



Smithsonian American Art Museum

New Spanish Missions in the American Imagination

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This contextual book-length study will be the first to examine the rich heritage of Spain's Franciscan and Jesuit missions in the American Southwest in art, literature, theater, and film from the 1820s to the 1950s. These missions inspired works by some of America's most important artists: photographers John K. Hillers, Timothy O'Sullivan, Carleton Watkins, William Henry Jackson, Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, Paul Strand, and Laura Gilpin; painters John Mix Stanley, Henry Cheever Pratt, Ernest Blumenschein, Victor Higgins, Walter Ufer, E. Martin Hennings, Georgia O'Keeffe, John Marin, Edward Hopper, and John Sloan; authors Helen Hunt Jackson, Charles Fletcher Lummis, Willa Cather, and Mary Austin; and filmmakers D.W. Griffith, Darryl F. Zanuck, and Alfred Hitchcock, among many others. Complex artistic, social, economic, and historical factors will be examined to elicit these works' purposes and to understand their intended audiences through study of extensive primary sources and the lengthy bibliography of secondary sources available at the Smithsonian and other institutions in Washington.

This study will explore how mission imagery—produced almost exclusively by Anglo artists and associated with Spain's attempted conversion of native populations—evolved. From the 1780s to the 1820s these pictures appeared as illustrations prepared for scientific reports by European and then American explorers to California. In the 1840s and 1850s they served as vital components of nationally strategic reports compiled by the U.S. Army and other federally sponsored explorations of the Southwest. From the 1870s on, mission images were gradually absorbed into the mainstream of American art, and by the 1920s were utilized by members of the modernist circle in New Mexico, where they also played an important role in cultural tourism. In California, novelists, playwrights, ethnographers, advertisers, and filmmakers affected mission imagery's emergence into American popular culture through broad-based media. Portrayal of these missions figured prominently in constructing history and cultural identity in the American Southwest.