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Arts



Rez on the Road

Diné photographer Rapheal Begay takes his photos home

Expand



Though Santa Fe isn't an official story-gathering spot for the All Rez project, photog Rapheal Begay will exhibit through mobile art space Axle Contemporary at numerous local locations in late June. (Rapheal Begay)

By Alex De Vore

May 29, 2024 at 12:00 am MDT

"I don't create with the intent of exhibiting the work," Diné photographer Rapheal Begay tells SFR. "I create as an extension of my being, and from my own



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Morning Word

President Biden Approves NM Disaster Declaration

By Julia Goldberg • June 21, 2024 at 6:43 am MDT

understanding and values as an artist based on the rez.”

Indeed, Begay, who hails from Window Rock, Arizona, has only exhibited his photography, most of it shot across the Navajo Nation, in a small handful of shows dating back to his first solo outing in 2021, A Vernacular Response, at Albuquerque’s Maxwell Museum of Anthropology.

Last year, he upped the ante as a co-curator and exhibitor at the Museum of Indian Arts & Culture show [Horizons: Weaving Between the Lines with Diné Textiles](#). This year, with a \$36,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, he’ll embark upon his biggest project to date: All Rez, a multi-stop photographic exhibit and story gathering project initiated with help from the Axle Contemporary mobile art space and museum anthropologist and independent curator Lillia McEnaney.

“It’s an opportunity to take photographs outside the museum walls and into reservation community gathering spaces,” Begay continues, “and to make it accessible on Diné Bikéyah; the Navajo Nation.”

The All Rez premise is ultimately simple, though powerful: Begay, along with McEnaney and Axle’s Jerry Wellman and Matthew Chase-Daniel, will take the Axle truck to various locations throughout the Navajo Nation, such as Tsé Bii’ Ndzisgaili (Monument Valley), Tséyi’ (Canyon de Chelly), Naat’aanii Neez (Shiprock), Tségháhoodzáni (Window Rock) and

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Plane
Tickets



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“Stakes
Could
Not Be
Higher
for
Women”



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others. At each locale, Begay will show 21 photos, including some wheat-pasted to the truck exterior, as well as on moveable A-frame mounts—think of it like an outdoor gallery. The interior of the truck, Begay explains, will be transformed into an approximation of a traditional Diné hogan, in which he hopes to meet and converse one-on-one with Indigenous locals from various areas in an effort to gather stories. With consent, those stories will be recorded and collected for inclusion in an archive destined for the project website, allrez.net. They could find a future home in museums or other institutions, though Begay isn't sure which ones just yet. For now, he says, he's mostly focused on gathering the stories.

"A lot of the context we landed on was with the Diné people in mind," he says. "I want my people to realize they're acknowledged, seen, being celebrated and welcomed."

If All Rez sounds novel, that's because it is. Certainly there is no shortage of photographic anthropological and artistic work featuring Indigenous peoples and cultures, though documentation was often conducted by non-Natives and rarely, if ever, had a facet like Begay's story gathering. The Maxwell's current exhibit, [*Nothing Left for Me: Federal Policy and the Photography of Milton Snow in Diné Bikéyah*](#), for example, showcases a human element to a period in the 1930s when the US Government forced livestock restrictions and other impactful actions

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upon Diné people. And though photographer Snow's work is captivating, he was ultimately an outsider.

Similarly, Axle Contemporary's multi-year [*E Pluribus Unum*](#) photo project found Wellman and Chase-Daniel taking portraits on the Navajo Nation in 2016. Chase-Daniel says they were welcomed with "open arms," though both he and Wellman were well aware they were visitors. Further, he adds, the state of Indigenous anthropology and exhibition has rapidly changed over time, and it has practically become a moral obligation for non-Native curators working with Indigenous arts and artifacts to assume support roles. All Rez, Chase-Daniel notes, is Begay's show.

"One hundred years ago and up until not that long ago, anthropology was about going out to cultures different than our dominant white culture and learning and documenting with photography and film and writing and interviews, and this was always outsiders looking in," Chase-Daniel says. "Alfonso Ortiz—he was a professor at [the University of New Mexico] and from Ohkay Owingeh, though he has passed on—was someone who did it differently, and even he faced criticism because some people felt like he exposed cultural things that should have stayed secret; and certainly old-fashioned white cultural anthropologists had done the same; but that's not what Rapheal is doing. He's a visual storyteller."



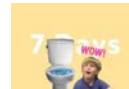
The Fork: Caesar salads from hither and thither



"The Watchers" Review



Bonus Features: June 19, 2024



7 Days: June 19, 2024



Eavesdropper: June 19, 2024



Claytoonz



The Fork: We got Casa Bonita for lunch—now what!?

TODAY'S EVENT

Today

Art Openin

Amidst Cries from the Rubble: Art of Loss and Resilience from Ukraine
Museum of International Folk Art

Santa Fe Society of Artists

Art Fair

8:00 am

Chase-Daniel points out an interesting element to Begay's work: There are never people in his current slate of photographs. Instead, they contain images of looms; roadside signage; a parade float tethered to the back of a pickup; a snarling rez dog; grazing sheep milling about a corral.

"With respect to visual sovereignty and self-determination, I believe the community members have the right and capability to define themselves," Begay says. "Diné relatives have been subjugated and defined through the lens, and I want to offer a different point of view. You cannot say there's not a human presence—the cultural landscapes reference lived experience and intergenerational placemaking; more importantly, by excluding the physical, the individual, it allows the viewer to occupy the and enter the space to reflect on their own relationship to the Southwest."

For McEnaney, who also co-curated the Milton Snow exhibition with Diné UNM professor and American Studies Chair Jennifer Nez Denetdale, All Rez signifies an evolutionary step for the world of institutional arts and exhibitions.


"This project is one of the most exciting things I've ever heard about, let alone worked on," she says, "We're really thinking about it as the future of Indigenous-centered museum practice and working against the legacy of settler colonial violence that museums continue to activate and perpetuate. The

 Santa Fe Society of Artists

El Mercado de El Museo

Cultural

9:00 am

 El Museo Cultural de Santa Fe

Railyard Artisan Market

9:00 am

 Farmers' Market Pavilion

Chess at the Mall

9:00 am

 DeVargas Center

Family Portraits at Vlade

Contemporary

10:00 am

 NM Museum of Art Vladem Contemporary

Pat Malone Trio

10:30 am

 Bishop's Lodge

days of old practices are leaving us so we can focus on Indigenous artists and scholars and community members. Still, in my role as a non-Native, I'm really seeing myself as a facilitator doing the nitty-gritty work that brings Rapheal's vision to life."

Begay, meanwhile, says he's grateful to McEnaney and Axle for the support, and he's ready to begin the All Rez journey with a kickoff event at the Maxwell on Saturday, June 1.

"It's the anniversary of the signing of the 1868 treaty between the Navajo and the US government that allowed my people to return home from Bosque Redondo," he says. "Summer on the rez is a time we celebrate. There's a lot of movement and migration; there's the movement of ideas."

All Rez Kickoff Celebration: 4-7 pm Saturday, June 1. Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, 500 University Blvd. NE, Albuquerque, (505) 277-4405



Alex De Vore

SFR Culture Editor Alex De Vore has written about the Santa Fe culture scene for over a decade and won awards for doing so. He's pretty tired of Americana and still hopes new punk bands might happen.



Letters to the Editor

Mail letters to PO Box 4910 Santa Fe, NM 87502 or email them to



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