

## Ranchos de Taos Church

The day was ending as I slowly drove home to Santa Fe. The stormy sky had brought a deluge intermingled with frozen rain and hail. A break in the downpour came as I was passing the village of Ranchos de Taos, New Mexico.

In the plaza there sits the San Francisco de Asis Mission Church which dates back to 1772. This church is one of the most painted, drawn, and photographed buildings in New Mexico. It is an elegant structure in both form and shape, crafted from the earth it sits on. Over the decades, I have probably passed by the Ranchos Church several hundred times. On some occasions I have stopped to admire and walk around, and at times have attempted to take photos. It is always worth the view as I pass by.

On this late afternoon as I turned into the plaza, the light became delicate and even, the sky above glowed softly with spirit, and the soil was rich in color from the rain revealing the soul force of the earth. At this moment it was my good fortune to have the plaza all to myself with not a single soul or creature around. It was time to make another attempt to capture the magic and splendor of this special place. The rain had slowed to a drizzle. With camera in hand I got out of my car. About 8 exposures into the process the thunder began to rumble, and the rains came. Returning to the car, I dried off my camera and myself, and sat in silence watching the light show in the sky above the church and listening to the rain. It was a sublime moment. Sitting there I began to contemplate the age and the antiquity of this spot. I remembered something my friend Rodolfo had once told me as we walked through the city of Rome. He explained how ancient civilizations are stacked up one upon another in his age-old city. It was all dust on top of dust. Contemporary buildings built on foundations of vanished structures from thousands of years ago. I began to wonder what was under the Ranchos Church and the history of this site. What cultures were here going back through time?

Back in the studio as I began to work, I pondered Rodolfo's words and the perspective they brought to the experience of that stormy afternoon. I saw the space that filled the landscape flowing into the canopy of a dream like sky, and then beyond into the universe, and eternity. The design that is integrated into the soil of the church foreground is Anasazi, photographed from a water jar that dates back about one thousand years. I began to picture cultures, peoples, and time marching on, transforming what was once one thing into something now very different. And all of it merging, combining, vibrating into the present moment, and taking form with majestic beauty as the Ranchos de Taos Church.

*E. McD August 23rd, 2021*