

On The Trail of Jo Mora



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Jo J. Mora from the 1979 Watercolor Collection of Hopi Kachina and Ceremonial Figures, Smithsonian Institute

by Marc Ryan

For nearly 50 years, California was graced by the presence of a dynamic and adventurous fellow named Joseph Jacinto Mora. "I had the privilege of knowing him briefly," wrote historian Frederick Dockstaeder; "and his personality, perceptive intuition and whole-hearted enthusiasm made him a tremendously impressive individual to be around. What he found interesting - and he was interested in everything - became a source of instant excitement and investigation, out of which came many of his major contributions."

Equally intimate with the ways of both cowboys and Indians of the Southwest and California, the darkly handsome artist who signed his works "Jo Mora" achieved recognition as a master sculptor who captured Western themes with total accuracy and universal feeling. It is his heroic bronze statuary, still scattered across the California coast and the Southwest, which have had the highest profile.

"MANA" means maid, but men only impersonate a masked Kachina, whether it be male or female." Many kachinas appear with the line of females beside them and they are often called by the name of the kachina with which they appear. "In the larger dances these Manas act as the 'orchestra'. Beside this one you will find a large squash which is dry and hollow. In her left hand she holds a notched stick and the scapula of a sheep. To 'make her music' and give the rhythm desired for the dance, she holds the notched stick over the hollow squash and scrapes the board back and forth over the notches in the tempo desired and raises the stick up and down to vary the tone. Sometimes a hollow cardboard box, generally decorated, is used - a Hopi drum or a couple of sheep skins tightly folded on which she whacks in rhythm with a stout stick. The hollow squash, however gives a very weird and most interesting sound. The hair-do of this Mana shows very plainly how the maids, and maids only, dressed their hair in the old days." -from Jo Mora's writing, 1904

Kachina Lithograph, 1979 Watercolor Collection of Hopi Kachina and Ceremonial Figures, Smithsonian Institute courtesy of Vigil's Collections, Nevada City, CA



DURING HIS FIRST
 SUMMER IN CALIFORNIA,
 HE VISITED ALL THE
 SPANISH MISSIONS RIDING
 HIS MARE TO
 SANTA BARBARA,
 THEN BY BOAT TO MEXICO



Father Junipero Serra founded the San Carlos Borromeo de Camello Mission at the mouth of the Carmel River, 1771

However, monumental works are but one facet of a supremely creative legacy which includes oil paintings, watercolors, murals, cartoons, historical dioramas, documentary photography, medallions, fountains, various architectural adornments, glazed terra cotta tiles, posters, maps, journals, a U.S. half dollar and three books, two of historical as well as artistic importance and one a children's animal tale written for his beloved family.

Jo Mora resided with his wife Grace, son Jo, Jr., and daughter Patty in Mountain View, San Jose, and then Carmel-by-the-Sea, California, from 1907 until his passing in 1947.

The trail that ended in Carmel had begun in Uruguay in 1876, where Jo Mora was born, the son of Domingo, a Catalonian-born sculptor and his French-Alsatian wife Laura Gaillard. The Moras had

been known in Spain as sculptors since the sixteenth century. In 1877, the Moras immigrated to the United States, taking up residence in New Jersey and later in Boston. Jo and his brother Luis were schooled at the finest Eastern art academies. By the time he was 25, "J.J.Mora" was a successful book illustrator and newspaper cartoonist for the Boston Herald. Like many youth of his day, Jo was fascinated by tales of the American West, and as a teenager had traveled to Texas with sketchbook in hand. On a ranch there, he drew the sights from a studio shack and was visited by the famous Western artist Frederic Remington, who liked his work and told the youth: "just keep doin' what you're doin', Son, you're doin' just fine."

After difficulties arose with his publishing contracts in Boston, Mora decided to head West once again, arriving by train in San Jose in 1903, where he first

stayed with his old New Jersey chum, Bob Eaton. His goal was to photograph and sketch the Hopi Snake Dance, an ancient, rare and sacred ceremony. In the meantime, he was hired on as a cowboy at the John Donahue ranch in what is now Solvang. During his first summer in California, he visited all the Spanish missions, riding his mare to Santa Barbara. He then traveled by boat to Encinada, Mexico and continued riding north across country to Santa Ines and finally back to Donahue's ranch. By now, as Mora researcher Stephen Mitchell explains, "he was an expert horseman, working alongside a number of middle-aged *vaqueros*, missionary-trained horsemen who, for many years, had tended immense Spanish cattle herds with unequaled skill and daring." Jo Mora's *Californios*, written and illustrated over 40 years later, is the definitive work on "America's first cowboys".

WHERE TO VIEW JO MORA'S ART –A SELECTED LIST OF CALIFORNIA LOCATIONS

Jo J. Mora's art is prolific as well as monumental. Many pieces were created outside of California, including works in Oklahoma, Kansas, Massachusetts, Oregon and at Yellowstone National Park . . .

Berkeley Campus, Berkeley
 Base of Sather Tower
 Memorial Bench with sculpted bears
 (1920, travertine marble)

Mission San Carlos
 Borromeo Del Rio Carmelo
 3080 Rio Road, Carmel
 Cross, sculpture and Father Serra's
 Cenotaph. 1924, bronze and California
 travertine marble

Serra/Dolores/Alma and Camino Del Monte Intersection, Carmel
 Carved benches and statue of Father Junipero Serra (1922, wood)

7th and Dolores, Carmel, in the courtyard – northeast corner
 El Paseo, man and woman dancing
 (1928, mixed media)

Carmel Library – Park and Harrison
 Branches at 6th and Mission, Carmel
 Ephemera collection and cartes

La Playa Hotel
 8th and Camino Real, Carmel
 Cartes and photograph

John Marshall State Historical Park
 310 Back Street, Coloma
 Fremont's Arrival (1947 watercolor)

King City High School Auditorium
 N. Mildred Ave., near Broadway, King
 City Bas relief architectural adornments
 interior and exterior (1939, concrete)

Arcadia, Los Angeles
 53 Huntington Drive
 Architectural details (1932)

Old Los Angeles Examiner Building
 1111-1131 S. Broadway, Los Angeles
 Interior details (1913, stone)

Los Angeles Public Library
 Main Branch at 630 W. 5th St., Los
 Angeles. Cartes, biographical outline and
 watercolor with autograph

Palace Theatre
 630 S. Broadway, Los Angeles
 Allegories of Song, Dance, Music
 and Drama
 (1911, mixed media)

Million Dollar Theatre
 34d and Broadway, Los Angeles
 8 heroic figures (1918, terra cotta)

Pacific Mutual Building
 6th and Grand, Los Angeles
 3 figures above the entrance on 6th Street
 (1917, terra cotta)

Holy Names College
 3500 Mountain Blvd., Oakland
 7 murals based on the Canterbury Tales
 (1935, oil on board)

Oakland Museum of California
 1000 Oak St., Oakland
 In History and Art collection
 (drawings, bronze sculptures and cartes)

Pat Hathaway Historic Photography
 469 Pacific St., Monterey
 (historic photographs)

Monterey History and Art Association Casa Serrano at 412
 Pacific St., Monterey
 (the largest collection of drawings
 sculptures and cartes)

Naval Postgraduate School
 1 University Circle, La Novia Room,
 Monterey. Diorama set of three horses
 with riders and wedding scene (1940)

Sutter's Fort State Park
 27th and L St., Sacramento
 diorama depicting the 1844 arrival of
 John C. Fremont and Kit Carson at
 Sutter's Fort (1947)

Monterey County Courthouse
 Alisal and Church Streets
 Salinas Fountain, bronze plaques, busts,
 capitals and panels
 (937, bronze and concrete)

Marin Center
 Avenue of the Flags, San Rafael
 Doughboy Memorial
 (1920, bronze)



Surviving through the 1950's, Rancho Carmelo in Carmel Valley "California's first dude ranch," owned and operated by Karl "K.D." Mathiot and his wife Louise as a meeting and riding place used by Jo Mora during his multi-faceted career

Mora's friend Bob Eaton was gold mining in the Sierra foothills. That fall he took the stagecoach from Marysville to La Porte, spending the winter high in the gold country, photographing and recording the details of the miners' lives in his journal.

By June of 1904, it was time to proceed to "Moki Land", the ancestral home of the Hopi, in the area of Oraibi, Arizona. He achieved his goal of photographing and sketching the Snake Dance. The photos are among the last ever taken of this rarest of ceremonies. They are now part of the Smithsonian collection.

Jo's fascination with the Hopi deepened. He took up residence at Polacca and then Second Mesa. His stay stretched to three years as he ultimately gained a special degree of intimacy with the Hopi. In the words of the 1979 Smithsonian publication on Jo Mora, "The ethnology of the Hopi was as important to Mora as were the paintings, the photos and the people...Jo Mora was one of the very few non-Indians ever to undergo a Kachina initiation (a Powamu ceremony in a Hano Kiva)."

Before his Hopi sojourn, Mora had met a young lady, Grace Needham, in San Jose, who was singing in a Gilbert & Sullivan production when they met in 1904. Upon his return to California in 1907, they were married in the mission at San Gabriel Mission and settled on a small cattle ranch in Mountain View on the eastern slopes of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Here, he built a studio. Before long Jo was reunited with his parents, who came to stay as son Joseph arrived in 1908. Jo began collaborating with Domingo on their common love of sculpturing, and the pair produced statuary for the Native Sons building in San Francisco before Domingo's passing in 1911.

Mora then produced several stone and marble sculptures for public buildings on the West coast. He served as a Major in the Field Artillery during World War I, and upon his return moved his family to Carmel in 1920. There he designed and carved a

stone and travertine sarcophagus for Father Serra at the Carmel Mission, which he ranked as his greatest work. In 1922, Jo moved to Pebble Beach, building a new house, stables, and studio, from which he would issue a ceaseless stream of art, as diversified as it was inspired. Highlights include the design of a commemorative U.S. half dollar for the California Diamond Jubilee; dioramas at Sutter's Fort in Sacramento and at his friend Will Rogers' Memorial in Claremore, Oklahoma; intricate poster art animated with historical details of the old West; and the books *Trail Dust and Saddle Leather* and *Californios* (reprinted by Dober Hill Books in 1996).

During the years in Pebble Beach, Jo loved to ride, hunt and fish with his daughter Patty and son Jo, Jr., who opened a silver shop in Carmel. The Moras enjoyed riding the trails east a few miles to Rancho Carmelo, a dude ranch owned and operated by Karl "K.D." Mathiot and his wife Louise. The Mathiots advertised their place as "California's first dude ranch...in the historic land of the caballeros" and treated guests to trail rides on their own herd of Palominos. Rancho Carmelo, with its gentle, forested slopes, trails that wind along the Carmel River in the Santa Lucia Mountains, resident cowboys and beautifully fenced corrals, must have been a happy place for Mora the old cowhand to ride in his later years, sustaining him as a person as well as an artist. Jo and K.D. became the best of friends and Mora designed and painted a special set of ashtrays for the dude ranch which were placed on each table of the large dining hall. A small glazed tray was set in a black metal holder which was fashioned into a uniquely Mora cowboy-and-bronco motif in silhouette. K.D. Mathiot's grandson, Bill McQuerry, owns one of two known surviving ashtrays and graciously allowed *California Tour & Travel* to photograph it, revealing for the first time in over sixty years another small gem left by the side

of the trail by Jo Mora (see photo below).

In 1998, the Monterey Museum of Art produced a full scale exhibition of Jo Mora's art that gave a remarkable view of the breadth and depth of his extraordinary legacy. Their publication *Jo Mora, Artist and Writer* features beautiful reproductions and two excellent essays. Their carte, *The Sculpture And Art Of Jo Mora*, shows the historical locations of most of his work and lists the museums, galleries, and sites where his works are accessible.

Surely such "site-seeing" would be a fine pastime for any lover of the Old West who might like to spend a few inspirational hours on the trail of Jo Mora, Renaissance Man of the West, of whom Peter Hiller, Curator of the Monterey Museum's exhibit, wrote: "I've come to believe that the spirit of Jo Mora's work brings out the best in people who knew him and who know of his accomplishments." Perhaps this quality in his art derives from its utterly accurate way of capturing the soul of the American West with all of its dreamy potentials and gritty glories.



JO MORA'S LATER
YEARS WERE SPENT
AS A WELL-
RECOGNIZED ARTIST
LIVING ON THE
MONTEREY
PENINSULA