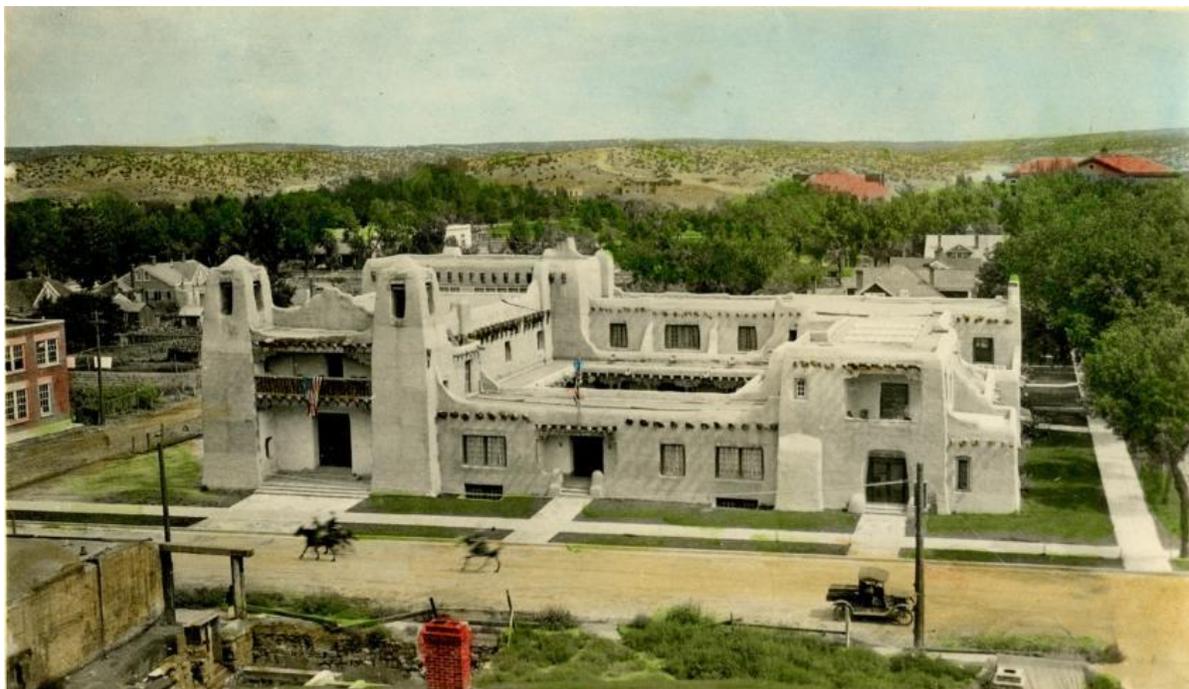


New Mexico Museum of Art plans centenary celebration

By Jackie Jadrnak / Journal North

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This hand-colored photograph by Evan C. Douglas shows the New Mexico Museum of Art around 1920. Note the horses on Palace Avenue, unpaved roads, an empty or gutted lot across the street and the number of residential homes nearby with no semblance to "Santa Fe style." (Courtesy of New Mexico Museum of Art)

SANTA FE, N.M. — For more on upcoming exhibits at the museum, see the story on Page 6.

The New Mexico Museum of Art has a big fat birthday coming up this year – but we may be the ones getting the gifts.



Scaffolds surround the New Mexico Museum of Art during its construction, likely around 1916. (Courtesy of New Mexico Museum of Art)

Well, yes, you can of course contribute to the effort to raise \$10 million (\$2 million of which already has been gathered or promised) to expand the outreach, offerings and space of the 100-year-old institution, but that won't

be a requirement for you to partake of the parties, programs and more that will be coming up to celebrate the museum's centennial.

The festivities are due to kick off in June with a concert that offers a reprise of "Sombras del Pais," Spanish songs that Felipe Delgado (a native son of Las Vegas, N.M.) and Anna Maud Van Hoose toured throughout the Southwest in the 1930s, with the museum's auditorium included among their stops. But the big event will be a giant block party in November to mark the actual birthday of the museum's opening.

A programming team will start meeting this month to work out details of other activities, said Rebecca Aubin, the museum's head of education and visitor experience.

"We want to make sure it's a community celebration, as well as a wider one," museum director Mary Kershaw said. While the museum attracts tourists, especially in the summer, "it's such an important institution for Santa Fe and New Mexico," as well, she said.

"It really was a community center when it was founded," she added.

Aubin noted that the "Music at the Museum" program has its roots in the donation of a pipe organ in 1937 and resulting concerts staged for the public. Gustave Baumann's puppets (or their duplicates) have been entertaining audiences since that same decade, when the museum offered Depression-ravaged New Mexicans an escape from the bitter economic reality around them.

During World War I, the American Red Cross and Women's Naval Service held meetings at the museum, and its auditorium also hosted a legislative memorial service for Theodore Roosevelt in 1919. And likely many people still remember artist Tommy Macaione's 80th birthday bash there in 1987.

People have been married on the stage of the St. Francis Auditorium – Aubin said she recently was contacted by a man who proposed to his spouse-to-be at the museum and wanted to reserve a time in 2018 to hold his wedding there.

And, Kershaw pointed out, "We're the place where the newly elected governor greets people on New Year's Day after taking the oath of office."

First role as gallery

The New Mexico Museum of Art is somewhat unusual in that it was founded without already having a core collection of artworks, Kershaw said. Instead, it was created more as an exhibition venue. "That's very rare," she said.



Santa Fe Fiesta celebrants gather at the steps of the New Mexico Museum of Art in this historic photograph, probably taken some time between 1925 and 1945. Courtesy of New Mexico Museum of Art)

It was intended to be the art gallery for the Museum of New Mexico, which the territorial Legislature established in 1909 at the Palace of the Governors just across Lincoln Avenue. Edgar Lee Hewett was named the first director

of the Museum of New Mexico in 1911 and staged an exhibition at the Palace the next year, not long after New Mexico became a state. His ashes are interred in the courtyard of the Museum of Art.

The museum was modeled after the New Mexico Pavilion, designed by architects Rapp and Rapp, in the Panama-California Exposition of 1915. As a matter of fact, if you visit Balboa Park in San Diego, you can still see that building, which now looks so very familiar. Built with 750,000 kiln-fired bricks made by inmates at the nearby state penitentiary, the museum opened Nov. 24, 1917, under the name Art Gallery of the Museum of New Mexico. While offering exhibition space to local and visiting artists, it also began building its own collection, which now numbers nearly 1,800 works.

And that's one of the reasons Kershaw is looking to expand space. The Museum of New Mexico (the entity that oversees the state museums in Santa Fe and not a building itself) already has acquired the Halpin Building at Montezuma Avenue and Guadalupe Street to convert it into another site for the museum, this one focusing on contemporary art, while also offering space for meeting rooms, education, study, studios and storage.

Over the first 10 years it is open, that new museum space is expected to generate \$194 million in new economic activity, as well as 345 new jobs creating \$102 million in income for local residents, and \$12.3 million in new state and local tax revenue, according to an analysis by O'Donnell Economics and Strategy that was released on Monday.

Renovations won't begin until the entire \$10 million is raised and opening is hoped for in 2020, Kershaw said. One of the goals is to make the new space modern enough to host major installations, new media projects and other genres of contemporary art that haven't always been easy to show in the main museum, with its limitations on electrical outlets and space. Even though the "new" gallery added to the museum in 1982 could hold large installations, in many cases, Kershaw said, "we can't get them in there because the doors are too small."

Asked if the limitations on storage space for the collections have caused the museum to reject potential donations of artworks, Kershaw hesitated, then answered, "Because we don't have space, we're not even considered for some of those significant collections. We still get very significant donations ... but they tend not to be very contemporary or to be whole collections."

Noting that Santa Fe is home to both major artists and major collectors, Kershaw said she would like the museum to be considered if and when they or their heirs want to find a home for their collections.

Closing for cleaning

In the meantime, improvements have been underway at the century-old museum and its grounds. The plantings in the courtyard have been dug up to take care of leaking pipes and lay pavement with enhanced handicapped accessibility. It will be replanted in the spring.

And the entire museum will be closed down from mid-September to mid-November for internal renovations, according to Kershaw.



This early photo of galleries within the Museum of Art shows how light the floors were before they accumulated a century of grime. (Courtesy of New Mexico Museum of Art)

The major work, which will require removal and storage of all the art on the walls, will be a deep cleaning of the building's floors. One hundred years of grime have darkened the concrete floors considerably, giving the galleries overall a somewhat somber and gloomy atmosphere.

But the original floors actually were much lighter and prettier, helping reflect light throughout the galleries.

"They're also quite damaged," Kershaw added, referring to scuffs, scrapes and more that mar the floors' surface.

So, while the museum will not be seeing visitors for a couple of months, the centenarian will reopen in time for its birthday, spiffed up and with a display of art to represent what has happened here over those 100 years.

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