By painting Fiesta de Santa Fe’s 1926 parade, Gustave Baumann captured the city’s social evolution—in motion—in a singular work recently donated to the New Mexico History Museum.

By Carmella Padilla

“I STILL REMEMBER the uproar of laughter as the parade circled the plaza,” wrote Santa Fe artist Gustave Baumann, recalling the Pasatiempo Parade of 1926, the Anglo art colony’s cheeky contribution to that year’s Fiesta de Santa Fe.

In an undated document titled “Fiesta History,” Baumann offered a series of short recollections detailing the fiesta mood of the early-to-mid-1920s, when, he wrote, “The artists and writers were becoming a part of Santa Fe life.” By their assessment, fiesta’s solemn historical premise had given way to “scholastic dullness,” while the tourism-driven marketing of the event excluded the community members it purported to represent. In response, the creatives cut loose. In addition to staging the first public burning of Zozobra and other offbeat activities, they launched the inaugural Pasatiempo Parade, aka the Hysterical Pageant. “Of this,” Baumann wrote, “I did a fairly accurate record in a painting now owned by the Walter Barkers in Pojoaque.”

After nearly eighty years of private ownership, the Barker-Eddy family of Santa Fe recently donated Baumann’s Pasatiempo Parade (at left) to the New Mexico History Museum, where it is now on public view. A rare and valuable acquisition in pristine condition, the 1938 oil-on-board painting offers an impressionistic...
rendering of the event from someone who understood it as both a whimsical and weighty symbol of the city’s cultural growing pains. Though lighthearted, its subject marks a particularly critical and creative point in the story of Santa Fe’s coming of age as an artist’s colony, a multiethnic community, and a cultural heritage destination.

Pasatiempo Parade “speaks to our history,” said Tom Leech, director of the Press at the Palace of the Governors, who secured the gift for the history museum. “Baumann paintings are rare, and this one has the Palace in it. There are certain Baumanns that I think are very important to New Mexico. This is one of them.”

Baumann is perhaps best known for his luminous color woodblock prints and mobile puppet theater of hand-carved marionettes, now in the collection of the New Mexico Museum of Art. With Pasatiempo Parade, the artist painted a historical record of a few hours on a single day in Santa Fe and a timeless social commentary on the city’s ever-evolving human parade. At the same time, he documented his experience as a one-time Santa Fe outsider whose creative sense of community earned him a respected position on the inside.

With a brilliant swirl of oranges, browns, yellows, and greens on a lustrous silverleaf background, Baumann sets the viewer’s vantage point from above a dizzying plaza parade scene. The outlook is from the plaza’s upper west end, likely from the top floor of the elegant, pressed brick and red sandstone Claire Hotel, now the balcony of the Ore House at Milagro. The composition is at once circular, condensed, and sweeping as Baumann captures the spectacle in its entirety—from the inviting green grass and globular mass of shade trees at the plaza’s center, to the draped window awnings on the east-side shops, to the squat adobe portal of the historic Palace on the north.

The playful portrait, 35 inches wide by 27½ inches high, nests inside a distinctive solid wood frame, pieced together by Baumann in sections with hand-hewn, Art Deco–like motifs. A piece of paper taped, presumably by Baumann, on the back side serves as a key to the painting’s imagery, his rough pen-ink sketches identifying the names and parade themes of the outrageously costumed art colony members shown rounding the plaza. From Witter Bynner, Will Shuster, and Sylvanus Morley, to Leonora Frances Curtin, Margretta Dietrich, and Dolly and John Sloan, Baumann represents a wacky, early twentieth-century cultural who’s who.

Subsequent gifts to the museum from the Ann Baumann Trust—Baumann’s “Fiesta History” and photographs of the parade—build additional layers of history and memory into the painting for a more comprehensive picture of the social, political, and creative forces at play in the 1926 Fiesta de Santa Fe. It all makes for a compelling and challenging portrait of the community that Baumann and his cohorts hoped Santa Fe could become—and that, nearly a century later, it still strives fully to be.

On Tuesday, September 7, 1926, the Santa Fe New Mexican devoted its daily editorial to fiesta’s new El Pasatiempo de la Gente (the People’s Pastime), ending on this feel-good note: “To draw and keep the community together, nothing else has such a magic influence as making merry together . . . . Santa Feans know and understand each other better as a result of El Pasatiempo.”

The newspaper’s assessment of the art colony’s light-hearted additions to fiesta was both bold and oversimplified. Yet it illuminated the cultural collisions that resulted from the Anglo influx to Santa Fe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Arriving in 1918, Baumann was one of many artists, writers, and other cultural expats who converged on the city seeking a less-complicated, more creative life. Born in Germany and raised in Chicago, where he enjoyed a successful run as a commercial illustrator, Baumann hoped to hone his skills in printmaking and woodworking. He found a font of inspiration in the city’s storybook charm and multicultural heritage and quickly fit in to the busy vibe of the budding art colony. Fitting into the complex and often-fraught cultural fabric of fiesta, however, would take him and his creative contingent to the extremes of imagination and public relations.

In the summer of 1916, the New Mexican had reported on a Chamber of Commerce initiative to stage “the revival on a stupendous scale of the De Vargas Pageant,” a project largely conceived by Museum of New Mexico director Edgar L. Hewett, attorney-historian Colonel Ralph E. Twitchell, and other tourism boosters. Nationally, historical pageants were all the rage. This one involved the reenactment of the 1692 entrada (entry) to Santa Fe by Don Diego de Vargas, the New Mexico governor and captain-general charged with reclaiming the Spanish province after the 1680 Pueblo Revolt. In truth, it was largely a historically reimagined reason to market Santa Fe as a cultural tourism center, or as the New Mexican put it, to “bring crowds from all over.”

Despite public enthusiasm, including from some art colony members, the project took three years to launch. On September 11, 1919, organizers hosted a three-day celebration...
with each day dedicated to one of the three cultures promoted as comprising early twentieth-century Santa Fe: Indian Day, Spanish Day, and finally, Trail (i.e. Anglo) Day. A similar historical program during Santa Fe’s 1883 Tertio-Millennial Exposition had featured the first Vargas entrada reenactment, replete with Hispano- and Anglo-costumed Spanish conquistadores, Franciscan priests, and Pueblo Indians. The reenactment was repeated during Fourth of July festivities in 1911 and included the governors of San Juan, Santa Clara, Tesuque, and San Ildefonso Pueblos. July 4, 1912, saw the last “De Vargas Pageant” before its revival as part of the Fiesta de Santa Fe of September 1919.

Fiesta organizers’ emphasis on Spanish culture and traditions was rooted in a 1712 declaration by the Spanish Marqués de la Peñuela establishing an annual fiesta honoring Vargas, who died in 1704. This was envisioned as a religious celebration of Vargas’s military pursuits and ardent devotion to a seventeenth-century Mexican willow-wood statue of Mary. Originally called Nuestra Señora de la Conquista by Vargas, the statue is now alternately known as Nuestra Señora de la Conquistadora or Nuestra Señora de la Paz. The fiesta entrada would ultimately come to symbolize Vargas’s relationship with the statue during his post-revolt reoccupation of Santa Fe.

Specifically, the entrada highlighted Vargas’s 1692 expedition to Santa Fe from El Paso del Norte, where the Spaniards fled after the revolt. His meetings with Indian leaders were nonviolent, leading him to believe that La Conquistadora’s intercession made Puebloans amenable to the Spaniards’ return. The fiesta

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Above: Gustave Baumann’s hand-sketch legend identifies the Pasatiemo Parade’s merry (and legendary) subjects. Photograph by John Eddy.
entrada narrative thus emerged with a theme of a “peaceful” and “bloodless” reconquest. But that was only half the story.

For Vargas’s 1693 return, La Conquistadora was carted to Santa Fe alongside Spanish settlers. But the Pueblo Indians had no intentions of leaving. This time, Vargas launched a bloody siege and reclaimed the capital. Nonetheless, the new fiesta focused on Vargas’s 1692 entrada, fueling the enduring myth of a fully bloodless reconquest.

As fiesta evolved into the 1920s, Baumann and other artists grew bored with its heavy historical pageantry and concerned about its exclusive commercial feel. Organizers blocked off parts of the plaza, enclosing festivities in the Palace courtyard and charging admission. Baumann described “a grandstand built up into the trees of the Plaza facing the Governor’s Palace with a high fence and ticket booth at the ends that kept out the very people with the most right to be there. . . . Fiesta aside from its religious significance seemed a little tedious,” he continued. “We decided to have a Fiesta of our own after the official version had taken place.”

It was a quiet, creative revolt. “Like conspirators,” Baumann wrote, “we met in the dark basement of a downtown curio store [the Spanish and Indian Trading Company] and hatched out a plot while sitting around on camphor smelling blankets piled up between shelves of Santos and Indian pottery.”

There, he continued, “ideas . . . sprouted spontaneously” in the darkness. “But what fun when the result finally burst out in the sunlight.”

Sponsored by the newly formed Old Santa Fe Association, the 1926 Pasatiempo Parade began at 2:30 p.m. on Saturday, September 4. It was a fully inclusive and multicultural local mélange, representing native and newcomer residents alike. All made their way downtown from St. Michael’s College, on today’s Old Santa Fe Trail, to Manhattan Avenue, the plaza, and points beyond. They entered the city center to the tune of an upbeat funeral march, a death knell cheerfully signaling the end of fiestas past.

Laughter filled the air as they processed in elaborate costumes, on foot or on zany floats. If not entirely politically correct by today’s standards, the parade themes and dress of the art colony in particular parodied the official fiesta and offered social commentary on other issues of the day. In his Pasatiempo Parade painting and his “Fiesta History” notes, Baumann conveyed the revelry in detail, calling out the art colony’s antics in the general order of the parade.

First came the “Prehistorics,” boys wearing sheep pelts and wielding stone axes, a parody, perhaps, of the prehistoric preoccupations of archaeologists like Hewett. Following was poet Witter “Hal” Bynner as an Indian chief harnessed to Dolly Sloan, wife of artist John Sloan, in Navajo garb. The pair demonstrated the then-common practice of Anglos dressing up in Native attire. They may also have been commenting on the Bursum Bill’s threat to encumber Native rights to tribal lands.

Next, artist Sheldon Parsons took a turn as Don Quixote on a prancing steed, while Zozobra creator Will Shuster drove a Ford disguised as a covered wagon. This, Baumann wrote, was “bulging with happy pioneers and a burlap horse that reared up from the radiator to kick whenever some onlooker came too near.” The performance arts were represented by cultural patron Leonora [Frances] Curtin and friends, who twirled through the streets as the Dizzy Dora Drunken Dancers, a spoof of Isadora Duncan. Meanwhile, Baumann’s wife, Jane, along with Ted Stevenson, satirized a previous fiesta performance by Creek-Cherokee opera singer Tsiannna Redfeather Blackstone and Mohawk baritone Oskenonton. In this case, Baumann wrote, the Santa Feans “quietly paddled their canoe [on wheels] singing ‘The land of the sky blue water.’”

Following Margretta Dietrich’s horse-drawn float, “Dr. Quack’s Remedies for the Uncultured,” City Builders Supply made the scene with its “original Rocky Mountain Canary,” a large birdcage with a burro inside. Former US Army captain Seymour “Cy” Hess recruited fifty more burros to pull a telephone pole float disguised as heavy artillery. Behind them, a giant kicking bull built by Baumann brawled with a group of “gaudy toreadors,” identified by Baumann as Howard Huey, [Martin] Gardesky, and F. [Fletcher] Catron.

Among the most hilarious entries, according to Baumann, was John Sloan’s “Harvey Bus,” a thirty-foot-long lampoon of the popular Fred Harvey Company Indian Detours. Constructed of lath and muslin, the bus was suspended from the shoulders of “tourists” with large inner-tube wheels dangling from the sides. “The signal for a punctured tire was a loud shot,” Baumann wrote, “when the whole bus, passengers and all, would settle down while carriers climbed out to repair the tire—nothing could be funnier.”

Bringing up the rear was a float of spectacular fashion, carrying renowned Maya archaeologist and Santa Fe resident Sylvanus “Vay” Morley dressed as an oddball “Mayan Chief.” While the New Mexican reported that Morley wore “egg beaters as earrings and pie tins as armor,” Baumann wrote that “Morley
Eddy, who grew up in Santa Fe, moved to Hawaii for twenty years before returning home thirteen years ago. Although he didn’t experience the same relationship with the Baumanns as his grandparents and mother, he identifies strongly with *Pasatiempo Parade*.

“When we were kids, we went down to the plaza every year in our fiesta wear,” he said. “There’s a deeper psychological and psychic connection to the past for some of us in Santa Fe, which I really embrace.”

After his mother’s death, Eddy remembered someone else who would embrace the painting’s concept and composition: Tom Leech of the Press at the Palace of the Governors. As fate would have it, Eddy met Leech one day outside his Palace Avenue office.

“I was strolling back from lunch,” Leech recalled. “He said he wanted me to look at something. My jaw dropped. I made a quick case why the painting should come to the History Museum.”

Leech is a longtime Baumann devotee whose historic print shop includes Baumann’s ca. 1900 printing press. “I’m interested in Baumann’s process, his work ethic, his dedication to craftsmanship,” Leech said.

The painting’s discovery, and the Barker-Eddy family’s subsequent gift of the piece, “has set me on a chase for other information about Baumann’s paintings,” Leech said. “The hope is that this will bring other things out.”

For his part, Eddy hopes the painting will inspire viewers to consider the parade and Baumann’s community involvement as lessons for today.

“It was people doing goofy, silly stuff, but they were turning a page here,” Eddy said. “Santa Fe was becoming more Anglo-centric. This group of Anglos was saying we’re going to do something special at fiesta that’s for everybody, but were going to do it our own way.

“We’re losing our understanding of how to do this as Santa Feans,” he continued. “Today, the Fiesta Historical-Hysterical Parade is all cheerleaders and politicians and booster clubs. We’ve lost the fun.”

More than fun, Eddy said, the painting as social commentary should be a springboard for serious cultural dialogue about both the positive and negative history of fiesta. Today’s Santa Fe Fiesta Council bills the modern-day event as “a time of prayer, rejoicing, and hospitality for all.” At the 2015 Vargas entraña, however, a group of indigenous and other youth activists disagreed. Wearing black T-shirts emblazoned with 1680, the date of the Pueblo Revolt, they stood silently in front of the Palace of the Governors holding signs protesting: “Don Diego gave the people one hour to surrender”; “They were subject to my burning...
them out and killing them all—Don Diego”; and “Every year, for all time, an accurate depiction should commemorate this day!”

Just as the 1926 Pasatiempo Parade added a new layer to the fiesta, the 2015 demonstration did the same—expressing the desire for honesty and unity in a community with a complex, and ever-fragile, history.

“New Mexico is ground zero for all of these cultures banging together,” Eddy said. “Let’s face it, it’s layers of conquest, and it’s time to address it. My feeling is let’s use this painting to talk about it, get it out—wherever that conversation leads.”

Eddy wondered aloud what Baumann would say about the modern-day Fiesta de Santa Fe. Baumann stayed involved in fiesta long after the 1926 parade, participating in secular and religious activities. In 1930 he restored the seventeenth-century statue of Vargas’s beloved La Conquistadora, which was worn and damaged after years of faithful fiesta processions. In 1933 he made a replica statue now used for all occasions except for fiesta-related events, when the original leaves her chapel in the Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi to mark the occasion.

Judging from his own words, Baumann would likely consider today’s fiesta a practical matter. “The ways of art and business are not always parallel but I was among those who for several years contributed a month out of every year to Fiesta activity,” he wrote. “Looking back now I still think it was worth it.”

Completing and writing about Pasatiempo Parade several years after the 1926 event, Baumann also wisely considered fiesta’s impact through the lens of time and perspective. He might well advise modern-day Santa Feans to do the same. Indeed, describing the parade as part of a movement to create new traditions in old Santa Fe, Baumann’s words echo with a relevance, lucidity, and power that extend from yesterday to today.

“I recall suggesting it might be a good scheme to take the Fiesta apart,” he wrote, “to see what it consists of and then adapt it to the needs of the moment.”

Carmella Padilla is a Santa Fe native and lifetime fiesta-goer who writes extensively about intersections in art, culture, and history in New Mexico and beyond. Her books include The Work of Art: Folk Artists in the 21st Century; El Rancho de las Golondrinas: Living History in New Mexico’s La Cienega Valley; and Low’n Slow: Lowriding in New Mexico. She coedited A Red Like No Other: How Cochineal Colored the World, the companion publication to the recent Museum of International Folk Art exhibition The Red That Colored the World. She is a recipient of the Governor’s Award for Excellence in the Arts and a frequent contributor to El Palacio.