



TOURING RED WHITE BLUE AND GOD BLESS
YOU:
A PORTRAIT OF NORTHERN NEW MEXICO
MAR 31, 2018 - JUL 29, 2018

Alex Harris

American (born 1949)

Sombrillo, New Mexico, Looking South from Ben Virgil's 1952 Chevrolet

August 1986, neg., 1994, print

Chromogenic print

With Visitors:

- Start in the nook on the east side of the gallery. Direct attention to two photographs on north wall.
 - Inform: These two pictures are of the same room, the one on the left was taken first, the photo on the right was taken a year later.
 - Ask: *What differences do you see between the two photographs?* (two chairs became one, door moved....)
 - Ask: *Why might this room have been rearranged in this way?*
 - Inform: The owner of this space lost his wife after the first photograph was taken. How might that change what we think about why the room was rearranged?
 - Inform: As a documentary photographer, Alex Harris, sees his art as capturing the truth.
 - Ask: *What "truth" do we know from viewing this work?*
 - Ask: *Which of our statements are facts and which are interpretations?*
 - Ask: *Are there times in which we see or hear interpretations as truth?* (this might be a confusing question for some visitors, so if you don't get answers, go ahead and inform.)
 - Inform: Often information in a museum is taken as the truth, when it is often interpretation. It could be the artists' voice which is presented most. Sometimes the curatorial voice is most prevalent. Sometimes curators choose not to present any voice (no wall text, no labels, no guides), in hopes that visitors do all the interpretation themselves. This exhibition leans heavily on the curators' interpretation. Ask: *In the wall text and extended object labels, where do you hear the voice of the artist?* (see the italicized quotes in the wall labels) *Where do you hear the voice of the curators?*
 - Ask: *In this explanation of voice, are there any voices which tend not to be represented in museums?* (owners of the spaces, owners of the cars, etc.)
- Go into the larger gallery. Direct visitors to think about the next question as they find one photo that appeals to them, and then notice the many details captured by the artist.
 - Ask: *How do all those details tell a story about the person who lives in this space?*
- Look at more photographs, noticing the details across many photographs.
 - Ask: *How do the details shape your perception about this place in New Mexico.*
- Ask: *How much of your perception is influenced by your own experiences and beliefs? How much is influenced by the artist's point of view? How much is influenced by the information provided by the curators?*

IF VISITORS WANT MORE INFORMATION

Concept of Exhibition

Documentary Photographer Alex Harris began creating images of Northern New Mexico in the 1970s, exploring how the interiors and exteriors of homes and vehicles expressed people's lives in their particular place. This exhibition features a selection of nearly three dozen photographs from Harris' series *Red White Blue and God Bless You*, taken between 1979 and 1988, and completed as a book project in 1992. Through intimate views of exuberant lived spaces within these Hispanic American rural communities the artist presents his experience of the cultural landscape. For more about Alex Harris, visit: alex-harris.com

Exhibition Components

The exhibition is divided into two sections:

1. *Red White Blue and God Bless You: A Portrait of Northern New Mexico* (more info on pg. 2-4)
2. *Thinking about Documentary Photography* (more info on pg. 5)

Section 1: *Red White Blue and God Bless You: A Portrait of Northern New Mexico*

This series is located within the Dickinson main space. This exhibition is a selection of photographs from a larger series titled *Red White Blue and God Bless You*, Harris' body of work made between 1979 and 1987. In this series, Harris was influenced by the work of other photographers; including Walker Evans, who revealed his subject by his straightforward attention to the ordinary, and Eugenio Sena, a local resident whose photographs of his community represented a familiarity that Harris admired. Our focus is on his approach to documenting personal spaces and how these images articulate lives in northern New Mexico. Do images without people constitute a portrait? Do our everyday surroundings represent the story of our lives?

In this series, Alex Harris photographs **interior spaces (see pg. 3 for examples), car interiors (pg. 4), and exterior spaces (pg. 4)** as a portrait of northern New Mexico. Alex Harris has challenged the definition of portraiture by presenting a collective picture of a region. How does a portrait of a community differ from an individual? Does an outsider's perspective limit their ability to convey the lived experience of its inhabitants?

In 1972, Alex Harris moved to northern New Mexico to create images that evoke stories about people's lives in towns and villages. As an outsider, Harris saw the region as remote and quite different from anything that he had known. Over the next 18 years, he got to know his neighbors, made friendships, and began to feel connected to his new home. Harris may have endeavored to document the people and the region, but he also chronicled his own experience of becoming a resident of northern New Mexico.

Examples of Interior Spaces:



Amadeo Sandoval's Kitchen and Bedroom, Río Lucío, New Mexico

July 1984, neg., 1994, print

Chromogenic print

Harris took the name for his series Red White Blue and God Bless You from the inscription above the door leading into Amadeo Sandoval's kitchen. Sandoval's house is central to the artist's understanding of his own fascination with the people of northern New Mexico. Reflecting on his process, the artist says, "From Amadeo's rooms I understood better my sustained attraction to this small, uncommon island of Hispanic northern New Mexico... I've wanted to photograph spaces without their inhabitants, spaces that tell a certain kind of story..."



Amadeo Sandoval's Kitchen and Bedroom, Río Lucío, New Mexico

June 1985, neg., 1994, print

Chromogenic print

Through this image Alex Harris brings our attention to a wall covered in family photographs and religious images. When reflecting on his experience of this room, he realized, "Almost every room I have photographed in northern New Mexico contains some of the feeling of Amadeo's rooms, tells the story of religion as part of daily life, tells the story of human devotion to home."

Celina Cruz's Kitchen, Peñasco, NM

July 1986, neg., 1993, print

Chromogenic print

Alex Harris used a large-format camera to make photographs with vivid detail. He chose to print very large-scale images as a way to give a sense of being in the space as we look at the photograph. How does scale affect your perception of other photographs in this gallery?

Examples of Car Interiors:



Sombrillo, New Mexico, Looking South from Ben Virgil's 1952 Chevrolet

August 1986, neg., 1994, print

Chromogenic print

With the other work you see in this exhibition, Harris tried to capture his scenes exactly as he found them, but he took greater liberty to stage his photographs of the interiors of cars. Many of the cars that interested him were parked in front of uninspiring views—in garages, facing concrete walls, under tarps—so instead, the artist chose where and when to photograph. How does the artist's choice of scenery affect your interpretation of the image?



Las Trampas, New Mexico, Looking East from Levi Lovato's 1972 Chevrolet Monte Carlo

July 1987, neg., 1994, print

Chromogenic print

"As scrupulously as [the older] generation tended their farms, these younger men restored and cared for their cars. Sitting in the backseats of their sedans and convertibles, I witnessed the unlikely juxtapositions of Hispanic, Anglo, and Indian culture that were their everyday experience, viewed the natural landscape through frames of plastic and chrome, and observed the remnants of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries through their twentieth century windows." This observation led Harris to compose images like this one. By framing the adobe church

through Lovato's windshield, Harris layers that individual's self-expression (expressed through his car) with the place. He ties cultural experience and identity to the very land that defines the Southwest.

Example of Exterior Space:



San Lorenzo Fiesta, Peñasco, New Mexico

August 1985, neg., 1994, print

Chromogenic print

While living near Peñasco, Alex Harris became friends with Virgilio Duran, who gave him the nickname "Sena." Eugenio Sena was a local photographer who used to make portraits for sale during the Fiesta de Santo Lorenzo. He would print them on-site and his customers would carry their portrait home that day. This image, looking down over the *fiesta*, may have been Harris' way of honoring Sena.

Section 2: Thinking about Documentary Photography

This section is in the nook before entering Dickinson. It is easy to see documentary photographers as objective witnesses. Documentarians like Alex Harris often frame their work in terms of an ethical process, committing to presenting their subjects unaltered. However, we must acknowledge that photography is not an objective medium. By selectively framing an image, the photographer draws our attention to a specific aspect of the subject, omitting the surrounding information. In the final image we see only a portion of what was witnessed.

In this section, we ask visitors to look at the other examples of documentary photography on the opposite wall. How does each artist construct a story about their subject? This section features selected photographs by the following artists:

Alex Harris:

Harris presents a narrative of love and loss in the dual portrait of Amadeo Sandoval's living room. The earlier photograph shows Sandoval's living room directly after the death of his wife, while the later photograph witnesses the same space the following year, after Sandoval himself had moved into a care home. Harris wonders, "*What would it be like to endure a severed life, without the person I loved, to be old and alone, in failing health, and with little hope for the future? From the surface of one couple's life, I excavated a powerful story about loss and old age.*" However, unlike many of his other portraits of lived spaces, this diptych is based on conjecture; Harris did not know his subject well, having only spoken to Sandoval once when he took the first photograph. Harris' pairing frames a powerful story, but one that might raise the question: does this portrait reveal more about the artist than his subject?

Mary Peck:

Peck presents an isolated scene: a long dirt road leading to a solitary building surrounded by trees and grave markers. Imagine what different emotions this photograph might evoke if the artist had chosen to zoom in on the building.

Laura Gilpin:

Beginning in 1945, Laura Gilpin traveled the full length of the Rio Grande river three times to photograph the river, the surrounding landscapes, and the people who lived and worked along its path. In 1949, when she published a book compiling her images, Gilpin described the book as a "portrait of a river." The character of the river shifts dramatically from spring floods to summer droughts, and Gilpin was keenly aware of how this impacted communities.

Nicholas Nixon:

For over four decades, Nixon has photographed his wife, Bebe, and her three sisters in what the artist describes as an "annual rite of passage." Two things have remained constant over the years: the sisters' arrangement (from left to right: Heather, Mimi, Bebe, and Laurie) and their collaborative process for selecting which image to represent the year.

ABOUT THE ARTIST



Alex Harris was raised in the South and lives in Durham, North Carolina. He has photographed extensively in the American South, New Mexico, Alaska, and Cuba. He is currently working on a “Picturing the South” Commission from the High Museum of Art in Atlanta to photograph on independent narrative movie sets across the South. His work is represented in major collections including The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, The J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, The Museum of Modern Art in New York, The High Museum of Art in Atlanta, The North Carolina Museum of Art, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. His awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship in Photography, a Rockefeller Foundation Humanities

Fellowship, and a Lyndhurst Prize. His photographs have been exhibited in numerous museums including exhibitions at the International Center of Photography in New York and the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. As a photographer and editor, Harris has published seventeen books including [River of Traps](#) (with William deBuys) a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in general non-fiction. His book, [The Idea of Cuba](#), was co-published in September of 2007 by the University of New Mexico Press and the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke. A recent book is [Why We Are Here](#), a collaboration with evolutionary biologist, E.O. Wilson, and in September of 2017 with Margaret Sartor he completed [Dream of a House: The Passions and Preoccupations of Reynolds Price](#). He is currently working with Sartor on another book under contract, *Where We Find Ourselves: the Photographs of Hugh Mangum* (UNC Press).

Harris was born in Atlanta, Georgia and grew up in the South. After graduation from Yale in 1971, he photographed North Carolina as part of a Duke University research project. Between 1972 and 1978 he lived and photographed in Hispanic villages in northern New Mexico and Inuit villages in Alaska. During these years, Harris also began to commute to North Carolina to teach documentary photography at Duke. In 1980 he founded the Center for Documentary Photography at Duke, which he directed for eight years. In 1989, he was a founder of [The Center for Documentary Studies at Duke](#). Between 1995 and 1998 Harris launched DoubleTake Magazine with Robert Coles and coedited the publication through its first twelve issues. He is currently Professor of the Practice of Public Policy and Documentary Studies at Duke. Within the Center for Documentary Studies, he is the Creative Director of the [Lewis Hine Documentary Fellows Program](#). In 2015 Harris won the [Robert Cox undergraduate teaching award](#) in the Social Sciences at Duke. For more info: <http://alex-harris.com/about/bio>

EVEN MORE INFORMATION



There is another piece by Alex Harris on view in the East Events Gallery
Black Mesa Looking East from Fred Cata's 1957 Chevrolet Belair
July 1987, neg., 1994, print
Chromogenic Print