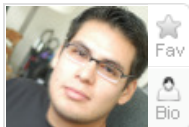


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The small town in focus

August 20, 5:37 PM • San Antonio Museum Examiner • Kristian Jaime

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With Fotoseptiembre approaching, small town, USA takes center stage in some unusual places

Small town America is not a setting that enjoys a particularly chic reputation, but with the Fotoseptiembre Photography Festival about to begin in San Antonio, its poised for the spotlight at the Witte Museum.

The 15 year-old festival has come a long way since its earnest beginnings where it could not dream of showcasing 230 photographers from across the world. Calling it a festival may sell it short considering that for the entire month of September, it descends upon 62 venues that stretch from the Alamo City to New York and art hubs in between.

Among those venues is the Witte Museum which boasts as eclectic a collection as any of the other 61 galleries. Small Town Texas, Ricardo Romo's individual show in the Focus Gallery is as much about the cultural contribution of the overlooked hamlets of Texas as it is about their disappearance. From August 22 to October 4, patrons are treated to a different vision of landscapes from Floresville to Nixon.

"As a dedicated observer of the small communities that dot the Texas horizon, Romo embarked on a photographic journey to more than seventy-five small towns with the goal of documenting the cultural and social features of a fading way of life," explained Arturo Almeida, the exhibition curator.

If Romo's name seems familiar, it should for a very good reason. When he is not being a shutter bug, he is the president of the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA). If running one of the largest universities in the UT System was not enough, the local boy from Fox Tech High School has made a name for himself in academia while finding wall space for his other love—photography with a smattering of history.

According to the Witte Museum, "through innovative programs in history, science and culture, strengthened by collections and facilities, the Witte enriches lives, promotes a quality of life for all



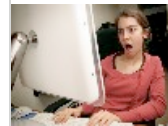
"Small Town, Texas" by Ricardo Romo (Photo/Courtesy)

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The Witte, much like other venues, aims for the greatest amount of traffic through their exhibits. So do not be surprised to have various opening all at the same time. According to festival officials, that is done purposely to delve headfirst into the community feel. It is not unusual for photography aficionados and enthusiasts to visit several galleries in what has become an evening of fine art.

Like any savvy venture this creates its share of traffic for all other exhibits as well and for any curator or director alike, that equals return business. In the emerging art world in San Antonio, nothing is more valuable.

For festival director, Michael Mehl, it is this access to various bodies of work that has contributed to the reputation Fotoseptiembre USA has worked hard to cultivate. For Mehl and the small army of people that make every September a collective ball of stress and cathartic bliss, every year brings a new crop of hungry and gallery-tested photographers.

One could only imagine how difficult it would be to wrangle such diverse artists without partners across the world. This time around, they include CONARTE Nuevo Leon, Fototeca de Nuevo Leon, Instituto Cultural de Mexico, Land Heritage Institute, Leo Matiz Foundation, SAPL Imaging and Say Si'.

For artists included in the numerous gallery shows, an immediate benefit of the month-long festival is international exposure with the movers and shakers of the San Antonio art community in what quickly becomes one of the most attended cultural events in the city.

The first official event for Fotoseptiembre kicks off at Silo Elevated Cuisine and Bar at 1133 Austin Highway with the solo show for photographer John Keoni Viriyapunt August 20 starting at 6:30 pm.

The complete listing for Fotoseptiembre events is available at www.fotoseptiembreusa.com.

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