



The New Mexican's Weekly Magazine
of Arts, Entertainment & Culture
July 24 - 30, 2009

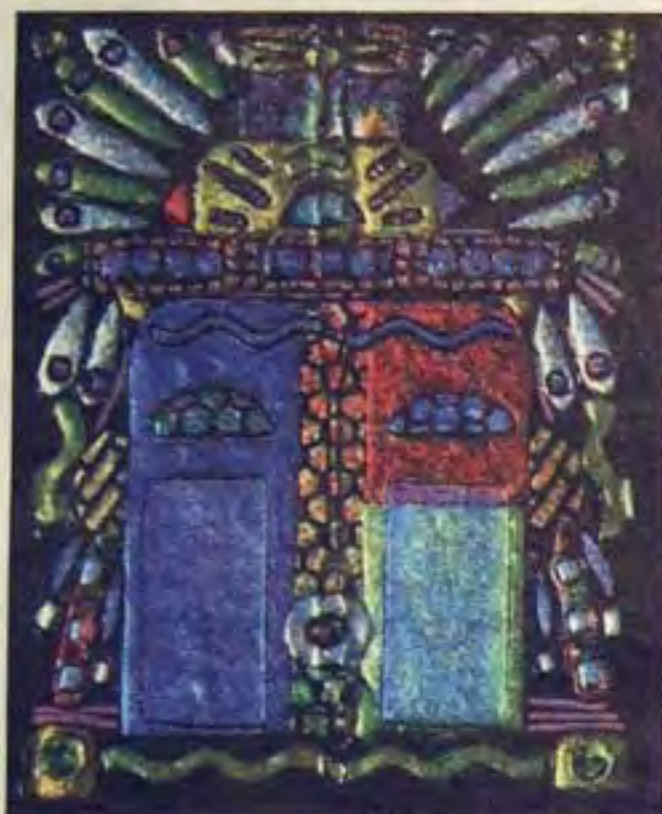
Pasatiempo



Arias from
the dark side

The Letter

From santos to spacesuits



Philip Lovato: *Dragonfly Spirit*, dichroic glass, 7.5 x 5.5 inches

In 1965, when the Spanish Colonial Arts Society revived the Spanish Market, dormant since the mid-1930s, it was held alongside Indian Market, but in 1972, the SCAS wisely gave Spanish Market its own weekend, the last full weekend in July. As in previous years, the 58th annual Spanish Market, held Saturday and Sunday, July 25 and 26, will continue to highlight traditional Spanish colonial-era arts and crafts. Visitors to the Plaza and its environs will also get a chance to see the annual Contemporary Hispanic Market, which for the past 23 years has provided contemporary artists a venue to showcase their innovative work. Contemporary Market is sponsored by El Museo Cultural de Santa Fe.

Walking among the many booths where artists from both markets will be exhibiting their work, you may suspect that the line between what is traditional and what is contemporary is often blurred. What prevents a santero from showing his carvings of religious icons in the traditional market may be nothing more than the use of synthetic pigments rather than natural ones. Other artists embrace Spanish colonial traditions as a means of expressing innovative ideas.

Many of the traditional Spanish colonial arts have been handed down in an intergenerational exchange, but **Cleo Romero**, a tinsmith in the traditional market (her work will be shown in Booth 50), did not learn her craft as part of a family legacy. She came to it after an accident in 2004 left her with a back injury. Although she had been

working with tin for a few years, it was only after the accident that she turned to her craft more ardently, leaving behind a career in banking that had lasted 30 years but didn't leave her much time to pursue her artistic interests. Her first attempt to get her work into the market, in 2005, was unsuccessful. "My family kept telling me I should try, and I kept thinking, I'm not good enough," she told *Pasatiempo*. "Of course I was rejected. My stuff was a little bit more contemporary."

On the advice of a friend in the market, Romero began to research her medium, visiting museums and studying their collections of Spanish colonial tinwork. She saw a black-and-white photograph of a tin wall sconce in a book but was told by museum staff that she couldn't examine the piece because it was part of a private collection. Working with a magnifying glass from the image in the book, Romero re-created the sconce. Just one year after



Josephine Mohr: *American Gothic*, paper cutout, 14.5 x 11 inches

being rejected, Romero was juried into the market and won a first-place ribbon for tinwork for the sconce. Inspired by traditional designs, Romero uses her skill to craft lamps and mirrors and embellishes them with a second skill: reverse painting on glass. "There were three groups in New Mexico who did reverse painting back in the 1800s," she said. Romero's reverse-painting techniques incorporate design elements such as scalloped and zigzag motifs inspired by all three groups into traditional mirrors. Having responded to a silent challenge from an image in a book, Romero now works as an educator, teaching people about tinwork and performing demonstrations at the Museum of Spanish Colonial Art.

Albuquerque artist **Josephine Mohr** works with paper cutouts. In Mexico, the practice is known as *papel picado*, and the medium is often used in celebrations of the Día de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead. Mohr shows her work in Contemporary Market (Booth 73) and, though she incorporates Day of the Dead-style figures into her pieces, she stops short of calling it *papel picado*. "They do paper cuts all over the world, and each country has its own name for it," she said. "People are always asking me what style I do, but I've never studied anyone, and I've never really looked it up."

Mohr works on one sheet at a time, while in *papel picado*, multiple sheets are cut using a chisel. Her designs incorporate roadrunners, jackrabbits, cowboy boots, and elements taken from Grimm's fairy tales. Mohr gave Grant Wood's iconic painting *American Gothic* a Day of the Dead makeover in one of her more humorous designs. "I wanted to do a *Mona Lisa*, but I just couldn't figure out how to make the smile," she said. Although she is skilled at watercolor painting and in printing techniques, Mohr's work in the market focuses on the paper cutouts, because that is the medium for which she was juried into the market.

continued on Page 54



Cleo Romero: tinwork with reverse glass painting, 12 inches in diameter



Cleo Romero: box,
tinwork with reverse painting,
5.5 x 8 x 10 inches

Taos artist **Philip Lovato** uses a high-tech type of glass to communicate the rich spiritual legacy of Native people of the Southwest. The modern process of creating dichroic glass was developed by NASA for use in spacesuit visors in order to give astronauts protection from unrefracted sunlight in space. The medium is composed of micro layers of metal oxides encased in fused glass that refract light. The result is a shimmering display of colors that change depending upon the angle from which they are viewed. Like Romero and Mohr, Lovato never apprenticed with anyone to learn his craft. "I got a book in Albuquerque on how to work with a kiln and how to fuse glass," he said. "I took it back to Taos and started on page one."

A native of Belen, New Mexico, Lovato had a vision one day as a boy: outside his window he saw a *koshari* clown approaching his house from some nearby hills. It was not until 30 years later that Lovato felt compelled to express through art the connection he felt with ancestral spirits such as Navajo yeis and Hopi katsinas. Lovato's wife first suggested that he depict the katsinas. Afterward, he had another visionary experience. "I was doing the glass," he said, "and I woke up one morning from a dream where this Indian with long black hair, who was half white and half black, said, 'You have to take this seriously.'" Lovato, who shows in Booth 47 at Contemporary Hispanic Market, uses dichroic glass to make jewelry and wall plaques that are mounted on black or white framed panels. His plaque called *Father of Gold*, composed of about 90 individual pieces of glass, appears in this year's poster for the contemporary market.

Despite the differing origins of their themes and techniques, these artists are all contemporary in one sense and traditional in another. It's best to approach the two markets as one. ◀

details

▼ Traditional Spanish Market preview

6-9 p.m. Friday, July 24

Santa Fe Community Convention Center, 201 W. Marcy St.

Spanish Colonial Arts Society members only, memberships start at \$40 and are available at the door; for information, call 982-2226 or visit spanishmarket.org

▼ Traditional Spanish Market

8 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday, July 25 & 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Sunday, July 26

The Plaza and nearby streets

▼ Contemporary Hispanic Market preview and awards ceremony

5:30-8 p.m. Friday, July 24

Santa Fe Community Convention Center, 201 W. Marcy St.

No charge; for information, call 992-0591 or visit contemporaryhispanicmarket.org

▼ Contemporary Hispanic Market

8 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday & Sunday, July 25 & 26

Lincoln Avenue between Palace Avenue & Federal Place



Cleo Romero: box,
tinwork with reverse painting,
5.5 x 8 x 10 inches

After surviving 30 years in the banking business, and two armed bank robberies, local woman tries her hand at a more relaxing career



Rebecca Craig/The New Mexican

Pojoaque tinworker Cleo Romero makes lamps, picture frames and jewelry boxes in her home.

WHOLE NEW CALLING

By John Knoll
For The New Mexican

In February 2004, Cleo Romero walked out a door of the Community Bank in Española. She slipped and landed on the icy parking lot.

The fall left her convalescing in and out of bed for several weeks. During her recuperation, she painfully drove to physical therapy and acupuncture treatments into the

summer. Although the injury was painful — it was a form of whiplash — she slowly recovered and got back on her feet.

Before the fall, she worked 30 years in the banking business, rising from teller at First National Bank of Santa Fe to assistant vice-president with First National Bank of Santa Fe in the Pojoaque branch and finally to regional manager at Community Bank in Española.

During her banking career, the

banks where she was employed were robbed four times. The first two were armed robberies which occurred at the First National Bank of Santa Fe in Pojoaque in 1977 and 1984, while the latter two were at the Community Bank in Española.

"The first two robberies were takeovers with guns," Romero said. "In the 1984 robbery, the gunmen wore ski masks. One gunman jumped over the counter and put a gun to the back of my head. I felt

my life flash before me."

Although the two robberies at the Community Bank didn't involve guns — they were note passers — Romero, recounting the four incidents with tears in her eyes, said "the robberies put the fear of God into me."

It was during her recuperation after her fall that she had the time to reassess her life.

Please see **NEW**, Page 3

New: Romero won first place at Spanish Market

Continued from Page 1

"Lying in bed after the accident, I thought, I don't want to do this anymore. I wanted another job, but I didn't know what I wanted to do."

When she was a young girl, her father, Arturo Romero, whose family first settled in Pojoaque Valley in 1717, taught her carpenter skills. She thought about doing woodwork, but her real passion was tinwork.

Romero, 54, said she started working with tin in 2000 after taking a class at Northern New Mexico Community College, but her bank job didn't give her much time to devote to her craft.

As she recuperated, she enjoyed staying at home more and more. Then her father had open-heart surgery in the summer of 2004 and she was blessed with the opportunity to spend time with him and help in his recovery.

"I started doing more and more tinwork, but I didn't think of myself as an artist," she said. "My family kept encouraging me to apply for the Spanish Market. But I didn't think I was good enough."

Her family kept telling her she was good enough. Finally, they persuaded her and in 2005 she applied for market, but was rejected.

"The rejection posed a challenge," she said. "I love challenges. I told myself I would continue my tinwork and apply for Spanish Market again in 2006."

Her persistence paid off. Not only was she accepted in 2006, she also won a first-place ribbon in tinwork for her delicately crafted 12-inch scone.

At this point, her career took off. In the next 18 months, she won five more awards, including a first place at the New Mexico State Fair for a Mora octagon mirror, embellished with hand flowers and painted



Rebecca Craig/The New Mexican

Pojoaque tinworker Cleo Romero uses a glass cutter to score the impressions of flowers into a sheet of tin. 'My art allows me to feel a connection with my heart,' she says. 'I've always had faith, but somehow my spirituality never touched my heart until I started working as an artist.'

Cleo Romero has four pieces in an exhibit at St. John's Episcopal Cathedral in Albuquerque.

in oil, using a reverse-painting technique.

One of the few New Mexico artists using the technique, which involves painting everything backward on the back of a pane of clear glass, Romero has evolved to the point where she is teaching her craft.

Last year, she taught tinwork at Alcalde Elementary. She also taught a workshop last month at the Spanish Colonial Museum

in Santa Fe with a reverse-painting workshop scheduled for August.

Using a limited number of tools, including tin snips, hammer, nails and a screwdriver, her repertoire of tinworks continues to expand.

"I get ideas from my dreams," she said. "Most of my pieces I see in my mind before I create them."

Despite her awards and an ability to craft a variety of intricate works — crucifixes, mirrors, chandeliers, tables, sconces, picture frames, baskets and flowers — she said she still has a difficult time believing her good fortune.

"I still don't believe it," she said. "People call me an artist, but I don't feel like they're talking about me. It's incredible. Without the accident, I'd probably still be in banking."

Romero has four pieces in the Santero Exhibit in Albuquerque. The exhibition is being held at St. John's Episcopal Cathedral.

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*"Zoraida's
& Eulogios's
Our Lady of
Guadalupe Chapel"*
Page 30 - 31

Spanish Colonial Influences

Saint Clement
"Blacksmiths"

(*A Blacksmith
and a Tinsmith)



If Santa Fe blacksmith René Zamora advises you to "hold your temper," he's most likely not referring to your attitude. Tempering involves heating to a very high temperature and then cooling it to make it harder. It's several special, time-tested techniques that he employs in his Santa Fe studio forge, where he painstakingly creates hardware and other items in the Spanish colonial tradition.

Blacksmiths were essential members of early Spanish explorations and settlements in the New World. The smiths shod horses and repaired armor for Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, Juan de Oñate, and all those who followed. A smith also made nails, hinges, locks, branding irons and agricultural tools. He repaired daggers, swords, and guns; made scissors, pots and griddles. He was indispensable. "By hammer in hand, all crafts stand," René quoted.

Un Herrero y Una Hojalatero: "New Mexico Metalworkers in the Old Tradition"

by Laura L. Carlson

Early New Mexican blacksmiths usually weren't master craftsmen, as were their brothers in Mexico. They had to cover all the differentiated jobs a smith did: farrier, armorer, locksmith, and more. In the 1600s and 1700s, only a few dozen smiths worked in the borderland province of New Mexico, and most of those were in Santa Fe.

Santa Fe is still a good place for blacksmiths, René said. It's a relatively wealthy community that supports the arts, attracts tourists, and allows artists to make a living.

René came to his art through the building trades. Born and raised in Santa Fe, he learned the old ways of working with wood and hand tools from his

business. He fires up his handmade forge with coke, a soft coal that burns very hot. Instead of wrought iron, which is too weak and isn't made any more, he uses an alloy of iron and another metal, such as molybdenum. The rods are heated past red-hot to a lemon color, approximately 2400°F. It took him years to be able to read the colors, to work the iron at the precise moment. Hammering the metal when it's too cool can cause it to shatter or break.

Using tools he made himself, René hammers and chisels the hot iron into desired shapes and designs. It doesn't take a great deal of muscle, he said, to pound the glowing metal on the anvil. Knowing where to hit and striking with the proper velocity are more important than brute strength. Women as well



grandfather. Later, he took classes at the Santa Fe Vocational School when it first opened and learned construction and furniture-making. Since then, he's always had a woodshop. When he became interested in the old styles, he searched for quality hardware to use on his furniture and couldn't find it. That was when he decided to make it himself.

He took an intensive course at the Turley School of Blacksmithing in Santa Fe, and "couldn't get enough of it." A few years later, in 2001, friends encouraged him to enter the Spanish Market, a juried exhibition of colonial-style arts and crafts. Soon he was winning awards.

René works in a sturdy studio made of recycled bricks and boards on Siler Road, between a woodworker and a scrap-metal

as men can be blacksmiths. He knows several women smiths, and has taught smithing techniques to girls as young as 13 years old.

René researches his patterns and mostly makes household hardware, but also fabricates decorative items like crosses. They are clean designs, functional, with fancy touches like



twisted handles, leaves, and curls. For the 2008 Spanish Market competition in late July, he made an intricate lock and lacy faceplate, all of its many parts created in his forge. "I start with the key," he said, "and unfortunately, I can only make one per lock." Turned sideways, his keys form a small "z," a signature trademark of his work.

He's done well at the Spanish Market: an honorable mention in revival arts '02; second place revival arts '03; first place, revival arts '04; and utilitarian awards, collaboration, in both '05 and '07. The last award was for a locking lid on a friend's chocolatera, an urn-shaped pot made to keep precious chocolate safe from prying hands.

After the Market, he'll be teaching a blacksmith class at Ghost Ranch in the fall. "That's what it's all about," he said with quiet pride. "You really can't do this and keep it to yourself."

René Zamora does commissioned work and can be contacted at 505-424-0443. A website is forthcoming.

Another Spanish Market award winner, Cleo Romero, sat among her glittering tinwork creations and recalled how she got started. She'd been in carpentry, too, working with her father in her spare time, making chests and other furniture. It was the day job that didn't work out so well. For nearly 30 years, she'd worked at a bank and had endured four robberies. During the last one, a bandit put a gun to her head. She promptly quit.

She slipped and fell in a parking lot, and then her father became quite ill. While taking care of her father and herself, Cleo had some time to reassess her life. She'd always liked crafts and working with her hands. In 2001, she took

a tinwork class at Northern New Mexico Community College and found herself really drawn to the art. She started small, making little frames for saint pictures and selling them in Bernadillo, while living the life of a "starving artist." Her family encouraged her to try to get into the Spanish Market, but she wasn't sure she was good enough. Cleo was turned down the first year, but she honed her craft and tried again. In 2006, she not only was accepted: she won first place in her category! In 2007, she received an honorable mention. She also won an award at Expo New Mexico.

Tinwork, she explained, came to New Mexico via Mexico. Tin was hard to come by in the Spanish colonial period and was considered precious. This "poor man's silver" didn't become easily available until after 1821, when Mexico took over the territory and the Santa Fe Trail opened up. Castaway tin cans from trade with the US army became sources of material for tin art, and later, thanks to the Industrial Revolution, sheets of inexpensive tin reached the frontier. The art reached its zenith during the US territorial period in the late 1800s, and then disappeared again, to be revived in the mid-1900s.

-Continued on Page 121-

Photos by Laura Carlson: Opposite page - René in his shop. Fire in the forge and handcrafted cross and fireplace screen. Tin Retablo by Christine Carey. Cleo Romero with a handcrafted wall hanging and her exquisite box that won first place and the purchase award at the 2008 Spanish Market.



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-Continued on Page 121-

Photos by Laura Carlson: Opposite page - René in his shop, Fire in the forge and handcrafted cross and fireplace screen. Tin Retablo by Christine Carey. Cleo Romero with a handcrafted wall hanging and her exquisite box that won first place and the purchase award at the 2008 Spanish Market.



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-Continued from page 89-

Un Herrero y Una Hojalatera*: “New Mexico Metalworkers in the Old Tradition”

By Laura L. Carlson

Due to its light weight, tin was primarily used for decorative objects: nichos (similar to shadow boxes), picture frames, lanterns, sconces, and candelabras. At first used in religious settings, tinwork quickly spread to homes. During its heyday, New Mexican tinwork had several distinct styles, named after the areas in which they were developed. The styles combined pictures, strips of wallpaper, mirrors, or reverse-painted glass with the decorated tin. Rio Arriba Painted Workshop featured flowers, while Isleta Tinsmith was lacier; Mesilla Combed used painted, parallel lines. Valencia Red and Green, Taos Serrate, Mora Octagonal, and Rio Abajo were other major styles.

Cleo has researched them all. She goes to museums or libraries and pores over old books until she finds a design she wants to try. Next

she draws on paper, cutting out the various pieces and fitting them together in a process she likens to “playing with paper dolls.” Once the design is finalized, she cuts the pieces out of metal sheets of #28-30 tin, careful not to nick her fingers on the sharp edges. Next she creates the patterns with various-sized hammers, chisels, and cutters. Some patterns are bumped out, others are incised, curled or stamped. There may be glass panels which are painted with folk art patterns or lined with pretty papers, or she may apply a mirror. Catholic funeral cards or other saint images may be inserted into fancy frames. After soldering everything together, she cleans and polishes the work with acetone, steel wool, or even a toothbrush. A small piece can take several hours to fabricate. The large pieces can take days.

Her workshop, a spare room in her home, holds a strange assortment of tools. Anything can become a tin-working tool, she explained—a piece of broomstick, an old electric toothbrush for polishing, even the fake credit cards that come in junk mail can help her create patterns. There are glass cutters, jewelry tools, pliers, and quilting rulers in the drawers and boxes under her worktables. The essentials, though, are a nail, tin snips, and a hammer. “That’s what you really need,” she said.

Most of her pieces are one of a kind, except for her tin boxes—she’s had many requests for those.

Beautiful on the outside, the silvery boxes open up to reveal a velvet-lined interior and a surprise—a lovely, 3-D tin rose on the inner lid. One contest entry she created was a complicated, leafy arbor with a wooden santo inside. She’s also completely covered end tables and lamps with patterned tin, combining her carpentry with her new skill. Her designs are wonderfully detailed, rendered with skill, and mirror-shiny. Her sold pieces hang in Bishop’s Lodge and private homes all over the country.

She has only one regret in starting this new career, which she dearly loves. “I wish I’d started doing it when I was younger,” she said.

For inquiries about any of her works, contact Cleo Romero at 505-753-2143 or 505-690-4673.

