

# Three Spanish Painters

## Velásquez, Murillo, and Zurbarán

Models for the San Diego Fine Arts Gallery (now the San Diego Museum of Art)

These life-sized plaster sculptures of three famous Spanish painters of the 17<sup>th</sup> century are the models created by sculptor Furio Piccirilli in New York City for Balboa Park's Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego. The permanent statues were cast in concrete and placed above the entrance to architect William Templeton Johnson's plateresque-style building, where they can be seen today. The models themselves can be seen up-close in the Casa del Prado courtyard.



Models in Casa del Prado Sculpture Court



Cast Sculptures on Museum of Art

That these models have survived at all is fortuitous. Rediscovered in 1975, they “were dumped ignominiously on the dirt-floor of a Balboa Park building” according to an article in the San Diego Union. That building is now the rebuilt Casa de Balboa, directly across El Prado from the Sculpture Court in the Casa del Prado. Col. Owen Clarke, executive director of the Aerospace Museum, said that he first saw the statues about eight years earlier:

We were moving airplanes around in the museum and noticed that the floor appeared to be weak in this old building. While we were bolstering the floor, we saw the three statues, just sort of dumped down off to one side. We mentioned it to a few people around town, but no one had any idea where they had come from.

For another eight years, the statues lay in the dirt undisturbed except for the night when vandals broke it, and, for some incomprehensible reason, smashed the faces with an iron pipe and kicked a hole in the back of one of them.

In 1975 The Committee of One Hundred called in John Clark, artist-craftsman who had supervised restoration work at Casa del Prado and at the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco, to repair the mutilated statues. The statues were then installed in the Panama-California Sculpture Court of the Casa del Prado, which had been created a year earlier.

The Committee of One Hundred is planning to restore the entire exhibit of all nineteen sculptural pieces, with improved lighting, enhanced display, and interpretive signage to tell the stories of this fascinating collection.