

NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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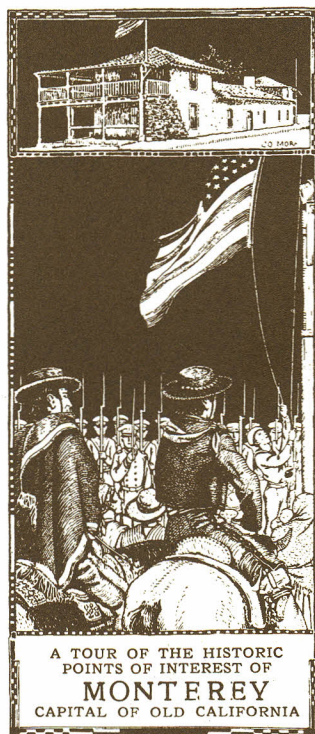
August, 1984

Jo Mora: Spokesman for the Old West

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Jo Mora (1876-1947) was one of California's most versatile artists, adept as painter, sculptor, muralist, jewelry-designer, author, actor, photographer, book-illustrator, cartoonist, cartographer. He even designed the "California Diamond Jubilee" commemorative half dollar in 1925. With rare insight and ever-present wit he left a remarkable legacy of recorded customs and costumes of Indians and cowboys during our country's fading frontier. An accomplished draftsman, Jo Mora achieved a stylistic rendering of animals and people which is uniquely his own. The Monterey History and Art Association is indeed fortunate in owning a fabulous collection of Mora books, paintings, sculptures and original drawings. To the latter, recently, have been added four plates of meticulously rendered watercolor studies of clothing which would have been worn by the explorer Portola and his entourage of Indians and Spanish teamsters and friars. These drawings are typical of the studious

research which Mora must have done before he began a 1939 diorama of the Portola expedition. They poignantly remind one of the history of that ill-fated diorama: The State of California had commissioned Mora to create a huge study for the California Pavilion at the World's Fair on Treasure Island. One hundred feet long, the sculptural group contained



A TOUR OF THE HISTORIC
POINTS OF INTEREST OF
MONTEREY
CAPITAL OF OLD CALIFORNIA

From the archives of B. McGlynn.

no less than sixty-four human figures and two hundred and four animals, all done in painted hydrastone, on a scale of two inches to the foot. "By means of changing intensities and combinations of colored lights, Portola and his followers appeared to approach under the pale light of dawn, pass through the hot sun of midday into the glowing colors of the setting sun, which then faded into the cold blue of a moonlit night." The exhibit was certainly the most spectacular in the pavilion! The plan was, at the close of the two-year-long exposition, to move the panorama into a building to be especially constructed at Sacramento. In June of 1940, the second year, the California Mission Trails Association proposed that after the fair ended the Mora work should go to Monterey instead. They declared:

Eminent educators say that it is the finest work of its kind the world has ever known (so) it is only fitting that it should be placed within the Mission Trails area which was traversed by Portola. Needless to say, Monterey, his destination and home of the sculptor, should be the place for this magnificent work.

The city of Monterey offered to erect a building to house it on the shore of El Estero. Mission Trail boards from all ten counties were urged to petition the Governor. However, before anything was decided, on August 24th a fire reduced to rubble the Treasure Island California Pavilion and its Jo Mora diorama.



*Jo Mora's Portola diorama,
courtesy Jo N. Mora.*

Joseph Jacinto Mora, one day to become famous on the shores of the Pacific, was born on October 22, 1876, far away on a shore of the South Atlantic Ocean, at Montevideo, Uruguay. He and an older brother, Francis Luis (1874-1940), were the only children of a couple from Catalana, Spain: the sculptor Domingo Mora and his French wife, Laura Guillard from Alsace Lorraine. The little boys' playpen was their father's studio where it seemed normal to be modeling clay or scribbling constantly. In 1882 the family moved to Massachusetts, and both Jo and Luis continued to study painting and sculpture with their father before attending the

Cowles Art School in Boston and later studying in New York with Chase and at the Art Students League.

Luis remained in New York City except for two different years when he resided in Barcelona, Spain. He became internationally famous for his landscapes and portraits, "translating what he knows best, the spirit of the Spaniard at play." Indeed, he held a commission from the Spanish government to paint one picture a year to be hung in the Prado Museum. Two of these were life-sized oils of Jo Mora's children, a son and daughter. Luis frequently visited his brother, becoming well-known on the Monterey Peninsula.

Jo's career took a different direction, molded by his lifelong, insatiable fascination with "the wild and woolly west." After a brief stint as illustrator for the *Boston Traveler* newspaper and as cartoonist for the *Boston Herald*, the eighteen-year-old departed on a rambling tour of Mexico and the Southwest, studying the land and its people and animals, always taking notes, sketching and modeling or carving little sculptures. As he remembered it in an interview of 1931:

It was in the fall of '94 when I left old San Antonio and struck across the Border. A gun and an ambition to ride the range constituted my equipment, in addition to a mustang and a command of Castilian acquired from my father. I was free, young, adventure was everywhere, and the lurking dangers of Mexico were a lure ... In the Indian villages I would squat beside an old squaw and watch her fashion grotesque figures in clay, and, much to her delight, the same clay in my hands would turn to Indians, cowboys, horses. On one of his rambles, Frederick Remington stumbled unto some of these rough studies. He was going over the cattle country, looking for color, and took the trouble to look me up. I showed him a number of models that I had at the ranch. "Son," he said, "You're doing fine. Just stay with it." After he left I started in real earnest. I took possession of a deserted shack back of the ranch house, and after dispossessing the trantulas and scorpions, I worked at my clay whenever fortunate enough to have a day or so at headquarters. Cowboys gaped and joked and handed out cryptic bits of valuable criticism. Indians looked on and granted approval or disapproval, while model after model was destroyed because it did not please me or some of my numerous critics.

It is of interest that (like other artists such as Remington, Russell, Paxson, Borein, Joe De Yong, Maynard Dixon) Jo Mora worked as a cowhand, learning firsthand about the accouterments of horses and the dress of the American cowboy; knowing from experience the contortions a *riata* can make; absorbing the milieu of ranching in minute detail so that later his art work would glow with that indefinable quality which comes only from authority.

Mora and his horse made a *pasear* of the Mexican plateau country, "from the Rio Grande to *Tierra Caliente*," he recorded. For his return

from Mexico the youth switched to a train from Monterrey bound for San Antonio. Conversation with strangers resulted in a job-offer to join an outfit driving a *caballada* of some 500 horses from the border far into Texas. Jo Mora was still working as a cow puncher in Texas in August of 1898 ("right after the end of the "Spanish-American War"). Shortly after, he traveled to New Mexico where he lost his heart to the colorful Indians and their even more spectacular deserts. However, Jo couldn't remain long for he was running out of money. He returned east to earn a "grubstake" necessary for another visit to his beloved west.

That "grubstake" took form as a contract with the Boston publishing house of Dana Estes Co., to re-write and illustrate such old classics as *Reynard the Fox* (which appeared in 1901) and *Anderson's Fairytale*s (the next year); together with an illustrated version of Laura E. Richard's *Hurdy-Gurdy*. In 1903 the *Boston Sun Herald* ran Mora's cartoons called "Animaldom," and the Estes firm published a "1903 Illustrated Animal Football Calendar" (probably a forerunner of his popular animated maps).

Apparently it was during this time that Jo Mora taught himself the art of photography, for when he went west early in 1903 his "grubstake" contained one of Kodak's newly-perfected, portable, collapsible box cameras. It was to be used constantly on all his future perigrinations.

Jo made his first trip to California to visit his parents who had moved to San Jose. He did not remain there long. That summer he drifted down to the Donahue ranch on the Santa Inez River near Solvang, where he was hired as cowhand, although the local men looked askance at his attire of Texas "wing chaps." The nearby mission of Santa Inez intrigued him with its dolorous beauty, slumbering in neglect; Jo decided to visit the chain of all the missions, beginning over the border in Sonora. Trailing a packtrain he spent the remainder of the summer exploring that land of the conquistadors, returning to the Santa Inez ranch via Capistrano Mission where he felt completely spellbound. In August Mora was back at San Jose and joined a winter tour of the country around the Yuba and Feather Rivers. The party was organized by a San Jose friend of Jo's, a mining engineer who was knowledgeable about lore of the Bret Harte area, and who also impressed the artist by pointing out the environmental desolation being wreaked by the placer mining. At about this time this same friend introduced Jo Mora to a San Jose girl, Grace Alma Needham, daughter of a local pioneer family. The couple soon began a lengthy — and lively — correspondence.

In June of 1904 Jo Mora and another friend set off for Southwest Indian country, driving an open wagon pulled by a pair of wayward mules. They chose a route which led through Yosemite Park, resulting in more adven-

tures than most men experience in a lifetime. The young men survived and arrived at Oraibi just in time to witness the famous Hopi Snake Dance. Jo decided to remain in the region to paint and photograph, and took a studio at Polacca, which is halfway between Oraibi and Keems Canyon. Later he shared the studio of already-famous E.A. Burbank at Walpi. It was Burbank who suggested that Mora make a scientific study of the magnificent Kachina costumes, and it was Burbank who induced the Indians to pose for the young stranger in his studio. It did not take Jo Mora long to learn the language of the Hopi and also of the Navajo; later he was adopted into both tribes. The Hopi held him in such respect that one of the chiefs even came to Mora one day and asked help in designing a new Kachina mask, using ideas gleaned from the picture of a quail which appeared in Jo's fieldbook on western birds.

In addition to his drawings of the Kachinas, Jo took constant notes about what he saw and thought. Frequently he wrote to his parents and to Grace, describing the sometimes frightening, always very awesome and moving, mystic religious rites which he was allowed to observe. Jo Mora was no anthropologist: as he himself exclaimed, "I've often thanked God it was my sincere job to paint these Katchinas [*sic*] exactly as I saw them operating ... I'm glad I didn't have to find out *why* they did this, and why they didn't." Nevertheless he was dedicated to photographing the Indians at work, at home, during their ceremonies, taking pictures which were compositionally beautiful but never posed, never romanticized; pictures which are an incredibly precious record for today's anthropologists because the Hopi tribal council outlawed artists and photographers in their villages in 1910, four years after Jo Mora's departure. A recent Smithsonian exhibition catalog noted, "This one man's photographs and paintings should eventually be recognized as one of the greatest visual contributions a non-Indian has produced on the Hopi culture."

Throughout his life Jo Mora was able to use his knowledge of the Southwest Indians. At one time he served the United States Army as interpreter during a reservation uprising. Another time the Hollywood movie industry engaged him as a consultant on Indian lore. And of course Indians were subjects of great importance in his artwork, as witness the white marble head of the Navajo girl and the large oil painting, "The Moccasin Maker," both on display in Monterey at *Casa Serrano*, headquarters of Monterey History and Art Association.

Toward the end of 1906 Jo Mora returned to San Jose and claimed Grace's hand. The couple were married on January 6, 1907, at the mission which had so appealed to the artist earlier, San Juan Capistrano. The following year the Moras bought a small cattle ranch on hills near Moun-

tain View, overlooking the Santa Clara Valley which was at that time mostly glorious orchards. Jo's parents joined them, and the men shared a studio and conducted an active practice. At *Casa Serrano* there is a fine marble portrait bust of a man, signed jointly by the sculptors. After old Domingo's death in 1911, Jo finished all work they had in-progress. Then in 1914 he and Grace moved to San Francisco and the artist began to fulfill what would become a lifetime of commissions for major sculptural pieces all over the United States. The only time Jo Mora was away from his studio was during World War I when he served in the field artillery, attaining the rank of major.



*Mora with one of the
Marland sculptures.
Courtesy Jo N. Mora.*

The Moras moved to Carmel-by-the-Sea in 1920, and Jo established a studio at the Carmel Mission where he began one of his most handsome pieces, the monumental bronze and travertine sarcophagus group of Father Serra and his assistants. After finishing this work the Moras acquired a new home at Pebble Beach where Jo had a separate studio, and the whole family enjoyed keeping horses.

Jo Mora became involved in civic activities such as taking part in Forest Theatre plays; he is still remembered for his lead role in "The Bad Man." The Del Monte Properties in 1922 commissioned another statue of Father Serra which Jo made of painted wood; it is today a well-known landmark in Carmel Woods, a gift to the town from the company. Another historical sculpture was commissioned by Del Monte and given to the Monterey History and Art Association: the 1926 *La Novia*, now on loan to the Naval Postgraduate School. In 1928 Jo Mora created a dual composition for L.C. Merrill's new arcade in Carmel, *El Paseo*; the courtly little figures can be seen gracing the inner court at Dolores and Seventh. Extensive work was done by Mora in 1936 for the new County Courthouse in Salinas; working closely with architect Robert Stanton, he de-

signed innumerable details, everything from a fountain to wall-decorations to metal door placards. The exterior of King City's Auditorium has a whole front facade of Jo Mora sculpture.

Other work for which Jo Mora is famous include heroic bronzes for the Marland Estate in Ponca City, Oklahoma; thirteen biographical dioramas of his friend Will Rogers for the Memorial in Claremore, Oklahoma; a diorama for Sutter's Fort in Sacramento. One of Jo's earliest works was done in 1913 when Julia Morgan (remembered as Heart's "lady architect") asked his cooperation with interior decorations for the *Los Angeles Examiner* Building. "Montalvo," Senator Phelan's estate near Saratoga, California, has a Mora fountain. The University of California at Berkeley campus contains a travertine marble bench designed by Jo Mora. He did the Post Office and Court House in Portland, Oregon; as well as a bronze doorway in the Union Wool Building at Boston, Massachusetts. Mora's "Dough Boy Memorial" is in Marin County, and San Jose has his heroic figures on its Scottish Rite Temple. San Francisco has many examples of Jo Mora's work; best-known are his "Cervantes" sculpture in Golden Gate Park and the Bret Harte memorial on a wall of the Bohemian Club. He did murals for the Drake-Wilshire Hotel in the city; also for the Hotel Canterbury which has transferred them to a private girls' school where the nuns are delighted to use them as vibrant examples of California history. Jo was on the Jury of Awards at the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. And he designed the award medal which was given to the bravest cowboy in the annual Salinas Rodeo.

Mora also produced numerous distinctive posters, such as one showing the evolution of the work horse in the west. And he drew animated maps (of California; of Yosemite; of the Monterey Peninsula; of Carmel-by-the-Sea, etc.); collectors' items now, these delightful studies are bright and lively, studded with seemingly innumerable tiny cartoon characters commemorating events or places.

With more leisure time in the latter half of his life, Jo Mora illustrated books which are much appreciated by California history buffs, wonderful books about "the California vaqueros, that hearty breed of missionary-trained horsemen" he so admired. In 1926 Mora illustrated Tirey L. Ford's classic *Dawn and the Dons, the Romance of Monterey*. In 1933 a Mora family cruise was immortalized in the humorous *A Log of the Pacific Main* which Jo wrote and illustrated; as he did *Trail Dust and Saddle Leather* in 1946. *Californios* was published in 1949 after his death.

Jo Mora passed away on October 10, 1947. Today we heartily agree with a remark he once made, "I'm mighty glad I knew the tag-end of the old west before it really got completely manicured and marcelled, and cowtowns grew into big cities."

**THE EDITORS
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