



Home ▸ Local News ▸ Hobbs, Lovington to host state-wide mobile photo gallery

LOCAL NEWS

Hobbs, Lovington to host state-wide mobile photo gallery

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A mobile photo gallery showing the diversity of New Mexico makes its stop in Lea County and its artists are looking for participants.

In 2012, the Axle artist-collaborators, Jerry Wellman and Matthew Chase-Daniel, began a photographic portrait project, E Pluribus Unum. This ongoing biennial project enlivens and documents communities throughout the state, with a mobile photographic portrait studio built inside the vintage aluminum Axle vehicle. Previous iterations of this project took place in Santa Fe in 2012, in Albuquerque in 2014, and on the Navajo Nation in 2016.

On Oct. 4-6, the photo exhibit comes to Lea County. It has scheduled stops on Oct. 4 at the Lea County Museum, Bob's Supermarket and Dryland's Brewery; Oct. 5 in Hobbs at New Mexico Junior College and the CORE and Oct. 6 at Western Heritage Museum and a yet-to-be-determined restaurant.

Participation is free to all. Visitors are asked to bring a small object of personal significance, and enter the mobile studio and sit for a black and white photo portrait while holding the object. The objects brought are as diverse as the participants. Objects have included car keys, photos of loved ones on cellphones, artworks, tools, books, food, toys and vintage collectibles.

"Part of the idea for this ongoing project is we have done it every two years in a different place to create a portrait of all of New Mexico," Wellman said. "There is such diversity in the different areas. Two years ago we were in the Navajo Nation and then Albuquerque and Santa Fe before that. The whole southeastern part of the state is so very different. We really value that New Mexico has such very different regions and different cultures and different people. We're really excited to document it and create a project there."

Three copies of each portrait are immediately printed with the gallery's printer. One photo is given to the participant, another is pasted to the exterior of the vehicle, creating a mobile and growing exhibition throughout the span of the project. The third print will later be included in an exhibition in a regional museum or art center. At the close of the project, Axle Contemporary Press will publish a book containing all of the portraits, and one image on the cover blending all off the hundreds of portraits into one face, representing the entirety of the community of participants.

Chase-Daniel said this portion of the project is called "E Pluribus Unum 2018," which the first part was the motto of the United States when it was first created.

"E Pluribus Unum means 'From Many One,'" Chase-Daniel said. "So we think of that with New Mexico. We're a very diverse state and from that we are all New Mexicans in our diversity."

The southeast New Mexico tour has scheduled stops in Roswell, Alamogordo, Tularosa, Carrizozo, Ruidoso, Lincoln, Carlsbad, Artesia, Portales and Clovis, throughout most of October.

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