

MISSION Jesuits on the Baja California

In the 17th century, the Jesuits founded mission stations in the rough North of Mexico, at the time still a large empty area on the map. The Jesuits differed from other missionaries in that they dearly wanted to preserve the original communities of the native people, while convincing them of their message. The respect for other cultures and the absolutely implicit principle of freedom were unique for this period. Additionally the Jesuits were anxious to save the native people from exploitation and enslavement through the Spanish conquistadores - as exemplified by the fate of the *Reduccion*es in Paraguay and the work of Father Eusebio Kino from South Tyrol, who is revered for his beneficial work in Sonora and Sinaloa up to the present today. This *work* contributed, among other reasons, to the ban of the Society of Jesus in 1773.

During this missionary time, the Jesuits explored the Sierra Madre Occidental and the deserts of the American Southwest and discovered that Baja California was not an island. In this *land without shadow* the conditions were much harsher than on the continent. The feeding of the baptized was only possible with the help of the mainland missions. Imported European diseases led to the death of the indigenous people in masses. There followed struggles between the Spanish and the natives - to which missions and missionaries also fell victim. After the expulsion of the Jesuits from Mexico in 1768 only a few missions could be taken over by the Franciscans and the Dominicans, the rest fell into decay.

The SOIL for this project was collected at the sites of the first established mission stations along the Camino Real on the Baja California in 2014, the two hundredth anniversary of the restoration of the Order. The produced EARTH ART WORKS will pay homage to the engagement of the Jesuits and their intelligent, inquiring minds, and the openness with which they approached the foreign and the unknown.