

SANTA FE UPS THE WATTAGE//AUGUST 25,2015//OREGON ARTSWATCH

Santa Fe's museums have declared this the "[Summer of Color](#)," each choosing one to build an exhibition around, and I made it to two: blue, at the Museum of Spanish Colonial Art, and red, at the Museum of International Folk Art.

The Spanish Colonial, working on a very small budget in a small space, produced [Blue on Blue: Indigo & Cobalt in New Spain](#), a smart, concise, and attractive show of textiles, carvings, earthenware, furniture, and a few paintings, much of it from the museum's own permanent collections, that continues through February 28. It is by nature a little scientific – wall texts talk about the history and nature of the dyes – but in the main it's simply an opportunity to look at the collection through the lens of the color itself rather than from a historical or stylistic perspective. Surprisingly, it makes for a cohesive show drawn from a variety of objects, from practical to decorative to spiritual to ornamental. There's a late 19th century wooden carving, almost toylike, of a cowboy riding a white horse; a mid-19th century pen-and-ink colored drawing of Saint Isabela, looking flat and primitive like a medieval European church painting; a more sophisticated anonymous oil painting from a century earlier in Mexico of a good shepherd, flock at hand and cherubs flapping in the air above; several superb blankets; and an oddly enchanting, highly stylized crucifixion painting by the early 19th century artist José Manuel Benavides. The variety is strangely beguiling, reflecting bits and pieces of a whole blue world-view.



"Praying to Mixe God, Oaxaca, Mexico," Sebastião Salgado. 1980. Vintage silver gelatin print. Collection of William and Anne Frej.

At least as intriguing, in an utterly different way, is the Spanish Colonial's [Tradición, Devoción y Vida: 80 Years of Black and White Photography in New Mexico and Mexico](#), which runs through October 31. Drawn mostly from the collection of Anne and William Frej, and including some pristine examples of William Frej's own work, the show goes above and beyond the ordinary run of photo shows, documenting many fascinating slices of life but also concentrating on composition: the angles and shades and balances inside

the frame. If anything's accidental among these images, it's perfectly accidental. Ranging from big-name photographers like Ansel Adams, Eliot Porter, and Mexico's Flor Garduño to people you've likely never heard of, the exhibit maintains a consistently high quality. In a city with several very good commercial photo galleries, it's good to see one of the museums devoting well-considered time and space to the art form, too.