



Smithsonian American Art Museum

## **Constructing Window Rock: Landscape and the New Deal in the Capital of the Navajo Nation**

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This dissertation examines the built environment of Window Rock, Arizona, a town established in 1934 by the Bureau of Indian Affairs to serve as the capital city of the Navajo reservation. The study explores the ways in which new building technologies, regional architectural styles, and open spaces served to inscribe cultural differences upon the town's landscape. It also analyzes the manner in which this modern capital and notions of Navajo identity were presented to the "mainstream" American public by means of two displays in the Department of the Interior Building in Washington, D.C.: a diorama of the town on exhibit since 1937, and five murals painted in 1940 by Navajo artist Gerald Nailor (1917–1952). These works are then contrasted with depictions of tribal history in the Navajo Nation itself: Nailor's eight murals painted in 1942 in the Tribal Council House at Window Rock and a series of contemporary dioramas displayed at Diné College in Tsaile, Arizona. The dissertation considers the Navajo capital\_ both the buildings and the spaces between and around them\_ as a primary source, together with paintings and sculptures, archival materials, and interviews with residents, in order to understand the government's intentions toward Navajo people during the New Deal and the changing objectives of the Navajo Nation in the decades since that era.