Written by By Naomi Mercedes Chan Sun Correspondent
Friday, 17 March 2017 07:50





The fresh, clean, and open space of Opo Gallery, hosted two celebrated mural artists this past Arts Crawl March 11– Nani Chacon and Be Sargent.

The exhibit runs for two months, and, it is an excellent opportunity for students and those curious about the people behind some very prominent murals in Gallup, Albuquerque, and elsewhere around the United States. Murals are a highly celebrated art form in New Mexico, not only due to the suitably dry climate, but for the aesthetics of the wide open skyline and constant bright sun.

Sargent was the only one of the two that was present before the show opened, but visitors were already milling in. Sargent grew up in both Albuquerque, and Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her prominent murals are found throughout Gallup. She worked in New Mexico, of course, but also Boston. The East Coast influence was clear in her work.

A visitor asked if she liked John Singer-Sargent.

“Do I like my great grandfather’s first cousin?” she quipped with a smile. “Yes I do.”

The famous artist, Singer-Sargent, born in a Florence, Italy, and famous and infamous in Paris, gave up a knighthood in England to retain his United States citizenship, unsurprisingly, as he enjoyed the American continent immensely. He traveled from Florida to Montana as well as up and down the East Coast. He lived from 1856-1925 and was in Be Sargent's family tree, as first cousin, three times removed.

Thoughtful and soft spoken, she explained that she was currently involved in landscape work, and showed me a pair of large, colorful abstract treescapes, emphasizing lines and negative space.

"I stopped producing murals in 2009," she said. "I wanted to focus on my abstracts and landscapes. Right now I'm just focusing on landscapes for the moment. Those were done out in the field, by the way - plein-aire"

The focus of the show was on the murals of the "muralistas," as Opo framed the show on their Facebook page; however, visitors can also take a look at those two newer works while they are at Opo as well as the adjacent gallery filled with the of art of Linda Bowlby.

Nani Chacon, who grew up in Chinle, AZ, arrived as the show got underway. The gallery was loud and lively. A movie showed Chacon's background in street graffiti and studio art, showcasing American Indian women, painted in the style of fashionable 1950's pinup models.

Some of the murals depicted sacred icons like Spider Woman vogueing on "She Taught Us How to Weave." The fresh face of the ancient mixed with the stylization of the new was exciting and interesting to the crowd gathered here.

"I get inspired by culture and history, light and simple beauty, making a communication, between contemporary life and traditional," she said.

Chacon says she is doing "a lot" of commissions at the moment, but her next public mural will

be going up at the Espanola Center Valley Fiber Arts Center in Espanola.

There were many interesting works at the show. Highlights include “Manifestations of the Glittering World” and “Against the Storm She Gathers Her Thoughts” by Chacon.

Chacon has the gift of transforming simple icons into stunning statements.

Limited edition photo prints of Chacon’s murals are available, signed and numbered.

Meanwhile, Sargent’s lovely iconic charcoal portraits alongside the concept work for the mural on Aztec Avenue, called “Work of Strength.”

“The red rocks turned out quite well on that one,” she said.

Sargent encourages instructors to bring art students to the gallery to view the works on display.

“I hope educators bring students by, here, because it shows process, and the intricacy of process, and how much work goes into murals. It’s really a rare opportunity to see this sort of art behind the scenes,” she said.

Sargent and Chacon will host a Q & A on April 22, from 2 - 4 pm at Opo Gallery.

Opo Gallery is located at 307 S. 2nd St., Gallup. Call (207) 522-9107 for information.

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