

Creative Creatures

The ideas and the work of the American and European painters, songwriters, photographers, fiction and non-fiction authors, musicians, film makers, architects, designers, poets, and dreamers I met during my 20 years in America.



22 / Susan Martin, PR and marketing, Los Angeles, California / Abiquiu, New Mexico

We first met when, maybe ten years ago, she was looking for a place to live in the high desert. Her background: New York City, Los Angeles, Paris (France). So, I advised to rent first, before buying—just to see if desert life would suit her. I had seen too many people come with great expectations and leave disappointed after a mere year of desert experience; *they just couldn't do it*. She appreciated my advice, but I shouldn't worry: she knew all about the desert and even more important: she knew herself. She bought a small house far out on Plaza Blanca Mesa, where her few distant neighbors include other former New Yorkers such as an author of former fame in the Big Apple's SM scene. From her home Susan Martin looks at the silhouettes of the Sangre de Cristo mountain range 100 miles away and down into the deep, white-walled arroyo that runs, if there happens to be water, towards the Chama River across her third neighbor's 7,500 acres. Actress Shirley McLain is this remote neighbor.

I soon discovered that Susan is an admirer of the same book that was of such importance to me that, years later, it made me return to Chase County, Kansas: William Least Heat-Moon's 'PrairieEarth'. I also discovered Susan has a larger past than her small frame suggests. Her last name, Martin, came from her marriage to a French artist with whom she'd lived in Paris. Her family name, which I cannot recall, came

from one of the architects who, in the 1930s, helped design the Moscow Metro. Her parents after returning from the USSR lived in a bohemian neighborhood near Echo Park--or was it Silver Lake--in Los Angeles, where Susan was born, in an experimental architectural section where cars were banned and even toddlers found a safe environment. One day I discovered a photo of a smiling young Susan playing on the steps of the steep walkway.

Jump ahead to 2002. Susan came to New Mexico with two dogs, an old one that soon died, and a young Australian sheep herder she called Snoop Dogg. Susan with her flashing intelligence, great sense of humor and raw, inspiring laugh became a good friend and Snoop became an unforgettable buddy who hiked along with me and my own dogs and stayed at our house each time a smartly dressed Susan had to leave the desert to work in either New York or Los Angeles, or Miami, or France. Susan's home may sit at the end of the earth, with views from her porch that make visitors hyperventilate and drool, it doesn't stop her from having two feet solidly planted in "the big world", because that's where she keeps making her income by continuing what she did all her life: promote the arts. The high desert mesa became her escape from the high demands and the craziness of the frontline art scene.

Susan Martin began her career in the early 1970s at Sotheby's and later founded G. Ray Hawkins Gallery, the first gallery in Los Angeles to specialize in 20th-century master photographers. In 1976 she co-founded Some Serious Business, a nonprofit organization that produced the first-ever performances in Southern California of such artists as Laurie Anderson, Philip Glass, Lawrence Weiner; and Robert Wilson and Lucinda Childs, those from the sophisticated Minimalist aural and visual theater piece 'I Was Sitting On My Patio This Guy Appeared I Thought I Was Hallucinating'-fame. Susan continued to establish her gutsy presence in the heady, go-go atmosphere of 1980s New York, representing galleries, nightclubs, cutting-edge artists, and issue-oriented nonprofits. She also founded and ran the fundraising campaign 'Art Against AIDS' with Elizabeth Taylor as Chair.

Returning to Los Angeles, Susan was communications director for the citywide World Festival of Sacred Music; editor of a few catalogues for Chief Curator Paul Schimmel of the Museum of Contemporary Art; marketing director for 'UCLA Live!', the premier presenting organization for performing arts in Southern California; and special events and PR counsel for the City of Santa Monica for cultural affairs--she edited their commemorative publication 'Twenty Years of the Santa Monica Arts Commission'.

Susan's diverse areas of interest and expertise do more than simply co-exist: they are the foundation for a deep understanding of the role of arts and culture in contemporary society. She could drop names like no one else if she wanted, but she seldom does. Still, the people she worked with, as I discovered over the years, are many of the heroes of my own day and include: Robert Longo, Lydia Lunch, Robert Mapplethorpe, Meredith Monk, Nam June Paik, Richard Serra, and Ettore Sottsass. Add recent clients such as Centre Pompidou, Paris; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Santa Monica Museum of Art; SITE Santa Fe Biennial; Lannan Foundation, Santa Fe; UCLA School of the Arts and Architecture... and you see what I mean. With a boundary-shattering professional history, she is still a uniquely talented and fascinating person, with a great sense of quality in art and design—and an address book worth gold.

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