

Museum exhibit features Diné portraits

BY TERRY BOWMAN
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WINDOW ROCK — A new art exhibit at the Navajo Nation Museum is unique and depicts a modern representation Diné culture.

The exhibit “E Pluribus Unum: Dinéah” will be displayed at the Navajo Nation Museum from July 12 to January 2018. The opening reception was on July 12.

Santa Fe, New Mexico, artists Jerry Wellman and Matthew Chase-Daniel are the creators of the show. The project that required them to travel the great Navajo Nation in their Axle Contemporary mobile art gallery and shoot over 800 black-and-white studio portraits of anyone willing to stand in front of a camera for free.

“We have 810 portraits altogether,” said Chase-Daniel in the gallery of the Navajo Museum.

The artists travelled around the Navajo Nation for two weeks and set up in 15 different locations, including Gallup, Toadlena, Chinle, Farmington and a stint at the 70th Navajo Nation Fair in Window Rock.

The gallery walls are filled with black-and-white portraits of a vast amount of individuals, like a collection of old photographs and headshots.

Each was allowed to bring with them one object that had meaning for the participant or something they wanted to share.

“People brought up these

unique items that mean a lot to them, some even brought portraits of people they knew,” said Wellman.

From amateur photographers holding cameras, to skateboarders holding boards to couples holding one another, each portrait was unique.

Some participants posed in their cowboy hats, veterans held military memorabilia, food lovers held fry bread and children held candy and toys.

The artists hope the exhibit will turn into a time capsule, depicting images of the U.S. and Navajo Nation in the early 21st Century.

“They’re holding objects, time objects as modern objects disappear after a certain amount of time,” said Wellman.

Each participant received a copy of their portrait after they were developed on the spot.

In the middle of the gallery, a lone portrait reveals a face and blurry clothing. But when you get closer, you realize the portrait is every single 810 portraits combined into one.

“It is a blended photo of everyone we photographed here on the Navajo Nation,” said Wellman.

The exhibit also features a life-size portrait of the mobile gallery, to show the viewer the size of the studio itself.

Wellman and Chase-Daniel set up their mobile art gallery at the Ch’ihootso Indian Market during the 70th Navajo Nation Fair and asked people to sit in front of their camera.

“E Pluribus Unum” is Latin for “out of many, one,” the motto for the U.S. During the



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Photographers Matthew Chase-Daniels, left, and Jerry Wellman, pose for a photograph alongside their “Moving Pictures” exhibit at the Navajo Nation Museum in Window Rock. Their exhibit depicts hundreds of portraits of Navajo people from their mobile studio-gallery beginning in September of last year.

70th Annual Navajo Nation Fair, the motto was “Let’s come together as one; through K’e we are strong,” an inspiration to the artists as they took photos of each Diné citizen.

“We thought that was a great coincidence,” said Chase-Daniel.

This is the second installment of “E Pluribus Unum.” The first installment featured portraits from people in Santa Fe and Albuquerque.

The artists hope to start their third installment later this year in southern New Mexico in places like Hobbs, Alamogordo and Clovis.

“E Pluribus Unum: Dinéah” will move to the University of New Mexico museum in Albuquerque after its finishes its run at the Navajo Nation Museum.

Chase-Daniel and Wellman both own the Axle Contemporary mobile studio in Santa Fe.

The artists also published a book containing all portraits taken on the Navajo Nation, an essay from the artists, an essay from Navajo Nation Museum Director Manuelito Wheeler and a poem from Diné poet Laureate Laura Tohe.

The book is available to purchase at Axle Contemporary in Santa Fe, the Navajo Nation Museum in Window Rock, Art123 Gallery in Gallup and online.