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Art exhibit goes mobile in Santa Fe

By Olivia Harlow | oharlow@sfnewmexican.com Nov 12, 2018 Updated 6 hrs ago



Michael Falasco, a photography director from Brooklyn who lives in Taos, photographs Axle Contemporary’s mobile art spac project E Pluribus Unum on Monday. There are 960 portraits pasted onto the vehicle on display through Wednesday in front Shake Foundation in Santa Fe. Photos by Gabriela Campos/The New Mexican

You may have seen the 1970 aluminum step van parked around Santa Fe, where it serves as a mobile art space.

Currently, hundreds of black-and-white portraits adorn the truck parked outside the Shake Foundation restaurant on upper Cerrillos Road.

The photos show faces, young and old, of people from southeastern New Mexico, clinging to objects that possess meaning in their lives.

Matthew Chase-Daniel, co-photographer for the project and co-founder of Axle Contemporary — the sort of gallery/studio-on-wheels responsible for showcasing this project, as well as other creative projects by various Santa Fe artists — says of the exhibit, “It’s just a sense of beauty of the diversity of individuals and humanity.”

This particular project — the fourth in a New Mexico-based portrait series — is titled E Pluribus Unum, the national motto that appears on U.S. currency and means “From Many, One” in Latin.

Faces that adorn the bus vary from enthusiastic smiles to expressions of brokenness and defeat. Items held by the subjects range from something as simple as car keys or a cellphone, to ashes of a loved one, handwritten letters, dogs or vintage collectibles.

“There’s meaning in our identity and the objects that people have in their lives,” said Chase-Daniel, adding that each photo is shot in the van’s studio, printed via its solar-powered printer and pasted to the exterior.

Locations in the project include Roswell, Hobbs, Alamogordo, Carlsbad, Portales and Clovis — places Chase-Daniel and his partner, Jerry Wellman, decided to explore.

These places, aren’t “quite as mountainous, not quite as hip and cool as Santa Fe,” said Chase-Daniel. “Going in as an outsider, you don’t have an easy way to connect.”

Traveling with a mobile art space, however, opens doors, he said. The first such project, in 2012, featured faces from around Santa Fe.

The second was in Albuquerque and the third was shot on various Navajo reservation sites, he said.

For E Pluribus Unum, the photographers started their travels in early October and finished shooting on Oct. 23. About a week ago, they put the van on display at Shake Foundation, where it has stayed put due to engine troubles, but is expected to move out Wednesday, at which time photos will be removed and replaced.

When each portrait is made, the photographers immediately produce three prints. One is given to the participant, another is glued to the van, and the third is kept for a later exhibition. Chase-Daniels expects to showcase images from this particular project at the Roswell Museum & Art Center sometime next year.

In the interim, Chase-Daniels and Wellman will work on a collage to use on the cover of a book of portraits they intend to publish.

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