

March 22-28, 2012

Arts & Entertainment Magazine of The Taos News

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GUERRILLA ART

Promo-Hobo Free Heart
emerges with a challenge to creativity

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Christopher Lujan holds up one of his handmade drums with a dreamcatcher-style handle underneath. See page 24.

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On the cover: Promo-Hobo art on the side of a derelict building near downtown Taos. Photo illustration by Rick Romancito

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TEMPO

The arts and entertainment magazine of The Taos News

Robin Martin/Owner • Chris Baker/Publisher

Jean Livingston/Editor • Rick Romancito/Tempo Editor

Tina Larkin/Chief Photographer

Marilyn Olsen/Artistic Designer • Virginia L. Clark/Chief Copy Editor

Amy Jones/Designer

(505) 413-9400

Publications: Thursday, periodical postage paid at the post office in Taos, N.M. Subscriptions by mail, possible in advance: \$11.00 per year, Cash/Check/credit/Money Order: \$11.00 per year. Distribution in New Mexico, 1.00 per year. Distribution of the "Street" rates. Call 505-758-2303. Published by iComfort, Inc. 40 The Taos News

Send orders to www.taosnews.com or call [505-413-9400](tel:5054139400)

Guerrilla art

Promo-Hobo Free Heart emerges with a challenge to creativity

By Rick Romancito

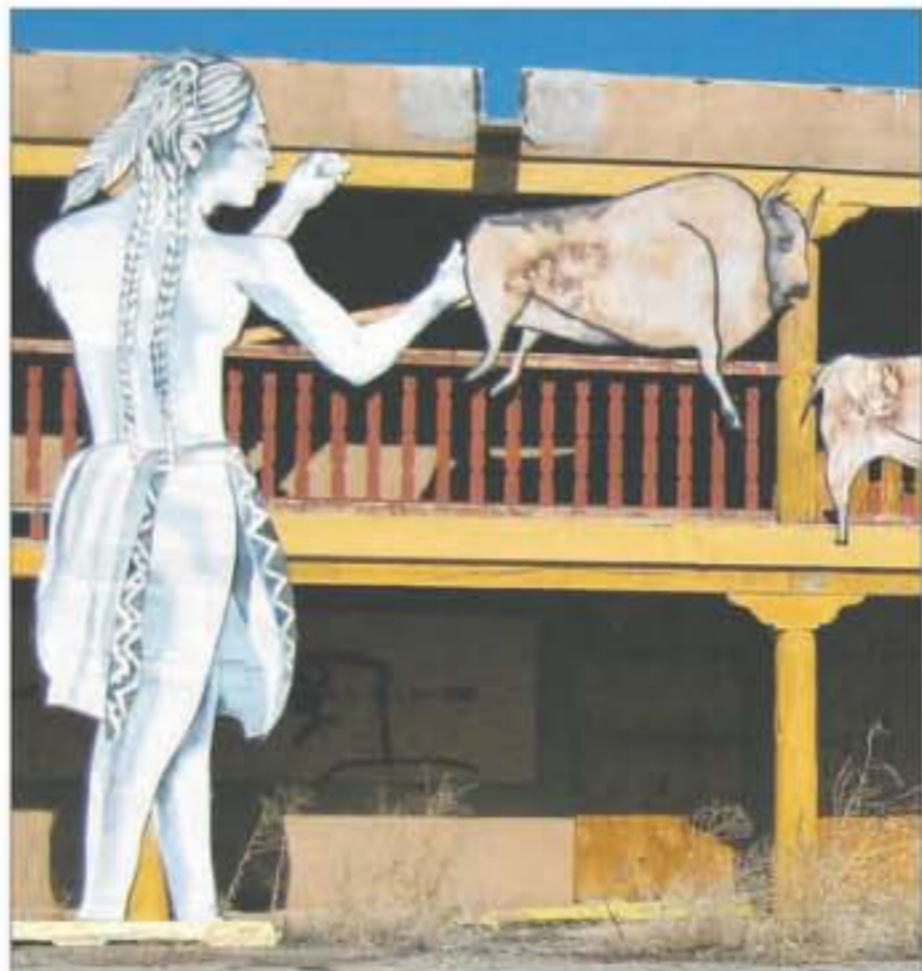
Something's got to give. There are artists here by the double-handful and creative minds galore. And, even though the art market appears to be on shaky ground, that hasn't stopped some people from just getting out there and doing something, anything.

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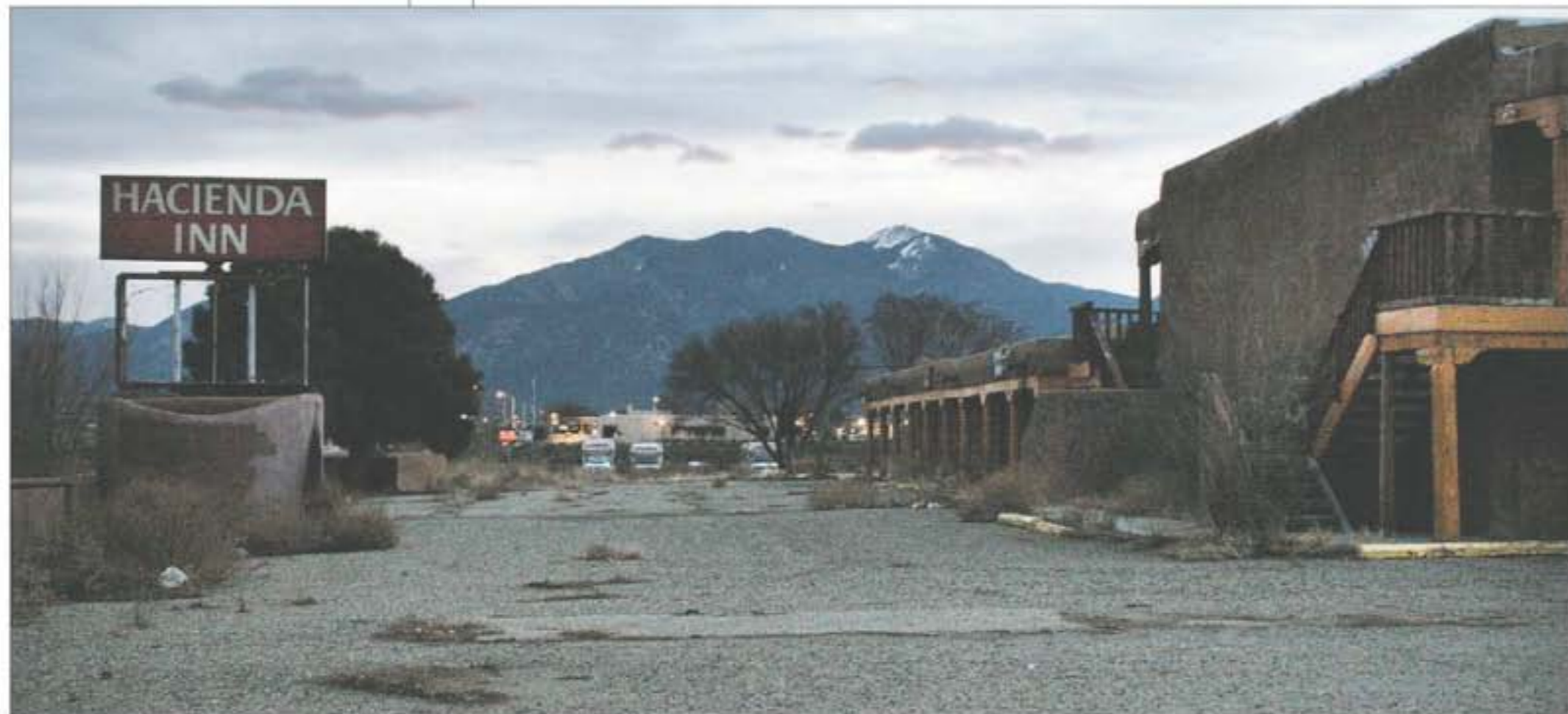


Promo-Hobo artists added their temporary touch to the Mary Medina Bldg. at Cruz Alta and Gusdorf Road.

One of the Promo-Hobo sites has been the unoccupied Mary Medina Building at Cruz Alta and Gusdorf Road, which has seen significant vandalism.



Temporary artworks from Promo-Hobo applied to the Hacienda Inn. Photo supplied by the artists.



The Hacienda Inn, located at 1321 Paseo del Pueblo Sur, closed in March 2009. Today, it is considered an unavoidable eyesore that greets visitors arriving in Taos from the south. It, too, has been a target of some Promo-Hobo guerrilla art.

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So, before long, we started seeing pieces of art popping up all over town, mostly on the walls of derelict buildings considered eyesores. We aren't talking about gangsta vandalism, that inarticulate spray-painted marking of territory that is itself an eyesore. This stuff is artwork drawn or painted on large pieces of paper or cardboard that is surreptitiously put up so it can be easily taken down with no damage or evidence left behind.

Then, a Facebook page went up. An inquiry was made. And, cautiously, they started coming out from the dark. Now, even though the majority prefers to remain anonymous, we know who they are.

They call themselves the Promo-Hobo Free Heart Project.

Through Steven Gootgeld, the group's video chronicler, we have learned that these folks of various ages bring with them a sense of guerrilla creativity, art that has to get out, no matter what.

Gootgeld says he was talking with another artist one day a couple of months ago "and it started out by realizing we both had a lot of art we created, because we were both prolific artists, and you know that the art market has just crashed, and I was kidding telling him it would be an interesting video to take some of my ceramic sculpture and video me smashing it with a hammer into my Dumpster. And, he started telling me about all the artwork he had stored in his closet and was practically sleeping with it as well."

From that conversation, the seeds of Promo-Hobo was born.

"It ultimately ended up with us deciding to use abandoned buildings as a canvas, because the town is full of 'taggers' and that's very destructive to property and costs people money to cover it. We would make these installations temporary — and by their very nature they're temporary, we basically pick up used cardboard, tape it all together and paint our work on it. Then, we'd just use staples on wood so it can be removed in seconds."

While the group insists on anonymity, they are planning an audacious new public expression.

"The Hobos are fixin' to throw an art show and reception in early April," an email message states. However, the exact location and date will be announced soon. This event will be open to the public.



Promo-Hobo is planning a public exhibition soon.

To enter the show, artists may submit original two-dimensional artwork to be wall-hung. All art will be accepted.

"Artists may submit life-size cardboard images of people at an art show. Must be black and white only. Our vision is to create a life-like art opening as a performance art piece. No signatures or names allowed. This is an anonymous event. All art will be installed at the show and be available for the public to view and take as they see fit," the announcement reads. "The Hobos will jury the show and create art tags for the Best and Worst of Show!"

For delivery of art, contact can be made through www.facebook.com/921promohobos/. Promo-Hobo Free Heart takes much of its

GUERRILLA ART continues on Page 36



An example of Promo-Hobo's temporary artwork, applied to a condemned building on Siler Road near downtown Taos.



You never know when or where the Promo-Hobos might strike next.

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philosophy from a political activist stance, minus the rage and hate. So, they decided to focus this project on "the heart and giving and free art."

Gootgeld says he's been entrenched in the art community for 20 years amid galleries and museums and accepted venues for culture, but he wound up with a bit of a chip on his shoulder. "Because I've seen and heard everything," he said. So, when he and other members of the fledgling group were putting it together they chose to pull a 180 and turn all that inside out. The art they produce has freed them and, in turn, is itself free.

He said when they put up an installation, they will usually take a photo and put it up on their Facebook page with GPS coordinates indicating where it can be found. Since the project began, he said there are some collectors who are chomping at the bit to find them. "They're even starting to send us pictures of it in their home, which is kind of cool," he said.



The anonymous artists of Promo-Hobo.

Their activity is not without risk, however.

Because they choose to sneak around to put up their artwork, sometimes undercover of night but mostly in broad daylight, they run the chance of being caught by either the property owner or the police. Plus, some of the properties they've chosen offer certain dangers of their own, being derelict and sometimes condemned. The Hacienda Inn, for instance, closed in 2009 and has since become an eyesore because the structure has become ruined and unstable. Gootgeld said they are fully aware of this and are prepared to pay the price, if any, because this means so much to them.

While some might call what they do vandalism, the law actually states that anyone who does measurable damage to a site is guilty of a misdemeanor. If the damage is over \$1,000, it becomes a felony. If a kid is caught with them, he or she might be turned over to juvenile probation authorities and their parents might have to face some level of accountability, according to town of Taos acting Police Chief Jerry Hogrefe.

But, because what Promo-Hobo does is put up artwork that is designed to be easily removed

by anyone, the penalty for being caught may be up to whatever a judge decides. Certainly, trespassing may be involved, but for a place like the Hacienda Inn, it's hard to say who even owns it.

The fact that Promo-Hobo chooses sites like the Hacienda Inn, located on the main highway through town; the Mary Medina Building at the corner of Gusdorf Road and Cruz Alta; and the Big-bee property on Siler Road across from Smith's Foods, brings attention to the very fact that these are buildings that have been allowed to become not just derelict but very dangerous because of the criminal activity they may attract. It's like Promo-Hobo is making an attempt to use art as a tool for change.

"Something that we work on together a lot," Gootgeld said, "is just focusing on giving, and our philosophy is that, yes, we're doing this with art and we're 'occupying art' with that idea but if we're to let go of this paradigm of 'lack' and start 'giving,' there would be so much abundance that everybody would have everything they need."

So, pay attention. You never know where and when Promo-Hobo may strike. They're out there, making art count.

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