TRANSFORMING IMAGES
NEW MEXICAN SANTOS IN-BETWEEN WORLDS

Claire Farago and Donna Pierce
with other contributors
INTRODUCTION: Locating New Mexican Santos in-between Worlds

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The very multiplicity of objects with which we deal presents historians of art with an interpretive paradox absent in other historical inquiries for works of art are both lost and found: both present and past, at the same time.

—Michael Ann Holly, "Meaning and Method"

The concept of "style" has been one of the cornerstones not only of the modern discipline of art history but also of related practices of social and cultural history and theory such as archaeology, anthropology, and ethnohistory. In this volume, the writers argue the inadequacy of the belief that styles are specific or essential to a person, place, or period, making powerfully clear the ideological and critical investments that the idea of style has had and still has in maintaining social, political, cultural, and religious identities. While the subject matter of this book is specific to religious practices in New Mexico between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, the implications of these investigations are far reaching both historically and historiographically, and both methodologically and theoretically.

A "historical" artifact of human manufacture—that is, a work of art in the most generic sense of the word—is one of those peculiar objects of historical inquiry that, in seeming defiance of time itself, are still with us today. In the above epigraph, Michael Ann Holly articulates the conundrum at the core of the historical enterprise: the very multiplicity of objects presents an interpretive paradox absent in other historical enterprises. "For works of art are both lost and found, both present and past, at the same time." Assumptions about their permanence or semipermanence quality are intrinsic to this conventional understanding of works of art. Similarly, we understand works of art as objects whose significance transcends the historical circumstances of their making. Precisely—

My thanks to Robert Zwickelberg, coeditor of a volume of collected essays entitled "Coping with Visuality: The Work of Art in and out of History," for allowing me to use the same quotation as we did at the beginning of our jointly authored introduction. A version of Holly's essay also appears in that book.
paradoxically—it is the materiality of the object that is at once affected and unaffected by time. This study deals with Catholic instruments of religious devotion produced in New Mexico from c. 1769 until the radical transformation of local artistic traditions in the twentieth century.1 We argue that local artistic practice is indeed to many cultural traditions, and it addresses the pressing question raised by this reevaluation: why has the New Mexican tradition been understood exclusively in terms of its “Spanish" root? Taken together, the writers in this volume make three key arguments. First, they make a case for bringing new theoretical perspectives and research strategies to bear on the New Mexican material and other colonial contexts. Second, and just as important, the essays in this volume demonstrate that the New Mexican materials provide an excellent case study for rethinking many of the most fundamental questions in art historical and anthropological study, including the assumptions about ethnicity and style, cultural appropriation, the ethics of scholarship, and the meanings that both practitioners and nonpractitioners assign to religious images. Third, the authors collectively argue that the New Mexican images had, and still have, importance to diverse audiences and makers. In making this argument, our collaborative study addresses a methodological problem of longstanding and widespread concern in the humanities: namely, how to account for relationships between “ethnicity” and culture, that is, between collective social identity and artistic production. One of the most demanding theoretical challenges posed by the study of cultural exchange lies in the complexity of paying attention to the history of the forms of thought that have been applied to the historical artifact, as well as to the history of the artifact itself. The present study, in keeping with an important trend in colonial studies worldwide, adopts a relativistic approach to the problem of reconstructing cultural context. In accepting partial recovery of dispersed cultural traditions as a valid form of interpretation, we argue that the distinctive style of New Mexican Christian images is due to, among other things, important continuities with the precontact artistic traditions of the Pueblo Indians and other indigenous societies.

The painstaking process of partial recovery involves identifying the continued presence and transformation of artistic conventions. The present study implicates historians in the same continuous chain of cultural events as their subject of study. As scholars supported by powerful institutions, we are not innocent bystanders to the history of cultural interaction in the colonial world. Yet previous generations of scholars were also sensitive to the problem of projecting their cultural values onto alien historical material. The difference between our current position and theirs is more tenous than some contemporary cultural theorists have argued. But to admit Interpretive aims may not have changed, but epistemological underpinnings have. One of our deepest-rooted forms of art-historical thought is the assumption that an artwork has a radical unity that reconciles harmoniously, sympathetically, any surface contradictions. This radical unity purportedly stems from the conscious or unconscious intention of the author, and in turn accounts for the work’s power to communicate to audiences. The conditions of production and use of art in colonial societies are fundamental questions: the connections among artistic intention, unified meaning, and communicative power. There appears to be no way to resolve the meaning of the colonial images into a single, stable reading, any more than there appears to be a resolution to the complex agencies involved in their production and use. The borders of semantic equivalence and polysemy involved in the present study suggest longstanding anthropological notions of the “syncretism” of colonial culture.

Exactly when and by whom portraits of saints and other holy figures began to be made in New Mexico are open questions. The first European exploration of the region was led by Vicente de Coronado, who found subsistence-level villages instead of the seven cities of gold he was working in 1539. The first settlers arrived nearly fifty years later, in 1598—another group of adventurers, led by Juan de Oñate. By 1640, Francisca missionaries filed the first report on the conversion process, but the regular clergy fought with landowners over rights to Indian labor to such an extent that, in 1680, the pueblos united to stage a well-organized revolt, ordering the destruction of all Christian images and forcing the settlers to retreat to El Paso. In 1692, Don Diego de Vargas recaptured Santa Fe, and abuses of the colonists continued, leading to a smaller revolt and further destruction of images in 1696, two years after the arrival of the first colonists who were prepared to survive by farming and providing for their own needs.2 The earlier-named artist whose works survive is Bernardo de Mier y Pacheco, born in Burgos, Spain, who was working in Santa Fe by around 1760.3 But about most of the individuals who produced polychrome wood sculptures and paintings on wood panel before the end of the nineteenth century, we know next to nothing.4 Of the perhaps 10,000 objects that are known to survive, only about twenty are signed or dated.5 Typically, all that remains in the museum records is the name of the immediate donor or the dealer. Perhaps continued culling of the archives will yield new information about artists and early owners, which can be matched with existing works of art. It is, however, unlikely that information of this nature will ever be found for the majority of surviving objects.

These circumstances, while limiting in one sense, are liberating in another. For they mean that the most significant documents about New Mexican Christian art are the images themselves. It will be argued here that New Mexican Christian images of saints and other holy figures are not syntheses of separate cultural traditions. Rather, in the vast overlap and even mutually exclusive meanings, like the positive and negative valences of the color "black," create— these images oscillate depending on the viewer’s frame of reference. Nothing about these images resembles the model of the artist-embodied-in-his-work that is the backbone of art-historical interpretation. But how do we account for conflicting and overlapping meanings attached to a visual motif by different cultural traditions without grounding the analysis in the artist’s inward state? Studying the New Mexican material has led us to consider cultural identity in a very basic way: how people manipulate whatever material culture is available in their environment to negotiate their relationship with the world. Art facts and images function in concrete, lived situations. Their meanings are "performed" in the sense that the same object carries different meanings in different contexts, and sometimes carries different connotations in the same context for different people. Mistakes, as much as real communication, allows different worldviews to coexist in the same place. The maker of the object, the patron of the object, or the distributor of the object are, in later times, and so on have all agency of some kind in the "aesthetic field," to give a name—Baudrillard’s—to all the social actions linked to the objects we use to construct meaningful relationships in the world. The prospect of disentangling these agencies is daunting: it is not surprising that most of the disentangling to date has taken place at the abstract level of theory. The distinctiveness of New Mexican santas, as these religious images are known in the scholarship today, consists not in their overt subjects (which conform to Catholic Reform models of saints) but in the elements that may appear to have been "merely decorative," graphically striking and frequently elaborately abstract design motifs and landscape anywhere else in the Spanish colonial world. The distinctive ness suggests that we should inquire not so much about the individual identities of their makers as about the collective identity of the society that produced and used them.

Yet everything we know about society suggests strongly that it did not have a single, homogeneous identity. The distinctiveness of New Mexican Christian art, then, raises questions central to post-colonial studies about the contributions of indigenous
people and their descendents to colonial culture, and the social construction of meaning among segmented audiences. The process of trying to account for cultural identity in a colonial society—particularly in sensitive areas such as religion and its circumstances where lack of direct evidence may tempt us to reason backward from contemporary practice—raises issues of power and interpretive privilege. Readers, perhaps even more than writers of historical texts, take for granted that chronology is a neutral ordering device, "natural" as it seems in "Natur." But every historical study is necessarily a selective representation and therefore an artifact. By definition, an interpretative theory tries to make sense of the world. In this context, temporal succession cannot have the epistemological status of a "chronology," as the historian Hayden White famously argued in his 1978 essay "The Fictions of Pictorial Representation," factual representation is grounded in the implicit claim that a chain of causes and effects was mere temporal succession and not narration. 5

Chronology is a powerful and seductive rhetorical apparatus. And cultural exchange has not been symmetrical. In a recent critique of postcolonial writing subtitled "Toward a History of the Vanishing Present," Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak discusses the hegemonic effects of a "chronology" in this mindset. She formulates the "reader’s perspective" as a paradigm, describing the "impossible position of a native informant whose identity has not been shaped by what Spivak calls the Kantiian/Hegean/Manarian heritage:

The possibility of the native informant is as I have already indicated, inscribed as evidence in the production of the scientific or disciplinary European knowledge of the culture of others from fieldwork through ethnography into anthropology. That apparently benign subordination of "time" (the lived) into "time" (the span of the law) cannot be reversed to a recognizable original form. It can be found only in the resistant reader and teacher at least (and persistently) attempt to undo that continuing subordination by the figuration of the "native informant."—into a reader's perspective...Ami we still condemned
to circulate around "fides, logos, and form" or can the (ex)istant at least be avoided? 6

Spivak’s critique is directed partly against the anti-Eurocentric of other postcolonial critics of European thought. No one will deny that, from first contact in 1529, Europeans attempted forcibly to impose their cultural beliefs in the American Southwest. The challenge before us is going beyond the old, silenced, worn-out, and worn-down representation between Eurocentrism and antim Eurocentrism. 7 As multiple authors of a unified study, we faced the organizational problem that, notwithstanding critiques of history writing, without chronological structure, our data would tend to appear chaotic and, beyond this, we would not be able to construct the narrative required in the fictive contract that is, masking ideology under the false sign of "natural" time. The study that follows articulates a response to political realities defined broadly to include, for example, professional expectations still emanating from some quarters to treat chronology as the neutral ordering device since each
non of historical studies—as part of the critical enterprise. In composing the manuscript, we have decided to maintain a chronological presentation, while breaking up the narrative sequence with short "interleaf essays" and extended "opinions" between and in the chapters. That is, we have made some use of "hyper-
" strategies, without, we hope, missing the ingredi
ts to the point of confounding our readers.

As a preliminary point of departure, we do not wish to claim in this study that the significance speci
s icons held for one segment of their original audi
evance was necessarily beyond the reach of other segments, but people undoubtedly attached varying importance to content derived from different cultural traditions and contexts. In the messy conglomeration of past-lived situations, moreover, a lot of the evidence does not survive, and what does survive is capable of multiple interpretations for this reason as well. In his 1940 study of Pueblo mission architecture, George Kabler formulated his classic view of a distinctive

Spanish colonial" culture in terms of its survival rate: "from the first formulation of the style to the recent
decades of architectural activity, New Mexico has maintained the status of a provincial area, isolated from the currents of change which were effective in Metropolitan centers of the Spanish world. The phe
nomenon of regional survivals of an older artistic tradition, altered only by progressive simplification and reduction, characterizes the arts of New Mexico. 8

Kabler’s statement that the region possessed the "sur
vival" of a prehispanic artistic tradition was altered only by "simplification and reduction" is based on the limited evidence he took into consideration. The present study in its entirety addresses the problem of "artistic tradition" in a heterogeneous society where distinct but fragmented, previously unrelated social groups are in sustained, intimate contact. The iconography and formal structure of the New Mexican santos demand to be investigated at a level of generality that encompasses native and imported pictorial traditions without bias. Without such a comparative analysis, we can accept as anything more than a Eurocentric assertion the statement that colonial art forms are ver
sions of old European traditions, "simplified" and "reduced" by isolation. Isolation is a relative phenomenon anyway. Cen
sibly, New Mexico was politically and geographically removed from ecclesiastical centers of the Catholic Church in Rome and the West Indies. But New Mex
ico was not isolated economically or culturally. The research published in this volume by Donna Pierce, Kelly Donohue-Wallace, and Geordie Thomas Note New Mexico’s links to a global network of commerce. The presence of imported goods from Mexico, Europe, and Asia—-even though the quanti
ties were limited—means that New Mexican artisans had an extensive range of visual sources at their dis
posal. Furthermore, to varying degrees of refinement, basically the same material culture was available to everyone, regardless of lifestyle, social status, or eco
nomic circumstances. As is explored at greater length in the following chapters, the traditional view that
locally made Catholic devotional art emerged in New Mexico from isolation a cultural center ignores a significant, enduring Native American presence. It also underrates the complex and heterogeneous conditions in which religious art circulated globally during the Spanish colonial period (1549–1821) and afterward. And it imposes an ethnocentric framework biased toward "culture" defined in European terms. New Mexico was a cultural center in its own right before, during, and after Spanish colonialism. From Reductive Categories to Social Realities Santos is the favored word for all New Mexican figurative religious art made in the "traditional" style. Sants are usually painted on panels then carved and painted in the round (bulto). The modernist reduction of New Mexican Catholic visual culture to its Spanish roots is exemplified in these three Spanish terms—terms that, according to at least one prominent artist with deep New Mexico roots, are twentieth-cen

rub apppellations not customarily used in Spanish speaking households. Images occur most frequently in Spanish historical documents, as it still refers to reli

Image. The term santos is said to have been introduced into New Spain further south during the early contact period, by missionaries who wanted to convey the difference between the proper religious veneration of images and idolatry: saints designated holy beings of lesser stature than the incarnation of god, or god in Nahua. 9 Santos designated the saints themselves. Today terms like santo, santisimo, and retablos are used instead of images to convey a sense of "cul
tural authenticity"—specifically, of "Hispanic New Mexican" cultural authenticity—in the predominantly English-speaking commercial art world. The relationship between the contemporary art market and religious iconography of the past is far from straightforward, and the relationship between ethnic and cultural identity is in any case not transparent. The burden of this book is to establish a historical and critical perspective broad enough to take opposed
cultural attitudes into account without creating a new totalizing structure. A case-study approach is well suited to this labor because it allows reconsideration of a specific range of artifacts in detail. To date, the literature on New Mexican religious art has been limited to cataloguing works by style and subject, except in a handful of cases, artist and date have been assigned solely on this basis. This book addresses problems of style and attribution in the existing literature and suggests new approaches, but it is primarily concerned with the social functions of images, not the individual identities of makers.

For the sake of this study of social function, it is absolutely essential to think beyond reductive categories like "Spanish" and "Native American" to the social realities to which these terms (too inadequately) refer. Since colonial times, the ethnic identity of New Mexicans has been far more complex than present-day terminology suggests. The traditional definition of ethnicity is membership in a distinct, self-identified population that is largely biologically self-perpetuating. By this definition, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century New Mexico can be described as a colonial society segregated by lifestyle and language into three dominant social groups: Spanish-style towns, Indian pueblos, and the nomadic frontier. None of these sections can be defined by lifestyle or generic pool as a separate ethnic group, because they interacted socially and economically. Genealogical records indicate that by c. 1790 a large segment of the population—at least one-third of New Mexico's 30,000 inhabitants and probably more—were mestizos.

One of the priorities of this entire undertaking has been to revise the assumption, too widely disseminated in the scholarship to attribute to individual writers, that the religious art of New Mexico was simply provincial "Spanish" art produced by "Spanish" artists. Standard explanations for the rise of local religious artistic production are demographic: we know that there were earlier images made locally that have not survived, but the later 1700s and early 1800s saw a dramatic increase in the settler population of Spanish colonial New Mexico. There were not enough priests to meet the needs of the expanding population, a shortage that made the availability of sacred images crucial. Lay Catholics often depends on images to enact the basic tenets of faith through individual piety and communal religious dramaturgies, rather than a system of worship organized institutionally around the sacraments administered by priests. "The folk of Spanish New Mexico," writes Will Wroth, a specialist in New Mexican religious art, "were obliged to take care of their own lives as best they could."

From the mid-eighteenth century, in addition to importing religious art from Mexico, New Mexico produced its own altarpieces and individual devotional panels depicting Christ, the Virgin, and saints made for both the Pueblo communities, sometimes by the same artists. Like their neighbors in the Christianized pueblos, the settlers were served by relatively very few priests. In these conditions, brotherhoods and brotherhoods, or cofradías, took care of community religious needs, just as they had in the Iberian Peninsula, where the majority of European settlers had ultimately originated. In the process, the local population produced substantial numbers of religious images. To the New Mexican communities that made them for their own domestic use, images of holy figures were part of what the contemporary historian Father Thomas Stoele calls "a complete motivational system" along with scripture and religious stories, prayers, processions, and other ceremonies.

The decline of local artistic production in the second half of the nineteenth century is attributed to both demographic and technological factors. This period saw enormous changes in New Mexican material culture, changes that were accelerated by the arrival of the national railroad system in 1875-85. Significant non-Catholic populations settled in the region after it became a U.S. possession in 1846. Where anthropologists, museum professionals, academics, and artists began arriving in New Mexico in the latter part of the nineteenth century, new cultural attitudes formed toward the region's material culture. By 1900, the local religious artistic production had been replaced for the most part by imported mass-produced prints (typically displayed in locally crafted tin frames) and plaster cast sculptures. The Hispanic arts revival initiated in the 1920s by the poet Frank Applegate, the writer Mary Austin, the collector Mabel Dodge Lujan, and other transplanted Easterners marks a dramatic change in the social function of New Mexican religious art. Instruments of religious practice were transformed into cultural and aesthetic contemplation outside the framework of Catholicism.

As a commercial network of dealers and buyers emerged, new labels such as colonial "Spanish" and native "Pueblo" were associated with the cultural productions of a complex society and its multicultural heritage. Art collectors stressed their elevated appreciation for "folk art," museum collections were formed, and eventually the federal government mounted a cultural preservation program for New Mexico's Spanish religious art. To this day, a thriving New Mexican market in historical and contemporary religious images provides a diverse public with "art," while offerings at pilgrimage sites, roadside shrines, and yard displays are abundant reminders that visual material culture still serves the religious needs of lay Catholics in New Mexico.

Overview of the Volume

To address the question of how social identity and cultural production are mediated by factors such as artistic conventions, social structure, and economic exchange, we found it necessary to go beyond existing genres of writing and existing fields of study, which are limited by problematic assumptions that social groups are homogeneous by nature, and that cultural production can and should be classified into categories such as "art" and "artisan," best understood in isolation from one another. In closing this introduction and opening the rest of this book, I want to emphasize what is at stake in studying the artistic production of heterogeneous societies. Behind the now-burgeoning academiac-
enterprise of postcolonial studies is the commitment of an earlier generation of disseminators of knowledge who first articulated, and thereby validated, the divided forms of (non)identity that exile and dispersal bestow. Among the best known of these post-World War II era writers whose shared concerns arose from personal experience in different colonial settings are Albert Memmi, Frantz Fanon, and Césaire Aimé.21 In Tom Hulme’s Political Criticism in Literary and Cultural Theory, Robert Young offers sober reflection for anyone who would celebrate the pose colonial subject position that these survivors of political opposition first articulated, either as a personal form of identity or as an academic subject of study. Young begins with the observation that academic institutions see “culture” as an object of study, yet there is no accurate corresponding to it. The dialectical form of theoretical conflicts ensnare from this false premise. Far from healing academic institutions apart, constitutes their necessary structure. These “turn halves of an integral freedom” never add up because the dialectical structure of academic division reproduces the economy of capitalism itself. If there is a way out of the quandary posed by the constant flow of irreconcilable choices, Young argues, it is not to choose between them, but to practice them all at the same time.

Writing in a way that allows irreconcilable choices to coexist is what this collaborative study offers in response to the interpretive challenge that material objects present. The relationship between “ethnography” and cultural production is a vexed question for many reasons, one of which is that one category often slides into the other in historical interpretations. Obviously, culture is not genetic—as past scholars of New Mexican cultural history, notably George Kubler and B. Ford, have relentlessly emphasized. Nevertheless, there is a relationship between the two, because both are determined by daily human contact, in households and communities. Yet this is the first study to document ethnic identities in the northernmost reach of the Spanish colonial empire in relationships to the region’s material culture.

Two general conclusions emerge from our collaborative, multi-evidentiary investigation. First, while there is no necessarily direct relationship whatsoever between culture and “ethnicity,” there is one between culture and material resources. The distinctive appearance of New Mexican santas is due, in other words, partly to the distribution of resources and the organization of labor. Yet, second, a strictly materialistic explanation is not fully satisfactory: the formal, symbolic, and ultimately nonsensical nature of art and visual systems seem to result from superimpositions (more than syntheses) of divergent cultural traditions. The implications of our findings, like the material evidence itself, differ according to who is observing. While there are significant overlaps and contrasts across some real differences, there are also a matter of scale.

This book is subdivided into four sections, dealing respectively with (1) questions of methodology, (2) the archival evidence, (3) the religious art itself, and (4) the history of the scholarship. In the opening theoretical section, entitled “Problems for Interpretation,” Claire Farrigo introduces the specific historical circumstances that shaped social interaction in New Mexico during and after the colonial period, challenging lingering Darwinian assumptions in the contemporary scholarship. This chapter frames the history of New Mexico as a case study in investigating the relationship between the ethnicity of a people and the culture they produce is mediated by many complex factors.

The second chapter follows this line of argumentation by developing criteria for interpreting the religious images produced in the region. It introduces visual evidence that many locally produced works of art are multiply indebted to two or more representational systems and iconographic traditions in ways that prevent any stable meaning from being assigned to the object. She argues that these circumstances allow different, even mutually exclusive, “meanings” to reside in the same image or object, depending on the viewer’s cultural orientation. In the third chapter, Donna Pierce explores the artistic sources available to New Mexico artists to reconstitute the historical transition from Baroque to Rococo in the material culture of the region. Pierce’s newly assembled evidence suggests that, far from being uninterested in or incapable of understanding stylistic trends, as is usually assumed, local artists responsible for the production of religious images were attentive to the latest formal innovations. Out of choice, as well as economic and technological necessity, they imitated these sources selectively, combining imported appropriations with elements drawn from local visual sources, and executing them in locally available materials.

In a short essay positioned as a transition or “interleaf” to the next section, Pierce continues her investigation of the social context in which anas circulated by underscoring that complex class issues were also involved in anas production. In some instances, an underlying political message adds yet another potential level of interpretation to the multilayered meanings present in New Mexican santos.

The second section of the study, entitled “Reconstructing Ethnicity from the Archives,” was conceived by art historians with the help of experts in other fields, anthropologists and genealogical historians, who analyzed the raw data of archival documents such as census, birth, marriage, death, and tax records. Archival research documents the activities of a population of diverse ethnic origins that interacted extensively, thus revising longstanding claims that the anas are the product of a segmented “Spanish” sector of the New Mexican population looking only to “Spanish” artistic sources. However, the archival data are far from straightforward. Inconsistent terminology and the accidents of document survival necessitate subtle interpretive tactics, as the fourth and fifth chapters about population records, written by José Esquivel and Paul Kramer, respectively, demonstrate. In his study of the early years of the Resettle-

ment period (1643–1720), José Esquivel focuses on the variety and internal consistency of anas designations preserved in the archival records and the context in which these designations appeared. It is important to emphasize that Esquivel does not assess the reliability
"Spanish" descent. Marianne Stoller counsels previous explanations of the artistic identity of the santos by assembling exten­ sive material and archival evidence, which suggests that Indians, Christians and probably Hispanicized, culturally or genetically or both, contributed to the artistic identity of New Mexican devotional art.

Chapters 8 and 9 deal with hide paintings, the earliest form in which religious images were locally pro­ duced. Although it has been common knowledge for quite some time that tanned hides were a major New Mexican export item, Donna Pierce publishes documented evidence to prove that hides were tanned in the Indian tradition (brain tanned), painted in New Mexican workshops, shipped to Mexico for the making of santos, and, in a few cases, with secular scenes, and exported to Mexico in quantity as well as used locally. The documents also reveal that Indian artists in New Mexico participated in the produc­ tion of these works of art at the earliest days of the colony into the mid-eighteenth century, that they were used in private homes as well as churches in New Mexico, and that they were owned by people of vari­ ous ethnic backgrounds. This information published by Pierce complements Esquivel’s important new archival findings, testifying to exchanges between the early set­ tlers and the native Mexican and Hispanic mestizo popula­ tion. There is evidence of Indian artists and Indian–Spanish elements that still appear in the santos. The documents that the ear­ liest named artist working in New Mexico whose work survives, the Spanish born and Mexican trained Miguel Pacheco, worked with the earliest known native-born artist whose works are extant, the prolific Pedro Peralta de Truchas, who is classified as mestizo in the records. In the following Interleaf, Pierce con­ tributes a short essay on Pacheco. In Chapter 9, Kelly Donahue Wallace considers how the eighteenth cen­ tury hide painters of New Mexico departed from their print sources, thus foiling the strategy of the Spanish crown and the Church of Rome to evangelize the faithful by allowing identical images of approved dogmas to travel simultaneously to the most distant regions of the viceroyalty. From archival documents and survivals of visual material evidence, we are beginning to piece together the various ways in which artistic skills were transmitted to the northern frontier of New Spain. The latest evidence points to the existence of professional workshops throughout the colonial period involving artists recognized to be of diverse ethnic origins.

In Chapter 10, Claire Farago explores the radically open-ended semiotic conditions embedded in images made by artists with such culturally complex back­ grounds, from the viewpoint of how these santos would have functioned for a heterogeneous public, pri­ marily in outlying towns founded in the mid-eigh­ teenth century where cultural interaction was intensive. The material evidence of the santos com­ pared with other types of material culture produced or available at the time is a poorly documentable and still too min­ imally dismissed as decorative fantasy, the misunder­ standing of a prototype, or the unavoidable reliance on crude materials and techniques is the visible measure of a new colonial identity. In an interlaced essay friends Romero observes counterparts to the complex processes of intercultural exchange in the performing arts. She traces the dance ritual of the matachines danza, introduced by the Spanish in the sixteenth century with the intention of converting the Indians to Catholicism, to scenes on both sides of the Atlantic, showing that New Mexican versions and North American forms assem­ ble the role of sacred dances among the Pueblos.

The authors of this study try to acknowledge the formal complexity of New Mexico’s religious images. The final section of the book, entitled “Inventing Modern Identities,” is framed to address the question of why this complexity had not been acknowledged earlier. Chapter 11, by Farago, outlines a deep-seated point of tension between institutionalized Catholicism and lay practice by considering what caused the decline of santos-making in the second half of the nine­ teenth century. She argues that, in New Mexico, where “international” and “regional” systems of cul­ tural production were not separate spheres of activity, anonymous mass media prints acquired distinctive local characteristics that enabled lay Catholics to seek efficacious contact with the supernatural through images. Continuing the same line of investigation, Thomas Riedel argues in Chapter 12 that the careers of two leading early twentieth-century New Mexican artists, Juan Sanchez and Patricio Buelna, dem­ onstrate the rapid transformation of santos-making from its roots in religious worship to its secularization as collectible “primitive” art identified exclusively with “Spanish” culture. The “revitalization” of Hispanic craft production at this juncture was often indicative of Anglo taste for the exotic and unspoiled expression of an imaginary colonial subject. Despite the rich liter­ ature on the “Spanish” identity of individual santos—the long-term result of the rapid transformations Riedel describes—the training of artists before the twentieth century is poorly documentable. In Chapter 13, Robin Farwell Gavin reviews the existing system of stylistic attribution, including standing assumptions about artistic training on which this system is based, and introduces extensive visual evidence that many santos were copied from other Mexican santos—a long-overdue acknowledgement that, in short, revises the whole system on which attributions are currently made. In Chapter 14, Dinh-Zegier reviews the pertin­ ent literature on the reception of religious art as she reports on her informal survey of contemporary buy­ ers of santos. Zeiger sums up her study by terms that resonate throughout the volume: “Santos are not closed, immediate images; rather, they appeal across a spectrum of religious practice and belief because of their multivalent meanings. Nor are they static and fixed in time and place. On the contrary, they are elas­ tically adaptable to the changing needs and different beholders: They remain today, as they were in the past, useful objects.”

Ultimately, cultural interaction is based on mutual trust and interest. Carmen Padilla, in a clos­ ing Interleaf essay, publishes the results of her inter­ views with Catholic members of Isleta, Laguna, Acoma, and Picuris Pueblos, which indicate a range of ways to adapt Catholicism to fit private spiritual lives.

As the historian Joe Sando, a native of Jemez Pueblo and director of the Institute for Pueblo Studies and Research in Albuquerque, emphasizes, the deeply intertwined history of the Hispanic and Pueblo cul­ tures cannot be overlooked. Yet a number of contem­ porary Pueblo people object to non-Pueblo historians writing “histories” of their culture. These objections are rooted in a sorry record of Western imperialism, and also in a native system for maintaining and transmitting shared beliefs through enactments, cere­ monies, and rituals.

Contemplating the current politics of cultural interaction in New Mexico, as academics and other professionals supported by private and state institutions, we have been challenged to account for contribu­ tions to New Mexican Catholic religious art of local, native, and non-European origin without repro­ ducing the colonial power structure. This work repre­ sents a case study addressed to the question of the forms that scholarly practice might take if it sought to hear the by-now familiar critique that the study of national cultures exists in (unacknowledged) collusion with imperialist politics. In short, this study is concerned with the ability of symbols to mean different things to different peo­ ple. In this sense, our interdisciplinary collaboration continues the project of the early-twentieth-century Renaissance art historian Aby Warburg (1866–1929), whose life’s work centered on the transformative power of visual symbols. In Chapter 15, the book con­ cludes with an essay calling for intellectually responsi­ ble and ethical scholarly practices, paradoxically framed as a critical response to the celebratory, largely uncritical contemporary reception of Warburg’s own outdated, problematic ideas about “primitive” Pueblo symbolism. We dedicate this study to the hope that future collaborations across social and disciplinary boundaries can present a greater diversity of perspec­ tives on the significance of santos than we are cur­ rently able to offer in an academic setting.