

Michael Abatemarco I



Tewa Tales

Jason Garcia: *Tewa Tales of Suspense* No. 1, 2008, hand-processed clay and mineral pigments

The stardate is 47751.2. The Federation has just ceded control of the planet Dorvan V to the Cardassians, which means relocating the planet's Native American colonists who fled from Earth to establish Dorvan V as their new home. Captain Jean-Luc Picard of the starship Enterprise has the unenviable task of convincing them to abandon the planet before it reverts back to the Cardassians, but the settlers refuse to go. Tensions mount between the Native Americans and the Cardassians. Meanwhile, Picard learns that one of his ancestors fought against Native Americans during the Pueblo Revolt of 1680. He now has an opportunity to right this perceived wrong committed eons before and align himself with the Native American colonists in their new struggle. These events occur in *Journey's End*, an episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* that originally aired in 1994. While *Journey's End* concludes happily when peace is brokered between the Native Americans and the Cardassians, the same cannot be said of the historic events the show references. The Pueblo Revolt was a violent conflict in which approximately 400 Spanish colonists, including 27 Franciscan missionaries, memorialized by Santa Fe's Cross of the Martyrs, lost their lives. The remaining colonists were driven from

Santa Fe, and for the next 12 years, the city was under Native control. In 1692 Don Diego de Vargas led the Spanish in a “bloodless” reconquest, taking back Santa Fe without the use of force, a fact which has led to the false perception that peace reigned in the region thereafter. The reconquest is remembered every year during the annual Fiesta de Santa Fe.

Historic events like the Pueblo Revolt may not immediately spring to mind when you think of science fiction, but blending the two has occupied Cochiti Pueblo-born artist Virgil Ortiz for some time. For the past 15 years, Ortiz, a 2015 recipient of the Governor’s Award for Excellence in the Arts, has been developing a movie script based on the revolt, with a futuristic component (the setting is the year 2180). Corresponding works in photography and ceramics are a part of Ortiz’s evolving 22nd-century narrative and make up the exhibition *Revolt 1680/2180*, on view through May 2016 at the Denver Art Museum. The ceramic and photographic pieces in the exhibit represent characters from Ortiz’s movie script, such as the Blind Archers. In his reimagined narrative of the revolt, Tahu, a young woman blinded by a conquistador during an archery contest, later forms the Blind Archers, who participate in the uprising. “The script is always changing, and every year that I do a show I introduce a new character that represents one of the 19 Pueblos here, like the Blind Archers that represent Cochiti or the Aeronauts — there are all these different characters,” Ortiz told *Pasatiempo*. “So every year, the script rewrites itself, and it’s grown its own wings.”

Pueblo artists like Ortiz take a different view of the reconquest than many in the Hispanic community and, consequently, a different view of the Santa Fe Fiesta. “I used to look at it with a lot of anger, but studying about the Pueblo Revolt and everybody that was involved, my basic mission now is to get everybody on the same boat and educate them about what happened to our people. It was the first American revolution,” Ortiz said. “A lot of it is not told in schools or history books. It’s been swept under the carpet, and a lot of the genocide that happened has not been talked about.”

After retaking Santa Fe, de Vargas left the region briefly to amass more forces in Mexico and returned in 1693. A number of Pueblo warriors prevented his reentry, and de Vargas responded with a show of force and took the city yet again — this time, in a far less bloodless conflict. De Vargas ordered the execution of the warriors that opposed him and subjected their families to years of servitude. “The Santa Fe Fiesta doesn’t promote that, of course,” said Santa Clara artist Jason Garcia, whose series *Tewa Tales of Suspense* reimagines the Pueblo Revolt in works with a comic-book style. “It’s kind of odd to see how people forget about the horrors, the historic and cultural traumas related to those events,” he said. Garcia’s work can be seen in *Axle Contemporary’s* exhibit *Slices of Wonder* through Sept. 20.

Another revolt staged by 14 pueblos in 1696 led to a long and protracted revenge. De Vargas did not manage to subdue all Pueblo opposition until around the turn of the century. “All the Pueblo people fought to survive and now we endure with all of our traditions intact,” Ortiz said. Garcia reiterated the point: “The Pueblos in New Mexico still practice their dances, their ceremonies, and their language is still spoken. We’re thankful that we’re still living in Santa Clara Pueblo. We still know what the traditional name is: Kha’p’oo Owinge, that means ‘rose path.’ We’re still connected to our ancestral village of Puye. Other tribes weren’t so successful in maintaining some of those things, so there’s that disconnect from their tribal identity.”

In 2013 a sculpture of de Vargas in Santa Fe’s Cathedral Park was damaged by vandals, who nearly knocked it off of its pedestal. It’s a mystery whether or not the damage was done to send a message. “It’s a pretty bold statement to deface a work of art,” said Garcia, whose own work in *Tewa Tales of Suspense* contains some controversial imagery, such as that of Po’pay, the religious leader from Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo (formerly San Juan Pueblo) who would emerge as the hero of the Pueblo Revolt, looming large over his Spanish enemies, and Tewa warriors slaughtering Franciscan missionaries. “The artist creates a piece to honor someone. Maybe

they haven't done the research, or maybe they have. It will offend someone somewhere along the line. People are shocked, in a sense, when they see my work. I'm just portraying the truth, the history. It's to teach people that this is what happened to my ancestors. This happened in New Mexico. If you don't talk about it, you forget about it. By talking about it you're also healing from it as well."

Ortiz approaches his work with a similar purpose in mind. "Setting it in 2180 allows me to bring in the sci-fi aspects of all the characters and the story and bring it up to date so that kids can really understand it. I want to pay tribute to the people who pulled off the Pueblo Revolt and Po'pay in particular, who brought together the pueblos. Today, there's 19 pueblos, but back in the day there were a lot more. To coordinate the Pueblo Revolt was a big task, and he pulled it off."

Po'pay was one of 47 Pueblo Indians imprisoned for witchcraft in 1675, prior to the Revolt, and tortured during his confinement by the order of Gov. Juan Francisco Treviño. Three of the accused men were hanged, and a fourth, also sentenced to be hanged, committed suicide. Their names are not commemorated on any plaques as they are for the Franciscan missionaries who died in the Revolt, but a life-size sculpture of Po'pay, carved in marble by Cliff Fragua, was unveiled at the National Statuary hall of the U.S. Capitol in 2005.

For some Pueblo children, unaware of the history being honored, Fiesta is a time for fireworks and the dramatic sight of Zozobra burning, with all the sorrows of the populace burning along with him. "I don't think they really got the meaning behind what it meant," Ortiz said. "We do still have things in place that remind us of that time in history, but Santa Fe Fiesta doesn't really bring it out," said Santo Domingo Pueblo cartoonist Ricardo Caté, whose comic strip Without Reservations runs daily in The Santa Fe New Mexican. "It's kind of like Thanksgiving or any of the holidays," he said. "We don't really celebrate it. We stand back and watch."

Caté took on the topic of the Fiesta's celebratory reenactments of de Vargas' reentry to the city in a recent cartoon in which one character asks another if he's seen the entrada of Don Diego de Vargas. The other replies, "I'm still waiting for the Pueblo Revolt reenactment."

Cochiti artist Diego Romero also creates works of social commentary that reflect themes of Native identity and history. Romero imbues his imagery with references to pop culture and mythology, rendering characters in comic-book style or in a style similar to figures on archaic Greek wares. A recent addition to the collection of the New Mexico Museum of Art, Siege of Santa Fe, shows the Pueblo takeover in a stylized depiction. The figures are divided, with conquistadors on one side and Pueblo warriors on the other, seemingly locked in eternal struggle, with no apparent victor. "I do the art that I do because it is the history of the area and I feel it's the untold history," Romero told Pasatiempo. "If you open a textbook, from page one it says Christopher Columbus discovered America. We don't get much of the Native perspective on these things." Romero pointed out that documents of the Spanish friars attest to the brutality Native peoples suffered under the conquistadors. "Within their own recordings lies the truth," he said. "But here's the thing: Is it the brutality of this particular conquest or is it the brutality of man? Our ancestors made many countless, perilous treks and journeys and risked their lives many times and have been in the throes of death so that we could be here. If you look at each individual's story and you were to follow it back all the way to the dawn of mankind, it's a miracle that person is even here."

Whether or not we really will be telling the story in 2180 or in the 24th century of Captain Picard depends a lot on our telling it now. ◀