

I had an Oklahoma landscape portrait from my 1991 Route 66 trip selected for this memorable show. I flew back to Gallup for the opening, my only art opening of my life.....

Dec. 4, 1992-----

GALLUP, N.M. When people dream about **Route 66**, they usually envision vintage cars, old diners and orphaned gas stations. But one of the more authentic stretches of what's left of the two-laner is the passage through the Native American country of **New Mexico**.

Gallup is a small town wedged in the northwestern end of McKinley County. Almost 44,000 of the county's 60,000 residents are Native Americans representing the Navajo, Hopi and Zuni (which is part of the Pueblo) tribes. Mother Teresa once put **Gallup** on her list of the world's forsaken places because of the intoxicated Native Americans who used to wander the streets. The 101-year-old town and the Native Americans deserve better.

As the folks at **Gallup**'s Red Mesa Art Center planned their 3rd Annual Route 66 Revisited exhibit, they realized the responsibility to include Native Americans as one of the key subjects, along with typical themes like roadside art and architecture, demonstration of migrant travel and a celebration of 1992's 66th Anniversary of **Route 66**.

All of those ideas jell magnificently into "**Route 66** Revisited," a collection of photography, sculpture, painting and other media that the **Gallup** Area Arts Council has brought here in cooperation with the Flat Iron Gallery of the Near Northwest Arts Council in Wicker Park.

It's a unique partnership that links a rural arts council with an inner-city arts council.

One of the more compelling artists in the exhibit is Chicago photographer Tom Lindfors, who contributed majestic black and white Native American portraits he took at powwows. They are depictions of deep integrity, such as the bold outlines of tribal elder Charging Eagle and the spirit of Taken Alive, a thirtysomething female member of a tribe.

"To me, **Route 66** started changing the way these people lived," Lindfors said last week. "It stood for change coming through and

moving them out on reservations. There are cultures that **Route 66** passes through, not only geographically, but over time. And it passes through some of the communities I have shot Native Americans."

Lindfors, 36, has photographed Native Americans across the United States, with an emphasis on the Dakota, Lakota and Sioux tribes of the Plains. He's a local commercial photographer who grew up around the Wisconsin Dells. His parents currently live on a Menominee reservation in Wisconsin. Lindfors' next phase is to spend a prolonged period of time on a reservation and photograph a medicine man and the people he has healed.

"All this started seven years ago," Lindfors said. "What I was trying to do was imitate some of the early historic photographs (such as those by outdoorsman Edward Sheriff Curtis, who photographed more than 40,000 Native Americans in his lifetime). It wasn't just to imitate the way their images looked, but to imitate their whole logistics."

That meant Lindfors hauled around a vintage 4-by-5 caped viewcamera and chemicals. He developed his portraits in the field, under a car or wherever else he could find darkness. "One thing that has impacted my work is movies like 'Dances With Wolves.' For me, it's kind of sad. Everybody (on a reservation) now has a screen actors' card. And a picture with Kevin (Costner). Everybody wants to get paid. The formal portrait part for me is sort of gone."

But the informal transitory spirit of the Mother Road lives through many of the show's portraits. For example, **New Mexico** artist Marilyn Conway's "Trading Post, **Route 66** Arizona" is a hand-colored silver gelatin print that contrasts a teepee with a neighboring satellite dish. Kelvin Yazzie of Flagstaff, Ariz., uses pit-fire ceramics to articulate the architectural individuality of **Route 66**.

"In terms of response, this is the most successful show we've ever done," said Red Mesa executive director Rosanne Groger. More than 400 artists representing 22 states and Canada submitted entries. The Goethe Institute in Germany has expressed interest in the show after it closes here. And indeed, it is worth seeing. It is the next best thing to being on the original street of dreams.

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