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Anthropological Preventive Conservation: Fading Assessment on Works of Feathers

UCLA and the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) are continuing to collaborate to study the fading behavior of selected feathers in order to formulate display lighting guidelines for anthropological featherwork. The development of these guidelines will be based on an accurate understanding of feather color chemistry including pigments and structure, cultural use including color selection and exposure through prior use, and accelerated fading with and without ultraviolet radiation.

Since feather coloration varies considerably between species, and recent research has indicated difficulty in procuring unaged feather samples, work is being restricted to six species of birds: American Goldfinch, Great Horned Owl, Mallard Duck, Northern Flicker, Red-tailed Hawk and Western Scrub-Jay. These birds were selected because they are not endangered, are local to California, and have cultural significance as evidenced by their use in past and recent regalia and basketry.

During the next year, the project will be focused on procuring fresh feather samples, carrying out accelerated aging of samples using a microfadometer and aging chamber, surveying colleagues regarding observed fading in collections, and meeting with cultural experts to discuss the importance of color in feather selection and traditional use and care practices of feathered objects. The project team will also devise a document to use for recording detailed information about anatomy and condition of feathers used on cultural objects and will test this form by

visiting collections to examine Native California featherwork. Investigations will also include the evaluation of color loss that occurs from sources other than fading, i.e. abrasion, and the effectiveness of microfading technology (MFT) as a predictive tool for feather fading behavior. A longer-term goal of the project is to determine whether protein damage results from photochemical exposure of feathers.

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Basket exhibition at the Southwest Museum of the American Indian at the Autry National Center

The Art of Native American Basketry: A Living Tradition is a comprehensive exhibition that opened on November 6, 2009 and is running through November 2, 2010 at the Autry's Museum of the American West in Griffith Park. The show exhibits more than 300 baskets selected from the Southwest Museum's collection of 14,000 baskets and represents more than 100 cultural groups from eleven regions of North America. Baskets range in size from small Pomo feather baskets made for sale to tourists, to massive Apache olla baskets used for storing seeds in large quantities.



Pomo feathered basket with string handle from the Edwin Greble Collection. Featured in the exhibit and on the website:

www.autrynationalcenter.org/basketry/

Photo credit: Angie McGrew.

The Autry invited thirteen contemporary basket weavers to serve as consultants in research and planning. In addition, baskets purchased from each consultant were accessioned and included in the exhibit. The exhibit is intended to demonstrate how the materials, techniques, and designs of the baskets vary from region to region, reflecting different