

PHOTOGRAPHY IN NEW MEXICO

UNM ART MUSEUM, CENTER FOR THE ARTS
UNM CAMPUS, ALBUQUERQUE

The New Mexican photographic heritage towers head and shoulders above many bodies of photographic accomplishment in other states, as most photographic historians would acknowledge. This is not to say that there have not been fine photographers at work in, say, North Dakota, Alabama or Minnesota; it is simply that the cultural heritage of New Mexico is so incomparably rich and variegated that it has served for ages as a powerful magnet for both native and outsider photographers. Last, and by no means least—especially when one considers the special medium of photography, the distillation of earthly light itself—the prismatic light of this territory has entranced generations of artists.

Add to this the multifarious landscape of New Mexico, ranging from the lush and verdant to vistas close to lunar, and it becomes completely understandable that such an exhibition as *Photography: New Mexico*, a choice sampling of photos from the collection of the Art Museum of the University of New Mexico, as assembled by the noted photographer, Thomas Barrow, should prove to be an informative and memorable experience.

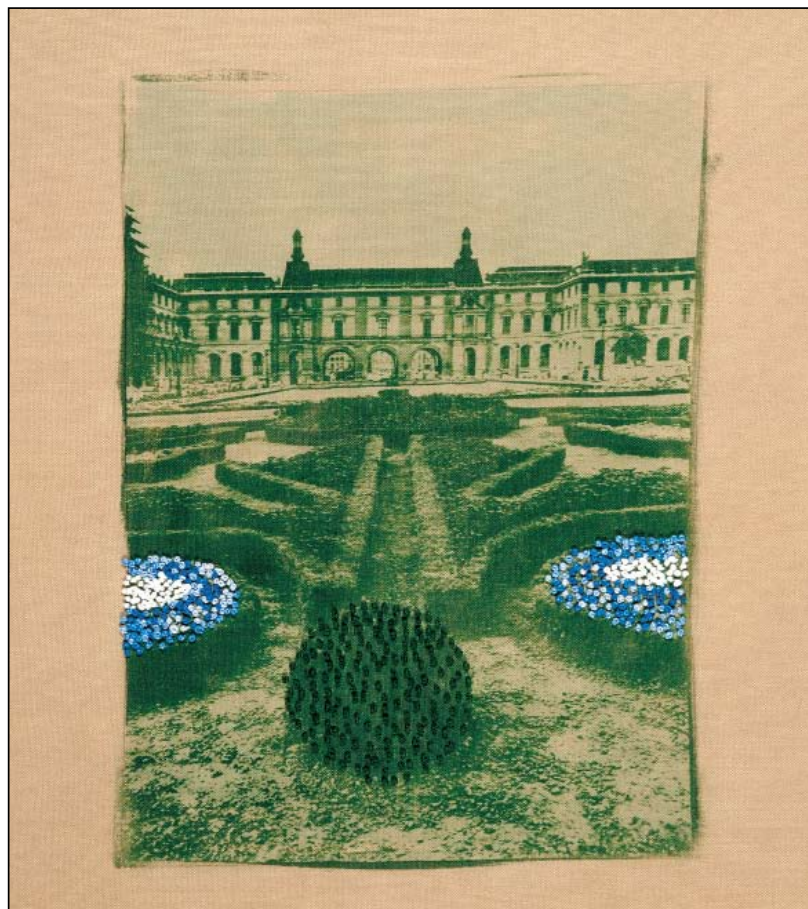
The occasion for this winter's exhibition of some great New Mexico photographs is the publication of a sumptuous (and long sought-after) book, *Photography: New Mexico*, by Albuquerque's Fresco Fine Art Publications, in 2008. With insightful texts by the photographic gray eminence himself, i.e. Thomas Barrow, and art critic Kristin Barendsen, and with an introductory essay by Stuart A. Ashman, N.M. Secretary of Cultural Affairs, this compilation of work by a handful of photographers living here belongs on any shelf that hopes to encompass the variety and amplitude of the subject.

A glance at the roster of artists included seems to be quite comprehensive and ambitious (though there are bound to be regrettable omissions, considering that only twenty-five are featured). A handful of images (in the Fresco publication) will likely haunt viewers for a long, long time.

Thomas Barrow's newest *Modest Structure* works, color, pin-hole camera shots of sorry, abandoned Southwestern commercial roadside buildings are not only exquisitely melancholy in their soft focus, but also seem to capture palpably the shimmering heat of the day.

Likewise fixed in my mind are some of the botanical-themed works of veteran Betty Hahn. *Museum Garden*, for example, wonderfully conflates two streams of artistic history. Recollecting the *nostalgie* of Atget's architectural images of palaces and anonymous by-ways of old France, Hahn enhances the vista by printing the image on fabric and picking out the blossoms in the museum garden *in stitching*, recalling, as Barendsen puts it, "the anonymous women in history who approached photography as craft."

JAN ADLMANN



Betty Hahn, *Museum Garden*, Bichromate on fabric with stitching, 1973