

## About faces: Axle Contemporary's mobile exhibition will roam Santa Fe through mid-November

By Kathaleen Roberts / Assistant Arts Editor Nov 3, 2024

This fall, Axle Contemporary's mobile art space wound down state roads, highways and unknown paths to photograph people in south-central and southwest New Mexico.

Located inside a retrofitted 1970 aluminum bread truck, this exhibition space on wheels rode in search of plazas, schools, roadsides and festivals to capture the human essence of communities in Las Cruces, Deming, Lordsburg, Columbus, Silver City, Truth or Consequences, Hatch, Socorro, Magdalena, Belen, Pie Town, Zuni, Pine Hill, Acoma and Grants for "E Pluribus Unum: Mogollon."



Three women in Las Cruces hold portraits from "E Pluribus Unum: Mogollon."  
Courtesy of Axle Contemporary



Three participants in "E Pluribus Unum: Mogollon" show their portraits.  
Courtesy of Axle Contemporary



Jerry Wellman and two participants in "E Pluribus Unum: Mogollon."  
Courtesy of Axle Contemporary



Jerry Wellman photographs subjects in Axle Contemporary's photo studio.

*Courtesy of Axle Contemporary*

The journey repeated a voyage begun in Santa Fe in 2012 and in Albuquerque in 2014.

“We thought we would make this project all over New Mexico,” said co-curator Matthew Chase-Daniel. “In each one, we’ve been publishing books with the portraits and essays.”

Each town’s library receives a copy of the book.

Chase-Daniel and his partner Jerry Wellman contacted each city in advance, including local arts organizations and people they knew from their many travels.

The pair set up a photo studio in the vehicle, complete with a tripod.

“People sit on a stool in front of a plain white backdrop,” Chase-Daniel said. “The camera is hooked up to a laptop and a printer.

“We don’t usually ask,” Chase-Daniel continued. “A lot of people are coming by because they know about it.”

The pair requires each subject to bring something meaningful to them. Those objects have ranged from the ashes of loved ones to dogs, cats, goats, geese and babies, as well as car keys and water bottles.

“They just add an element to the place and time,” Chase-Daniel said. “Holding something in a photo offers distraction from the photo studio. They’re more into the object and it relaxes the experience.”

Each subject leaves with their portrait; a second attaches to the truck.



The truck recently visited the Hatch Chile Festival and Pie Town, where those objects included pies and chile.

The roving exhibition will drive around Santa Fe through mid-November. See the website [axleart.com](http://axleart.com) for the latest location.

In the end, Chase-Daniel blends the portraits into a single image.

“There’s a lot of division and perceived division politically and socially in the United States these days,” he said. “And New Mexico is a pretty diverse place with different ideas, cultures and histories, but it has been a pretty tolerant place. We wanted to explore that from Indigenous communities to oil drilling communities.”

By now, Axle has compiled about 5,000 photographs, each temporarily glued to the outside of the vehicle.

In 2025, the portraits will be gathered into a book and presented in a museum exhibition at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces. The New Mexico Museum of Art in Santa Fe houses the archives.

A girl's portrait from “E Pluribus Unum: Mogollon.”  
Courtesy of Axle Contemporary