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Fire and Earth: Native American Pottery from New Mexican Pueblos - Catalogue

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June 27 – October 3, 2013



Fairfield University

THE BELLARMINE MUSEUM OF ART

First created nearly two millennia ago, Pueblo pottery is remarkable not only for its formal beauty but also for its cultural importance. Centuries after the Anasazi (or ancestral Pueblo people) first began making potted vessels from coils of tempered earth – rubbed smooth and painted with local clays, minerals, and vegetal pigments – their successors continue to do the same. An ancestral whisper, this knowledge was (and is) passed down from artist to artist, generation after generation, ensuring the survival of both ancient pottery techniques and the cultures that birthed them. Herein lies the beauty of objects whose value is truly much more than skin deep: They embody their creators’ cultural inheritances.

As material manifestations of the different Pueblos’ values and experiences, these pots bear witness to the remarkable histories of their peoples. From the establishment of fixed and settled villages to the successive waves of conquest and all that this implies, the earthenware vessels created by New Mexico’s native populations have been buffeted by the winds of change. Yet despite subtle shifts in their silhouettes and decorative elements, the pots on view in the Bellarmine Museum of Art’s *Fire & Earth: Native American Pottery from New Mexican Pueblos* exhibition remind us that Pueblo pottery has never strayed too far from its ancient forebears, both cultural and aesthetic; a testament to the strength of these peoples’ roots and the depth of their cultural legacies.

Like most, if not all, museums, the Bellarmine depends upon the support of enlightened patrons and sponsors to make our educational aspirations a reality. This exhibition is no exception. To that end, I extend my heartfelt thanks to the generous individuals who have lent us the fine works in this show in addition to underwriting a substantial portion of our programming. I would also like to convey my sincere thanks to Megan Fox Kelly for coordinating this show, as well as to Maria Dembrowsky Nigro for her contributed essay. Finally, I thank my Fairfield University colleagues, including Associate Professor of English Dr. Peter Bayers, as well as our sponsors – the National Endowment for the Humanities, Whole Foods Market, and Morris Media Group – for making this show all that it could be.

Jill Deupi, J.D., Ph.D.
Founding Director and Chief Curator



Historic Black and Red Lidded Jar, 19th century, Collected in 1880,
13 x 12 inches

For hundreds of years, native inhabitants of America's Southwestern territories have cultivated a tradition of pottery that continues today as a vibrant, highly skilled art form. Passed down from one generation to the next, Pueblo pottery is characterized by its graceful forms and highly stylized patterning. The regional practice of making decorated clay pots likely originated with the Anasazi people (500–1300 CE), ancestors of today's Pueblo tribes who made painted ceramic wares for both utilitarian and ritual purposes. These early potters developed laborious techniques for gathering and preparing clay, which was then shaped into vessels, sanded, smoothed, polished, and fired; techniques that have remained more or less constant over the centuries. What did change were the styles of, and decorative patterns on, such pottery, which varies widely from one Pueblo to the next and reflects a range of influences and pressures, both internal and external.



Figure 1

Shortly after the Pueblo people began farming squash, corn, and beans around 500 BCE, they established permanent communities of multi-leveled, apartment-style adobe homes. Sixteenth-century Spanish explorers used the Castilian word *pueblo* (meaning “town”) to describe these settlements. The term soon came to represent the peoples themselves, together with their peaceful, agrarian culture; a culture that was markedly different from the semi-nomadic Navajo and nomadic Apache living nearby.

The Pueblos, which are scattered throughout the arid Southwestern landscape, were relatively isolated both from one another and from other native groups for centuries. They enjoyed social stability and cultural continuity. Within their diverse cultural traditions and customs, the most salient common characteristic of the Pueblo people was, and is, their shared practice of making pottery. Despite being referred to collectively as “Pueblo,” however, these peoples should not be considered a unified “tribe” since each is distinct from the other. Within the 19 New Mexican Pueblos, for example, five different languages are spoken and both matrilineal and patrilineal societal frameworks exist.



The process of making pottery begins with the excavation of clay from a site near a particular Pueblo. While clay is common throughout the Southwest it varies from one locale to the next in type and in color, which may range from white to gray from black to yellow and even red. Clay used by the Acoma Pueblo, for example, turns very white when fired, while that used by the Hopi ranges from light cream to medium buff. Once the clay is removed from the earth, it is dried in the sun, soaked in

water, cleaned of impurities (such as pebbles and twigs), and tempered with powdered potsherds. It may take days to create the proper mixture of ground clay and pulverized potsherd temper.



Figure 2

Once the desired consistency is achieved, the pot is constructed by hand, without the use of a potter's wheel. The potter, usually a woman, rolls out long ropes of clay that are coiled upward around a form called a *huditzi*, until the desired height and shape is reached. She then uses a gourd to scrape and smooth both the interior and exterior walls of the pot before burnishing it with a flat stone. Slip (a suspension of clay and water) is applied and the pot is painted with pigments made from locally sourced minerals and vegetable matter. The final step is the firing, which is done outdoors by placing the pots on a protective barrier of potsherds laid over smoldering dung: This process deepens the pots' colors and brings any applied decorative elements to life.

While the shapes of many Pueblo vessels are similar, colors and decorative elements vary according to the community and the availability of specific clays and pigments. Acoma pottery, for example, is known for its very thin walls, stylistic fluted rims, and beautifully painted geometric designs, executed either in black alone (“monochrome”) or in red and black (“polychrome”). Acoma Fine Line Jar (cover image, Figure 1, and page 9) is an excellent example of the complex geometric patterns so closely identified with this Pueblo's pottery. The evenly spaced thin black lines were painted freehand on white slip; a remarkable feat considering that the support is a three-dimensional, spherical object.

While Acoma pottery is often decorated with painstakingly compact designs, Zuni potters typically create more open compositions. They also demonstrate a marked preference for sculptural objects enhanced with water and hunting symbols, including tadpoles, “heartline” deer (an open-mouthed deer with lines extending from the mouth to the animal's triangle-shaped heart), and dragonflies. Several of these elements are visible in the Zuni Terraced Kiva Step Bowl (Figure 2, page 22). The stepped sides of this ceremonial bowl reference the ladder or stairs needed to access a *kiva*, a room used by modern Pueblo dwellers for religious rituals. The pot is decorated with a large frog and smaller tadpoles, both water symbols that, again, convey the importance of water to the Zuni.



Figure 5



Pueblo life dramatically changed when native and Spanish cultures collided in the 16th century. As a result of massive social, religious, and economic shifts, pottery became a marketable commodity for native populations, who traded their wares with the Spanish for items such as horses, iron knives, and meats not readily available in their own communities. Soon the Pueblo people began adapting their traditional forms to meet the needs and expectations of Spanish domestic life. For example, potters began creating candlesticks, chalices, and bowls in addition to incorporating certain European design elements, including rosettes, into their repertoires of design motifs.



Figure 4

The willingness of these potters to integrate non-Native elements into their work prefigures pieces such as the WWI Armistice Commemorative Koshare Pictorial Jar (Figure 3, page 16). Made in 1918 to commemorate Armistice Day, this particular pot combines traditional Pueblo imagery with American emblems, such as the iconic flag. Much like her ancestors, the unknown artist who created this vessel was clearly responding to current events in a rapidly changing world through her work.

The introduction of the railroad in the late 19th century opened the West to travel, increasing accessibility to the region and ending the relative isolation of many Pueblos. An influx of goods and people flooded the Southwest, and commercially made tin and porcelain items quickly replaced ceramic pots, bowls, and utensils, which in turn threatened the skilled craft of Pueblo pottery. Needing to secure their livelihoods, potters began selling their wares to curious tourists at train stations and depots. The intrinsic beauty of Pueblo pottery was not lost on traveling tourists, and European-Americans fascinated with these items began collecting them actively around 1880. Private collectors such as Albert C. Barnes (founder of the famed Barnes Foundation) acquired exceptional examples of historical and modern pottery to incorporate into his exemplary collections of paintings and decorative arts. Historical museums such as the Smithsonian Institution began collecting and documenting the work of various Pueblos and of individual artists as early as 1881 and then in earnest after 1903. But until the 1970s, only two pottery artists, Nampeyo of the Hopi Pueblo and Maria Martinez of San Ildefonso, were well known.

Nampeyo (ca. 1858 – 1942) was the most famous Hopi potter, executing polychrome designs directly onto the vessel without applying white slip, a method that had been popular for generations. Inspired by the patterns found on ancient pottery from the abandoned Pueblo village of Sikyatki, Nampeyo's innovative designs led to a revival of Hopi pottery in the late 19th century. She employed her artistic genius to construct a whole new vocabulary of forms and designs. Several of her daughters followed in Nampeyo's footsteps, becoming skilled potters and teaching their own daughters the craft, thereby giving birth to a clan of revered potters.

San Ildefonso potter Maria Martinez (ca. 1887–1980) played a vital role in the elevation of Pueblo pottery to an art form. In the early 20th century Maria and her husband Julian experimented with reductive firing and burnishing, ultimately producing the beautifully decorated ceramics known as San Ildefonso black-on-black (Figure 4, page 16). Their pots have both matte and glossy finishes and are decorated with updated versions of prehistoric design motifs, including feathers and mythological creatures; stunning innovations that made Maria and San Ildefonso famous. Although still working within the realm of traditional Pueblo pottery, Martinez pushed the level of the aesthetic of this class of objects to new heights.



Pueblo potters continue to create objects of high quality and beauty that are considered art in their own right. Contemporary artisans uphold the traditional techniques while incorporating new elements, linking the ancient world with the present.

Maria Dembrowsky Nigro

ACOMA PUEBLO

Located approximately 50 miles west of Albuquerque, New Mexico, Acoma Pueblo is one of the oldest continuously inhabited sites in North America. Its pottery is characterized by very thin walls, stylistic fluted rims, and, most famously, painted fine-line geometric designs. Acoma potters excavate and use local slate-like clay that turns a crisp white when fired. This white background lends itself

to sharply contrasting black images as well as polychrome depictions of rainbows, parrots, deer, and floral designs. Notable Acoma potters include Lucy M. Lewis (ca. 1890-1992), considered one of the matriarchs of Native American pottery, and Marie Z. Chino (1907-1982).



Historic Four Color Jar, late 19th century, 12 x 13 ½ inches



Fine Line Jar, 1st half of 20th century, 12 x 13 ½ inches



Marie Z. Chino (1907-1982), *Historic Fine Line Jar*, ca. 1950-1980, 7 x 9 inches

COCHITI PUEBLO

Cochiti Pueblo is located 55 miles north of Albuquerque, New Mexico, on over 53,000 acres of land through which the Rio Grande River flows. Traditional Cochiti pottery is classified as either Kiva or Cochiti Polychrome, which is painted in red and black on cream. These pots are often decorated with linear designs of fantastic birds and animal forms, as well as symbols of clouds and lightning suggesting rain. Contemporary Cochiti pottery artist, Virgil Ortiz (b. 1969) is well known for his incorporation of both traditional as well as modern symbols and imagery into graphically bold designs.



Virgil Ortiz (b. 1969), *Olla*, ca. 1980-1990
11 x 13 inches

HOPI PUEBLO

The Hopi and Hopi-Tewa Pueblos are situated on First Mesa in Northeastern Arizona, just west of northern New Mexico. From the 14th to 18th centuries, the Hopi-Tewa lived in Pueblo communities in the Galisteo basin in New Mexico. The Hopi-Tewa migrated from their ancestral home in New Mexico around 1696, after the second revolt of the Pueblo Indians against Spanish occupiers in those territories. The Tewa fled their homes in the Rio Grande Valley, establishing the Tewa village in Arizona where they have lived as close neighbors of the Hopi Indians for over 250 years. The Hopi-Tewa maintain the language and many of cultural characteristics of their kin, the New Mexico Tewa.



Rondina Huma (b. 1947), *Polychrome Jar*, ca. 1970-1980, 3 1/3 x 6 inches (left)
Polychrome Jar, ca. 1970-1980, 6 1/4 x 7 1/4 inches (right)

Hopi pottery is made from local clays that range in color from light cream to medium buff or red when fired. It is this blush-colored surface that distinguishes Hopi pottery from that of other Pueblos. The most famous Hopi potter was (Iris) Nampeyo (ca. 1860–1942), who executed polychrome designs directly onto her vessels without applying white slip; a method that had been popular for generations (see pages 6-7). Inspired by the patterns found on ancient pottery from the abandoned Pueblo village of Sikyatki, Nampeyo's innovative designs led to a revival of Hopi pottery in the late 19th century.

Several Hopi-Tewa potters have been included in this exhibition because of the cultural and stylistic affinities between their work and that of the New Mexican pueblos. Steve Lucas, Rondina Huma, and Sylvia Naha, descendants of the influential Nampeyo family of Hopi-Tewa potters, are represented here with signature examples of their work.



Steve Lucas (dates unknown), *Polychrome Flat Jar*, 1993, 4 ½ x 9 ½ inches (left)
Rondina Huma (b. 1947) *Jar*, ca. 1970-1980, 5 ½ x 8 ½ inches (right)



Sylvia Naha (b. 1951), *Black and White Seed Jar*, ca. 1980-1990,
3 x 8 ¼ inches

LAGUNA PUEBLO

Laguna Pueblo is sometimes considered a “twin” of the better-known Acoma Pueblo (which is located about 16 miles westward), since the two share so many cultural similarities. Potters from both Pueblos, for example, use clay that turns white when fired. What distinguishes Laguna from Acoma pottery are its distinctive large floral designs, executed in both black and terracotta.



Historic Jar, ca. 1908, 9 x 8 inches

SAN ILDEFONSO PUEBLO

San Ildefonso Pueblo is located approximately 20 miles north of Santa Fe along the Rio Grande River, in relatively close proximity to the Bandelier National Monument. This Pueblo is renowned for the black-on-black pottery that Maria Martinez (ca. 1887-1990) and her husband Julian (1879-1943) first pioneered in 1919 (see page 7). Inspired by ancient pots, Maria and Julian experimented with reductive firing, ultimately producing beautifully polished vessels known as San Ildefonso black-on-black. Julian drew upon prehistoric designs (pre-1540 CE) when developing patterns and embellishments for Maria’s vessels. Considered the matriarch of Pueblo potters, Martinez was one of the first potters to sign her name, elevating the art to new heights.



Lidded Polychrome Jar, 1st half of 20th century,
9 x 8 ½ inches



Anna Montoya Martinez (1885-1955) and Cresencio Martinez (1879-1918), *Historic Polychrome Jar*, ca. 1915, 10 ½ x 11 inches



Terraced Bowl with Koshares, ca. 1915, 6 ¼ x 8 inches



WWI Armistice Commemorative Koshare Pictorial Jar, ca. 1918, 9 x 11 ¼ inches



Maria Martinez (ca. 1887-1980) and Julian Martinez (1879-1943), *Feather Jar*; ca. 1925-1943, 6 ½ x 10 inches (left)
Santana Martinez (1909-2002), and Adam Martinez (ca. 1903-2000) *Jar*, ca. 1960-1970, 7 x 7 ¾ inches (right)

SANTA CLARA PUEBLO

Santa Clara Pueblo is located alongside the Rio Grande River, about 28 miles north of Santa Fe, and dates back to the 12th century. Like nearby San Ildefonso Pueblo, Santa Clara is known for its beautiful black ware. However, the tradition of carving and impressing decorations into the thick pots distinguishes Santa Clara pottery from that of other pueblos. Like Maria Martinez at San Ildefonso (see page 16), Santa Clara's Margaret Tafoya (1904–2001) was widely known as one of the best potters in the Southwest. In addition to her incredible ability to mold large storage jars, she mastered the use of a simple impressed bear paw motif that is typical of Santa Clara pottery.



Belen Tapia (1914-1999), *Carved Jar*; 2nd half of 20th century, 7 ¾ x 11 inches



Angela Baca (b. 1927), *Melon Jar*, ca. 1975-1980, 5 ¾ x 8 ½ inches (left)
Severa Tafoya (1890-1973), *Bowl with Bear Paw*, ca. 1950-1970, 3 x 9 ¾ inches (right)



Virginia Tafoya (b. 1963)
Pot, ca. 1990-2000, 7 ¾ x 6 ½ inches (left)
Jar, ca. 1990-2000, 10 ¾ x 12 inches (right)

SANTO DOMINGO PUEBLO

Santo Domingo, one of the largest Pueblos, is located between Santa Fe and Albuquerque, New Mexico. Santo Domingo pottery can be identified by its beige-colored clay, cream slip, and dark black geometric designs. The most striking features of such pieces are the designs themselves, which are created with large swaths of black and ample negative space. The bold geometric patterns of Santo Domingo stand in contrast to the intricate fine line patterns of the Acoma Pueblo.



Paulita Pacheco (b. 1943), *Four-Color Bird Jar*; 2nd half of 20th century, 10 ½ x 11 ½ inches



Robert Tenorio (b. 1950), *Polychrome Jar*; ca. 1980-1990, 13 ¼ x 14 inches (left)
Paulita Pacheco (b. 1943), *Polychrome Jar*; 2nd half of 20th century, 9 ¾ x 11 ½ inches (right)

TESUQUE PUEBLO

Tesuque Pueblo is located just 10 miles north of Santa Fe and is one of the smallest and most traditional Pueblos. For generations, Tesuque potters produced beautiful black and polychrome on cream pottery. However, in the late 1880s, these artisans began mass-producing small bowls and rain god sculptures decorated in bright colors for commercial sale to the tourist market in nearby Santa Fe.



Historic Black and Red Lidded Jar; 19th century, Collected in 1880, 13 x 12 inches



Historic Bowl with Red Interior and Snake Design, late 19th century, 4 x 7 ½ inches

ZIA PUEBLO

Located in north-central New Mexico, Zia Pueblo is known for a style of pottery that shows very little European influence. Vessels are made from a clay that turns a deep red when fired. However, a white slip is usually applied to create a buff-colored surface that is then decorated in



Trinidad Medina (ca. 1883-1964), *Historic Polychrome Jar*, ca. 1934, 10 x 12 inches



Lucinda Toririo (dates unknown), *Polychrome Bird Jar*, ca. 1940, 11 x 12 inches (left)
Juanita Pino (1900-1987), *Polychrome Jar*, ca. 1940, 9 ½ x 10 inches (right)

black, red, and orange hues. Zia potters are known for the “sky band” – a broad ribbon of color that frames more intricate patterns. Pots made before 1765 have a painted red rim top while vessels made after that date have a black rim.



S. P. Medina (b. 1932), *Polychrome Bird Jar*, ca. 1960-1970, 9 x 10 ½ inches



Elizabeth Medina (b. 1956), *Jar with Heartline Deer*, ca. 1990-2000, 13 x 15 inches

ZUNI PUEBLO

Located some 40 miles south of Gallup, New Mexico, Zuni Pueblo is more remote than the other Pueblos. Zuni potters demonstrate a preference for sculptural pieces with water and hunting symbols such as tadpoles, heartline deer (an open-mouthed deer with an arrow extending from the mouth to the inside of the animal), and dragonflies executed in a dark brown mineral paint. Clay used by Zuni potters is usually pink, although gray clay is sometimes employed.



Terraced Kiva Step Bowl, late 19th century, 5 x 9 inches

RECOMMENDED READING

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