots, signage, curbing, and other modern improvements. The resulting impression is of a timeless, vaguely "historic" landscape with no markers to date the buildings or the grounds.

Even more strikingly, the models eliminate workspaces that were central to the productivity of the mission enterprise and to the control of indigenous labor. Instead, the models present the missions as charming, beautiful monasteries with cloister gardens. In contrast to the utilitarian landscape, most of the models have carefully groomed grounds, and several have intricately planted formal gardens that were not established at the missions until the late nineteenth century (1872 in the case of Santa Barbara) and at most other missions in the 1910s-1950s (Brown 1988; Kryder-Reid 2007, 2010). For example, Santa Barbara's garden design is represented in intricate detail with its central fountain surrounded by geometric beds and intersecting walks, while San Fernando is depicted with its 1923 "Memory Garden" in front of the mission (Figure 2).

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

The romanticized and sanctified rendition of the missions is also reinforced by the portrayal of figures in the landscape. While the colonial missions housed hundreds of neophytes along with a

few padres and a small contingent of soldiers, the only people represented in the models are frocked monks in poses of contemplation, study, and worship. For example, in the Santa Barbara model two monks kneel before a wooden cross, while at Mission San Francisco a monk walks through the cemetery garden with book in hand. At San Fernando, three monks are seated on benches that surround the fountains while two others gaze contemplatively into the garden. These figures convey the impression that the colonial missions were all male, cloistered monasteries. Conspicuously absent from these seemingly sacred, peaceful places are Native Americans, soldiers, and merchants, as well as the tourists and parishioners who frequented the sites in the 1930s.

The contemplative character of the spaces is created as much by absence as presence. Save for a couple of wagons, there are no references to the crops and crafts produced in these landscapes or the labor or laborers they required. There are no mills, presses, kilns, threshing floors, corrals, *lavanderías*, washhouses, or ovens. Even the industrial features that had been excavated by 1939, such as the tanning vats at San Gabriel and San Fernando and the forge at San Juan Capistrano, are missing in the reconstructed landscapes. There are no examples of native housing, either traditional bent-pole dwellings or adobe "neophyte villages." Some models have a two-wheeled wooden cart, such as the straw-filled *careta* parked beside Santa Cruz, but they are positioned around the grounds as if they were tasteful lawn ornaments. In short, the models depict the mission buildings in the midst of a garden tended by a few friars, rather than a working plantation maintained by hundreds of Native Americans. The garden settings, with their strolling, praying monks, emphasize the beauty and charm of the historic missions and eradicate references to the coercion and labor central to their colonial operations. In 1939, this marginalization of Native and Mexican heritage was not only consonant with the public

discourse and visual culture of the day, but paralleled the practices of social exclusion, such as the forced repatriation of ethnic Mexicans regardless of their citizenship, public health policies of ethnic quarantining, and urban design predicated on “ethnic grids of place and memory” (Deverell 2004:173).

In the Baxandall’s second realm of curatorial choices, the 1939 models have passed through at least three distinct display contexts: the state-sponsored Golden Gate Exposition, the commercial Cliff House Restaurant, and the non-profit California Missions Museum. Each of these settings, while distinct social contexts, commodified the missions and mobilized them as potent symbols of a celebratory “Spanish” heritage. Visitors to the original exhibit in the Mission Trails Building Exposition understood the implicit promotional agendas of the educational and cultural exhibits, performances, and spectacles, and their participation was predicated on the fair’s celebration of regional and national pride. Furthermore, the mission models were part of a distinctive class of objects inviting visitors to engage with heritage through visual and immersive experiences (Moss 2010; Rydell 1993). Dioramas, scale models, miniature rooms, collections of miniatures, relief maps, and entire reconstructed environments were the mainstay of the Exposition’s cultural exhibits to the extent that one report of the fair observed that there were so many miniature exhibits that “it is quite possible now to have an entire world’s fair, in miniature, within a single building—one as marvelous and intriguing as its big brother” (*SFC* 1939g:3E). Not only were the mission models part of this broader miniaturized materiality, they deployed conventions of viewing that parallel the touristic gaze (MacCannell 1976) and the same “techniques of the observer” provoked by twentieth century images and spectacles (Crary 1990). The voyeurism also had implications for the commodification of the mission sites as tourist destinations. Exhibits of the cultural and natural highlights of the region were designed to mimic



a sense of journey and spur interest in touring the west. For example, a newspaper profiling the California Highway Fish, Game and Parks exhibit asked readers, "Would you like to travel the length and breadth of California in five minutes?" (*SFC* 1939f: 2E). The scale renderings invited imaginary time travel as well. The same story noted that this "remarkable exhibit" can "take you back many years and many more years into the future" with its projection of "highways of the future, six-lane affairs with park strips between and all grade crossings eliminated."

Underlying the models' charm and popular appeal was a complex ideology that belied their seeming innocence and diminutive scale. As has been argued in other contexts, the miniaturized worlds of models and dioramas objectify and essentialize complex environments, histories, and ideas (Arnoldi 1999; Insley 2008; Long 2003; Stewart 1993; Varutti 2011; Wonders 1993). They not only represent living environments, other cultures, and historic moments in static, material form, but they transform them into commodities that can be owned, controlled, exhibited, and viewed. In the context of a state-sponsored Exposition designed to celebrate achievement, attract tourists, encourage consumers, and promote investment, the models' significance as celebrations of a valorized colonial past is entirely logical. As Lisa Rubens (2004: 91-123) has argued, the 1939 Exposition was sponsored by some of the most influential institutions in the West and steeped in the vision and politics of the New Deal. For western states in particular, the Exposition showcased the region as a leader in the modern American economy, and it promoted specific economic, aesthetic, and ideological constructions of the West. Narratives of conquest and settlement were played out in elaborate theatrical productions, while exhibits highlighted natural resources, economic development, and tourist destinations. In contrast to the modernist sensibilities of much of the rest of the fair, the Mission Trails Building's homage to a nostalgic, romanticized vision of California's colonial past banked

its cultural capital in a vision of the past that was beautiful, peaceful, and sacred. The mission models played particularly into the state's triumphal rendition of colonial origins that masked the human conflict inherent in the dispossession of Native lands and disruption of their lifeways.

The aestheticized mission heritage that served the Exposition's vision of California's colonial past was equally effective in their subsequent commercial setting where Cliff House owner George Whitney, Sr., added the models to quirky collection of spinning wheels, antique bicycles, music boxes, and the Tom Thumb collection (Hountala 2009; National Park Service 1992; Whitney 2002). The Cliff House was adjacent to the Sutro Baths and the Playland amusement park, two other Whitney enterprises, and offered diners both classic roadhouse food and an entertaining décor. To emphasize the regional connection, Whitney and his brother and co-owner Leo Whitney constructed a Mission Revival style addition of adobe, wood, and tile on the north side of the restaurant where the mission models were exhibited over a collection of mechanical instruments and antique arcade games in the Musée Mécanique. In the logic of Whitney's collection, the mission models were nostalgic relics of a local Exposition and a romanticized homage to the state's heritage, as well as visually engaging curiosities. The models' display in a roadhouse restaurant that was similarly predicated on highway tourism reinforces the parallel appropriation of mission history for contemporary commercial purposes. [INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE].

The curatorial vision of the models' current home at the California Missions Museum continues the promotional agendas of the 1939 Exposition and the roadhouse venue. Nancy Cline, co-owner of Cline Cellars, a winery north of Sonoma, purchased the models at auction in 1998 because she wanted to preserve the missions' legacy and provide educational experiences, especially for school children (Torassa 2005: F1). After displaying them for a time at the winery,

Cline was motivated by their popularity to found a museum (completed in 2005) whose purpose is: “To preserve, restore, and display the California Mission Models and other historical items in an educational environment, which promotes appreciation of the ingenuity, commitment, and perseverance of the early California missionaries and pioneers” (National Heritage Foundation, 2008). The dedicatory plaque at the mission entrance, erected by the Native Sons of the Golden West in June 2006, echoes the mission statement’s celebratory tone: “This museum hopes to impart to all who visit it a sense of awe at the ingenuity, dedication, and tenacity of those who have gone before us.”

The display strategies reinforce the museum’s ideological goals. The mission models stand on wooden bases topped with Plexiglas vitrines with largely descriptive and positive interpretive text. Each mission is identified by name on an engraved plaque on the base, a brief history of the mission is conveyed in a short, typed exhibit label mounted on the vitrine, and a longer description is presented as a manuscript page of calligraphic writing on top of the cases. The labels' interpretation focuses on the basic chronology of each mission’s founding and subsequent development, noting few facts after secularization except where the building’s fate was impacted by flood or earthquake. Consistent with the museum's mission, the tone of the exhibit text is sympathetic to the church, using phrases such as “the mission bravely continued its efforts”, “intended to provide a favorable influence on the Indians of the area”, and “neophytes came slowly, but religious progress came in time” (California Mission Museum text, for La Soledad and San Jose models). Even in instances where Native American resistance was the most extreme, the narrative downplays the violence of colonization. For example, the label for Santa Cruz, site of some of the most violent Native resistance, states: "Another drawback was a

nearby settlement with a population consistently hostile to the ecclesiastical administration. Remonstrance did no good and for some time the mission was abandoned."

In addition to their role "as an extraordinary and accurate depiction of California history" (California Missions Museum web site, 2009), the museum presents the models as relics of the 1939 Exposition. The one-room gallery's uniform presentation reinforces the impression of the models as a collection and an artistic corpus, eliding associations among the models, the mission sites, and the colonial past. The arrangement of the cases invites visitors on both a tour of the missions and a reenactment of the 1939 exhibit. Cline has noted, "As far as we know, this is the only place where you can witness (models of) all 21 missions under the same roof" (Torassa 2005:F1). Rather than walking through the immersive setting of buildings and grounds as a tourist at a mission would, however, the museum visitor consumes the missions as a series of destinations where the primary experience is the gaze (Figure 4). The display on waist-high bases under spotlights encourages visitors to peer through the models' arches, scrutinize details of shrubbery and tile work, and study their craftsmanship. The models' artistry is seductive, directing attention to the craft of the maker and the pleasure of entering into the exquisite miniature world. The referential triumvirate of model-site-history reinforces a sense of authenticity as a visitor to the museum's opening observed (Torassa 2005:F1). The impact of the 1939 models' representational conventions is limited if one considers only the museum's attendance, but images of the model are on the museum's web site and potentially seen by thousands of fourth graders each year researching their mission projects and perpetuating the models' visual conventions.

[INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE]

Historicizing mission model making reveals influence of a highly diffused but pervasive cultural practice. The tradition of fourth grade model making exemplifies Turkle's observation that "Contemporary regimes of power have become capillary, in the sense that power is embodied in widely distributed institutions and objects" (Turkle 2007: 311). The visual analysis of children's mission models posted on web sites and displayed at missions and local libraries demonstrates the reification of the ideological constructs perpetuated through model making, despite the fact the assignment has never been officially mandated and despite the educational potential of model building as a learning experience (Jackson 1972; King 1996). The California State Educational Standards ask students to describe "relationships" among soldiers, missionaries, and Indians, but the models they create suggest that students focus instead on the built environment, rarely including figures in the landscape. For all their research on architectural details, founding dates, and crop yields, many of the children's models continue to include anachronistic representations of lush, colorful mission gardens. Some reproduce full gardens, with fountain, walks, and flowerbeds. Others represent the ornamental spaces more abstractly with items such as out-of-scale plastic flowers, birdbaths, and colorful tiled fountains (Figure 5). The imagery of the missions as peaceful, sacred, and beautiful places continues to be reinforced by commercial interests as well. A number of companies offer model building kits and accessories such as a "rustic cross made from 2 wooden twigs nailed together," "gold metal bells to hang in your tower," a plastic water fountain, and a wishing well (Create-A-Mission web site).

[INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE]

Curating Heritage

Community-curated heritage presents opportunities for people to interpret the past as reflections of their own interests and positions and in ways that may resist or reinforce existing narratives. Proponents of the democratizing and maximizing the relevance of cultural institutions embrace this model of shared authority and co-curation as an antidote to elitist institutional authoritarianism (Adair, Filene, and Koloski 2011). But the history of California mission models exemplifies the challenges of combining formal and informal heritage practices and the complexities of defining “community” a more inclusive curatorial process.

For almost a century mission model creators and collectors have perpetuated an idealized representation of the missions' past, both visually and rhetorically, that is at best exclusionary and at worst perpetuates claims of racial superiority (Weber 1990). While a beloved tradition for some, the models continue to be part of a broader celebratory discourse of the missions and an avenue for participating in a privileged, exclusionary heritage. An editorial on the opening day of the 1939 Exposition articulates similar sentiments of manifest destiny and triumphalist colonial-settler ideologies as the Missions Museum:

[EXT] It is not a turning point, but the start of a new thrilling chapter in the story of this vivid city of destiny...Every San Franciscan, every Californian, should enjoy in the full each hour of this tremendous effort and spectacle...to rejoice...in the achievement of the American ideal....the future triumphs that loyal Californians believe fate has provided for this land blest by Providence, are not the achievements of one generation or of one age. A race immortal while it holds to its ideals, its courage and conscience, contributed of its best to make this California (SFC 1939c: 16). [EXT]

The mission models' messages are subtler, but no less persuasive professions of exclusionary heritage. Despite their disparate display contexts—museum, mission, restaurant, and amusement

park—the ideological power of the models has consistently resonated with audiences' desires to celebrate California's origins, marginalize colonialism's injustices, and to obfuscate its consequences for the colonized. Like other examples of aestheticized heritage (Hartnett 2011; Helmreich 2002; Ruggles 2011; Smith 2006), the models reinforce a history of the missions that privileges the age and beauty of the sites while avoiding the more painful chapters of subjugation, disease, and death. Presented as recreations of the colonial era missions but staged with friars posed in their luxuriant twentieth century patio gardens, the models imitate that which never existed, a form of simulacra (Baudrillard 1988). They derive their power from their claim to be a historical referent, but as a fabricated and aestheticized heritage they reproduce ideologies of a valorized Spanish past with priest as humble hero and native peoples a vanished population. The mission models are a "system of objects," a communal collection that has acquired fetishized meanings and has been consumed in daily life as part of a coherent dominant historical discourse (Baudrillard 1996: 200). Studies of the intersection of memory and kinship have noted that the "conjunction of the intimate and the political, the ordinary and the momentous" are how "cumulatively and over time, small everyday processes of relatedness—such as narrating stories of past kinship...constituting small ceremonies of commemoration...—have a larger-scale political import" (Carsten 2008: 4). Over time, these mission models have produced ever thicker layers of meaning as generations invest themselves in the practice of model building and participate in its visual vocabulary of California's constructed past.

The politics of the past manifested through the mission models has not gone unnoticed. There has been a persistent stream of criticism, particularly in the last fifteen years, by teachers, some of whom refuse to assign the model projects, and by parents who question its educational value. Native scholars such as Edward Castillo (1991) have been particularly scathing in their

criticism of the mission model projects. For example, Native writer and activist Deborah Miranda has proposed a mission model "thought experiment" to highlight the problematics of asking children to represent oppressive institutions in the benign media of a worksheets and models. Miranda asks readers to consider the typical assignment requiring students to fill out a worksheet asking questions about mission construction, tribes that lived there, its crops or manufactured products, and special features. She then presents the same assignment but substituting first the context of a Mississippi slave plantation and, finally, a German concentration camp (Miranda 2013:186-191). Despite such criticism, each year brings a fresh crop of models, stories in local papers, exhibits in libraries, and recollections of parents about the generational rite of passage.

Here lies the critical juncture of the community-curated history materialized in mission models and the associated discursive practices. Rather than the democratic counternarratives Gable and Handler (2000) see as a corrective to official histories, the models reproduce the selective narrations and privileged positions of that authorized heritage discourse of which scholars such as Lowenthal (1998), Smith (2006), and Harrison (2013) have been critical. Historicizing mission model making helps reveals their role over generations in replicating an idealized mission materiality and its underlying ideologies that reinforce state and institutional interests.

Acknowledging that the models have a specific history and exploring the political and ideological consequences of those practices is a start toward a more critical approach to mission heritage (Gillman 2010; Mathers, Darvill, and Little 2005; Moore and Whelan 2007; Moyer and Shackel 2007; Smith, Messenger, and Soderland 2010). Engaging with the complex history of model-making does not proscribe conventions for mission model making or call for abandoning



the mission model assignment. Instead, it encourages self-reflective, intentional decisions about what and whom students and other community members choose to include in their representations of the past. Such an approach to community curation envisions a shared authority in which letting go is not merely sharing the interpretive stage, but inviting others to employ the same scrutiny and critical reflection about their interpretive process that all who work at the junctures of history and heritage must apply.

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<sup>1</sup> It is not clear when the mission model projects were first assigned in schools, but photographic evidence dates to 1972. The practice appears to have been well established by the 1960s and may go back a decade or more before that time. According to Bradley Fogo (2010), the 1981 History-Social Science Framework was the first state curriculum framework to suggest the study of California history in 4th grade. The general learning objectives have been revised several times. Curriculum materials and teacher's lesson plans are developed at the local level.