

# Pasatiempo

¡BIENVENIDOS, VLADÉM!

## Coming home

By Kate Nelson  
September 22, 2023



Harmony Hammond  
Clayton Porter

Galleries in major art markets represent them. International biennales embrace them. Out-of-state collectors adore them. But in New Mexico, many contemporary artists say, even their neighbors don't know what they do.

Instead, they toil away in near anonymity on art that defies easy explanations. Now, beyond the prestige of a state-owned museum collecting and displaying their works, the most precious thing the new Vladem Contemporary delivers to them could be establishing hometown connections.

For certain you'll see a time-traveling tale of the 1680 Pueblo Revolt, a warship turned dreamy light sculpture, and paintings bound with grommets to evoke a new sense of the human body. Just don't be surprised if you also see one of their makers while shopping at your favorite grocery store.

### Harmony Hammond

Layers of midnight-toned Prussian blue oil paint suture the horizontal straps that Harmony Hammond wrapped around *Cinch V*, one of her two near-monochrome paintings in Shadow and Light. In the center, a string laces back and forth through grommets at each end of the straps. Untied at the bottom, the strings hang unevenly off the edge of the painting.

"*Cinch V* is torso-sized," Hammond says from her Galisteo home. "The straps suggest ribs. But the straps are loose. The painting is not about binding, bandaging, or bondage, but rather about the possibility of constriction or binding. There's a kind of tension. Were the strings just untied and loosened? Or might they be pulled tight like a corset?"

In *Witness*, a grid of grommets embedded in the light, buff-colored surface opens a pictorial space, suggesting eyes or body orifices. Referencing an area beneath the surface, they ask, "Who or what has been covered up, buried, or erased?"

Such questions have long informed Hammond's socially engaged abstract paintings. She examines how materials and the ways they are used bring content into abstract work — especially the body. For example, the canvas for *Witness* with its seamed flaps casting shadows on the surface and the grommets in *Cinch V* come from repurposed worn-out Aikido mat covers. Hammond studied and taught the Japanese martial art for 36 years; the canvas literally bears a history of bodies falling on and rolling over it, including Hammond's.

An artist, writer, curator, and university professor, Hammond was a leading figure in the development of the feminist art movement in New York in the early 1970s. Her work has been exhibited in museums and galleries throughout the U.S. and Europe, including the New Mexico Museum of Art, where her pieces have been included in three group exhibitions and two mini-solo shows in the alcove spaces.

“Because of the museum’s extensive and important historical collections, there has been minimal time and space to feature the work of contemporary artists,” she says. “Vladem Contemporary will change all that. Aside from continuous theme-based exhibitions of contemporary work, it will be able to present retrospectives of work by individual artists and special projects. “This is important because the New Mexico Museum of Art is a collecting museum. Contemporary work can not only be seen at the Vladem, but also acquired as part of the New Mexico Museum of Art’s ongoing permanent collection.”

With those additions, the collective voice of the art — the story of how this place shapes a visual narrative — can resound for generations to come. ◀

### **Judy Chicago, Belén**

Known for: Surrealist paintings and multimedia installations that address issues of the feminine form, the patriarchy, and the Holocaust.

“I am a big supporter of finding new avenues to make art accessible to more people. Pretty much from the beginning of my career, when museums and galleries shut the door in my face, I was able through a myriad of grassroots movements to find alternate venues to show and share my art. It’s wonderful that New Mexico now has a dedicated art space to showcase modern art created by New Mexican artists; and I’m thrilled to be a part of the inaugural show.”

### **Cristina González, Santa Fe**

Known for: Public art that explores Chicana themes and often riffs on papel picado in metal, vinyl, and paint.

“For over 100 years, New Mexico has clung to a dominant, ‘tricultural’ narrative of art that reinforces damaging stereotypes. The Vladem has the opportunity to unravel, complexify, and reimagine this story. It could also get super experimental and participatory, which would be fabulous and unprecedented for a state museum in New Mexico.”

### **Oswaldo Macía, Santa Fe and London**

Known for: Olfactory/acoustic (scent and sound) sculptures that create immersive environments.

“Since I started living here, I have begun to feel that Santa Fe shares that phenomenon particular to the desert of appearing static but which is in fact made up of many dynamic parts all in constant movement. Santa Fe is an important intersection for many, not only artists, the point where one passes from one place to another. It is a step, a transition, a crossing driven by ideas and dreams.”

### **Virgil Ortiz, Cochiti Pueblo**

Known for: Contemporary pottery and grand installations for Revolt 1680/2180, an ongoing project examining the Pueblo Revolt.

“Unless you create your own venues, it’s really hard to find a space like the Vladem. We get to reach whole new clients. My tip to visitors is just go in and experience it. Try to start on a clean palate. Go in as raw as you can. Experience the building. No judgment and no more imaginary hurdles.”

### **Erika Wanenmacher, Santa Fe**

Known for: Suffusing multimedia works with themes of magic, mythology, and mysticism.

“This is a big deal that we actually have a devoted contemporary art museum that the state owns, that a state museum — and this is really important — is collecting artists in New Mexico doing world-class work that oftentimes you don’t get to see. Many more people are now looking at Santa Fe as a major art node.”

### **Harmony Hammond, Galisteo**

Known for: Incorporating found objects into paintings that address issues both personal and political.

“The Museum of Art has an incredible historical collection. In the past, that work needed to be exhibited, and there has been only a little room for contemporary work. The Vladem can take contemporary work and contextualize it within a historical thread. It can put it in different, multiple narratives. And it can allow for big solo exhibits.”