

down was one lowest-possible mark from a painter with \$900 total from an average item price (AIP) of \$35, as well as a perfectly average grade from a tole painter (\$700 total/\$15 AIP). Other exhibitors who listed revenue data included: a photographer (\$7,700 total/\$40 AIP), a clay artisan (\$3,300 total/\$15 AIP) and a maker of holiday home décor (\$3,100 total/\$40 AIP).

Most of our sample group also commented on this all-important aspect. For example, the holiday décor maker said, "Sales were good for an early season show," the clay artisan said "...sales are good" and the photographer said, "This is the biggest and best indoor art & craft show in Las Vegas each year." And while the tole painter was blasé about his/her take, he/she offered, "My sales may not have been great

but for the amount of product I had on hand, it was wonderful." (This was also his/her first Harvest Festival, and he/she plans on bringing more merchandise to upcoming appearances with these shows.)

As it turned out, the painter with \$900 total assigned lowball grades to most other categories – but he/she was the only reviewer to give anything lower than an average mark to any of them. And even the painter found no fault with attendance (8.4), weather (8.1) or advertising (8.8). Per the holiday décor maker, this event enjoyed "great crowd reception and interest."

Management (8.7) also avoided the painter's wrath, but artist treatment (8.4) and artist amenities (7.7) did not. "We did this show for the first time in 2012, and it set

our business on a new course," said the photographer. "Thank you, Harvest Festival!"

Quality of work (7.7), balance of mediums (7.0) and prestige of show (8.4) followed the same general pattern of high marks from all save the painter, who also insisted that this event "...is a knickknack show [and] not for fine artists." No other auditors backed up that claim in comments or scores, though, and the photographer said, "There is something for everyone."

Finally, while layout (8.6) and parking (8.1) both picked up one average mark each, they otherwise joined load-in/-out (8.1) in getting high ratings all around. With that being said, an exhibitor with an unknown medium, total or AIP (but strong grades for everything save layout) recommended reconfiguring the aisles to give patrons more browsing room.

Based on this feedback, you might want to look into participating in some Harvest Festivals, particularly if you're on the West Coast and have merchandise priced at \$50 or less. The 18th annual Las Vegas Harvest Festival is expected to take place in September.

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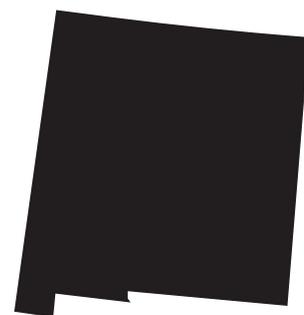
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► **November 28-30, Rio Grande Arts & Crafts Festival**



A live performance at Rio Grande's Holiday Show in Albuquerque in November (photo by Jim Carnevale).

— **Holiday Show, Albuquerque.**

Contact: Ruth Gore, 3709 Westerfield Drive NE, Suite A, Albuquerque, NM 87111. Phone: 505-292-7457. Fax: 505-293-1153. Email: info@riograndefestivals.com. Website: www.riograndefestivals.com. Application fee: \$30. Space fee: \$450-\$900. Space size: 10x10 to 10x20. 100% indoors. Exhibitors: 185. Attendance: 20,000 (source: gate receipts). Admission: \$7.

By Jim Carnevale

New Mexico and National Reporter
Email: jim@jcarnevale.com
Medium: Photography

We have all seen images of Black Friday shopping with throngs of people fighting for the best bargains of the season. Well, imagine that sort of frenzy at an arts and crafts festival. While it wasn't the typical mayhem that is annually portrayed on the evening news, the lines to get into Rio Grande's Holiday Show were long — very long. Literally stretching down the block and around the corner, the end of the line was not

in sight. Again, promoter Ruth Gore and her staff worked their magic to bring in an abundance of willing buyers to this event, which started the day after Thanksgiving.

As for the logistics, typical of

the Rio Grande shows, load-in/-out was a breeze. The venue has abundant parking and several access points for artists to enter for setup. Of course, Gore and her staff are known for treating artists well. Refreshments were provided for exhibitors, and Gore personally visited every artist during setup to make sure all was well and ascertain any needs.

A carefully selected variety of live music, food and an abundance of activities added to the show's festive, fun spirit. According to the promoter, attendance this year was up between 20 to 25 percent, and sales were brisk. Thousands of shoppers, both local and visitors to central New Mexico, decided to abandon the big-box stores and shopping malls to support the juried event's array of participating artists from across the country.

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As a result, there were many very happy shoppers and very happy exhibitors – including me.

Among artists participating in the promoter's exit survey, more than 75 percent reported sales the same or better than previous years. More than 96 percent stated they would return next year. Furthermore, one exhibitor said, "The show was a lot of fun – great energy from other artists as well as customers!" A second exhibitor called this festival a "very well-run show," and added, "The amount of information given to the artists is better than any other show I've done," while a third said he/she "...loved this show, sales were great – like the old days!"

The variety and quality of artists was outstanding, too, and a veteran artist shared that he/she feels that the Rio Grande shows'

success hinges on promoter Ruth Gore's understanding that high-grade art attracts high-grade customers. Carefully selected by jury, exhibitors offered a range of items that was perfect to meet the gift needs of most buyers. The most commonly reported average price point was \$65.

Overall, Rio Grande's Holiday Show is traditionally a festive event and highly successful for most of the artists who participate. This year was no exception. Sales on Friday were reported to be the best of the weekend, while Saturday and Sunday were diminished. For local artists, the Thanksgiving weekend date posed no problems. Out-of-town exhibitors will find that it might involve some sacrifice, but the show's success usually makes it well worth it.

Editor's note: The following review offers another perspective.

By David Schneider

Arizona and New Mexico Reporter

Email: david@fringe.com

Medium: Photography

Rio Grande's Holiday Show is always good, and this year's edition followed that tradition. Its Thanksgiving weekend positioning might seem like an odd time for a fine art festival, but patrons appreciate the timing, and the show sees quite a bit of traffic.

Setup here is as good as you can get, and you have all day Wednesday and all day Thursday to finish. This system gives out-of-towners flexibility in their travel schedules without having an idle day in town on Thanksgiving. Additionally, the promoters arrange for a Thanksgiving meal at a local restaurant, which is a

wonderful touch.

The show's indoor nature at Expo New Mexico (the state fairgrounds) makes load-in/-out easy. With plenty of artist parking ringing the building, walking to your vehicle is quick and easy, no matter where your booth is. Wide doors allow easy access, as well, which is appreciated by those with large carts. It also helps spread out much of the usual artist congestion, simplifying the process for everyone. Trailer and RV parking is available on the fairgrounds, and larger vehicles are not a problem.

The show itself is laid out generously, with a mix of booth sizes to choose from. The aisles between the booths are wide, and there are open spaces with benches. Patrons appreciate not being squeezed in and the ability to relax. Live music and performances also take place, and artists are asked to decorate their booths with holiday flair.

Rio Grande festivals typically draw a significant crowd and always have a line waiting for the doors to open. Friday morning's line, however, was unusually large, and stretched out the length of the building, crossed the street and kept going. That alone built excitement, and Black Friday shoppers were out in full force. Friday's traffic remained quite strong throughout the day. Saturday's attendance started slower but built quickly, resulting in another robust day. Sunday's traffic was slower than hoped for, but that is hardly surprising.

I should also note that Rio Grande offers a "Grande Pass," which allows patrons into all of their shows for one price, which



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is a great deal for attendees and artists. Patrons will come back time and again, and just because you can't make a sale to a shopper on one day does not mean they won't come back. They can and do.

This event sees a mix of purchasing habits, too, as patrons' purchases reflect their quest for gifts. As such, price points targeted for gift-giving can return excellent results. However, patrons aren't always shopping for others, and they're willing to purchase pieces for themselves. In short, there is a wide range of opportunity here.

As for sales, the overall feeling among exhibitors was "average" to "excellent." Remember, though, that this show typically returns well, so "average" is a very good thing indeed. Most artists I talked to reported being happy with their results. This spanned all categories, including photography, jewelry, wood, leather, apparel, metal, pottery and everything in between.

A potter had a very good show and was pleased with his/her decision to build in extra inventory. Similarly, a leather artisan had returning customers from previous shows and picked up additional work from them, a woodworker sold through most of his/her inventory and a fabric artist saw steady sales, making load-out considerably easier than load-in. Finally, a pencil artist reported Friday to be his/her best single day ever, which is saying something considering he/she has been doing shows for quite a while.

However, not every exhibitor enjoyed strong revenue: While two photographers were reporting

excellent sales, another was struggling to make booth fees. By and large, however, the show was good on all counts.

In the end, Rio Grande's Holiday Show is excellent and well worth adding to your end-of-the-year schedule.

Editor's note: We received a handful of FastAudit reviews of this show by press time, and every member of our sample group would return. Exhibitors who provided sales data included: a jeweler with \$3,900 total from an average item price (AIP) of \$100, a printmaker (\$2,021 total/\$75 AIP), a mixed media artist (\$2,000 total/\$20 AIP) and a second jeweler (\$1,888 total/\$85 AIP).

Furthermore, they were unanimous in assigning above-par grades to every category, the overall average scores for which (on a 10-point scale) are as follows: sales

(6.6), quality of work (7.2), balance of mediums (8.4), prestige of show (8.4), attendance (8.0), weather (9.8), advertising (9.8), management (10.0), artist treatment (10.0), artist amenities (9.2), layout (8.4), load-in/-out (9.6) and parking (9.6).



► **September 6-7, Colorscape Chenango Arts Festival, Norwich.**
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