

# 'E Pluribus Unum'



Courtesy photo  
Matthew Chase-Daniel and Jerry Wellman, founders of Axle Contemporary, a mobile art studio and gallery, will bring their "E Pluribus Unum: Dinéshá" photography project to the area for 11 days, beginning Friday in Gallup.

## Mobile art studio headed to Gallup, Navajo

By Elizabeth Hardin-Burcola  
Independent correspondent

**G**ALLUP — A fun, participatory and communitywide art project is about to hit Gallup and the Navajo Nation, courtesy of a couple of innovative Santa Fe artists.

Matthew Chase-Daniel and Jerry Wellman, founders of Axle Contemporary, a mobile art studio and gallery, are bringing their "E Pluribus Unum: Dinéshá" photography project to the area for 11 days, beginning Friday in Gallup. The idea behind the project is to create a communitywide portrait by photographing a diverse sampling of people living in Dinéshá — the Navajo people's traditional homeland.

"It's really a place-based project," Chase-Daniel said in a phone interview Monday, explaining the project is open and free to people of all cultures and backgrounds.

One thing the artists are specifically looking for, however, are for participants to bring any small object of personal significance to hold in their portrait. Those objects can range from cellphones to family heirlooms, as well as a pet or a child.

For their first day in Gallup, Chase-Daniel and Wellman have selected the city's top destination for shopping, running errands and bumping into family and friends: Wal-Mart.

Other locations that will see the artists' custom retrofitted 1970 aluminum step van include the Gallup Flea Market, the Jim Harlin Community Party, the University of New Mexico-Gallup campus, Jerry's Café, Camille's Sidewalk Café, Coal Street Pub and the downtown ArtsCrawl.

On Monday, the artists will be shooting portraits at the Bi-County Fair in Prewitt, and on Wednesday they will move on to the Navajo Nation.

Chase-Daniel said he and Wellman intentionally chose "gathering places" in order to photograph residents of more rural and remote communities who are visiting town.

### 'Out of many, one'

This is the artists' third "E Pluribus Unum" project to document the people of New Mexico and the Southwest. The first two projects, in Santa Fe and Albuquerque, have been the subject of news stories and a New Mexico PBS "¡COLORES!" program.

"The idea is to promote experimentation in the arts, and maybe more importantly, it's to bring art to people who may not normally experience art," Wellman explained in the PBS video.

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### Photography Schedule

Below is the tentative photography schedule for the "E Pluribus Unum: Dinéshá" mobile art studio. Check the website of Axle Contemporary for updates.

- Friday, Sept. 2: Gallup Wal-Mart, all day.
- Saturday, Sept. 3: Gallup Flea Market, 9 a.m.-2 p.m.; Community Pantry, 2:30-4 p.m.; Jerry's Café, 5-8 p.m.
- Sunday, Sept. 4: Camille's Sidewalk Café, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.; Coal Street Pub, 6-9 p.m.
- Monday, Sept. 5: Bi-County Fair in Prewitt.
- Tuesday, Sept. 6: University of New Mexico-Gallup, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
- Wednesday, Sept. 7: Toadlena Trading Post, west of Newcomb, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
- Thursday, Sept. 8: Gorman Hall at Navajo Nation Fair in Window Rock, all day and evening.
- Friday, Sept. 9: Navajo Nation Fair, all day and evening.
- Saturday, Sept. 10: Navajo Nation Fair again, daytime; Gallup ArtsCrawl, 7-9 p.m.
- Sunday, Sept. 11: Chinle's Tséyí' Shopping Center, noon-5 p.m.
- Monday, Sept. 12: Shiprock, 10 a.m.-noon; Farmington's Orchard Park, 5-8 p.m.

Online: [www.axleart.com](http://www.axleart.com)

"E Pluribus Unum" is Latin for "out of many, one." It was adopted in 1782 as the motto for the Great Seal of the United States, and it is most commonly featured on the one dollar bill.

Chase-Daniel and Wellman said participants will be given a free copy of their portrait. A second copy will be glued to the exterior of the artists' mobile studio with wheat paste, and a third copy will become part of an art exhibit at the Navajo Nation Museum in 2017. Participants will also be invited to write reflections on the phrase "e pluribus unum," if they would like to do so.

In addition to the "Dinéshá" art exhibit, which may also come to Gallup, Chase-Daniel and Wellman will publish a book featuring the entire collection of photographs, as well as participants' written reflections. The book's cover image will feature a singular image created by blending the hundreds of individual portraits.

Copies of the book will be distributed for free to all participants and local libraries. Additional copies will also be available for sale.

Chase-Daniel and Wellman said they are looking forward to seeing what types of objects local people choose to include in their "E Pluribus Unum: Dinéshá" portraits.

"It has been amazing the different kinds of items we've seen," Wellman said of the Santa Fe and Albuquerque projects.

In one powerful experience, he explained, a person chose to be photographed with a cookie tin filled with the ashes of a friend.

But even if participants don't bring a special object with them, Chase-Daniel added, people often carry everyday items that have strong personal significance. In 50 to 100 years, he said, those everyday items will be of interest.

"They're going to be very interesting and indicative of this time and place," he said.