

## Verses to an Institution

New Mexico poets share odes to the New Mexico Museum of Art on the occasion of its centennial.

### WHAT'S NOT LOST

Something happens  
when there is an absence of foundation  
there is a direction chosen  
where heart, intent, and desire, meet  
    intuition—where  
preservation meets development  
meets community  
to set a precedent  
for instances in which the likes of  
    MOMA follow suit.

Architecture and ancient character  
conversing as if they're  
of two different tongues  
but translation isn't lost altogether—  
    instead a romantic erosion  
set in motion  
a revival that was  
and remains  
inherently difficult.

Yet performed with grace  
and put in place  
as Santa Fe Style,  
Where seven sings of luck  
like ceremony  
like the planting of a seed  
for means of interpretation  
an authentic invitation  
to the American avant-garde

What was once considered  
to be hopeless and backwards in ways  
saw a change —

a shift in the foundations  
a brown and round revival  
one that danced toward an identity  
worthy of development  
deserving of preservation.  
Development of value  
preservation of meaning  
and the sustained promise  
of authentic existence

abound—within these rounded  
walls,  
in these echoed halls  
with floors that ache  
to speak—oh the stories they've heard.

of creation  
expansion  
collision  
dialogue and growth.

musings of inclusion  
a unique revelation  
a gift in the desert.

One of sand and mud  
earth and sky  
and everything in between  
the in between,  
it's where we find ourselves,  
now.

As cultures have clashed, coalesced  
coalesced, clashed

Erosion, a term not quite  
fitting, unless we aim  
to find the beauty in what is lost,  
the treasure that is story,  
that is song,  
that is memory until memories are gone.

and so here,  
striking are the instances  
of remembering—  
where we came from  
who we are  
where we're going.

100 years removed from this place in time  
what might we find at this particular site  
what will have beautifully eroded  
into a quest for something more  
to be questioned  
to be brought about in the idea of  
beauty, of belonging,  
of story and legacy.

And where is that  
Santa Fe horizon, somewhere else?  
Likely anywhere  
and that ought to be just fine to those  
who have walked these halls

and shared in the  
creation  
the construction  
the preservation  
of beauty  
in  
art as response  
in motion,  
in memory,  
forever.

—Carlos Contreras

### Note

This is the latest in a series of commemorative poems *El Palacio* has commissioned from Carlos Contreras. He has also written “Along the Beaten Path” for El Camino Real ([bit.ly/ecrpoem](http://bit.ly/ecrpoem)), “It Used to Be a Village” for Coronado Historic Site ([bit.ly/chspoem](http://bit.ly/chspoem)), and “Communion in the Desert” ([bit.ly/nmhmpoem](http://bit.ly/nmhmpoem)) on the occasion of the opening of the New Mexico History Museum, among others.

## A FESTSCHRIFT ENDING ON A DRAWING BY RICHARD TUTTLE

“Nearness preserves farness.”—*Martin Heidegger*

Window-glance of lilacs on adobe, a  
light breeze and sunlight  
shivering thin shadows on the wall,  
tulips blading up  
through loam and leaf-rot. From brush-  
stroke and trowel-slip,

from windrow poplars leafing-out to  
wind-dwarfed oak,  
a shadowy yet lucid history—water  
rushing the ditch-mouth,  
rose and lilac rifted alike with  
mountain light and thunderhead,

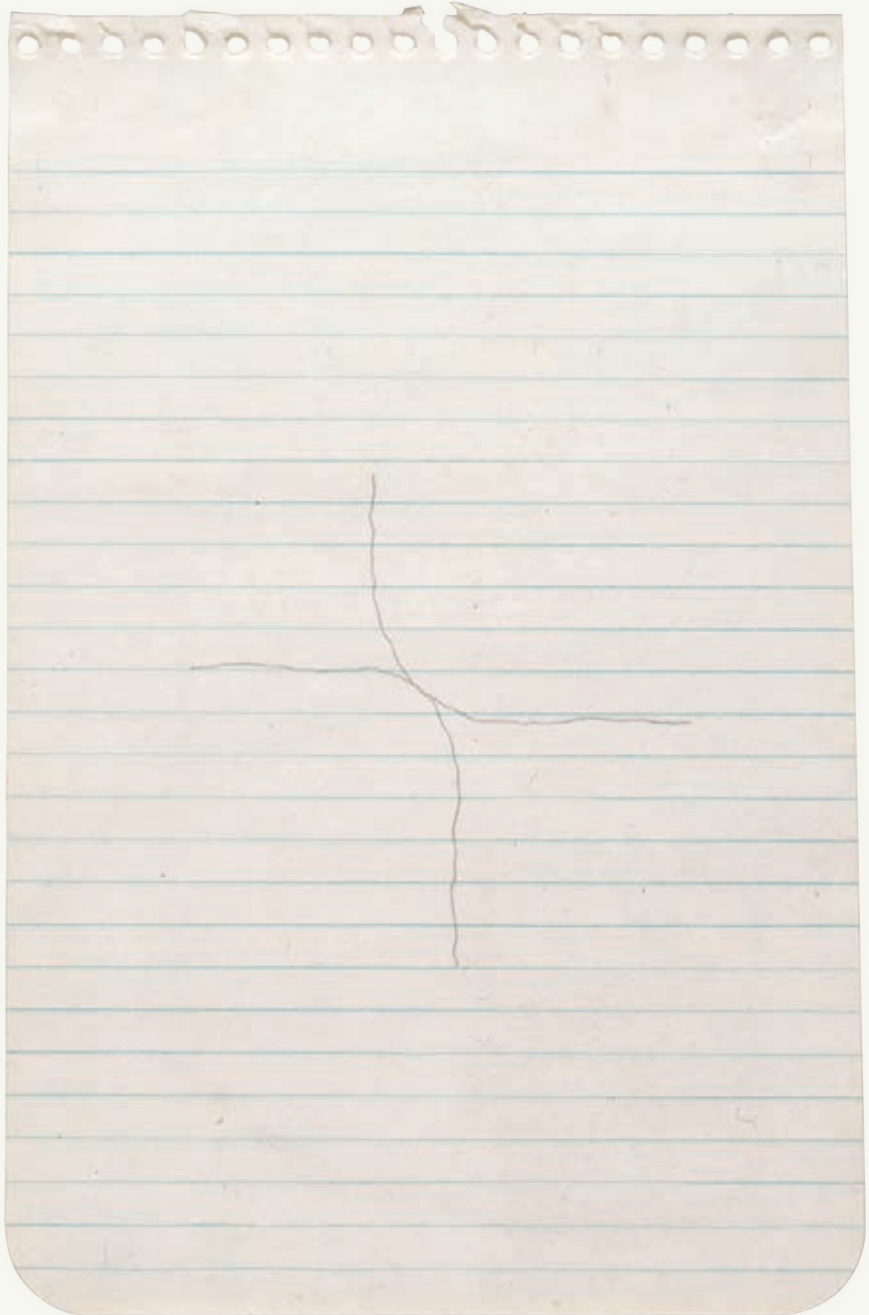
with elk-bugle, bear-chuff, bolete and  
chanterelle, the silent rift  
between first sight and pounce, the  
lion shadowing the straggling lamb  
like a painting that carries the heft of  
gold-leaf, of clay and wool,

the arched stroke of horses, golden in  
the mist-shrouded meadow.  
We are like that newly-sighted woman  
oppressed by the vituperations  
Of shadow, of color—the bugled blues  
and honking reds pressed hard

against her eyes, her ears, purpling  
everything—a blastula of color,  
a fistula, a fist that whelms and  
overwhelms with newness  
until the barest stroke of graphite—  
part line, part silence—tacks

across a flat pond of lined paper, a  
light hand on the tiller, buffeted  
by chance, by the weight of sunlight  
on penstemon—a breath so  
gentle now across the earlobe carrying  
just your whispered name.

—*Jon Davis*



**Richard Tuttle**, *Rome Drawing #78*, 1974. Graphite on lined notebook paper, 7 11/16 × 5 in. New Mexico Museum of Art, The Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection: Fifty Works for Fifty States, a joint initiative of the Trustees of the Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection and the National Gallery of Art, with generous support of the National Endowments for the Arts and the Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2009 (2009.36.48). Photograph by Blair Clark. © Richard Tuttle, courtesy Pace Gallery.



**John Sloan**, *Little Black Mesa*, 1945. Oil on Masonite, 19 15/16 × 24 in. Collection of the New Mexico Museum of Art. Bequest of Helen Miller Jones, 1986 (1986.137.22). Photograph by Blair Clark. © John Sloan Estate.

## MOONRISE OVER HERNANDEZ

The baby never slept, and if she did  
it was only for ten minutes at a time.  
She wasn't distressed, simply inquisitive.  
She didn't want to miss out on anything.  
At dusk I walked her in my arms around the Plaza.  
The moon rising above Picacho Peak pleased her, the star  
over Loretto Chapel illuminating the narrow streets of town.  
We climbed the softly worn stairs of the museum,  
the uneven wooden floors giving way under my feet like a  
well-watered lawn.  
She craned her head and stretched her arms toward the dark  
vigas of the ceiling  
with its carved red and blue bulleted pattern.  
In a narrow room painted the green of a young ponderosa,  
she gazed at Ansel Adams' photographs,  
moved her eyes across the southwestern sky of his prints,  
pointing to the small white speck in the black sky  
rising over snow-capped mountains, the river village of  
Hernandez,  
and said her first word, *up*.

—Elizabeth Jacobson

## WHAT CAUGHT MY EYE

Would life be richer if the sunflowers blooming  
Became tanagers and feathers flew out of the bird.  
Maximilian yellow hit the George Bellows blue sky

I used to live below the abstract, adobe,  
a tract house in the real. Our field flanked  
La Mesita, inhabiting John Sloan's masonite.

Oh Georgia, You drew me, lured by a skull,  
a blue feud. I arrived and found a pelvis  
by the road, caught is what I know about bone.

I ride this white painted horse home from the "Rendezvous."  
My horse is in oil. My horse is in alfalfa.  
A group from India passes between this life and my last.

Two of them take illicit photographs  
next to two Hopi dancing in bronze,  
a rattlesnake held in teeth

The man who donated his kidney strolls by.  
Life always grabs me, rattle and fear,  
Though my people rarely handled snakes.

Paint gasps for canvas.  
We toss our lives back and forth, smile,  
Handle what we dare.

—Joan Logghe

*This poem was previously published in The Singing Bowl  
(University of New Mexico Press).*

## THE REHEARSAL

Thunderheads above the Plaza,  
a stop, a start—  
guitar and violin rehearse.  
One of those days  
when conversations can go wrong  
but the violinist is barefoot and cheerful  
in hot pink and kelly green  
and the guitar player smiles adoringly.  
"It's fantastic!" comes from the audience.

**Rebecca Salsbury (Strand) James**, *Earth and Water*, 1950. Reverse oil on glass, 19 3/4 x 16 in. Collection of the New Mexico Museum of Art. Bequest of Helen Miller Jones, 1986 (1986.137.11). Photograph by Blair Clark.

Rehearsals are confusing,  
as is life,  
the same problematic measure  
over and over  
and how many times I've looked  
at these murals—  
St. Clare rejecting the worldly life  
in Pre-Raphaelite fashion.

The crucifix reaches higher  
than the Mayan priest's staff—  
these images speak of conquest—  
and Christopher Columbus  
dreaming of a schooner's  
red sails at sunset.

Then Robert Schumann  
Piano Quintet in E-flat,  
the poor composer  
dying in the insane asylum.  
Yet it seems so amazing  
to be walking around needing only  
a stringed instrument  
to produce these notes.  
The piece so familiar to my ear  
yet essentially unknown.  
Notes falling and falling and falling.

How each person  
in the audience  
contains an entire world,  
remains mysterious,  
even to themselves.  
Sorrow, greed, opinion, accomplishment, secrets, lunch.  
Who can walk down an avenue  
in a great city and say—  
I am complete.  
Now the violinist is playing the cello!  
Showing off or to prove a point.  
And the cellist is laughing.

—Miriam Sagan



## EARTH AND WATER

At home, though out of place, caught in a spell,  
like Rousseau's nude drowsing on her jungle chaise,  
a numinous radiant-white outside shell,

suggestive, slyly, of a desert skull.  
Painted in reverse, on the back of glass,  
at home, though out of place, caught in a spell.

In the first brushstrokes, fine as filoselle,  
the details are laid down: wisps of snake grass,  
a numinous radiant-white outside shell,

camper in which itinerant undine could dwell,  
at any moment to emerge and gaze,  
at home, though out of place, caught in a spell

under the creviced juniper, the swell  
of distant mesas, now iconic as  
a numinous radiant-white outside shell.

An echo chamber, like a villanelle,  
through which the rhymes of desert seas can pass,  
at home, though out of place, caught in a spell,  
a numinous radiant-white outside shell.

—Carol Moldaw

## THICK TIME

At dawn the Sangre de Cristos usher in slants of light;  
all begins anew amid cool clean breezes  
in the ancestral homeland of our relatives, the Kiis'áanii.<sup>1</sup>

Yootó<sup>2</sup> is resplendent in the clear morning:  
piñon, cedar and juniper, low red hills  
and huge cottonwoods along the river  
and the Plaza glisten in the new day.  
They are eternal witnesses.

Near our home, the huge yellow chamisa are at their finest  
in the bright September days though we admit  
our detour around them due to their boisterous scent  
and loud bees feasting on their nectar.  
The young chamisa are perfectly round and stately;  
their still-closed blossoms eager to debut in a few weeks.  
They emerged in exact proportion to nearby stands  
of brush, cholla, yucca and sage.

The crisp morning summons the sleek train  
that is piloted by a bright yellow/orange roadrunner.  
The car carries tourists who talk loudly though seated  
together;  
they are compelled to share their grasp of local food, cafes,  
shops and pueblos.  
Sullen students lug huge bags down the aisle then sling  
them onto seats;  
they are shielded by headphones and pause only to tap  
intense texts into the world.

Solitary tourists keep watch on the landscape, snapping  
pictures  
of lone horses on the hills, the crimson bajada dotted with  
green brush  
and lone billowing cloud. Near the depot, they take selfies  
suddenly smiling broadly and unabashedly  
at their outstretched hand. The sudden action momentarily  
startles others.

Fridays on the Santa Fe plaza:  
slight winds carry enticing whiffs of hot dogs, burritos and  
kettle corn.

Bright balloons rise languidly above shrill wails and  
outstretched hands.  
On the verandas above, people sip cool drinks, dine on spicy  
dishes  
or warm, crusty pizza. Their banter and laughter wafts  
across joining  
the din of children running about, that tall guy talking  
boldly into his phone  
and the teenagers huddled on the grass sharing smoke  
their hushed voices punctuated by occasional whoops of laughter.

The huge, leafy cottonwoods regard the stooped elder who  
treads warily;  
she pauses to watch the children carelessly bound ahead.  
She smiles  
and recalls those delicious days when she too was light and  
untethered.

Ecstatic little dogs struggle to sniff every inch while minding  
their “good dog”  
status lest they are picked up. It’s torture to be carried in  
such a delectable place!

Near the Obelisk, a busker strums guitar while silently pleading  
for another bill, or better yet, a fiver. As graying hair falls over  
his bowed face, he recalls the long-gone years of dim smoky  
bars,  
rowdy laughter, fanciful undying camaraderie, cold sweaty  
cans of beer  
and that huge clear bowl stuffed with bills.  
“Ah, Kentridge, the residue of the past is very much with  
us,”<sup>3</sup>  
he says to himself and smiles.

At the museum, my footsteps creak on the worn wooden floor,  
Along the court yard pink hollyhocks and cerise roses  
are radiant against the thick earthen walls.  
The portals play annual hosts to strands of shiny, fresh ristras;  
their deep, red iridescence a celebrated contrast to turquoise  
skies.



Inside the dim museum, security guards politely shush  
patrons,  
whisper restroom directions then move about silently.  
I wander through the halls and consider lines, colors,  
angles of light and time conceits in varied works as  
Maria Martinez, Scholder, Houser, Rembrandt and Picasso.  
The echo of each scribble, line, stroke of pen, brush or yucca  
leaf  
gesture from each frame, from decades, and centuries ago.

Later, I sit beside the Santa Fe river where the fluttering  
cottonwoods  
evoke my ancestors' long-ago journey to Yootó.  
In the mid-1860s, the Diné were rounded up by the U.S. Army.  
They were to be imprisoned at Fort Sumner,  
but were first marched through Santa Fe to quell fears  
about "marauding" Navajos and Apaches.  
To the capturers' surprise, the townspeople attacked the weary  
disheveled children, elders and families.  
They threw sticks, rocks and some even kicked and struck them.  
Alarmed, the military formed a protective circle around them  
then finally led them southward on the 200-mile walk to  
Ft. Sumner.  
The Diné were held there for four years then released in 1868.  
In the afternoon din, I stretch my arms  
and straighten my back: a reminder to maintain posture.

I see myself as others might: a Diné woman alone in Santa Fe  
though I am bequeathed again with prayers, songs, and memory.  
I understand that the huge trees, the cold river, dark velvet  
mountains  
and even the thick brown walls recognize me.

They bid me to return so as to cherish our ancestors,  
and the multitude of gifts that surround us.  
We are bidden to remember their journeys  
as we prepare for the days ahead.

—Luci Tapahonso

## Notes

1. The Pueblo people.
2. Yootó is the Navajo name for Santa Fe, meaning a necklace made of beads of clear cold water.
3. William Kentridge, *Arc Procession 9. Lines of Thought: Drawing from Michelangelo to Now*. New Mexico Museum of Art. September 2017.

## THE REHEARSAL AT ST. FRANCIS AUDITORIUM

Xylophone, triangle, marimba, soprano, violin—  
the musicians use stopwatches, map out  
in sound the convergence of three rivers at a farm,  
but it sounds like the jungle at midnight.  
Caught in a blizzard and surrounded by wolves  
circling closer and closer, you might

remember the smell of huisache on a warm spring night.  
You might remember three deer startled and stopped  
at the edge of a road in a black canyon.

A child wants to act crazy, acts crazy,  
is thereby sane. If you ache with longing  
or are terrified: ache, be terrified, be hysterical,

walk into a redwood forest and listen:  
hear a pine cone drop into a pool of water.  
And what is your life then? In the time

it takes to make a fist or open your hand,  
the musicians have stopped. But a life only stops  
when what you want is no longer possible.

—Arthur Sze