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OPPORTUNITY FOR EMERGING
ARTISTS, CONSERVATORS,
AND ARCHIVISTS

The Fantastical Dominguez Sculpture
Conservation Apprenticeship Project
Whittier Narrows Recreation Area,
South El Monte



CIVIC ART OPEN CALL

THE FANTASTICAL DOMINGUEZ SCULPTURE CONSERVATION APPRENTICESHIP PROJECT

The Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture,
in partnership with Site & Studio Conservation, seek
six apprentices to participate in the conservation and
historical research of Benjamin Dominguez's play sculptures.

LOCATION

Whittier Narrows Recreation Area

APPLICATION DEADLINE

Thursday, August 7, 2025, 4pm PST

COMPENSATION

\$25/hour

OVERVIEW

The Fantastical Dominguez Sculpture Conservation Apprenticeship Project is a unique opportunity for emerging artists, conservators, and archivists to preserve a beloved artwork in the LA County Civic Art Collection. Through training, knowledge sharing, and engagement, we aim to honor collective histories through collaborative memory work.



Fish, Benjamin Dominguez, 1961, Whittier Narrows Recreation Area. Photo from unknown date and source.

Cover image:

Two-Headed Dragon, Benjamin Dominguez, 1961, Whittier Narrows Recreation Area. Photo by Joshua White/JW Pictures.

Project Goals

The conservation component of the project aims to:

- Create opportunities for emerging public artists and conservators to collaborate in the preservation of artworks in their communities.
- Provide an introductory hands-on experience in artwork documentation and assessment, the material science of exterior artworks, and conservation treatment.
- Equip apprentices with the knowledge and skills to apply preservation methods into their own art practices.
- Provide guidance for apprentices on portfolio development to support career pathways in conservation, public art, and related fields.
- Learn about managing large-scale multi-disciplinary projects

The historical research component of the project aims to:

- Provide opportunities to archive community photographs, memories, and experiences with artworks in their communities.
- Prepare apprentices with the knowledge and skills needed to work in the fields of library and archival science, collections management, and art history through mentorship.
- Train apprentices on the fundamentals of archival research, documentation, digital preservation and exhibiting community history.
- Mentor apprentices on approaches to community archiving methods and best practices, including project design, public engagement, as well as archive collection, handling, and cataloging.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture's Civic Art Division, is working with Site & Studio Conservation to perform conservation of the play sculptures by artist Benjamin Dominguez, located in the Whittier Narrows Recreation Area (750 S Santa Anita Ave, South El Monte, CA 91733). The project includes opportunities for six emerging conservators, artists, and archivists to participate in the conservation and historical research of the sculptures.

Why is public art significant?

Public art is embedded in the community, open and accessible to the public at no cost. Public art lives in spaces where people play, learn, work, and provide or seek special services. It can inspire, be playful, healing, and provide a customary experience for all.

Artworks in public art collections have very special needs for preservation and maintenance. They spend their entire lifetime interacting with agents of deterioration such as exposure to light and ultraviolet rays, fluctuating humidity, physical risks such as earthquakes or floods, and human interactions. Damage to public artworks can be caused by these agents of deterioration, failure of fabrication or installation materials, or even improper maintenance.

To ensure a long lifetime for an artwork in the LA County Civic Art Collection, the Civic Art Division works with conservators during the development of an artwork, to assess materials and provide maintenance guidelines for County facilities. Conservators also provide conservation services for artworks in need of repair.

What is Art Conservation?

Art Conservation is a profession devoted to the care of art and items of cultural significance through research, examination, documentation, treatment, preventive care, and education. Art Conservators provide guidance on the storage, installation, exhibition, and transportation of artworks, performing treatments such as cleaning and repairs, researching artist and cultural materials used to create the artwork, and analyzing how or why an artwork is deteriorating.

Art conservators study a range of fields to gain knowledge and skills from the arts, history, and sciences. Conservators usually specialize in a particular media or type of object, such as paintings, murals, sculptures, works on paper, books, textiles, architecture, or archaeological materials. Many art conservators work at museums, but they can also work in the public sector and/or have independent businesses.¹

ARTWORK INFORMATION

Surrounding Legg Lake in Whittier Narrows Recreation Area are six fantastical aquatic-themed sculptures by Mexican artist Benjamin Dominguez (1894-1974). The artworks are titled *Starfish*, *Octopus*, *Fish*, *Tripod*, *Mother Dragon* and *Two-Headed Dragon*, all completed in 1961 and composed of concrete, paint, and steel.

¹ For more information about the conservation field, please visit the American Institute for Conservation (AIC) web page.

These sculptures represent a movement in the early 1960s of modern parks being seen as museums where the public could enjoy arts and crafts of the community. Designed with children in mind, Dominguez's sculptures invite imaginative play and hands-on interaction.

For over 60 years, these sculptures have served as joyful icons of cultural expression, community identity and creative play in Los Angeles County.



Starfish



Octopus



Tripod



Fish



Mother Dragon



Two-Headed Dragon

Photos by Joshua White/JW Pictures.

CIVIC ART OPEN CALL

The Fantastical Dominguez Sculpture Conservation Apprenticeship Project

SCOPE OF WORK

Site & Studio Conservation will contract, supervise, and mentor four pre-program conservators and emerging public artists in conservation skills, and two emerging archivists in historical research skills throughout the project. The apprentices will receive professional guidance as follows:

CONSERVATION

- Graphic and photo-documentation,
- Identification and assessment of condition phenomena and artist materials,
- Analysis of materials and methods for preparing and fabricating three-dimensional concrete sculptures,
- Agents of deterioration and risks to outdoor sculptures,
- Research on conservation treatment materials,
- Conservation treatment and other technical skills needed for the conservation of the play sculptures,
- Long-term preservation, including long-term maintenance and monitoring protocols for exterior sculptures.

HISTORICAL RESEARCH

- Collection of historical, photographic, and other documentation of the play sculptures.
- Archival description, cataloging, and preservation skills,
- Documentation and digitization,
- Conducting archival research and community analysis,
- Archival best practices and protocols, especially for community-engaged field work.

Apprentices may also participate in public art tour(s) of the area and studio visits of local art conservators.

ELIGIBILITY

This call is open to:

- Los Angeles County residents over the age of 18 years.
- Individuals interested in pursuing the field of art conservation.
- Individuals who are in their early stages of their art practice.
- Individuals interested in pursuing library and archival science, collections, and/or curatorial careers.
- Individuals who are interested in the preservation of cultural heritage in their communities.
- Residents who have ties to Whittier Narrows and surrounding communities are highly encouraged to apply.

Requirements:

- Must be available to work at least 80 hours throughout the duration of the project, beginning October through December 2025.
- Must be available to work during daylight hours, Monday-Friday (Saturdays can also be accommodated), for no more than eight hours during 8am – 6pm.

Desired Skills:

- Ability to follow detailed instructions.
- Hand dexterity and the ability to learn or use specialized tools*.
- Ability and patience to complete detailed oriented tasks.
- Ability to work independently and collaboratively in a group.
- Ability to perform physical tasks such as bending, kneeling, climbing, and standing for long periods of time*.
- Ability to conduct work from ladders*.
- Accommodations can be made for disabilities.

**For conservation apprentices*

COMPENSATION AND PROJECT DETAILS

- Selected apprentices will enter into a contract with the supervising conservator, Site & Studio Conservation. The selected apprentices will be paid \$25/hour.
- Hours are flexible but the selected apprentice must be available for at least 80 hours of work throughout the duration of the project.
- Proposed apprentice schedule must be approved by Site & Studio Conservation to meet project needs.
- General liability insurance is covered under the supervising conservator, which includes coverage for risk of bodily injury or damage to the artwork. Medical liability insurance is excluded.
- Apprentices are responsible for food and transportation to the work site.
- Conservation materials and tools will be provided.
- The project will last approximately eight to ten weeks.



Mother Dragon, Benjamin Dominguez, 1961, Whittier Narrows Recreation Area.
Photo by Joshua White/JW Pictures.

CIVIC ART OPEN CALL

The Fantastical Dominguez Sculpture Conservation Apprenticeship Project

TIMELINE

Call for Apprentices Release Date	Wednesday, July 9, 2025
Virtual Informational Meeting 1	Monday July 21, 2025, 12:00pm PDT
Virtual Informational Meeting 2	Wednesday, July 23, 2025, 7:00pm PDT
In-person Information Meeting (El Monte Library)	Saturday, July 26, 2025, 10:30am PDT
Submission Deadline	Thursday, August 7, 2025, 4pm PDT
Apprentice Selection	August 22, 2025
Project Start Date	October 14, 2025
Project Completion	December 31, 2025

INFORMATIONAL MEETINGS (RECOMMENDED)

We highly encourage applicants interested in applying to attend one of the informational meetings. Applicants will learn more about the project goals, scope of work, the application process, and ask questions. The meetings will not be recorded, but a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) will be published to the Arts and Culture website and emailed to registered attendees following the meetings.

VIRTUAL Info Session 1

Monday July 21, 2025, at 12:00pm PDT (via Zoom)

[Register to Attend](#)

VIRTUAL Info Session 2

Wednesday, July 23, 2025, at 7:00pm PDT (via Zoom)

[Register to Attend](#)

IN-PERSON Info Session

Saturday, July 26, 2025, at 10:30am PDT
(El Monte Library, 3224 Tyler Avenue, El Monte, CA 91731)

[Register to Attend](#)

TO APPLY

All interested applicants are invited to apply online using [this link](#).

SUBMISSION MATERIALS

Please submit the following materials by **Thursday, August 7, 2025, 4pm PST**.

1. Description of Interest (2–3 paragraphs)

- Why does this apprenticeship program interest you, which may include your connection to the Whittier Narrows community and play sculptures?
- Why are you interested in the field of conservation, public art, or historical research?
- Discuss one or a combination of the following:
 - Brief description of your artistic practice, your sources of inspiration, and your method of developing your artwork and/or;
 - Brief description of previous art conservation experience and/or;
 - Brief description of your experience in library and archival science, collections, or curatorial research?

2. Letter of Support (no more than one page) from someone who knows your commitment to your journey as an emerging artist, emerging art conservator, or emerging librarian/archivist. The letter can be from someone who knows you in a professional or personal capacity, such as a teacher, previous or current employer, or mentor.

3. Portfolio and Work Samples

Conservation Apprentices (One of the following):

- Please provide up to five (5) images of your most applicable past artworks. For each artwork presented, include the date of completion, medium, location (if applicable), brief description of the artwork OR;
- Please submit up to five (5) images of most applicable past samples of studio arts and crafts. For each sample, include the date of completion, medium, location (if applicable), and brief description OR;

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

- Please include up to five (5) images of past conservation treatments. For each conservation example, include the date of the project, artist or cultural identification of the artwork or item, date of the artwork or item, and brief description of your conservation treatment OR;
- up to five (5) images, in combination of the above.

Archivist Apprentices (Both of the following):

- Please include up to two (2) writing samples (10 pages maximum) of historical research, art history, or technical art history AND;
- Please provide one or more project summaries (1 page) of digital or web-based research or archival projects.

SELECTION PROCESS

A selection panel composed of Arts and Culture staff, the conservator and previous apprentices will review all applications and select six apprentices. Successful applications will exhibit interest in the project, commitment to their art practice, pursuit of conservation field, pursuit of the library/archival field, and high level of aesthetic quality in portfolio and research quality in writing and project samples.



Historic photo of the Ruiz Family from unknown date and source.
Two-Headed Dragon, Benjamin Dominguez, 1961, Whittier Narrows Recreation Area.

CIVIC ART OPEN CALL

The Fantastical Dominguez Sculpture Conservation Apprenticeship Project

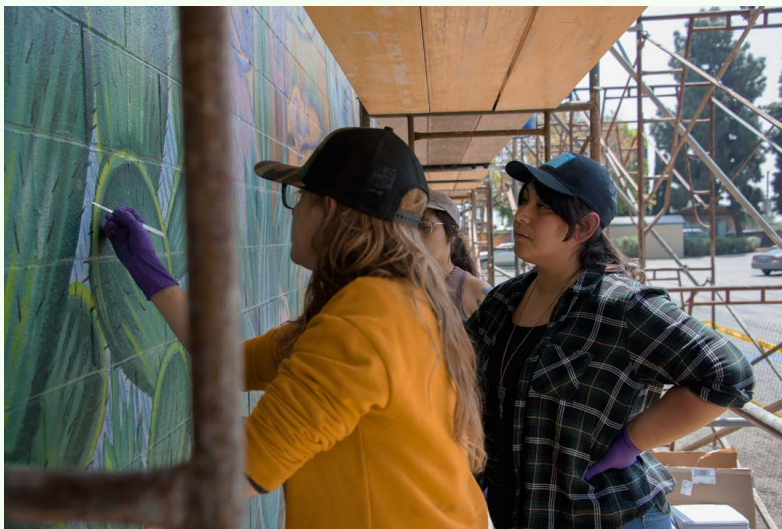
ABOUT THE ARTIST

Benjamin Dominguez was born in Guanajuato, Mexico in 1894. He trained as an artist specializing in concrete at the Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas (National Academy of Plastic Arts) of the University of Mexico from 1922-25. He created many works in Mexico, including animal landscapes for the Chapultepec Mexico City Zoo. At the age of 62 he immigrated to the United States with his family. It was in the United States that Dominguez constructed imaginative and playful sculptures for children's playgrounds found in Vincent Lugo Park in San Gabriel, California, Atlantis Play Center in Garden Grove, California, and the Las Vegas Desert Inn Golf Course (since removed). Benjamin Dominguez worked throughout his life and died in 1974 at the age of 80.

ABOUT THE CONSERVATOR

Kiernan Graves began her career as a Wall Painting Conservator by obtaining a master's degree from the Courtauld Institute of Art in 2007. Though she had always been interested in art and understanding culture and history through this visual lens, she focused on the artist's interpretation of society and material techniques by studying a combination of art history, science, anthropology and studio arts. As murals are usually site-specific and created for a community rather than for an individual patron, she was drawn to this medium.

While the majority of her education and field work for the first part of her career was more archaeologically focused, she chose to study the community-based exterior murals painted on concrete in Los Angeles for her master's thesis and is particularly drawn to modern frescoes, modern acrylic murals and contemporary street art.



Conservator Kiernan Graves of Site & Studio Conservation with apprentice Diana Sanchez and conservation technician Carolina Benítez. *Inner Resources*, Paul Botello, 2000, City Terrace Park. Photo by Andrés Vázquez.

CIVIC ART OPEN CALL

The Fantastical Dominguez Sculpture Conservation Apprenticeship Project

From its inception, she has organized her private practice, Site & Studio Conservation, to prioritize working with a diverse group of interns, pre-program conservators, graduate level students, conservation technicians and artists. Believing that the most significant positive impact to the future of the conservation discipline is to support a wide range of voices and perspectives in the study and care of cultural heritage.

ABOUT THE CIVIC ART DIVISION

Arts and Culture's Civic Art Division works with established and emerging artists to commission socially engaged civic artworks, community engagement activities, as well as support conservation efforts, artistic and cultural services, and an evolving array of programming throughout the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County in all five Supervisorial Districts. Completed projects are accessioned into the Los Angeles County Civic Art Collection. Since the establishment of the Civic Art Division in 2004, over 600 historic and contemporary artworks from over 300 artists have been accessioned to the Collection.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- For questions, please contact Laleña Vellanoweth, Conservation and Collections Manager, Civic Art Division, lvellanoweth@arts.lacounty.gov or Kiernan Graves, Site & Studio Conservation, kiernan@siteandstudio.com
- For information about the Civic Art Division, please visit lacountyarts.org/experiences/civic-art.
- For information about Site & Studio Conservation, please visit <https://siteandstudio.com/>.
- This opportunity does not constitute an offer to contract or a promise for remuneration, recognition, or any other thing. Submission of any materials in response to this opportunity will not constitute an express or implied contract. The information contained and/or any program or event described herein may be changed, amended, modified, canceled, revoked, or abandoned without notice at any time and for any reason in the sole discretion of Arts and Culture or the County of Los Angeles.



Starfish, Benjamin Dominguez, 1961, Whittier Narrows Recreation Area. Photo by Joshua White/JW Pictures.