

IN HIS NATIVE LAND:

The Early Modern Photography of John Candelario

During the decades of the 1930s and 1940s the crosscurrents of modernism swept across New Mexico from New York and San Francisco. John Candelario (1916-1993) worked and exchanged correspondence with America's first generation of modernists: from Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz to curator Nancy Newhall at the Museum of Modern Art, patron Mabel Dodge Luhan, and pioneering photographers Edward Weston, Laura Gilpin, and Eliot Porter.

Candelario photographed his native land with poetic clarity beginning in 1938. The photographer first studied various processes from platinum and silver printing to carbon, gum bichromate, bromoil, and bromoil transfer printing.¹ He learned basics in portraiture from Fred Archer, interior photography from Californians Will Connell and color printing from William Mortensen, platinum printing from Laura Gilpin, and advanced composition from Nicholas Haz. However his most significant experience was at home.

For two summers in 1938 and 1939 the young photographer worked with master photographer Edward Weston. He drove him by car through northern New Mexico where they both photographed together. While Weston was adding to his growing lexicon of southwestern subjects, Candelario absorbed some of the most significant lessons of modern photography first-hand. Continuous correspondence between the two allowed the master to critique the younger photographer's original prints.

Candelario refined his own personal vision in the tradition that Edward Weston, worked with his son Brett.² The experience with Weston inspired the photographer to produce one of his greatest works, *New Mexico*, the unique portfolio of platinum prints. In 1946, Candelario was made a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain in recognition for his portfolio. The platinum photographs were created by his own altered chemical process, which created cool black-tones, rather than traditional warm-toned prints.



Doorway at Trampas, 1939



Penitente Cross and Chapel, 1937

After working with Weston, the photographer met painter Georgia O'Keeffe near her New Mexico residence. They became friends. She shared his photographs with Alfred Stieglitz in New York, who wrote to the photographer: "I like them because of their straightforwardness - their honesty - a feeling all their own - because they are devoid of trickiness - artiness. The feeling is all your own. And the photography is good. Very good. Remain true to yourself and go right ahead on your own path for it is a sound one."³ Candelario subsequently made portraits of O'Keeffe for the American Publishing Company. In 1947, Mabel Dodge Luhan commissioned him to photograph for her book *Taos and Its Artists*. The publication also included portraits by Alfred Stieglitz, Laura Gilpin, and Will Connell.

Candelario exhibited his photographs at national and international galleries and institutions, including An American Place, Alfred Stieglitz's gallery in New York⁴ and the Royal Photographic Society in London. From March 22 to April 30, 1944, the Museum of Modern Art mounted the exhibition titled *New Workers 1*. Included were seventeen of his platinum and bromide prints along with photographs by Lisette Model, Adrian Siegel, Walter Rosenblum, Morris Engel, and Dorothy Norman. At this time, Candelario created photo-stories for the *Life*, *Look*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Holiday*, *National Geographic*, and covers for *New Mexico Magazine*, as well as leading photography journals: *U.S. Camera*, *Popular Photography*, *Minicam Photography*, and *The Complete Photographer*.

Later in his career, Candelario worked as a cameraman, producer, director, and writer in the motion picture industry. He received numerous honors including the TV Emmy, a Peabody, Golden and Silver Reel Awards, as well as awards from film festivals in America, Europe, and Latin America. Through a lifetime of friendships with Native Americans, the photographer never ceased to document their customs, heritage, ceremonials, and ceremonial dances with the camera and audiotape. Candelario also had the foresight to audiotape significant figures in the Taos arts community such as Frieda Lawrence and Tony Luhan.

In His Native Land includes unique platinum prints, photographs, and correspondence during the first formative decade of John Candelario's photographic career. Selections are from the archive of the John S. Candelario Estate in the Museum of New Mexico. *In His Native Land: The Early Modern Photography of John Candelario* is exhibited in the Beauregard Photography Gallery, Museum of Fine Arts, Museum of New Mexico from September 15, 2000 to Summer 2001.

1 For further technical information see the Exhibition Library Book or visit the Fine Arts Museum Library and Archive.

2 March 27, 1993, Candelario to the Curator of Photography, Museum of Fine Arts Library and Archive.

3 April 19, 1943, Stieglitz to Candelario, Museum of Fine Arts Library and Archive.

4 Van Deren Coke, from an interview with the artist, "Three Generations of Hispanic Photographers Working in New Mexico: John S. Candelario," Taos: The Harwood Foundation Museum of the University of New Mexico, 1993, 4.