



Seventy-Two Square Inches of Public Art

BY CYNTHIA BAUGHMAN

In this issue we celebrate the contributions of women to the West, the brief and brilliant career of painter and potter Tony Da, New Mexico artists who became soldiers, and, as Katherine Ware puts it, artists' "insistence on maintaining the role of beauty and hope in our lives." In conjunction with the exhibition Ware curated for the New Mexico Museum of Art, *Earth Now: American Landscape Photographers and the Environment*, we asked longtime *El Palacio* contributor Jack Loeffler to write about the history of environmentalism in New Mexico, and he gave us a passionate account of his years in the movement. Jack Loeffler sometimes seems to us the Zelig of New Mexico—the character who turns up everywhere and seems to have a connection with everyone (we hope someday to persuade him to recount how the oeuvre of this issue's "Framework" photographer, Edward S. Curtis, once passed through his hands—a tale that is curiously related to the one he tells here). We expect that some readers will cheer Loeffler and his buddies and some will decry them—whatever your mood and your views, we are always happy to hear from you.

And whether you are optimistic or pessimistic about our environment, we hope that you can picture a barn (the last barn in a barren land or one of many in a verdant valley) standing a hundred years from now, with a license plate nailed to its wall. The plate might be dented and rusted but the turquoise hue still shines through and you can make out a red and yellow Zia sun sign, and the phrase "Centennial 1912–2012." The Automobile License Plate Collector's Association (ALPCA, Inc.) has recently deemed New Mexico's Centennial plate the best in the nation, and it was designed right here, by *El Palacio* Creative Director David Rohr. We are busting with pride.

El Palacio's designers work for the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs on exhibitions, advertisements, brochures,

billboards, and all the many graphic needs of the state museums and monuments. Sometime in late 2009, Rohr was tasked with designing a license plate for the upcoming Centennial. David is not only a multimedia designer and videographer, he is also pursuing a graduate degree in history at the University of New Mexico, and his interest in history goes back to his childhood in Wichita when he was intrigued by books of historical photographs of his city, and pondered the changes from past to present. His recent projects include the touch screen interactive Railroad History of New Mexico on the Van of Enchantment, and updates to the Lincoln State Monument exhibitions (he will write about Lincoln in a forthcoming issue). And so, with an historian's eye as well as a designer's,



David studied past license plates, and honed his design to capture some of the blocky, retro feel of the early ones. The president of the ALPCA praised the "simple but elegant design" that makes the plate "stand out on the roadways as both a proud symbol of New Mexico's heritage and an easily recognizable

plate across the state and across the nation." Now, as David's seventy-two-square-inch piece of public art travels in triumph across the roadways, we are crafting our Centennial issue, coming in Spring 2012. We are reading fascinating essays and on the hunt for photographs of some intriguing people and moments that we are sure someone must have photographed—the pictures have to be stashed away somewhere. We look forward to bringing you stories of famous, obscure, and forgotten New Mexicans who contributed to the transition from territory to state, and to the complex character and cultural richness of the state we love. ■

Cynthia Baughman can be reached at cynthia.baughman@state.nm.us, 505-476-1146, or P.O. Box 2087, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87504-2087.

We welcome your comments and queries.