PEYTON
WRIGHT

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Leo Salazar

(1931 - 1991)

Leo G. Salazar was renowned worldwide and his work is found in churches throughout New Mexico and in the collection of the Vatican in Rome, the Smithsonian Institution, the Berlin Museum of International Folk Art and private collections throughout the world.

Salazar began carving cedar wood Santos at the age of 33 in 1965. He quickly became committed to his artistic practice, devoting eight to ten hours a day to his art. He credited his practice and inspiration to Patrociño Barela, stating "I learned by just watching the great master Pat Barela of Taos," whom he watched first hand developing his own carvings from the natural forms within the wood.

Leo developed his own abstract style. There was no spacious studio with north light in summer so he sat on an old car seat beneath a pickup camper shell propped up on pieces of plywood in his backyard. In winter, he moved into a tin storage shed and fed chips and branches into an old wood stove for heat.

He continued his direct and traditional techniques of woodcarving even when he became well known and his work was in high demand, insisting on doing all the work by hand while the piece was cradled in his lap. He carved wood because he loved the feel of it in his hands, stating, "You must be close to the wood to do good work."

His family has continued in the tradition, with his sons Leonardo and Ernesto and his sons Jason and Jacob all becoming accomplished

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woodcarvers, receiving prestigious awards and represented in numerous collections.

Biographical sources: Taos News, Santa Fe Community College