

# HISTORIC SANTA FE

The Historic Santa Fe Foundation Monthly Journal MARCH 2019





Image above, New Mexico School for the Arts Junior NMSA Visual Arts class. Their exhibition *Decomposition* is currently on display at HSFF's El Zaguán through March 29, 2019.

## Inside Historic Santa Fe

Our mission is to preserve, protect, and promote the historic properties and diverse cultural heritage of the Santa Fe area, and to educate the public about Santa Fe's history and the importance of preservation.

HSFF publishes one eZine per month with content that provides our audience with a look at what is happening at the Foundation, and beyond in the world of New Mexico and Santa Fe history, archaeology, and the arts, among other topics relevant to our readers.

We are still working away on the Master Plan for El Zaguán. We are discussing the future uses of the building, the archives, the garden and grounds, and the institutional knowledge of staff, Board and volunteers. We will share updates on this planning and other HSFF programs and events including Salons, exhibitions, and tours with you in our eZines, emails, website and printed newsletters. Make sure to sign up for our newsletter on our website. Sign up for MEMBERSHIP online at [historicsantafe.org/join-give](https://historicsantafe.org/join-give) or call us at 505-983-2567 to find out about member rates and benefits. Thanks for your continued support.

In this issue, we publish a book review by Pete Warzel of Frank Graziano's *Historic Churches of New Mexico Today* and New Mexico School for the Arts Visual Arts Instructor Tom Miller talks about the exhibition currently on display at El Zaguán that was conceived, installed and marketed by the school's Junior Conceptual Concerns. Please enjoy.

Find out about our events at [historicsantafe.org/events](https://historicsantafe.org/events)

Cover image by Bella Palmer, Untitled video still, 2018.  
Her film is on view as part of the exhibition *Decomposition* at HSFF's El Zaguán through March 29, 2019

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# BOOK REVIEW

## *Historic Churches of New Mexico Today*

By Frank Graziano

Reviewed by Pete Warzel

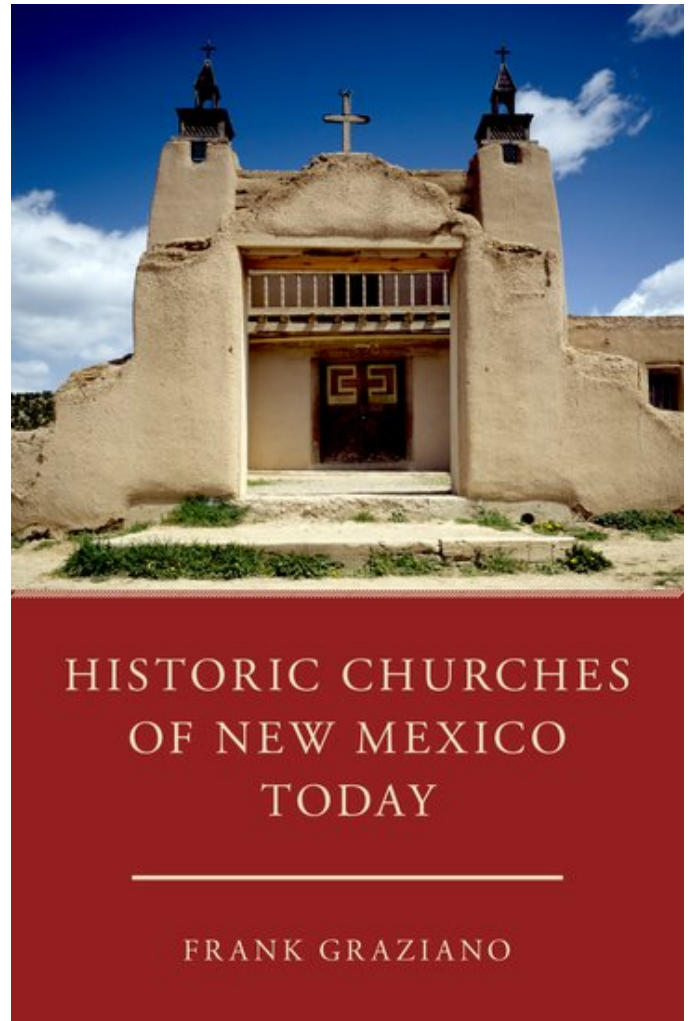
Doctor Graziano begins his most recent book with an arresting dedication – “In memory of truth. 2017.” Juxtaposition of his judgment of the socio-political atmosphere in the United States today and the complex statements of faith and tradition in the communities centered by the historic churches of New Mexico is profound.

In the spirit of what is left of truthfulness, here is full disclosure: Frank Graziano has become a friend of the Historic Santa Fe Foundation. Introduced to me by Michael Brown, President of School for Advanced Research (SAR), who trucked me up to Chamisal, NM for a fine lunch at Frank’s home, we have since worked together on projects, he delivered a wonderful lecture on this book when it was a work-in-progress at one of our Salon talks in 2018, and we will hold a book launch for this newly published work on May 21, 2019, at El Zaguán.

None of that plays into the review that follows. This book stands rightly on its own.

Frank Graziano has written a very readable yet literary, ethnography of the elegant historic churches of New Mexico as they are used, cared for, and integrated into their immediate communities today. It is based on extensive scholarship and research into the long histories of these buildings in context of place. But the scholarship is not in your face, rather his field-work conducting interviews in pueblos and villages takes center place, so people eclipse the buildings themselves and become the progression of the history of these elegant spaces.

Graziano also carefully places himself in the narrative, giving the tone of the work a more personal shading. His voice is humble and inquisitive. “I’m not sure why I’m here.” So, begins the first chapter, *Santuario de Chimayó*,



a fitting start as this chapel is the perhaps the most renowned of the churches in New Mexico. For better or worse, tourists visit in droves and the faithful come on various pilgrimages every year to access the holy dirt for cures – physical, dependencies, psychological, infertility – every imaginable sense of unfitness. He gives the history of the chapel, an overview of related religious art in the Americas, as well of dirt-related healings in Mexico. Yet the impact of the chapel itself, its small interior crammed with magnificent *santero* art, is one that he terms “cultural consonance” defined as a sense of everyday familiarity in a place made of dirt and wood, adobe and vigas, the same materials used in the homes of Chimayó. Separate from that sense of community is the grim dichotomy of drug crime and faith, and Graziano does not shy away from the horrible disconnect. He is after the truth in the communities he studies in these pages.

Leaving Chimayó he lays the groundwork for Cordova, Truchas, Trampas (the magnificent San José de Gracia), Picuris, on the way to Rancho de Taos via the High Road, and then speaks to the inhabitants who maintain and





© Frank Graziano. Santuario de Chimayo, Chimayo, NM

utilize their churches in real time. South then to Laguna Pueblo and San José, the Saint Joseph Mission Church, where he discusses with tribal members the parallel acceptance and existence of their ancient religion with Catholicism, emphasized by an Eagle Dance within the church, emptied of pews, on Christmas Eve. “Catholicism was thus integrated into Pueblo culture on its own terms, modifying but not displacing core native values and traditions.” At Acoma and its massive San Esteban del Rey church, the co-existence or co-mingling of pueblo beliefs and Catholicism takes a slightly divergent approach, as the Spanish religion was imposed by brutal conquest, not by request as at Laguna. Graziano notes that the church “is as integral to native traditions – or more so – than it is to the Catholicism of its origins.”

So, you begin to see and understand the variations of faith and incorporation of European religion at the

different pueblos and Hispanic mountain communities. There is a wide range of definition such as at Picuris, where Catholicism has always been resisted but the church, San Lorenzo, is so very important to the Pueblo community as its own history – building v. religion differentiated. Or at Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria in Doña Ana where the decaying church building became a workshop for at risk youth, teaching skills, paying them, and rebuilding the important center of community and lives.

On the Mescalero Apache Reservation, the church becomes something else. This building is made of rock, not the adobes of Northern New Mexico. The architecture is stunning, the space cathedral-like, but on the wall behind the altar in the sanctuary is the real statement of religious life in this community. The Apache Christ is an eight-foot tall icon that acts as altar screen at





St. Joseph Apache Mission church, and is a visual confirmation by its painter, Robert Lentz, that, as he states, “people could be Apache and Catholic, and both completely.” The church proper, built in the 1920s and 30s, fell into disrepair over time and is under ongoing continual rehabilitation that Graziano emphasizes is an “idea of historic restoration as self-restoration,” meaning the people involved in the hands-on work accomplish much more than stabilizing the walls of a building. Perhaps they stabilize themselves and refresh a sense of community in the process.

The concept of *Querencia* appears late in the book, in the section on San Francisco de Assis in Golden, New Mexico. Yet, it is the true center of this writing, the concept that “a form of place attachment is a cumulative bonding process.” *Querencia* is a wonderful Spanish word, almost indefinable precisely, yet overall a perfect etymology of place, and all the connotations of sense of place. I first learned this word in conjunction with the bullfight and the bull’s innate retreat to a specific place in the ring where it feels safe. People too return to the mountain villages, the pueblos, to the churches and rituals that anchor them safely in time – *querencia*.

In the end, the joining of historical research and interviews in the present makes for a balance that is the true nature of these enduring churches. In the pueblos and the mountain villages of Northern New Mexico the past is always present, informing and shading the now, and most certainly the future. Frank Graziano has done the fieldwork and delivered a finely written book about the lifeblood of these historic properties we normally only see from the roadside and view as in the past. The overall sense is that the past traditions, rituals, and beliefs, are so real and current today. The sense of place and the role of these buildings in the community remain central to cultural identity. It is both a joyful, and at times, disheartening book, just as the histories of these villages and pueblos have also been, for a very long time.

**Note:** Although the book is a serious ethnology, it also functions as a guide book to the incredible churches. Graziano gives directions and instructions on access. The reader could make many informative trips, book in hand, and learn something valuable in the process.

*Historic Churches of New Mexico Today*

By Frank Graziano

Oxford University Press

Paperback, 341 pages

\$35.00

**Publication Date 4.1.2019**



All photos this page © Frank Graziano.  
Captions from top left, clockwise: La Cueva, Moquino, St. Patrick.

# EL ZAGUÁN AS CLASSROOM

Tom Miller, Visual Arts Instructor at NMSA



New Mexico School for the Arts' Junior NMSA Visual Arts class installs the exhibition *Decomposition* at Historic Santa Fe Foundation in March 2019. In this piece, instructor Tom Miller discusses the process involved in this exhibition and demonstrates how the development and execution of an exhibition prepares students for more than a career in the arts. *Decomposition* is on display at HSFF's El Zaguán through March 29, 2019.

On January, 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019 the Junior Conceptual Concerns class began the process of putting on a class exhibition at Historic Santa Foundation's El Zaguán gallery space on Canyon Road. The Junior exhibition titled *Decomposition* opened Friday, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019.

The Junior NMSA Visual Arts class was given the opportunity to work with the HSFF at El Zaguán. The process of shaping the exhibition was set into motion immediately after winter break. Prior to our first visit to the gallery, we began discussing the essential details of the exhibition; things like theme, title, and installation. Our discussion covered previous exhibitions that we have participated in and those that we have visited. For the exhibition theme, we wanted something that was open for exploration and something that could support multiple meanings and approaches. The class decided

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against having a specific medium, size, or subject matter to work in. We recognized the short time frame that we were working within and the need to fill the space without overfilling it. Junior Conceptual Concerns marks a shift from specifically assigned projects that make up the beginning of the NMSA Visual Art curriculum to a more open and self-driven direction.

Our class made an initial site visit where we discussed what was possible and what was acceptable in the space. We were able to react to the exhibition that was currently hanging in the gallery and gain information about what we might be able to do in the gallery. Our beginning approach was that we could do anything in the gallery and that we would begin to compromise once we were in the space and able to speak with Melanie McWhorter HSFF's development coordinator and Mara Saxer HSFF's preservation specialist and preparator. In our conversation with Mara, we were able to question her about how to install work onto the walls and from the ceiling. The dialogue we shared served to illuminate what was possible to do and what had previously been done in the gallery. Our discussion included the use of the table, power supplies, and pedestals in the space, which is regularly used for meetings and presentations. As a result of our conversation with Mara, we were able to gain the trust and freedom to design and install the exhibition as a class.

Back in the studio at NMSA, we began making adjustments to our thoughts about the exhibition. Now that we knew the limitations of the space we could begin



planning the work that would comprise the show. Our first task was to tackle the name or theme. *Decomposition* was picked from words and ideas generated by the students. We used an open process of voting, conversing, and elimination until the final title was decided on. *Decomposition* is defined as the process of rotting or breaking down into pieces. We also discussed how decomposition could relate to the familiar formal art term, composition. This broad definition gave the class enough room to both frame the idea and locate their individual point-of-view. The next step was to take over the poster design. Each student designed a poster to represent the exhibition. After a short voting period Eli Smith's poster design was selected and modified.

Each artist developed a working plan through sketches, plans, experimentation and drawing. Quinn Jonas' trash landscape embodied decomposition through a tied, knotted, broken down, and rotted "quilt" of found materials. After she had completed multiple preparatory drawings, the materials were located on and around the Cathedral school property. Veronica Toledo's oil painting and clay fish sculpture represent a metaphorical analysis of the decomposition of the physical versus the persistence of the mind/soul. "Davis", depicted in five paintings by Avis Kerns, is a series of acrylic paintings that Kerns calls an alter ego focusing on the artist's flawed self. Each image is broken down into highlighted blemishes as a response to the theme. These artworks along with others represent a broad selection of media installed.

Three days before the opening of *Decomposition* the class reconvened at El Zaguán to install the exhibition. In preparation for the installation the artists were required to make mounts, prepare pedestals, add hanging wires, and otherwise prepare their artwork for an efficient and thoughtful presentation. Eli Smith and Max Grabowsky built metal mounts to display Smith's felted teeth "Cavity" and Grabowsky's multimedia sound and photo work "Orang". Video artists Bella Palmer and Sean Montoya prepared monitors with looping videos and surrounded them with related ephemera. The process required student leadership and collaboration.

The planning and execution of *Decomposition* at El Zaguán took place over about five weeks. The collaboration with the Historic Santa Fe Foundation is a great example of project-based learning. *Decomposition* will allow the Junior Visual Art students, soon to be the Senior Visual Arts class of 2020 to walk into their Senior year with a vision of how to collaborate on their Senior

thesis exhibition. This vision includes noting successes, things to improve, challenges, and skills gained that relate to both collective and personal production. This experience has provided these students with tools and skills to be further developed and reinforced in order to present a challenging, thought provoking and forward thinking Senior Thesis Exhibition together.



© Lavina Sage Gray, *abhorrence*, charcoal, india ink, and acrylic paint, 53"x46"



© Andrea Bruno, *Happy Camper*, 2019, comic panel





© Frank Graziano. San Antonio, Chimayo, NM

## HSFF MISSION

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