

Di Nidahaz'áágo

COMMUNITY

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WINDOW ROCK — Visual storyteller Raphael Begay said his imagination and backyard, where healing and acceptance exist, are his saving grace. "It's been my safe space," Begay said about his photography, which was presented as a series at the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology at the University of New Mexico Albuquerque in 2019. Since then, Begay planned and furthered his exploration of the past, present, and future by bringing a few selected photographs and new ones back to Diné Bikéyah, where they were originally from. The ALL REZ is a traveling photography exhibition of Begay's previous and new work plastered outside an Axle Contemporary retrofitted 1970 aluminum-bodied step van. Additionally, the interior of the van holds more of his photographs, acting as a gallery. One steps into the van and walks inside to view the images. The exhibition embodies and explores the core values of Diné Bikéyah, for which Begay hopes to use his photography as a conduit for storytelling and to make connections and understanding. Following tradition, going clockwise, the exhibition first began in the east at Crownpoint Rug Auction, then went to Gallup Flea Market, and finally made its third stop at Chł'łhoosł Indian Market Place and the Navajo Nation Museum on June 14.

One who walks around

Originally from Tsé Náschł'ł, Arizona, Raphael Begay is Hónáshł'łnł and born for Kíníshł'łnł. His maternal grandfather is Țááháá, and his paternal grandfather is 'Ashjįhł. All of Begay's photographs hold memory and space, and he describes how art work generally allows artists to do so. The ALL REZ exhibition is one project that Begay dreamed of documenting, activating, and celebrating his way of life and working collaboratively with his community to facilitate the sharing of land-based knowledge. "It's a gift to my people," Begay said about the exhibition outside the Navajo Nation Museum on June 14. "I just want them to have pride in being from the reservation (where) overcoming some of the challenges that comes with life on the reservation." He added that this is one small act that activates the idea of storytelling in all realms. "It's a matter of being present and sharing."

His parents are Jesse Begay Sr., from Coyote Canyon, New Mexico, and Irene Țááháá, from Tsé Náschł'ł. His late grandparents are Raphael and Marie Țááháá. "I'm the legacy of their love story," Begay said about his grandparents. When asked where Begay grew up, his father, Jesse, stopped by the van, where he spoke about the overcast sky with tears of joy. "You outdid yourself this time," Jesse told his son. "Not many artists have a chance to be sitting where you're sitting."

"Thank you, Dad," Begay told his father. "They got famous, and then they lose sight of everything." Jesse continued, "I'm glad you're still here... this is part of life, being an artist."

Diné Błłáshł'łnł

"It's interesting to think about the reality of the work where it comes from," said Raphael Begay. He explains the intent and projection of what artwork can be. However, the reality of it all can seep through cracks where a few may not understand the purpose of it. Within his first two stops in the Eastern Agency, Begay said that visitors who viewed the exhibit needed help understanding what was happening, which fascinated him. He said artists tend to hold space for their family teachings and stories, and it is up to them to embrace those values with their creativity. As June arrived in a time of return, homecoming, and migration, "Knowing that these ideas and stories and energies that's within this space will just



Visual storyteller Raphael Begay, originally from Tsé Náschł'ł, Ariz., stands inside the 1970 aluminum-bodied step-van where on display are photographs that he captured around his community in Tsé Náschł'ł.

'This is part of life'

All Rez, a traveling photography exhibition, hits the road on Diné Bikéyah

continue to grow," he added. "It is a reminder of the beauty, strength, and resilience that is within our backyard," Begay shared. "A reminder of the relationships that we have with our non-human relatives." Begay said the phrase "All REZ" connotes something being "less than" or "limited like being bound to the reservation. However, it could become its own aesthetic and perspective, which is worth celebrating. Like the image "Rez Dog," the dog shows teeth, snarls, its tail tucked between its legs, and its ribs show like shadow lines while hovering over a sheep's head after a butchering. A similar depiction of everyday life on Diné Bikéyah, where "rez" dogs have become the reality of Diné. "Seeing my photographs... I'm curious to see and hear how my people will think of themselves when viewing the work," Begay said.

For Begay, ideas turned into reality. The idea of a mobile art space traveling across Diné Bikéyah occurred in 2016, when the exact vehicle was here with E Fluribus Unum: Dinehtah, a mobile portrait studio and exhibition. This project visited Prewitt, Gallup, Poedłana, Window Rock, Chinle, Shiprock, and Farmington. The following year, the portraits were transformed into an exhibition at the Navajo Nation Museum. "At its core, ALL REZ is the act of returning home and celebrating the beauty," Begay continued. "It is an opportunity to remember, listen, and embody an intersection of Diné photography and oral history." Within the four sacred mountains and centered around kéyah, hooghán, k'é, and tını́, this multi-faceted project will continue to travel across New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah, stopping at a variety of Diné community gathering spaces. ALL REZ is a collaboration between Begay, Lillia McEnaney, Axle Contemporary, and the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology at the University of New Mexico. It is supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, with additional funding from the Alfonso Ortiz Center for Intercultural Studies at UNM.



A few photographs by visual storyteller Raphael Begay are displayed outside the Axle Contemporary 1970 aluminum-bodied step-van on June 14, during its third stop at the Navajo Nation Museum in Window Rock.

ALL REZ SCHEDULE:

- JUNE 21**
Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park, Monument Valley, Utah
8 A.M.-3 P.M.
- JUNE 22**
Shiprock Farmer's Market, Shiprock, New Mexico
8 A.M.-3 P.M.
- JUNE 29**
Farmer's Market/SITE Santa Fe, Santa Fe, New Mexico
8 A.M.-4 P.M.
- JUNE 30**
Museum of Indian Arts & Culture, Santa Fe, New Mexico
10 A.M.-4 P.M.



"Frozen" is one of many examples of surprising natural elements occurring when visual storyteller Raphael Begay captured a frozen mini waterfall in his community in Tsé Náschł'ł, Ariz., in 2018. To his surprise, a frozen waterfall in Arizona is not seen often.