

Douglas Fairfield | The New Mexican

Kicking it new school



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— Douglas Barkey



Douglas Barkey, Santa Fe Community College's new dean of the School of Arts and Design

Top, Douglas Barkey: *Sky and Tree*, 2006, giclée on paper, 32 x 21 inches

If a soccer team consisted exclusively of art-department faculty at Santa Fe Community College, what would you name it? The Renaissance? Art Brut? The Kitsch? Typically, artists aren't known for their athletic prowess, and vice versa, although it's not unheard of. Remember NFL defensive lineman Rosey Grier and needlepoint?

Douglas Barkey, the new dean of the School of Arts and Design at Santa Fe Community College, is an avid soccer player and a former collegiate coach, but don't expect him to rally his troops for field position anytime soon. Barkey has other goals to kick around as he begins leading SFCC's arts and design department. One goal is "beginning the process of getting [National Association of Schools of Art and Design] accreditation," he said in a recent interview with *Pasatiempo*.

Before assuming his new position at the college, Barkey was vice president for learning at Training & Development Corporation's Media WORKS Enterprise (TDC is a national nonprofit think tank for improving workforce performance). Earlier, he chaired the visual arts department for Sage College in Albany, New York; taught photography and media arts at College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine; and was director for Altos de Chavón School of Design, an arts community in the Dominican Republic affiliated with Parsons, The New School for Design, in New York.

Pasa: Where are you originally from?

Barkey: I was born in St. Paul, Minnesota. [Our family] moved to Argentina when I was 8 and lived there until I was 18. I lived in La Rioja, Santiago del Estero, and my last two years in Buenos Aires. My parents were missionaries.

Pasa: Had you ever visited Santa Fe?

Barkey: My parents used to live here about 20 years ago, and I visited them once during Christmas, and that was it.

Pasa: Did Santa Fe get under your skin during that one-time visit?

Barkey: I remember I took quite a few photographs. It was soon after getting my MFA in Iowa, and I was interested in the light and the quality of the desert. I was attracted to the landscape quite a bit and shot a few rolls of black-and-white. But I just never had the opportunity to come back.

Pasa: What is your initial impression of the art scene in Santa Fe?

Barkey: Despite having been here only a short time, I have visited a few galleries and plan to do more as time permits. But it's my impression that Santa Fe is vital and there's a little bit of everything. When I've walked through galleries I've seen everything from what you might find in a gallery in Chelsea [New York City], very contemporary, to things more geared toward the tourist trade. So there's quite a range of artifacts available to people. It seems like a very vibrant community, and it's amazing to me that there are so many arts events going on all the time.

Pasa: Do you feel you're walking into a healthy environment at SFCC?

Barkey: From my perspective, professor [Siegfried] Halus, who chaired the Fine Arts Department and built the program, left a legacy of high-quality faculty and an outstanding facility that I plan to leverage to grow the School of Arts and Design. The reason I accepted this position is that I felt the department had a lot of potential. The facility is top-notch, and the faculty is very highly qualified. During my interview and after touring the department, I thought the way the program was designed was as if you designed a university program and lopped off the third and fourth years, unlike the community colleges I have experienced, which were essentially advanced high schools. Facilities and expectations were not at an advanced level, as I perceive to be the case here. So the environment is healthy in that sense.



Stand of Trees, 2005, giclée on paper, 22 x 70 inches; images courtesy Douglas Barkey

On the other hand, the department has had a lack of leadership due to the separation of the department from the main school, and Halus had been gone for a year or so. A temporary [chairperson] had been brought in, and the department had been leaderless for a while. Now the school has reconfigured the structure of all departments, which includes the art department.

Pasa: Were you recruited for the position?

Barkey: No. I saw an advertisement in the [College Art Association] journal, and my position with TDC had come to an end. I had already begun applying for dean and associate dean positions and wanted to get back into academe.

Pasa: It's common knowledge that there has been a lot of turnover at the top at SFCC. Do you believe things have stabilized?

Barkey: Yeah, I certainly heard about that. But the people here now, like Ron Liss [vice president for academic and student affairs], seem to have a steady hand and have written good policy and gotten things more consistent and fair.

Pasa: There are a lot of adjunct instructors at SFCC. What's your take on full-time faculty versus a program top-heavy with adjuncts?

Barkey: Well, it reminds me of Parsons School of Design, where they have full-time chairs of departments but they hire adjuncts out of New York City, so that keeps the school tapped into what's going on in the business of art and design. I think here it can be the same kind of arrangement.

Pasa: But this isn't New York.

Barkey: No, but we have an amazingly great pool of artists in Santa Fe who have their MFA degrees and are career artists that have been successful. However, I believe we could use a better balance of full-time leadership in each area, so I hope to move gradually to more full-time positions.

Pasa: What is one of your immediate priorities as dean?

Barkey: I am currently working toward bringing more organization to the curriculum. We have a lot of courses tailor-made by adjuncts that have no association to a core curriculum. Our course offerings are like a tree that branches out all over the place; granted, some great courses exist, but they're not connected. A new initiative we're working toward is to tie them together with certificate programs that bring the courses into a body of knowledge around different specializations. So someone could take four or five courses and obtain a certificate in one area.

Pasa: For instance?

Barkey: Developing and designing new degrees that take advantage of courses we already offer in professional crafts (fine woodworking, jewelry, ceramics); photography (fine arts, commercial, alternative processes), and performing arts (dance, theater, music); making our associate degree in fine arts more robust by adding tracks in sculpture, painting, ceramics, printmaking, and book arts. These study tracks will also be available separately as certificates.

We also discussed tying courses together thematically. For example, creating a certificate in the study of the body, so rather than the course being about media, a student might explore the figure in drawing, in photography, in figurative sculpture. But also interdisciplinary study looking at the figure from a biological viewpoint — gender and identity.

Pasa: Would such certificate programs be available to the entire student body or just art majors?

Barkey: They would be available for everyone.

Pasa: Will any programs be phased out?

Barkey: Not at this time.

Pasa: Do you believe your position as director of Altos de Chavón in the Dominican Republic was a significant factor in your hire, as far as working in a different cultural setting and how that might translate into the mix of cultures in Santa Fe?

Barkey: Yes, I think it was a factor. I grew up in Argentina until I was 18. The position in the Dominican Republic utilized all of my skills — my background in Latin America and arts and design — and this job is similar. I feel I'll be able to connect with the Hispanic community because I'm bilingual. And I hope to be instrumental in increasing the diversity of the administration and faculty.

Pasa: Talk to me about your own work as an artist.

Barkey: [Coming out of graduate school], postmodernism was the hot thing. ... Basically, I was cutting up negatives and taping them back together, then printing them to create photographic collages. My work was about the media making a spectacle about everything.

Pasa: You were making social commentaries?

Barkey: Yeah, that body of work was all a critique of American culture. Then I started to [photograph] landscapes and, during long exposures, began to move the camera [exploring how] light blurs the environment and the new spaces that were created, not knowing what I would get.

Digital photography allowed me to get immediate feedback so I could adjust shutter speed, and so forth, in order to achieve the desired effect. Ultimately, I use my camera to transform nature into a flowing river of light, a dancing and vibrant landscape.

Pasa: Getting back to your role as dean, what do you hope to achieve in the next few years?

Barkey: I would like to research the feasibility of new programs that pertain to the creative economy in Santa Fe, such as textile design, product design, and digital art. Also, strengthen the on-site BFA program we have with UNM and create more articulation agreements with other regional four-year schools of arts and design. Consequently, high school students could look at SFCC as a bridge to those other schools. ◀