

Artist plans benefit for Stray Hearts

Josie Lenwell's New Mexico-inspired images will be shown in her vibrant home

Staff report

Art, like life, is a progression for Taos photographer and animal lover Josie Lenwell. From the time she was a small child, Lenwell said she dressed up her pets and made photographs of them.

Sometimes, her pets were guinea pigs, and they were less than cooperative, but undaunted, Lenwell persisted. Eventually, the guinea pigs passed on, Lenwell grew up and began taking in stray dogs and cats, and a digital camera replaced her old black-and-white Kodak and Pentax point and shoot.

That's when things got interesting.

With her first digital camera, Lenwell began a series of photo collages featuring one of her dogs, Sweet Georgia Brown, whom she photographed as a cowdog exploring the wild lands of Northern New Mexico. She then used Photoshop to place Georgia into classic New Mexican settings, which she also photographed.

Over time, the artist began to notice how much she loved those backgrounds — old ruins, abandoned adobes, and petroglyphs — and as she says in a press release, “A whole new world opened up to me.”



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Stray Hearts benefit

■ **When:** Sunday (Dec. 9), 4-7 p.m.

■ **Where:** Lenwell home, 3006 Cottontail Road, Cañon

■ **Admission:** Free, open to public

■ **Information:** (575) 751-0407

with her. Like many photographers before her, she said she feels a particular affinity for the drama and beauty of New Mexico.

“Here,” she says, “I focus on the effects of nature on old and abandoned structures.”

Lenwell explains that she loves “the rough, crumbling bricks of an old adobe home returning to the earth, the splintered windows and



“Tres Cruces” by Lenwell

Courtesy photo illustration

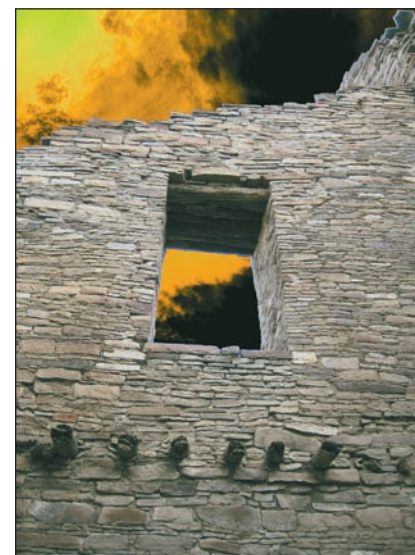
doors through which people and light have come and gone. I love the old wooden crosses in the grave sites aged and broken by time and the elements. I love the rock formations and ruins within our national monuments, sculpted by centuries of wind, rain and snow and the petroglyphs that are pecked in ancient stone, their stories left only to our imagination.”

At the same time that nature presents her with rich photographic opportunities, however, it also provides a challenge.

“Nature can be so unreliable,” she says. “The perfect photo moment appears and is gone. Some of my best photos are taken in less-than-perfect light, with a less-than-perfect sky, but what I love is to come back to my studio, download my photos, and play with the images, adding filters, adjusting the saturation, the contrast and the hues until the image I captured takes on a life of its own.”

Just as intriguing as the photographs and the stories they tell is the setting of the show, Lenwell's home. “My home is like a gallery, and it's my biggest art project to date!”

The home has been featured in *New Mexico Magazine's* “Special Home Edition” and this year's February-March edition of *Enchanted Homes*, published by *The Taos News*. When Lenwell built the house 10 years ago, she made use of old hand-hewn beams from fallen adobes, cedar fence posts from a Colorado ranch, downed trees she dragged out of the forest herself, and other elements that either came directly from nature or were in the process of



“Stone Eye” by Josie Lenwell, one of the works included in “Mystery and Magic.”

Courtesy photo illustration

returning to it.

The result is a warm, vibrant, creative environment where Lenwell meshes her love of art with her passion for animals and her vocation. A licensed psychotherapist, she runs a private practice from one part of her home. The therapy studio is filled with art supplies that Lenwell uses in her therapy.

While “Mystery and Magic” focuses on dramatic landscapes and cityscapes, prints of Lenwell's animal photographs — including some of Sweet Georgia Brown the cowdog — will be available in the form of Christmas, holiday and blank greeting cards. Lenwell will donate 20 percent of all sales from the show to Stray Hearts Animal Shelter.

For more information, contact the artist at (575) 751-0407.