

Collectors' Collections

BY DANIEL KOSHAREK



Ray Belcher, *Church, Steeple*, undated. Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), HP.2015.67.

There are people in the world we call collectors, and if not for them most of our museums and cultural institutions would be empty. It is through their foresight and largesse that we have the incredible richness of art lining the walls of our museums, and artifacts on the shelves of our archives and libraries. Collectors, essentially curators and creators who assemble bodies of work on their particular interests, often see the value of artwork, documents, photographs, and other material long before the rest of us do. This innate ability enables them to anticipate a work's future role in telling a story or illustrating an art form.

Such was the case with Santa Fe artist and photographer Barbara Erdman, who passed away in 2007; her photograph collection came to the Palace of the Governors Photo Archives in 2015. Viewing the collection the first time was a kid-in-the-candy-store experience. Shelves of framed photographs were presented; we could take any and all that we wanted from the impressive collection of work, which Erdman began buying in the 1970s. Living an exuberant career herself as a self-

proclaimed abstract expressionist, Erdman was a well-traveled sculptor, painter, printmaker, and photographer who possessed a fine eye for fine art. Over the years she assembled a virtual who's who of contemporary New Mexico photographers.

One of the well-represented artists in the collection is Ray Belcher; his *Church, Steeple* is a stunning example. Majestic landscapes and Zen-like cloud formations of New Mexico are a hallmark of Belcher's photography. This image reveals his profound sensitivity to the natural world and how we impact it. It constitutes a rich metaphor about the ability of human perception to create and not just reflect that world. This image, alongside others by Kevin Bubriski, Herb Lotz, Lisa Law, David Scheinbaum, Rolf Koppel, and Walter Chappell, demonstrates the expansive range of images Erdman collected. ■

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