



And **La Bruja**
Brought the Sunflowers

THE BENEFITS AND COSTS OF ANGLO ARTS PATRONAGE

By Lois P. Rudnick



La Bruja

The sunflowers of northern New Mexico are one of the sumptuous visual delights for residents and visitors in summertime. But they are also an invasive weed. In fact, it was rumored by the Hispanos of Taos Valley that arts patron Mabel Dodge Luhan inflicted them on their crops after she arrived in 1918. This dramatic legend is a paradigm of one of the most fascinating—and controversial—aspects of New Mexico’s cultural history: the benefits and costs of Anglo patronage of Hispano and Native American arts.

Mabel Dodge Luhan started collecting santos (Hispano religious carvings) soon after she moved to Taos. One of the first Anglo patrons to promote them as an art form, she sent her collection to a New York City gallery for a show in 1919, probably the first on the East Coast. In 1925 she published an article in *The Arts* magazine titled “The Santos of New Mexico.” As a self-proclaimed expert who touted the artistic significance of Hispano religious woodcarving, she was shocked when Taoseños who read her article were outraged because she described their religious practices as “primitive” and “masochistic.” In an unpublished memoir she wrote in 1947, Luhan recalled the origins of the sunflower legend:

[T]he Mexicans had begun to look on me as a kind of witch; for the first summer I came, the sunflowers started in the Valley. They hopped up in all the crops and great bands of them lined the highways. They came right on after that, summer after summer. The Mexicans blamed me for them! “That woman,” they said. “Never before had they had the pest of sunflower weeds until she came and brought them with her!” They spread the rumor that I had strewn the seed all over the valley from my native New York state!

Mabel donated her santos to the Harwood Museum of Art in Taos soon after these events. The collection—still on view at the museum—is an undoubted treasure, but Luhan’s patronage exemplifies a much more complicated story.

Why Did the Anglo Expatriates Come to New Mexico?

It took New Mexico sixty-four years to go from territorial status to US statehood, in 1912, primarily because it was a majority-minority state, whose predominantly non-white, Spanish-speaking, Catholic population made most Americans consider it un-American. Over the course of the early twentieth century in

New Mexico, Anglo artists, writers, and patrons helped to transform Pueblo Indians from a disparaged “vanishing race” to the sublime spiritual healers of the nation; and *nuevomexicanos*—at least those of the middle and upper classes—from degraded mestizos to descendants of white Spaniards who had brought a distinguished civilization to the nation. By the 1920s, leaders of the Anglo arts communities in Santa Fe and Taos were arguing that northern New Mexico was, *because* of its Native American and Hispano populations, the *most* American of places, and the best source of inspiration for a revitalized national culture.

The leaders of the Anglo arts communities of Santa Fe and Taos, most of whom hailed from major urban centers on the East Coast and the Midwest, perceived northern New Mexico as a New World whose terrain, climate, and Native and Hispano peoples offered a model of ecological, spiritual, and artistic integration for an alienated and decadent Western civilization. Their views were rooted in their own personal needs, as well as in more public ideals of honoring the long-ignored social and cultural contributions of Hispanos and Indians to the life of the region and the nation. They were antimodern moderns who were fleeing a nation that had become an industrial, commercial, urbanized world power by the dawn of the twentieth century, one invested in war, militarism, and mass production and consumption, and in what the Anglo patrons viewed as tawdry popular and middlebrow cultures.

In their flight from urban America, Anglo artists, writers, and patrons were also escaping the social and cultural impacts of class and labor warfare, and in some cases, bad health. Sunmount Sanitarium in Santa Fe was an incubator for several men and women who would become political, social, literary, and business leaders of the state. They saw themselves as agents

Opposite left: **Gerald Cassidy, *Cui Bono?*** (detail), ca. 1911. Oil on canvas, 93½ × 48 in. Collection of the New Mexico Museum of Art. Gift of Gerald Cassidy, 1915, 282.23P. ➤ The title, which translates as “Who Benefits?” raises important ethical and political questions about the relationships among the Indian subjects of Anglo paintings, the artists who used them as models, and the viewers/tourists who look at them.

Opposite right: **Mabel Dodge Sterne**, ca. 1918, photo courtesy of The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. ➤ Soon after arriving in Taos, in January 1918, Mabel cut off her long hair and sported an Indian serape, hoping to attain some of the serenity that she associated with Pueblo women.

of social and cultural change, although their embrace of Pueblo and Hispano cultures was often based on highly romantic and sometimes primitivist notions. Here, they argued in the local, regional, and national press, long-lived, seemingly stable communities lived peacefully, simply, and without dissension, producing material cultures where the instinct of craftsmanship was alive and well and religion was rooted in a natural world that sustained them economically and spiritually.

One of the deepest attractions for these moderns was that the Pueblos and Hispanos seemed to be the very antithesis of who and what they were—intellectually curious, independent, and, for the women in particular, desirous of defining their lives outside of traditional gender, sexual, and class norms. Paradoxically, to say the least, many Anglo patrons wanted Pueblos and Hispanos to stay exactly as they imagined them to have always been, embedded in a past that reminded them of what they themselves had given up, and of the spiritual and communal values they believed their country had lost. Their powerful interest in and support of groups that existed, if at all, only on the margins of most Americans' consciousness and concern motivated the Anglo patrons' most and least beneficial views and actions.

Cultural Capital and the State Capital

Santa Fe is perhaps the only capital of a state in the US that was founded on making culture its chief source of capital. In northern New Mexico, Anglo writers, artists, and patrons wielded civic, cultural, and political power that was unheard of elsewhere in the nation among their peers during the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s. They fought for Pueblo land and water rights, for the protection of Pueblo religious rituals, and for improved health care in the pueblos; and they created outlets for the sale and distribution of Pueblo and Hispano arts locally, regionally, and nationally. They created the “Pueblo-Spanish Revival style” as a distinctive regional architectural norm that still defines the historic district of Santa Fe, as well as much of the architecture of northern New Mexico. They raised the visibility, aesthetic, and cash value of Hispanic and Native American arts; and they were founders of organizations, collections, and institutions—the Laboratory of Anthropology, the School of American Research, the Museum of New Mexico, the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian, the Spanish Colonial Arts Society, the Indian Arts Fund, Indian and Spanish Markets, El Rancho de las Golondrinas—that brought immense benefits

to the social and cultural life of the region as well as economic benefits to hundreds of Pueblo and Hispano artists and artisans in the interwar era.

At the same time, their patronage was often patronizing, even among the most sensitive of them, like Kenneth Chapman, who gave generous financial incentives to Pueblo potters to produce high-quality pots modeled on historic and prehistoric designs. Chapman devoted much of his life in Santa Fe to collecting prehistoric and historic Pueblo pots and to copying hundreds of their patterns to provide Pueblo potters with what he believed were the best “traditional” and most “authentic” designs for them to copy and adapt in their work.

Writer Erna Fergusson, a third-generation Albuquerquean, was undoubtedly one of the romanticists in her portrayals of the “tri-ethnic harmony” of the Southwest. But she was also able to satirize what historian Philip Deloria calls “playing Indian.” In a 1936 article for the *North American Review*, “Crusade for Santa Fe,” Fergusson wrote:

What a relief to turn . . . to softly mellowed pueblos where brown men raised what they ate in peace. . . . Nothing was too extreme to express their desires to go western, Indian, to live simply, be part of the country. [Poet] Witter Bynner bought and wore and hung on his friends a famous collection of Indian jewelry. Alice Corbin introduced the velvet Navajo blouse. Stetson hats, cowboy boots, flannel shirts, even blankets were the approved costume. Everybody had a pet pueblo, a pet Indian, a pet craft.

Art patrons were horrified by the cheap trade goods that had been luring tourists to “the Land of Enchantment” since the 1880s, when the railroad first came to New Mexico. But they, too, lured the tourists they scorned. They wrote articles for the railroad, their art was reproduced in its publications and calendars, and they reinvented “historic traditions” like the Santa Fe Fiesta, during which they could dress up as Indians and Hispanos. Through their writing, art, and advocacy, they contributed to the construction of what historian Chris Wilson calls “the myth of Santa Fe” (and Taos) at the same time that they enabled the very progress and commercialization they had settled in northern New Mexico to escape, and—through their advocacy and preservation of traditional Pueblo and Hispano cultures—that they hoped to undermine. They were, inadvertently for the most part, promoters of what has become the state’s primary economic base: ethnic tourism, which

depends on an attraction to the cultural exoticism of native populations and their art, architecture, music, food, clothing, dance, and rituals.

A City of Women

Santa Fe, and Taos to a lesser degree, was a city of women, or “a city of ladies,” to borrow Mary Austin’s quaint phrase. Anglo women were leaders in the arts and patronage fields and central to the civic and institutional life of the city. In fact, Santa Fe and Taos may have been the only American communities in the interwar years whose artist and writer colonies were dominated by women. Here they found opportunities to create new fields and institutions by promoting previously devalued arts and crafts for which they could become cultural brokers and arbiters of value and authenticity. They enjoyed kinds of freedom, authority, and power that would not have been possible in the places from which they came. The experiences of a few of these remarkable women illuminate some of the complex tensions involved in their art, writing, and patronage.

Alice Corbin Henderson Associate editor of *Poetry* magazine, the premier modern poetry journal in the early twentieth-century US, Alice Corbin Henderson came to Santa Fe in 1916, suffering from tuberculosis. A tireless advocate of the Southwest in her prose and poetry, including her publications of Hispano folk songs and cowboy songs, she was actively involved in the creation

Top: **Margretta Dietrich spoofing a proposal for a Chautauqua for Santa Fe**, August 4–7, 1926. Courtesy Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), Neg. No. 010932. ➤ Dietrich’s Fiesta float was part of a successful battle to keep the Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs from building a “culture” center which she and other Santa Fe patrons believed threatened the lofty cultural values they promoted.

Middle: **Interior of “The Native Market,”** ca. 1934. Courtesy Acequia Madre House. ➤ Leonora Frances Curtin created and subsidized this store, which demonstrated and sold Hispanic craft making and arts during the Great Depression. It stayed in business from 1934 to 1940.

Bottom: **Kenneth Chapman sketching designs on Pueblo pottery**, ca. 1915. Courtesy Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), Neg. No. 013312. ➤ Chapman created numerous portfolios of traditional Pueblo pottery designs and headed the Pueblo Pottery Fund. He was photographed here in the Laboratory of Anthropology.





of the Indian Arts Fund (1925) and the New Mexican Association for Indian Affairs (1922), for which she invented the “Poets Round-Up”: in a rodeo-like setting, Santa Fe poets came out of cardboard chutes reading poems to raise money for the organization. The first poem that Henderson published after her arrival in Santa Fe, “Litany in the Desert,” speaks eloquently about the ravages of World War I and industrialism on the Western world: “On the other side of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, there is a great welter of steel and flame. . . I know nothing of it here. . . I do not know why men fight and die. I do not know why men sweat and slave. I know nothing of it here.”

But many nuevomexicanos did “sweat and slave”—perhaps not in urban factories but certainly as day and migrant laborers on commercial farms and in the mines of New Mexico and Colorado, increasingly so throughout the 1920s and 1930s, when the rural economy was in serious decline. This is something Henderson would not have known in 1916 but that she must have known after she had lived among Hispanos for many years on Camino del Monte Sol (she was responsible for its name change from “Telephone Road”). Yet neither she nor any of her Anglo patron colleagues wrote or painted about the poverty or the racial and class tensions that were part of daily life in northern New Mexico and from which they benefited personally in terms of inexpensive day labor, domestic work, and models for their art.

Mabel Dodge (Luhan) Mabel Dodge (Luhan) had been a leading patron of the radical avant-garde in politics and the

Top: **Poet Alice Corbin Henderson and her husband, painter William Penhallow Henderson**, 1932. Photo by Will Connell. Courtesy Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), Neg. No. 059757.

Middle: **Patio, Palace of the Governors, Fiesta, 1925**. From left to right are Mayor Nathan Jaffa, Oskentonon (chief of a Canadian Mohawk tribe), Edgar L. Hewett, and José D. Sena, Jr., a prominent Hispano civic leader. Courtesy Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), Neg. No. 007271. ➤ The City Different’s leading cultural impresario, Hewett played a key role in shaping the image of “historic” Santa Fe and in several important cultural institutions.

Bottom: **Julian and Maria Martinez making pottery, San Ildefonso Pueblo**, ca. 1950, for the New Mexico State Tourist Bureau. Courtesy Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), Neg. No. 009185.

arts in Greenwich Village between 1912 and 1915. But after she discovered the Pueblos, she wrote in her 1937 memoir, *Edge of Taos Desert: An Escape to Reality*, she was converted from the individual to the tribal:

The singular raging lust for individuality and separateness had been impelling me all my years as it did everyone else on earth—when all of a sudden I was brought up against the Tribe, where a different instinct ruled, where a different knowledge gave power from any I had known, and where virtue lay in wholeness instead of in dismemberment.

Unlike any other of her Anglo peers, Luhan married a Pueblo Indian, Antonio Lujan, from Taos. Mabel was responsible for putting Taos on the map of modern art by bringing major writers, artists, and social reformers to northern New Mexico, who painted, photographed, and wrote about the beauty and power of its physical and cultural landscapes—Georgia O’Keeffe, Ansel Adams, and D. H. Lawrence among them. But in her publications and activism, she presented the Pueblos as a single entity, without any assertion of individual will or interest in modern progress. Perhaps her greatest contribution to Pueblo welfare was bringing John Collier to northern New Mexico, where he began a thirty-year campaign for Indian civil and political rights, most effectively (though controversially) in the “Indian New Deal” he was able to legislate as commissioner of Indian affairs under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Mary Austin Mary Austin had been a pioneer homesteader in Owens Valley, California, a bioregionalist on water issues, a prolific writer, and an activist for Native American rights before she settled in Santa Fe in 1924. Austin wrote about the Southwest in prophetic terms, most dramatically her 1924 book, *Land of Journey’s Ending*:

Here in the Southwest, and along the western coast, where our blood-stream reaches its New-World journey’s ending, it finds itself possessed, with no effort, along with beauty and food—and power-producing natural resources, of a competent alphabet of cultural expression. Thus it gains so enormously over all other sections, . . . that one confidently predicts the rise there, within appreciable time, of the next great fructifying world culture.

Austin’s rhetoric was indeed a powerful stimulus to many artists who came to Santa Fe with aspirations to create an

original American art, including novelist Willa Cather (*Death Comes for the Archbishop*, 1927) and choreographer Martha Graham (*Primitive Mysteries*, 1933; *El Penitente*, 1940). But Austin’s prediction was premised on the supposed racial “purity” of cultures that hadn’t and shouldn’t, she believed, “mix.” This meant a willed ignorance of the hybrid nature of New Mexico’s populations, as well as of the arts, song, dance, and rituals they had created, one that had been influenced by intercultural exchange for over three hundred and fifty years.

Austin was one of the founders of the Spanish Colonial Arts Society (SCAS) in 1925. In 1929 she located a benefactor to purchase El Santuario de Chimayó, which was about to be demolished, and SCAS donated it to the Archdiocese of Santa Fe on the promise that it would be protected in perpetuity. During the Great Depression, SCAS helped to foment a “Hispanic New Deal,” unique in the Southwest, to preserve the village cultures that the founders admired. This New Deal included the delivery of wool, tin, leather, and other raw materials to artists’ villages; a state-funded Hispano arts program in the public schools; and the creation of bluebooks devoted to the detailed recording of dyes, tanning, colcha embroidery, and adobe home construction.

Elizabeth and Martha White and Mary Cabot Wheelwright Elizabeth and Martha White, Bryn Mawr graduates from a wealthy Eastern family, built their estate, El Delirio (named after a bar they loved in Spain), and willed the compound to the School of American Research (now the School for Advanced Research), one of the premier institutions in the world for the study of global cultures. While they were alive, the Whites donated the land for the Laboratory of Anthropology and for the Museum of Navajo Ceremonial Art, later the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian, named for its founder and designed by William Penhallow Henderson. Wheelwright, with collaborator, Navajo Medicine Man Hastin Klah, established the museum to study Navajo religion. Today the museum collects and documents Navajo and other Native American arts and cultures.

Leonora Scott Muse Curtin and Leonora Frances Curtin Paloheimo Leonora Frances Curtin opened Native Market in Santa Fe, in 1934, which showed Hispano craftspeople at work and sold their goods. During the almost seven years it lasted during the Great Depression, it supported 350 artisans. Her mother was a self-taught ethnobotanist, whose book, *Healing*

Herbs of the Upper Rio Grande: Traditional Medicine of the Southwest (1947), was an homage to the Hispana curanderas who had kept herbal medicinal knowledge and practice alive. Leonora Frances Curtin and her husband Y.A. Paloheimo, a Finnish consul interested in his country's history of open-air museums, turned their ranch in La Cienega into El Rancho de las Golondrinas. Opened in 1972, it was the first US living history museum devoted to Hispanic history; its purpose to educate the public about the culture and practices of Spanish Colonial New Mexico.

Margretta Dietrich Many Anglo women patrons were instrumental in supporting the careers of Pueblo Indian women painters, such as Tonita Peña of San Idelfonso Pueblo and Pablita Velarde from Santa Clara Pueblo, who were criticized by their tribe for doing what was not considered women's work. Margretta Dietrich, one of the most influential patrons of Indian and Spanish Colonial Arts, bought 250 paintings from the Pueblo and Navajo artists she supported. They painted in a style promoted by Elizabeth DeHuff and Dorothy Dunn, who helped to create a new tradition of Indian painting during the interwar years that produced extraordinary works of art. But the Anglos set the terms of what could be painted—stylized scenes of daily and ceremonial life.

A Complex Legacy

Anglo patrons who supported Pueblo and Hispano cultures helped to turn around centuries of negative stereotypes. But they typically believed that they knew what was best for both groups. Historian John Nieto-Phillips has noted that one of the great ironies of New Mexico history is that despite many Anglos' profession of love for "all things Spanish," this did not translate into civic, racial, or political equality for nuevomexicanos, partly because they privileged the white, non-Indian Spanish heritage. Patrons of Indian and Hispano arts had little interest in developing or encouraging economic opportunities for those not suited to careers as artists.

There have been numerous books and articles written by scholars over the past thirty years that have critiqued Anglo patronage in New Mexico. While some of these authors go overboard, in my estimation, in blaming Anglo patrons for problems that have multiple and complex origins, most of them acknowledge the work that Anglo patrons accomplished on behalf of, and necessarily with, the cooperation and agency of Pueblo and Hispano artists. Many contemporary Native

American and Hispano artists have made use of the collections started by these early twentieth-century Anglo patrons, both honoring and breaking the boundaries of centuries of real and constructed traditions that still define most of the work displayed, judged, and sold at Spanish and Indian Markets in Santa Fe each summer.

This more complex and contested history of northern New Mexico is rarely addressed in popular representations of the state. But it poses vital questions for all of us who care deeply about its past and present. How can we acknowledge both the undoubted good of Anglo patronage *and* the painful histories it helped to obscure, so that we can honestly address the deeply intertwined costs and benefits of our cultural heritage? ■

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See elpalacio.org for a slideshow and a list of suggested reading.

Top left: **Federal Arts Project (WPA) wood carver José Dolores Lopez**, ca. 1935–1943. Photo by T. Harmon Parkhurst. Courtesy Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), Neg. No. 094470. ➤ Lopez was the first discovery by Mary Austin and Frank Applegate in what they claimed as the Hispano carving revival. Although many 19th-century bultos were polychromed, SCAS deemed unpainted religious figures the most authentic.

Top right: **The young Pablita Velarde**, ca. 1932. Photo by T. Harmon Parkhurst. Courtesy Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), Neg. No. 073942. ➤ The Dorothy Dunn Studio at the Santa Fe Indian School was the most important art school for Native painters in the 1930s and 40s.

Bottom: **John Sloan, *Music in the Plaza (Plaza, Evening, Santa Fe)***, 1920, oil on canvas, 26 × 32 in. Collection of the New Mexico Museum of Art. Gift of Mrs. Cyrus McCormick, 1952, 326.23P. ➤ The painting celebrates the sociality of the Santa Fe Plaza, but most of those who are shown are Anglo tourists, of whom Sloan was notoriously critical. In the lower left-hand corner is an elderly Hispana woman, wrapped in a black shawl, who is barely visible in a community space that has been taken over by modern Anglos.

