

# Catherine Robles-Shaw: Nederland, Colorado

## *Retablos and Painted Bultos*



As a santera, Catherine hopes to preserve some of the unique traditions of her Hispanic culture. Her ancestors were among the first settlers in the Conejos Land Grant and lived in Mogote and Las Mesitas, Colorado. She states “Retablos are the story tellers of my ancestors. They are the natural extension of the beauty and simplicity of our Spanish lives.”

Catherine strives to represent her work with as much historic accuracy as possible and she uses the same materials that were used in the 18th and 19th centuries. She hand carves her retablos from flat wooden boards made from local woods such as pine and aspen. Her bulto three dimensional carvings are made of cottonwood root and local woods. The pieces are coated with gesso, made from gypsum and rabbit skin glue. Catherine uses plant and insect extracts, as well as mineral colored earth, for her paints. She then coats the painted pieces with the pinion sap varnish, made by dissolving pitch nuggets in grain alcohol (mula). The finished pieces are then waxed and prepared for display.

Catherine’s pieces can be seen in permanent collections at many prominent museums throughout New Mexico and Colorado including the Denver Art Museum, Museo de las Americas, and Museum of Spanish Colonial Art in Santa Fe. Her work is featured in many books and articles, and she has received numerous awards. Her most recent honors include 2nd Place – Altar Screens at the 2008 Santa Fe Spanish Market and 1st Place in 2007, 1st Place – Retablos at the Tesoro Cultural Center’s 2007 Spanish Market and 2nd Place in 2006, 1st Place – Holly Coors Award at the 2005 Foothills Art Center, 1st Place – Alter Screens and 1st Place – Guadalupe Award at the 2005 Santa Fe Spanish Market, and the Eppie Archuleta Award at the 2005 Chili Harvest Festival.