



For immediate release | April 2015
Contact: Berta Corredor, Cultural Office Embassy of Spain
Berta.corredor@spainculture.us 301 7427788

SPAIN arts & culture presents
MOVING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK
Journeys Across the Old Spanish Trail



Photo by Janire Nájera

WHEN

PRESS BREAKFAST: THURSDAY, APRIL 30: 9 AM WALK-THROUGH: 9.30 AM
PUBLIC OPENING: THURSDAY APRIL 30: 7:00PM-8.30PM

EXHIBITION ON VIEW: APRIL 30 - JUNE 28, 2015

GALLERY HOURS: FRIDAY THROUGH SUNDAY FROM 12 PM TO 7 PM;
MONDAY, TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY, AND THURSDAY BY APPOINTMENT AT: CONTACT@SPAINCULTURE.US. FREE

WHERE

FORMER RESIDENCE OF THE AMBASSADORS OF SPAIN
2801 16TH STREET NORTHWEST, WASHINGTON, DC 20009

MORE INFO [HTTP://WWW.SPAINCULTURE.US/CITY/WASHINGTON-DC/MOVING-FORWARD-LOOKING-BACK-JOURNEYS-ACROSS-THE-OLD-SPANISH-TRAIL/](http://www.spainculture.us/city/washington-dc/moving-forward-looking-back-journeys-across-the-old-spanish-trail/)
PICTURES [HTTPS://WWW.DROPBOX.COM/SH/ZNOVXLZT3RDS9EZ/AAACl_EnZSp3AHnkWGYBx0GLA?DL=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/ZNOVXLZT3RDS9EZ/AAACl_EnZSp3AHnkWGYBx0GLA?DL=0)



Washington, D.C.- **MOVING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK, Journeys Across the Old Spanish Trail** is an artistic project combining photography, video, and sound by Spanish artist Janire Nájera who has explored the Spanish legacy along the Old Spanish Trail.

MOVING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK began in March 2014 with a road trip across the Southwest following the footsteps of trader Antonio Armijo, who opened the route of the Old Spanish Trail between the states of New Mexico and California in the 19th century. Janire Nájera traveled in a RV starting her journey in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the oldest continuously occupied state capital in the United States, and passing by areas of Colorado, Arizona, Utah and Nevada until the RV finally arrived in Los Angeles, California. This journey evokes the spirit of adventure synonymous with the trail and the wider depiction of these six states ever since they were frontier lands or environments of discovery.

The object Nájera's trip was to meet, to interview, and to photograph Spanish descendants to explore how the traditions of the first settlers have merged with local cultures influencing the creation and identity of today's pueblos and cities. The journey has been documented with the assistance of visual artist **Matt Wright**, who has taken a range of panoramic images and time lapses to place the portraits within the environments in which they were captured.

The RV Janire Nájera has been travelling in was a portable studio, a home and a meeting place from which to engage with Spanish descendants who have managed to maintain their traditions over generations amongst multiple other cultures. Since its year of fabrication is 1984, it has been named *Orwell*.

The photojournalist wrote a **blog** (<http://www.movingforwardlookingback.us/author/janire/>) about the people and stories she met alongside her trip. Besides, she interviewed historians and journalists from the area to document this cultural heritage. Nájera, not only took pictures of the Spanish descendants she encountered along the way, but also recorded their oral histories, engaging with them in conversations about their Hispanic identity. Where the early pioneers would have traded goods, Nájera traded narratives in the hope of revealing and absorbing traces of the intangible heritage that still remains to this day.

The photographer explains her idea of **MOVING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK**: *“I wanted to experiment what a Spanish feels while traveling in an unknown territory, exchanging cultures instead of merchandise. This trip is a symbolic representation which invokes our past and reflects the adventure spirit with the only mission of discover a proud culture which has fought to keep its customs.”*

“The early pioneers travelled this trail mainly to trade goods. Yet my intentions for this journey were not to exchange blankets and serapes for mules and horses, but to engage with Spanish descendants in order to share their stories and reveal the intangible heritage that still evokes Spanish culture in New Mexico and California. I do not wish to glorify or romanticize the Spanish presence in the US with this project, but instead to simply, document, and highlight what I encountered along my travels, advancing a discourse anchored more in the present than in the past.”

An interactive exhibition where portraits tell their own story

Each portrait is accompanied by the taped conversation between Nájera and the protagonist of the picture. The portrayed talk about their experiences, their memories, their perception about being Hispanic descendants, and how these origins influence in their lives.

*Headphones will be available for the public to listen to some of these interviews. The complete audio files will be available for downloading on mobile devices.



The book

In addition to the photography exhibition that premieres at the Former Residence of the Ambassadors of Spain in Washington, D.C., Nájera has recorded her experience along the route in a book (<http://bit.ly/1DTvawG>) in English and Spanish. The idea for the book is to combine the portraits and interviews of the Spanish descendants with academic essays about the legacy of Spanish language, architecture, gastronomy, art, religion, and intangible heritage found in New Mexico and California, once connected through the Old Spanish Trail.

Related event: BOOK LAUNCH AND EXHIBITION TOUR

- On Saturday, May 2nd at 12 pm. RSVP required.
- Join us for the public presentation of the book *Moving Forward, Looking Back*
- Along with Embassy of Spain's Cultural Counselor Guillermo Corral, photographer Janire Nájera will recount her experience interviewing and photographing the Spanish descendants from the Southwest while driving an old RV across the Old Spanish Trail. Nájera will also discuss her views about the historical and present traces of Spanish culture in the U.S. She will then guide us on a tour through the exhibition.
- The talk will be accompanied by mimosas and Spanish snacks.

ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF THE PROJECT

MOVING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK is a project of SPAIN arts&culture, the cultural program of the Embassy of Spain. In August 2013 we started an open call among the members of SPAIN RED, <http://www.spainred.us>, a platform for the promotion of Spanish artists and creators in the United States. The premise of the contest was to present a significant panorama of the culture of the “Spanish-American”, the living testimony of more than 300 years of Spanish presence in this territory. This project sought to reflect this experience with a contemporary and attractive language through a creative, original, and accessible vision. There were more than 30 proposals. On October 15, 2013 the proposal presented by photographer Janire Nájera was chosen.

ABOUT JANIRE NÁJERA

Janire Nájera was born in Bilbao and raised in Nájera (La Rioja). She studied journalism in Madrid and photography at the University of Wales, Newport. Since graduating, she has undertaken artistic residencies and exhibited internationally. The Spanish and the Welsh Arts Councils have supported the production of her most recent projects in New Mexico (USA) and Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates). Through her work she hopes to re-think and develop imagery that questions the histories and environments we belong to. *My documentary practice is concerned with highlighting communities that have been displaced through changing social and economic climates, she says.* For the last five years she has curated the multidisciplinary art project ‘Ghosts in Armour’, an artistic exploration into the declining of an industry that has shaped parallel cultures across Europe. Nowadays, she works as a documentary photographer and curator in Wales (UK), Bilbao, and Santa Fe (Nuevo México). More info: janirenajera.com

THE BLOG <http://www.movingforwardlookingback.us>



MORE ABOUT THE ROUTE

Nájera has undertaken a trip following the route explored by Antonio Armijo in 1829/30 to research how the traditions of the first settlers have merged with domestic cultures and influenced the creation and identity of the pueblos and modern cities of today.

The starting point is Santa Fe, capital of New Mexico, the oldest state capital in the US. In 2010 the city celebrated its 400 anniversary since Pedro de Peralta established it in 1610. **New Mexico is one of the most culturally diverse states and the one with the most Hispanics and American Indians in the US.** After Santa Fe, Janire went explored villages north of New Mexico where the local communities still talk in Spanish. Villages like Taos, Abiquiu, Questa, Peñasco, Truchas, Mora, and Chimayó, towns like Durango in Colorado, Moab in Utah, the area of San Bernardino and the city of Los Angeles, in California, were some of the destinations.

This arduous pack mule trail, which flourished in the 19th century, allowed early merchants from both regions to engage in trade within a vast and imposing environment. Approximately 1200 miles long, the original pathways have long since been replaced by railroads and freeways. Landscapes have evolved since blankets and quilts were exchanged for mules and horses, and the perceived distances substantially shortened since the original caravans, which would have traveled around 15 miles a day, have been replaced with modern transportation.

The Old Spanish Trail as it's currently known was in fact a myriad of alternate routes slowly developed by countless Spanish explorers and fur traders who with the assistance of American Indians were finally able to connect the pastoral industries of New Mexico with the ranching economy of California. For today's traveler, the Old Spanish Trail is an adventurous route crossing the Southwest, which offers multiple glimpses upon the lasting legacy of these early Spanish expeditions. Moving forward, looking back will facilitate reflection upon the influences still found in the language, architecture, gastronomy, art and religion found within these territories.