

Editor's Letter

The first time I saw the structure behind me in this photo, it was surrounded by parishioners covering it with a mixture of mud and hay. Often, when I show this view of the building to people, they have no idea what it is. But it is a church that has been portrayed by artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe, Ansel Adams, and others more than any other church in the United States.

This is the back of the San Francisco de Asis (Saint Francis of Assisi), a Spanish Mission church in Rancho de Taos, just south of Taos, New Mexico, seen from the highway that passes right next to it.

Built from 1772 to 1816, this adobe church is regularly replastered by its congregation. I first became aware of it through O'Keeffe's paintings and I am still thrilled to introduce it to novice viewers, as I did last summer in *SchoolArts'* Santa Fe Pueblo Art and Culture workshop.

San Francisco de Asis is a structure born of necessity, made with the only materials on hand at the time, designed by persons unknown. Yet its rounded, organic forms seem to have risen naturally from the same color ground. Because of its distinctiveness, I often use it to introduce the concept of the built environment to my students.

In developing this issue of *SchoolArts*, I discovered that the phrase "built environment" can be puzzling to some. According to Wikipedia, it refers to the people-built surroundings that "provide

the setting for human activity, ranging in scale from personal shelter to neighborhoods to the large-scale civic surroundings." Teaching about the built environment provides opportunities for students to learn about three-dimensional structures, architectural models, historic and contemporary architecture, architectural styles, sustainable architecture, building materials, visual culture, and related careers in art.

We know our students won't all grow up to be architects, but they can all become more aware and appreciative of their built environment and the creativity, design, and thought that went into its development.



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Nancy Walker