A Century of Collecting Fine Art

Selecting one work of fine art created each year of the Museum of New Mexico’s existence was at times easy, and at other times excruciatingly difficult.

Often there were periods of incredible aesthetic achievement. Take 1923. How do you choose one from among four gems of the collections? Do you pick Josef Bakos’ *The Springtime Rainbow*, Ernest Blumenschein’s *Dance at Taos*, Raymond Jonson’s *Earth Rhythms No. 2*, or Stuart Davis’ *New Mexico Peak*?

I decided on the Davis oil because it represented an incredible artistic irony. This New York modernist felt constrained by the genre of New Mexico landscape painting and was overwhelmed by the color and expanse of the vistas. He solved the problem by abandoning the use of color and creating monochromatic works that allowed him to respond to the landscape, and not simply replicate what he had seen.

More importantly, Davis’ New Mexico imagery is exceedingly rare. He only worked in New Mexico only during the summer of ’23, and for a time the absence of his work from the collection left a huge gap in our history of southwestern art. Fortunately in 2005 the New Mexico Museum of Art was able to purchase this fine example his work.

*New Mexico Peak* is on long-term display in *How the West Is One*, and is reproduced in the companion book *The Art of New Mexico* and in the lower left corner of this page.

Come to the show, and take a good long look.

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For information about these and more, visit elpalacio.org
Plate numbers correspond to those that appear in The Art of New Mexico: How the West Is One. The unconventional collections book was written by Joseph Traugott, curator of 20th century art at the New Mexico Museum of Art, and published by the Museum of New Mexico Press, Santa Fe, New Mexico, in association with the museum.


15. Berlyn B. Brixner (b. 1911), official photograph, Los Alamos Project, Optics Group (g 11), First Atomic Explosion at a Distance of About Five Miles, Trinity Site, New Mexico, July 16, 1945, 1945. Gelatin silver print, 7¼ x 9¾ in. Photo Archives, Palace of the Governors, Neg. No. 29314. Plate 133.


34. Gail Rieke (b. 1944) and Zachariah Rieke (b. 1943), Love Nest, 1998. Mixed media, 7 x 10 x 3 in. Museum purchase with funds from the Elizabeth and Duncan Boeckman Acquisition Endowment, 1998. Plate 201.


45. Maria Montoya Martinez (ca. 1880s–1980), *Untitled*, fired prehistoric clay recovered by Edgar Lee Hewett from Puye ruin, 1909. 1½ x 6½ x 3 in. Museum of Indian Arts & Culture/Laboratory of Anthropology 1769/12. Plate 43.


