



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

Humanities

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

Narrative Section of a Successful Application

The attached document contains the grant narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the Research Programs application guidelines [here](#) for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Research Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: Pre-Columbian Art of the Western and Northern Frontiers of Mesoamerica

Institution: California State University, Fresno

Project Director: Keith M. Jordan

Grant Program: Awards for Faculty at Hispanic-Serving Institutions

The Other Ancient Mexico: Pre-Columbian Art of the Western and Northern Frontiers of Mesoamerica

Dr. Keith Jordan

My project is intended as small step towards rectifying a major gap in education about Mexico's ancient cultural heritage and reclaiming neglected indigenous art traditions from the margins to which they have been historically relegated in the field of art history. In undergraduate art history courses, in introductory books, and in articles and documentaries in mass media, one can easily access information about the pre-Columbian art of the native peoples of central and southern Mexico, especially the Aztec and Maya. But to the west and north of these cultures, in the Mexican states of Colima, Nayarit, Jalisco, Zacatecas, Durango, and Sinaloa, other ancient groups created a rich variety of art and architecture in the three millennia prior to the Spanish Conquest. Yet, if the Aztec and Maya have become the "superstars" of Mesoamerican art, the subject of large exhibitions in major museums, the ancient art of West and Northern Mexico has been marginalized and neglected. It is often considered to be on the fringes of Mesoamerican civilization, if not outside that cultural area entirely. When treated in undergraduate art history classes and texts about Mesoamerican art, these regions do not get much space, and what coverage they do receive is sometimes inaccurate. They are often represented as "backward" compared to other Mexican cultures, but this is far from the case. Teaching at CSU Fresno for the past seven years, a Hispanic-serving institution in California's Central Valley, I have become acutely aware of these gaps. Most of my students of Mexican descent—who make up more than half of those enrolled in my classes—trace their ancestry to these neglected areas, and these ancient art traditions are part of their cultural heritage, but are ignored in art history curricula in favor of the more famous civilizations to the south. I am seeking funding from NEH in order improve the quality and scope of a new class addressing West/North Mexican pre-Columbian art by supplementing and replacing the visual aids with new digital slides of architecture and artifacts, and increasing the breadth and depth of its content by my personal field research in Mexico. I have taught this class once as an experiment, but the improvements will help strengthen it to become a permanent addition to the art history curriculum at CSU Fresno. I hope as well to propose it as a potential model for other schools in the CSU system to create similar offerings.

Ancient West and Northern Mexican art has great importance for the history of art. In Colima, Nayarit, and Jalisco, the ceramic sculpture of the shaft tomb cultures that flourished between 3500 and 1500 years ago became popular among collectors and served as inspiration to artists like Rivera and Kahlo in the mid-20th century, but suffered from a fundamental misunderstanding of its nature for decades. Early scholarship interpreted these works as products of "simple" village societies, lacking elaborate architecture, complex political structures, or elaborate mythologies like those of the central Mexican peoples. It is now known that ancient West Mexican shaft tomb art was created by class societies ruled by chiefs and reflects complex religious beliefs. In Jalisco, the Teuchitlan tradition of monumental architecture, including enormous circular ceremonial platforms and dating to the early centuries CE, is still relatively little-known to the general public. In Zacatecas and Durango, the Chalchihuites culture (500-900 CE) not only produced ceremonial centers incorporating sophisticated astronomical alignments, but was the originator of several important architectural and sculptural forms and motifs found later among the Toltecs and Aztecs, including the eagle eating a serpent that is part of the modern Mexican flag. Yet, it is often completely ignored in the literature of art history. The same design appears on magnificent pseudo-Cloisonne (inlaid with slip paint) ceramics from Jalisco, also to date unstudied by art historians. In Sinaloa and Nayarit, the Aztatlán tradition (c. 1000-1400 CE) reflected contemporary art styles from central Mexico in its polychrome ceramics, but reinterpreted them in unique ways. These masterpieces of ceramic slip painting go almost completely unmentioned in the literature of art history.

Contribution: My class is an attempt to make up for the neglect and misrepresentation of West and North Mexican pre-Columbian art in art history. While these regions receive most of their coverage in publications and (rarely) classes in archaeology (and there too, they often receive less attention than their more popular counterparts to the south), this course explores them using the methods and perspective of art history: formal and iconographic analysis, social and economic contextual approaches, and the select application of structuralist, poststructuralist, feminist, etc., methods of art history, modified to fit the study of cultures without written documentation (and with a healthy dose of caution and skepticism). While drawing heavily on archaeology and other social sciences for background, it approaches the subject from within the humanities. The course surveys the art of West and North Mexico from the Early Formative Period, around 1500 BCE to the Spanish Conquest. I discuss all works in their specific social, historical, and religious contexts, using information obtained from archaeology, anthropology, the writings of Spanish conquistadors and missionaries, and the beliefs and practices of modern Native American peoples in the region (like the Huichol or Wixáritari) to help students understand their meaning and function. I examine each local tradition in relation to broad themes shared between these culture areas and the other peoples of Mesoamerica: shamanism; sacred landscapes; world centers, cosmic mountains and portals between worlds; and art in the service of rulership. The course analyzes the relationships between these northern and western cultures and their more famous relations to the south, and ends by considering how the arts of ancient Mexico and the Southwest US interacted and enriched each other in ancient times, before European ideas led to the drawing of artificial political borders between these regions. (See course syllabus for further details.)

Research: The earlier version of the class was based exclusively on literature-based research, five years of pursuing, reading, critically evaluating, synthesizing and integrating the extant books, journal articles, and electronic publications on North and West Mexican art and (mostly) archaeology to produce the notes and texts of my lectures, and scanning images from these publications to use as PowerPoint slides. However, I believe this preparation has been inadequate on two counts: 1) in teaching about Mesoamerican art, I have always found I have done the best job in communicating the content and context of architecture and art I have viewed in person during my doctoral research and other travels. Architectural spaces in particular can only be fully understood and thus explained by direct experience, as plans and graphs do not adequately convey the nature of lived and sacred space, so important in the Mesoamerican context. 2) The visual sources for the northern cultures are scanty and inadequate. Many of the illustrations of Chalchihuites and Aztatlán art and architecture that I used in the first version of the class are line drawings and poor quality black and white photos taken from archaeological publications. Architecture and polychrome ceramics both suffer greatly when represented by such poor reproductions. My present task in improving the course is field research to visit and take high resolution digital photographs at the sites and site museums of Alta Vista, a major Chalchihuites center in Zacatecas; La Quemada in the same state, attributed to the Chalchihuites or related Malpaso culture; La Ferrería in Durango, a smaller Chalchihuites center; the Aztatlán collections in the Museo Arqueológico in Mazatlán in Sinaloa, and at the recently partly restored site of Teuchitlan in Jalisco and the Museo de Cultura in the nearby town of Tala. This will lead to a more accurate and direct perspective on these sites and objects for my course lectures and more accurate and powerful images to display as PowerPoint presentations. Visiting these sites will also allow me to procure any new relevant publications that I have missed and, dependent on their availability, to obtain more information from curators and archaeologists.

Contribution: The course complements my ARTH173/Pre-Columbian Mexico class, which deals with the Aztecs, Maya, and other southern Mexican civilizations. The revised course will greatly expand and enrich the range of coverage of ancient Mexican art for the studio art, art history, and graphic design majors in the Department of Art and Design, as well as potentially serving as a course option for the Chicano and Latin American Studies program like my current Pre-Columbian Mexico, Andean and Native North American classes. It will be the first class devoted exclusively to North/West Mexico for that program as well. The same goes for students majoring in anthropology and history. Response to the

first teaching of the class was very enthusiastic, students giving the class and instructor a rating of 5.0 out of 5.0 on the student evaluations, as many of the students were led to explore their own northern and western Mexican heritage in greater depth and breadth than had been previously possible. I anticipate that the expanded and improved version will be even better at meeting their need to examine the ancient legacy of their ancestors. Enrollment in the first version was 28; I hope to raise enrollment to the new version to 70-75.

Methods and Work Plan: I will be teaching the course in an unmodified form one more time in Fall 2014. In Fall 2015, I will begin the process of getting this class, now taught as a temporary course in art (ART 109T), recognized and added to the official course catalogue at CSU Fresno. This will require review and approval of course materials and documentation by three faculty committees at the Art and Design Department, College of Arts and Humanities, and University levels. In order to have the course fully revised and improved by that date, with full time NEH support I will spend June of 2015 on field research in Mexico and July on editing the visual materials for the course and creating new notes and course documents based on my examination of the sites and artifacts. Arriving in Mexico City at the beginning of June, I will travel first to Durango, capital city of that state, to explore and photograph the Chalchihuites culture site and site museum of La Ferrería (formerly known as Schroeder Ranch) five miles to the south. Then it will be on to Zacatecas, using the capital city of the same name as a base for exploration of the sites and site museums of Alta Vista (by Omnibus de Mexico via a transfer in Sombrerete) and La Quemada (by bus or hotel-arranged transportation from Hotel Villa Colonial in Zacatecas). I will need to spend at least two days at each of these sites to thoroughly explore and photograph the extant architecture and collections of ceramics in the site museums, as well as permits to photograph the latter. From Zacatecas, I will go to Mazatlán and examine the polychrome pottery and carved stone slabs of the Aztatlán culture in the Museo Arqueológico. The last part of my journey will take me to Guachimontones/Teuchitlan and Tala in Jalisco. NEH funding will be used for the air travel, accommodations, bus and taxi travel, site admissions, photo permits and purchase of any relevant new literature. I will return to the US at the beginning of July and use that month for the actual course revisions, and funds will be used to pay for professional editing of photos and creation of quality presentation, working with professional graphic designers. The expanded course, if approved as a permanent offering, will be taught again in Fall 2016.

Competencies, Skills, and Access: I possess the art historical background, language skills, experience travelling in Mexico, and teaching and writing abilities to complete all aspects of this project. I have a Ph.D. in pre-Columbian art history from City University of New York, where my dissertation focused on the Toltec, a central Mexican civilization with strong links to the northern Chalchihuites culture. I have published articles and given papers at professional conferences in my field, and have a book based on my thesis research in progress with British Archaeological Reports/Archaeopress. I have read the bulk of the extant archaeological and art historical literature on West Mexico, and practically all of that on the Chalchihuites and Aztatlán cultures (which is not very much!) in English and Spanish. Besides my reading abilities in Spanish, I am sufficiently fluent in spoken Spanish to navigate around central Mexico from Querétaro to Puebla and Tlaxcala during my dissertation research, and am very familiar and comfortable with the excellent bus system in Mexico. I have taught a trial version of the course in Fall 2009, and have been teaching courses in “non-Western” art since 2002 (see CV).

Final Product and Dissemination: As noted above, the final product of the research will be a revised West/North Mexico art history class with much improved graphics to convey information more accurately and an expanded fund of information to enrich the content of the lectures, offered to all interested students at CSU Fresno and potentially to CSU branches, with materials available to other academics on request.

Statement of Eligibility: CSU Fresno is a Hispanic-Serving institution, as determined by the Department of Education and the data on file with the National Center for Educational Statistics.