

A Century of Masters



Helen Cordero, Male Storyteller Figure, c. 1960. Cochiti Pueblo, New Mexico. Girard Foundation Collection, Museum of International Folk Art, DCA, Santa Fe, NM. Photo by Blair Clark.

Aurelia Gomez

The National Heritage Fellowship in Folk and Traditional Arts honors and preserves folkloric and craft traditions in the United States. New Mexico is one of the states with the highest numbers of artists per capita to receive this honor. *A Century of Masters* at the Museum of International Folk Art celebrates these artists and their work. The artists featured are largely responsible for preserving and contributing to the proliferation of each tradition, while paving the way for New Mexican arts in the twenty-first century.

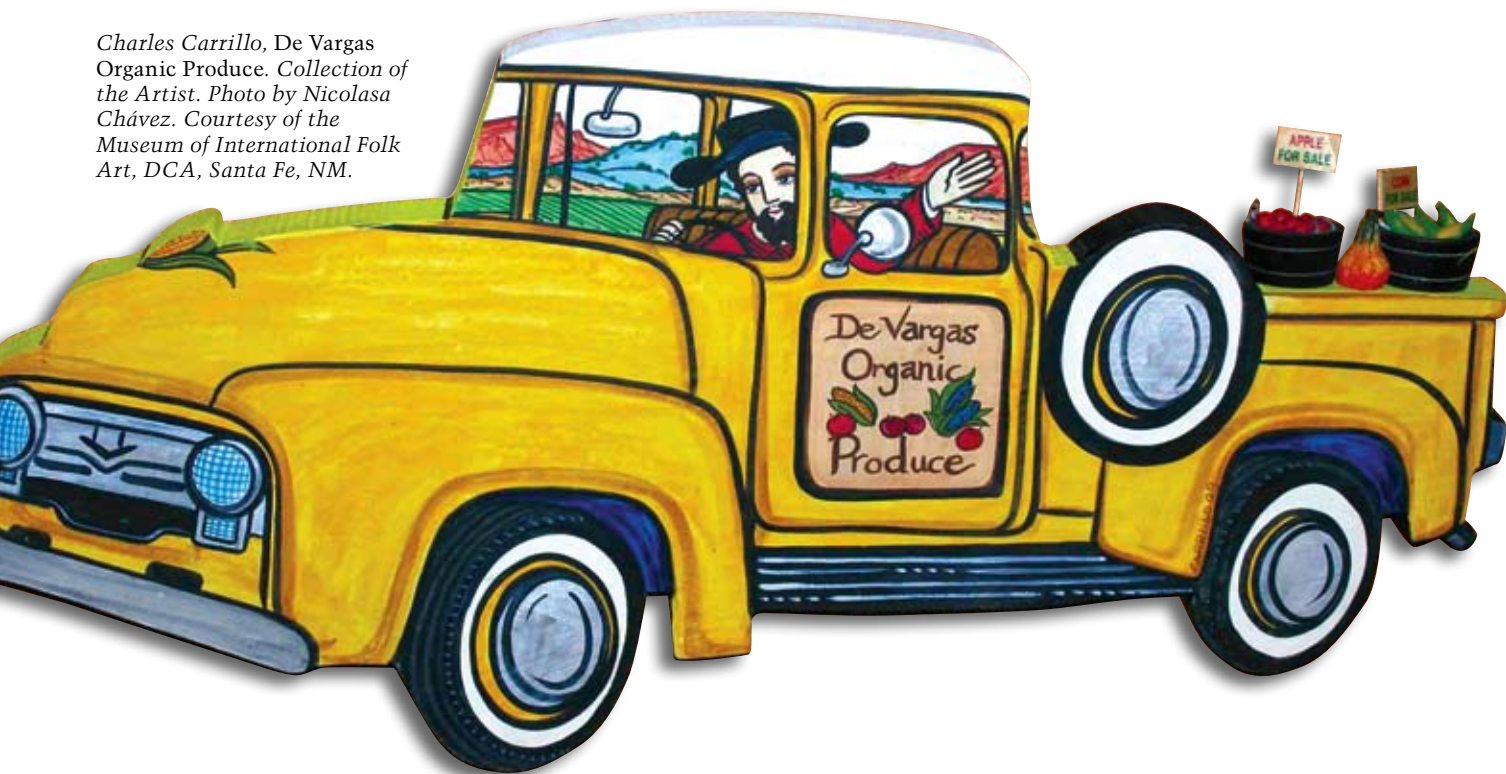
Charles M. Carrillo (b. 1956)

Charles M. Carrillo is a scholar who initially worked as an archaeologist. As he became immersed in the cultural life in the northern New Mexican community of Abiquiú, he began to make *santos*, traditional carvings that represent saints, angels, or other religious figures. By the early 1980s, Carrillo realized his true calling. He has researched the techniques, materials, and subject matter of early *santeros* (artists who make *santos*), and today he is not only a recognized authority, but also a renowned *santero* in his own right.

Helen Cordero (1915–1994)

Cochiti artist Helen Cordero grew up in a Pueblo with a centuries-old ceramics tradition. Never satisfied with her attempts at traditional shapes or functional ceramics, she tried her hand at making figures. Initially Cordero made animals and small, individual figures. She then created the storyteller figure—a male figure with children sitting or crawling him. Cordero was remembering her grandfather, Santiago Quintana, who was a great storyteller and was often surrounded by many children.

Charles Carrillo, De Vargas Organic Produce. Collection of the Artist. Photo by Nicolasa Chávez. Courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art, DCA, Santa Fe, NM.



Frances Varos Graves (1910–1999)

Embroidery artist Frances Varos Graves relied on timeless methods of using naturally dyed churro wool to create all-over *colcha* (a traditional New Mexican style of embroidery) patterns reminiscent of embroidery from an earlier time. She was an innovator who reused or recycled deteriorating pieces of naturally dyed wool from aging Rio Grande weavings. Graves also stitched figurative images and used them as the main characters or subjects of her *colcha*.

George López (1900–1993)

George López was a sixth-generation wood carver and son of master santero José Dolores López. He is known for his many religious images as well as his intricately carved Trees of Life, one of which was created from 395 individual pieces.

Ramón José López (b. 1951)

Ramón José López is a self-taught artist in many of the New Mexican traditions, including the art of the santero, silversmithing, and hide painting. López has continued to use many carving tools that belonged to his santero grandfather.

Eliseo and Paula Rodríguez (1915–2009; 1915–2008)

Well-known revival artists, Eliseo and Paula Rodríguez are credited with being the first artists to incorporate figurative motifs into straw appliqué. Earlier forms of *aplicación de paja* from the late 1700s through the late 1800s were decorated with geometric and floral or vine-like elements. Eliseo and Paula incorporated saints and biblical scenes so that each piece told a story.

Emilio and Senaida Romero (1910–1998; 1909–2001)

Emilio and Senaida Romero both came from families with skills in tin-smithing. Senaida's family experience was also steeped in *colcha* embroidery. Their marriage brought together the two crafts. Together, they created an entirely new style of tinwork that many contemporary artists continue to be inspired by today. The Romeros elevated crafts that were considered solely utilitarian to a new aesthetic level, which suited a new century, as well as a new audience.

Margaret Tafoya (1904–2001)

Potter Margaret Tafoya continued a 1,500-year ceramics tradition passed from generation to generation. Her parents were expert clay artists and she and her mother were known for their ability to make jars that were more than 30" (75 cm) high. Tafoya distinguished her work by creating highly polished carved surfaces that transformed the utilitarian tradition into an art form.

Irvin Trujillo (b. 1954)

Irvin Trujillo is a seventh-generation weaver and the son of Chimayó weaving master Jacobo Ortega Trujillo. Irvin is both an innovator and master of the New Mexican weaving tradition. Trujillo relentlessly studied ancient weaving techniques. In 1980 he and his wife Lisa founded the Centinela Traditional Arts studio to advance the tradition in their northern New Mexico community. 🌀

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