

ART ● CRAFT ● TRAVEL ● INTERIOR DESIGN

# AMERICANStyle

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# Characteristically QUIRKY

There's much more  
to Albuquerque's  
eclectic art scene than  
turquoise and silver

BY LYNNE MARGOLIS

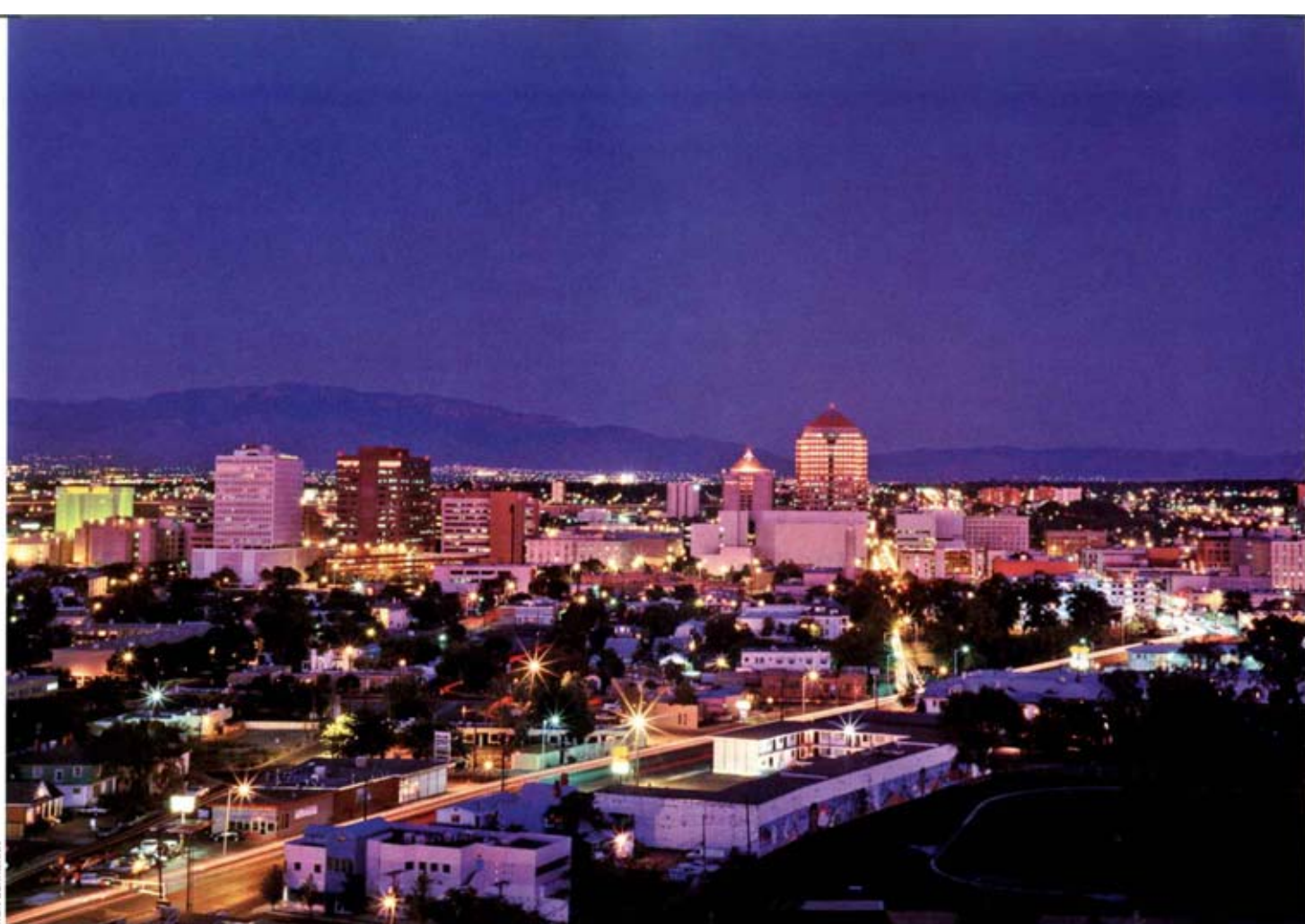


If the city of Albuquerque, N.M., ever decides to abandon "It's a trip" as its tourism slogan, it could always try "They don't call us 'querque' for nuthin'."

Sure, it's a bad pun, but it fits a city whose art scene is most often described as eclectic and ... quirky. Albuquerqueans take their art scene very seriously, but they know better than to take the art itself that way.

Other cities fund stadiums; Albuquerque finances museums. The city lays claim to having one of the nation's oldest One Percent for Art programs, with funds supporting everything from the Albuquerque Museum of Art & History in Old Town to more than 400 pieces of public art around town. The museum, which under-

RON BEHRMANN



went an \$8 million expansion in 2005, boasts an expanded sculpture garden with works by artists including Luis Jiménez and John Boomer, and an 8,000-square-foot changing exhibition gallery.

The creative temperament the city is so proud of is built into its heritage, developed through centuries of multicultural history. In

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addition to being a museum, the National Hispanic Cultural Center is an architectural work of art. Its structures tell the story of various cultures intermingling in New Mexico, including a work in progress—when complete, Frederico Vigil's 4,000-square-foot circular fresco will depict the history of Hispanics in the Americas.

**At night, Albuquerque sparkles in the foothills of the Sandia Mountains. One of the shining stars in the city's contemporary arts scene, Mariposa Gallery carries classic work, including ceramics by Polly Whitcomb, far left, as well as edgier works such as mixed-media "Skeletons" by Ken Saville.**

But you don't need to visit museums to see the art. It's sprinkled all over the city. A road divider might take the form of a giant, intricately bricked rattlesnake, mosaics and murals dress all sorts of surfaces, and

downtown street signs represent significant local events and icons.

Those signs run along Central Avenue, Downtown's main thoroughfare, otherwise known as Historic Route 66, where the neon glow emanating from vintage motor lodges, gas stations, diners and pre-strip-mall shopping centers each night really does give the sense of

a trip. Right through a time warp.

Art lovers who want to get their kicks on Route 66 might want to start in the resuscitated Nob Hill neighborhood, home of Mariposa Gallery. In business for 33 years, it's one of the area's contemporary-craft resident elders (though not nearly as old as Wright's Indian Art in nearby Northeast Heights, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary Oct. 12-14). Co-owner Jennifer Rohrig, who wasn't even born when Mariposa opened, says the gallery has succeeded by changing with the times.

Though Rohrig confesses it's hard to cycle out artists they've represented for years, she and partner Liz Dineen—both former Mariposa employees—decided when they took over that the place needed an infusion of new work. They've also

## Museums and Galleries

**A**lbuquerque boasts more than 50 galleries, both on the main drags and tucked away in corners. A complete list is available on the Collector's Guide website ([www.collectorsguide.com](http://www.collectorsguide.com)).

### Museums

**Albuquerque Museum of Art & History**  
2000 Mountain Road NW  
505-242-4600  
[www.cabq.gov/museum](http://www.cabq.gov/museum)

**Anderson-Abruzzo Albuquerque International Balloon Museum**  
Balloon Fiesta Park  
9201 Balloon Museum Drive NW  
505-768-6020  
[www.cabq.gov/balloon](http://www.cabq.gov/balloon)

The annual International Balloon Fiesta, the world's largest ballooning event, is Oct. 6-14.

**Indian Pueblo Cultural Center**  
2401 12th St. NW  
505-843-7270  
[www.indianpueblo.org](http://www.indianpueblo.org)  
You can also arrange Acoma Pueblo tours through the center.

**National Hispanic Cultural Center**  
1701 4th St. SW  
505-246-2261  
[www.nhccnm.org](http://www.nhccnm.org)  
Check whether public viewing dates are coming up for Frederico Vigil's monumental work in progress, a 4,000-square-foot, circular fresco depicting the history of Hispanics in the Americas.

### Galleries

**DOWNTOWN**  
**516 Arts**  
516 Central Ave. SW  
505-242-1445  
[www.516arts.org](http://www.516arts.org)

**Sumner & Dene Creations in Art**  
517 Central Ave. NW  
505-842-1400  
[www.sumnerdene.com](http://www.sumnerdene.com)

**NOB HILL**  
**Mariposa Gallery**  
3500 Central Ave. NE  
505-268-6828  
[www.mariposa-gallery.com](http://www.mariposa-gallery.com)

**Matrix Fine Art**  
3812 Central Ave. SE  
505-268-8952  
[www.matrixfineart.com](http://www.matrixfineart.com)

**Nob Hill Arts Complex**  
3812 Central Ave. SE  
505-286-4936  
[www.artscrawl.org/Studiosat3812/studiosat3812.html](http://www.artscrawl.org/Studiosat3812/studiosat3812.html)

**OLD TOWN**  
**Agape Southwest Pueblo Pottery**  
414 Romero Road NW  
505-243-2366  
[www.agapesw.com](http://www.agapesw.com)

**Amapola Gallery**  
205 Romero Road NW  
505-242-4311  
[www.amapolagallery.com](http://www.amapolagallery.com)

**Andrews Pueblo Pottery**  
303 Romero Road NW  
505-243-0414  
[www.andrewspp.com](http://www.andrewspp.com)

**Gowen Arts**  
303 Romero Road NW  
505-242-6831  
[www.galleryg7.com](http://www.galleryg7.com)

**Margaret Moses**  
326 San Felipe NW  
505-842-1808  
[www.margaretmoses.com](http://www.margaretmoses.com)

**Paragon Gallery**  
206 1/2 San Felipe NW  
505-242-6828  
[www.paragongallery.com](http://www.paragongallery.com)

**Weems Gallery**  
303 Romero Road NW  
505-764-0302  
[www.weemsgallery.com](http://www.weemsgallery.com)

**UPTOWN**  
**Exhibit 51**  
5100 Tabo Blvd. NE  
505-275-1551  
[www.exhibit51.com](http://www.exhibit51.com)

**Palette Contemporary Art & Craft**  
7400 Montgomery Blvd. NE  
505-855-7777  
[www.palettecontemporary.com](http://www.palettecontemporary.com)

**Park Fine Art**  
20 First Plaza NW  
505-764-1900  
[www.parkfineart.com](http://www.parkfineart.com)

**Weyrich Gallery**  
2935D Louisiana NE  
505-883-7410  
[www.weyrichgallery.com](http://www.weyrichgallery.com)

**Wright's Indian Art**  
The Courtyard, lower level  
1100 San Mateo Blvd. NE  
505-266-0120  
[www.wrightsgallery.com](http://www.wrightsgallery.com)

**CITYWIDE**  
**Neighborhood ARTScrawl and Citywide First Friday**  
505-244-0362  
[www.artscrawlalbq.org](http://www.artscrawlalbq.org)

given it a little extra prestige with folk artist Ken Saville's skeletons and collages by Suzanne Sbarge.

Sparge and Saville are among Mariposa's many local artists. Rohrig says the gallery focuses on New

## Albuquerque's art scene reflects the city itself, "a beautiful, eclectic blend" of Native American, Hispanic, Southwestern and contemporary influences.

—Roy Sumner Johnson, owner, Sumner & Dene Creations in Art

Mexican art, but "without the howling coyotes."

"The gallery has always been a place for emerging artists," says Rohrig. "Anybody can come in here and buy affordable art."

"We're able to cultivate young collectors and serve experienced collectors as well," she continues. "We really want to make art accessible and unpretentious."

**C**ollage artist Sbarge, executive director of Albuquerque's 516 Arts, is one of the city's cultural movers-and-shakers. Before operating 516, she ran the gallery in its previous incarnation as the popular Magnifico Arts at the same location. The two-story 516 Arts bills itself as a cross between a gallery and a museum; beyond exhibitions of both traditional and contemporary work, programs and events at the complex



Rebecca Smith, whose work is available at Downtown's Sumner & Dene Creations in Art, incorporates traditional Southwestern imagery into her woven tapestries.



MARBLESTREETSTUDIO.COM

Shopping centers and vintage motels help give Route 66, which runs through Nob Hill, a quintessential “road trip” vibe. Among artists represented by Nob Hill’s Mariposa Gallery is Suzanne Sbarge, whose “Flit” collage is pictured, right.

run the gamut from lectures to live music and poetry performances.

516 was launched last December, with a show entitled “Green,” showcasing work by New Mexico artists in a variety of mediums. The title played double duty, acting as a symbol of the rebirth of an arts venue at the location. Organizers of 516 are hoping the nonprofit will bring a wider range of visitors to Downtown, Sbarge says.

Roy Sumner Johnson, owner of another veteran gallery, Downtown’s Sumner & Dene Creations in Art, has a similar goal in mind. That’s why he carries everything from kitschy collectibles to fine art at his gallery, across the street from 516 Arts. “I’ve been in business for 27 years, and to survive, I have to have souvenirs available. It doesn’t matter if it’s a \$5 souvenir or a \$5,000 souvenir,” he says. “It’s still something of that experience you had here in New Mexico.”

Johnson describes Albuquerque’s art scene as a reflection of the city



#### IF YOU GO

**T**he most valuable source of information available to serious or casual art collectors is [www.collectorsguide.com](http://www.collectorsguide.com), the companion website for Pam and Don Michaelis’ free Collector’s Guide for Albuquerque, Santa Fe and Taos. It’s got constantly updated information about gallery and museum exhibits and events, plus tips for lodging, dining and shopping. More than 100 articles give important background and advice about such issues as finding authentic Native American crafts.

The recently redesigned Albuquerque Convention & Visitors Bureau website ([www.itsatrip.org](http://www.itsatrip.org)) is a great resource. You can plan a complete trip, from booking a hotel to plotting your sight-seeing schedule (information about each attraction and an event calendar are provided). It even offers PDA-friendly downloads. The neighborhood guide section has rundowns on each of the city’s areas, along with maps. You can order a free visitors guide online, or by calling 800-284-2282. For event information, try 505-842-9918. —L.M.



## BE PREPARED

**W**hen it comes to buying souvenirs in Albuquerque, there's really only one way to know if what you're getting is the real deal, according to Don and Pamela Michaelis, who publish the annual *Collector's Guide for Albuquerque, Santa Fe and Taos*.

"Spend a little time reading in advance to learn how to tell quality, authentic art," Don says.

There's a difference, for example, between traditional and contemporary pueblo pottery, and we're not talking style—the question is whether it was handmade by traditional methods or produced using modern pottery techniques. The latter can be quite beautiful, just as chemically stabilized or reconstituted turquoise can be beautiful. The problem that has plagued reputable sellers for years is misrepresentation.

If you know the turquoise you're buying was mined in China and the setting was not made by Native Americans, fine. But if you're told it's a natural, untreated stone, set in an Indian artisan's one-of-a-kind creation, and it's not, that's fraud. In New Mexico, dealers can be prosecuted for it. You should be able to get a written certificate of authenticity when you make a purchase if you request it. —L.M.

LEFT: MICHAEL HAYES; RIGHT: BOB BEHRMANN



Each October hundreds of vibrantly colored hot air balloons take to the skies above Albuquerque as part of the International Balloon Fiesta, now in its 35th year.

itself: "a beautiful, eclectic blend" of Native American, Hispanic, Southwestern and contemporary influences.

"Eclectic"—or that "q" word—could certainly describe his store's retail mix. Standouts include Normand Couture's Jelly Beans series, modular sofas "with a sense of humor," and tapestry art by Rebecca Smith.

**B**oth Southwest art and souvenirs can be found at just about every turn in Albuquerque, but particularly in the city's Old Town section, where you can buy directly from Native American crafters who spread their wares on blankets. Visiting Old Town gives visitors a taste of the original Albuquerque, settled 70 years before the American Revolution. Settlers built their homes, shops and offices around the plaza, which remains the center of activity.

If browsing in galleries is more to your liking, more than 20 are located in the flat-roofed buildings of Old Town. Weems Galleries, whose original site in Eastdale opened 26 years ago, opened a second location in Old Town 16 years ago. Mary Ann Weems set tongues wagging when she first opened her establish-

ment, mixing fine art with crafts and offering art at more affordable prices than many other galleries. That philosophy continues to propel the gallery, says employee Karen Furia. They keep art affordable "so everyone's lives can be enriched by it," Furia says.

If her two galleries weren't enough to cement her reputation as an arts advocate in Albuquerque, Weems also organized the first Weems Artfest 25 years ago, to capture the holiday sales market for art fairs. The annual event, now known as the Weems International Artfest, brings together artists, children and charities, and has attracted celebrity artists including Sophia Loren and the late Anthony Quinn.

**W**hether you're looking to bring home a piece of the Southwest with a traditional silver and turquoise work, or hoping for something a little more out of the ordinary, the best plan is to go without preconceived notions. And there are so many great deals to be had (the natives say you won't find these prices in Taos or Santa Fe), the best rule of thumb is, if you love it, buy it. Or at least, have lots of fun looking. ●

**LYNNE MARGOLIS** is an Austin, Texas-based veteran arts/entertainment and travel writer and editor whose work has regularly appeared in the internationally syndicated *Christian Science Monitor*.