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Los Angeles Times

NEH funds LACMA show on Sri Lanka, Ken Burns film on Vietnam War



Ken Burns during a 2014 panel discussion in Beverly Hills. The National Endowment for the Humanities has made a \$1-million grant for Burns' 10-part documentary on the Vietnam War, expected to be broadcast in 2017 on PBS. (Richard Shotwell / Invision / Associated Press)

By [Mike Boehm](#)

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The National Endowment for the Humanities will funnel \$1.4 million to California museums, university-based scholars and libraries in grants announced this week, including \$40,000 for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art for a touring exhibition on the art of Sri Lanka.

Among the \$22.8 million in grants nationwide, the biggest for a single project is \$1 million to help fund a 10-part documentary on the Vietnam War directed by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick.

It's expected to air on PBS in 2017. According to the NEH, Burns and Novick hope "to inspire a long overdue conversation about this watershed in our history" by drawing on the latest scholarship and interviewing nearly 100 American and Vietnamese witnesses to the war.

Reflecting the long lead period to research and secure loans of key artworks for big survey exhibitions, LACMA doesn't expect to open "The Jeweled Isle: Art from Sri Lanka," until 2019.

The show will span 2,000 years of artwork from the island nation off the coast of India, whose recent history includes the long, bloody and ultimately suppressed rebellion of its Tamil minority.

LACMA spokeswoman Miranda Carroll said the tour destinations after the show opens at LACMA are still being determined.

Including the grant to LACMA, \$443,000 will go to 11 Southern California institutions from San Diego to Santa Barbara. The largest is \$200,000 to UCLA and its Chicano Studies Research Center, which will use the money to digitize papers and photographs documenting the social history of Mexican Americans in Los Angeles during the 1960s and 1970s.

Making scholarly works and source materials such as UCLA's Chicano archives available online has been a priority for the NEH, and the latest round of grants continues along that path.

The biggest grant in California, \$300,000 to the Peninsula Library System in San Mateo, is for digitizing historic audio and video clips that include recorded oral histories from eyewitnesses to various historic events. The oral histories include the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906, footage from the Manzanar internment camp where Japanese Americans were imprisoned during World War II, excerpts of Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1967 speech at an anti-Vietnam War rally at UC Berkeley, and interviews conducted on the streets of L.A. in the immediate aftermath of the 1992 riots sparked by the acquittal of police officers who'd been accused of brutality in their videotaped arrest of Rodney King.

Pepperdine University in Malibu will receive \$22,000 toward developing a seminar course on the role of art in diverse cultures, and UC Irvine has been awarded \$36,500 for a project aimed at linking data from its library's collection of 500 "artist's books," which are works of visual art rendered in book form. The collection emphasizes works by and about women, Latin American artists' books and works about contemporary American politics.

Other grants for art exhibitions include \$300,000 to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts for a traveling show opening in 2016 on how World War I affected American art from 1913 to 1938 and \$300,000 to Baltimore's Walters Art Gallery for a show on how the five senses were represented in the art of medieval Europe, also debuting next year.

The Massachusetts-based Center for Independent Documentary will receive \$500,000 for "A Long Way From Home: The Untold Story of Baseball's Desegregation," by Miami-based filmmaker Gaspar Gonzalez. It will focus on racism faced by black players in baseball's minor leagues well into the 1960s, long after Jackie Robinson had broken the major leagues' color barrier in 1947.

New York City's Aquila Theater Company will get \$300,000 to develop a national project called "The Warrior Chorus," in which 100 American military veterans -- including 25 in Los Angeles, where USC is a partner -- will be immersed in classic ancient Greek texts about war.

The aim, according to the NEH's project description, is to use the ancients as a springboard for "discussions about war, comradeship, country, home and family," among other topics. Veterans who go through the 10-week program will learn to deliver live performances and readings and lead workshops and discussions that connect the ancient Greeks' enduring explorations of warfare with the American experience.