



Here, Now and Always

By Emily Van Cleve Photography by Don Werthmann



NAVAJO SCHOOL, TWIN LAKES, 1950. PAUL W. MASTERS, PHOTOGRAPHER; MNM NEG. No. 98289. ARCHIVAL PHOTOGRAPHY FROM THE MUSEUM OF NEW MEXICO.

There's a quiet revolution going on inside select museums across the country. Directors and curators are beginning to open their museum doors and invite community input when preparing exhibits that reflect the cultures of people who live around them. These community/curatorial partnerships are adding breadth and depth to a multitude of museum displays.

Here, Now and Always, the innovative permanent exhibit at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture (MIAC) that opened in August 1997, tells the rich, complex and diverse stories of the living Indian peoples of the Southwest. The 9,000 square foot exhibit in the Amy Rose Bloch Wing contains a selection of 1,300 historical objects from the 72,000 pieces and six million artifacts comprising the museum's collection. Its birth eight years ago came out of the museum's desire to fulfill its mission of interpreting Native American arts and culture in collaboration with Native curators, leaders, artists, writers and educators who are active partners in research, scholarship, exhibitions and education.

When the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture was built in 1987, Ed Ladd was named director for the new building's exhibitions program. Ladd (a Zuni Indian who since has served as the museum's Curator of Ethnology

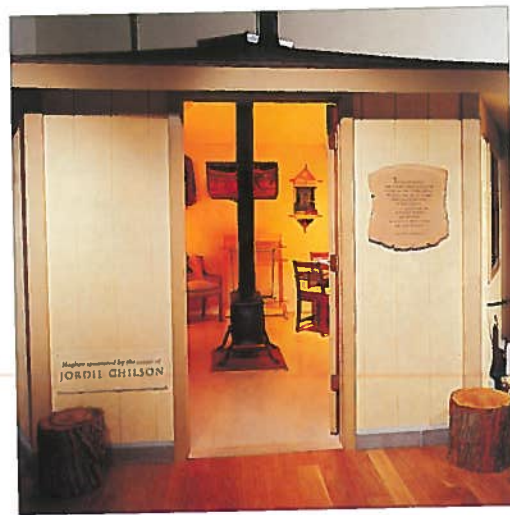
FROM LEFT: McCUNE CURATOR LILLIE LANE, MUSEUM DIRECTOR PAT HOUSE AND CHIEF CURATOR SARAH SCHLANGER IN THE FOCAL POINT OF THE "SURVIVAL" GALLERY: A RECONSTRUCTED BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS (BIA) CLASSROOM.



NAVAJO SILVERSMITH AND SON AT DOOR OF HIS SHOP, CRYSTAL, NEW MEXICO, AUGUST 1929. WILLIAM H. SASSAMAN, PHOTOGRAPHER; MNM NEG. No. 22567.

and is now Assistant Director of Communications Programs) brought to the position his vision of an exhibition-through-Indian-eyes of Native American art and culture. He and others anticipated that the new facility would be able to display a representative cross-section of the extensive and greatly admired artifact collection owned by the Museum of New Mexico and housed at the Laboratory of Anthropology. However, the amount of exhibition space that was suitable for public viewing turned out to be only 5,000 square feet of the 30,000 square feet built.

By 1993 an ambitious plan to add a new wing that showed Indian art through Indian eyes was developed by the staff (including Ladd, curator Sarah Schlanger and educator



RECONSTRUCTED HOGAN IN "HERE, NOW AND ALWAYS."

Carol Cooper) then led by the museum's director and assistant director Stephen Becker and Bruce Bernstein. Additional exhibition perspective came from Native leaders including Rina Swentzell, Santa Clara Pueblo architect, writer and art critic; Tessie Naranjo (Santa Clara), Ted Jojola (Isleta) and Gloria Emerson (Diné).

At a round table discussion at the Laboratory of Anthropology, MIAC Director Patricia House (Cherokee), Chief Curator Sarah Schlanger and McCune Curator Lillie Lane (Diné) talked with *El Palacio* about the exciting educational process that was involved with developing and creating *Here, Now and Always* and the challenges that lie ahead for the museum.

Each has come to the museum with a wealth of life experiences that offer varied, thoughtful and intelligent approaches to this collaborative effort.

• **Pat House** brought her own multi-cultural heritage and strong background in museum programs and development to the museum when she was named director (following Becker and later Bernstein) in December 1997. House was with The Bowers Museum of Cultural Art in Santa Ana, California, for five years, and then Chief Executive Officer of the Latin-American Art Museum in Long Beach, California, just before accepting the top position at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture.

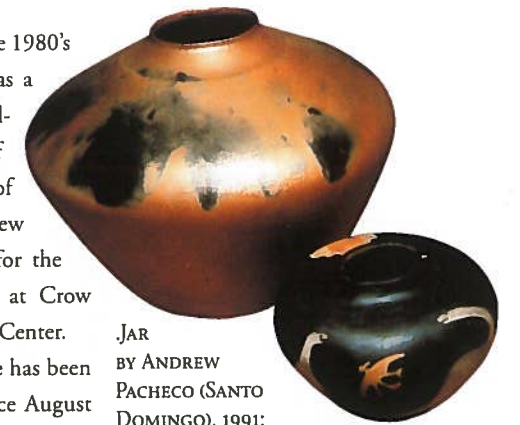
"Museums that deal with art and cultures are working with the artistic expression of a cultural group as interpreted through the eyes of artists," House said. "During my tenure at The Bowers, we worked with the issues of creating museum exhibits that reflect cultural art. Art and material culture can be viewed from varied perspectives. Through my work at The Bowers I learned how to integrate the contemporary cultural expressions of indigenous peoples with historical references provided by curators. It was an exciting process that ultimately brought life and dynamic energy to our many varied exhibits."

• **Sarah Schlanger**, who came to the museum in 1993 where she is chief curator, has been studying and working in the field with North American indigenous cultures for more than 20 years. After receiving her Masters (1980) and Ph.D. (1985) in anthropology from Washington State University, she went to the field as a staff archaeologist for the Navajo Nation Archaeology Department and the Zuni Archaeology

Program. During the late 1980's and early 1990's she was a cultural resource specialist for the Office of Archaeological Studies of the Museum of New Mexico and a scholar for the Four Corners Seminar at Crow Canyon Archaeological Center.

• Curator Lillie Lane has been on the MIAC staff since August of 1996, when the McCune Foundation funded a curator's position to support the new wing exhibition. She grew up on the Navajo Reservation in Window Rock, Arizona, and attended the University of Arizona where she majored in English, her second language. Her extensive work in linguistics and British literature has helped her provide a bridge between the Navajo and European/American based culture. She has served as a Navajo language consultant for the Department of Linguistics at the University of Arizona and a Navajo Cultural Specialist for the historic Preservation Department in Window Rock, Arizona.

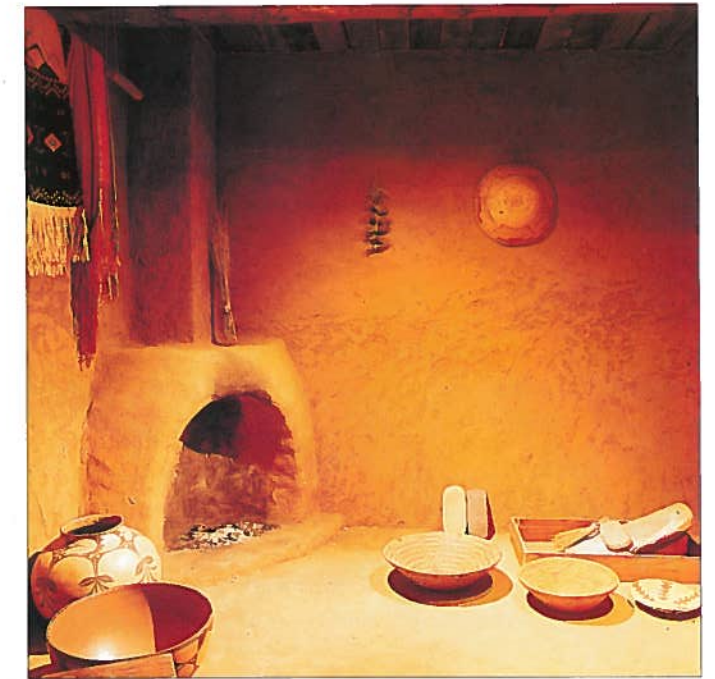
El Palacio: Here, Now and Always began as a team effort of scholars, elders and leaders from Indian communities across the Southwest in collaboration with museum professionals. What challenges were faced when



JAR BY ANDREW PACHECO (SANTO DOMINGO), 1991; MICACEOUS CLAY JAR BY LONNIE VIGIL (NAMBE), 1993.



RECONSTRUCTED KITCHENS—HUD-ISSUE AND TRADITIONAL—IN "HERE, NOW AND ALWAYS."





NAVAJO HOGANS, CA. 1906-19. CARTER H. HARRISON, PHOTOGRAPHER; MNM NEG. NO. 7437.

representatives from a multitude of tribes came together to offer a wide variety of ideas and perspectives?

Sarah Schlanger: When I came to the museum in 1993 we really started to work on the specific planning for the exhibit. We were concerned with not only the conceptual part but how it would look. We concentrated on what the building should look like and how the path the visitors took should be designed. Rina (Swentzell) is an architect so she provided a lot of valuable ideas. The interesting parts of the discussion had to do with working with different people's cultural understandings of how things should look. Everyone had their own opinions and thoughts based on the traditions of their own particular culture. Some of the things we talked about involved the texture of the exhibit, the direction one would take when walking and the colors that should be found in the exhibit. For example, we had to ask ourselves if the directional colors we used should be those that a Navajo person would recognize instantly or ones that a Santa Clara Pueblo person would immediately recognize.

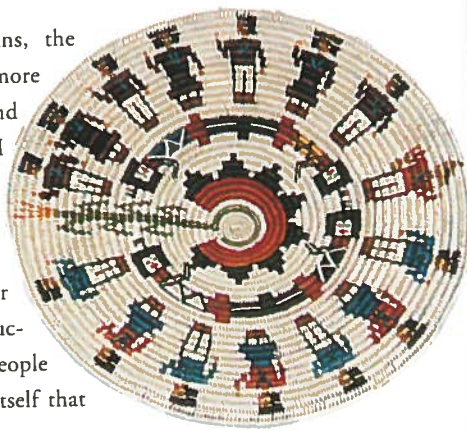
Lillie Lane: When we talked about the center areas in the exhibit, I found out that these areas were very important to the Pueblo people, whereas the Navajo people are concerned with getting out and being able to see for miles around. By talking about these issues we were able to come up with a design of the center area of the exhibit that satisfied everyone.

Sarah Schlanger: Through these discussions all participants learned

how different forms of communication are received and understood by various groups of people. One thing that none of us in academia had learned from textbooks about the people of the Southwest is that everyone has a chance to say what they're going to say without interruption. The MIAC staff had to learn how to slow down and let the talk develop.

Pat House: For Native Americans, the process is just as important or more important than the product and builds trust and understanding. I think the process of doing this exhibition was more important than the exhibition to a lot of people and just as important to other people. Sometimes after such a successful period of process, many people are so gratified with the process itself that once you're ready to go ahead and create the product, they forget that it's necessary, that the product was one reason for the process.

A visitor's first impressions of an exhibition create the framework for what follows. Would you please talk about the unique entrance to Here, Now and Always?



BASKETRY
TRAY BY SALLY BLACK
(NAVAJO), CA. 1988.

Sarah Schlanger: We spent a lot of time trying to develop a way to get the visitor into the exhibit. It became central in our minds to present visitors with the kind of experience that both puts them in the Southwest and takes them out of their normal way of thinking at the same time. We wanted to start with silence but we couldn't do that very well in this setting. We realized that the experience shouldn't begin with sounds from people but with sounds from nature. Water is the first sound as the visitor walks up the ramp. Sometimes it's running, sometimes it's gurgling. It took a long time to work out what sounds would be used and the order in which to put them. These sounds merge to sounds made by people.

After ascending the ramp visitors enter a four-coved interactive video section where they can watch Native American people telling their tribal creation and origin stories. Why do you think this video format is effective?

Pat House: I like the videos for several reasons. They're informative and interesting. I like hearing directly from the Native people about their lives and experiences. They're not just giving us a product but an image of their vision. We're hearing their personal thoughts and feelings about life, art and the future. Each person speaks as an individual as well as a member of his or her tribe. The voices are kept whole and intact. The videos are also wonderful because they symbolize the process involved with creating the exhibit.

Lillie Lane: Storytelling is an integral part of Native American cultures. So much is communicated through stories about our past, present and future. We decided to use storytelling as a tool of sharing both at the beginning and at the end of the exhibit.

Was it difficult to select text for the exhibit?

Sarah Schlanger: Exhibition text was written by a team of sixteen writers including fourteen Native Americans. When we first asked these writers to send us written material, they sent texts that sounded very museum-like and somewhat depersonalized. Fortunately, [renowned Navajo poet] Luci Tapahonso put the writers through a terrific three-day writing

workshop, which was like going back to school for all of us. We needed to learn how to get personal in our writing and not let the words sound like something out of a history book.

Pat House: So often museum objects are described through text written in the third person. Lucy inspired the writers to feel personal involvement with the exhibit.

Sarah Schlanger: Feel it, and then to let it show. When we wrote about the things in the exhibit, we found ourselves talking extensively about what words we would use to describe these objects. Many of the printed words used in the exhibit reflect non-translatable concepts. We got stuck on the words "items," "things" and "artifacts." The pieces we're showing aren't isolated from the cultures. The term "artifact" isolates the piece.

Lillie Lane: Early on we had long discussions about using the word artifact and no one was comfortable with it. It implied things that were no longer living. But we all agreed we couldn't find another word to describe the condition of things in a museum.



RECONSTRUCTED TOHONO O'ODHAM RAMADA IN "HERE, NOW AND ALWAYS."



TRADING POST, PAGOSA SPRINGS, COLORADO. MNM NEG. NO. 59326.



TOP: NAVAJO GIRLS' MESS HALL AND DORMITORY, SHIPROCK AGENCY. MNM NEG. NO. 30159.
 BELOW: NAVAJO GIRLS' DORMITORY, NASCHITI SCHOOL. PAUL W. MASTERS, MNM NEG. NO. 98261.

Were many people involved with the selection of the exhibition's artifacts and other objects that told the story?

Sarah Schlanger: Yes. We would take out artifacts from our collection and show them to people who would give comments about whether or not they thought these items should be part of the exhibit. What we found was that people were much less interested in focusing on the tangible objects and far more on intangible concepts.

Tessie Naranjo expressed really well how many Native Americans feel when she wrote about the importance of ancestors, the notion of time and the need for community. She said that the future is not the

focus, that there is "primarily the past, what we have done; and the present, where we are now and how we are living our lives at the moment." I think she came up with one of the most phenomenal lines that anyone has come up with to not only describe this exhibition but any exhibition like it.

When walking through the exhibit one can't help but notice that all the objects, whether they are older and had been created for functional purposes or contemporary and decorative, are very beautiful.

Sarah Schlanger: When we put together the pieces for the "Ancestors" gallery we picked objects that go beyond the functional. They're beautiful pieces that took a great deal of time and skill to make. We put the "Art" section at the end of the exhibit, but the visitor has seen almost all these wonderfully made pieces throughout the exhibit in other sections because so many of the functional items in traditional Native American lives were artistically made.

Lillie Lane: Traditional objects in Native American cultures were created to reflect balance and harmony. There was a complete integration of art with life. Until recently art has not been a separate word used to describe objects that have been created for spiritual or practical reasons.

Why is the exhibit titled Here, Now and Always?

Pat House: The exhibit shows the continuity in cultures rather than simply offering a historical perspective. Unfortunately, there are cultures around the world that have died, but we're not talking about dead cultures in *Here, Now and Always*. In order to show the cultures in a continuum we have integrated modern day items with older ones. After you go through the exhibit you can see that many of the objects in your daily life are the same as those used in the lives of today's Native Americans.

Sarah Schlanger: We have purposely put a contemporary Taos HUD (Housing and Urban Development) kitchen next to a traditional kitchen to inspire dialogue between museum staff and between visitors. We want to encourage discussions about what's the same and what's different between the two kitchens. Twentieth century HUD housing has had a profound impact on Native communities. For the Pueblo people, HUD housing has meant that they are living farther apart from each other than they were used to in the past while the Navajo people have been forced to live closer together.

Lillie Lane: Native students who have toured the exhibit have really enjoyed all the contemporary references. When I gave a tour to a group of students from a school in Monument Valley, Arizona, they were delighted to see one of their band uniforms on display in the "Language and Song" section.

Sarah Schlanger: And the only criticism we've heard from those kids and others who have visited is that we labeled the Nintendo incorrectly in the "Cycles" section.

What is unique about the new "Survival" gallery, which just opened?

Sarah Schlanger: One aspect of Indian experience that Native American leaders really wanted to see represented in the exhibit is school. We created the "Survival" gallery as a small reproduction of a BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs) classroom. The room's design was modeled after a classroom at the Santa Fe Indian School, complete with desks, a clock, an American flag, a blackboard and lesson plans on the board. Many Native Americans have experienced boarding schools, including Lillie.

Lillie Lane: I interviewed a wide variety of people representing three generations for the videos that accompany this exhibit. Everyone has had different experiences of going off to boarding schools and missionary schools. I can remember how I wanted to cry when I was being driven back to boarding school on Sunday evenings. The food, language and living conditions are so different from what we're used to at home.

I wanted someone to say that they hated boarding school and had a horrible time when I was making the video, but I couldn't get anybody to say that school was bad. Many of the older people who attended boarding schools moved to cities after school but eventually returned to the reservation.

Sarah Schlanger: The boarding school experience speaks directly to the survival question. Boarding school was and continues to be a common experience, a bond, for generations of Indians. Across the country many different groups of Native people went through—some would say survived—the boarding school system. Because survival is an

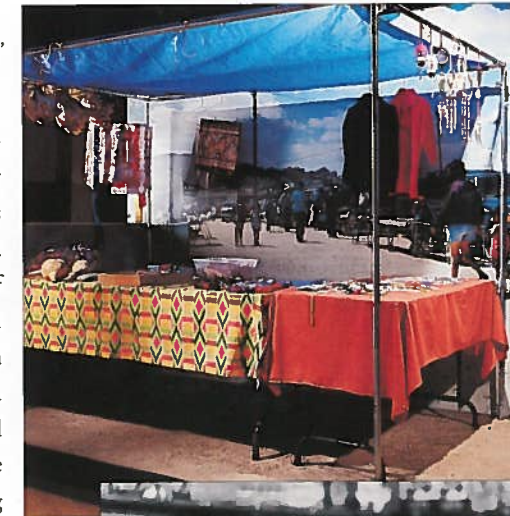
ongoing, dynamic process, we will be occasionally changing the stories told in the "Current Issues" gallery at the end of the exhibit. Recently we asked community members to address the question of what best describes survival in their respective communities. These new comments will replace the original ones recorded a year ago.

Pat House: When most Indian people talk about the idea of boarding school they don't not supportive of it. On a conceptual level most are negative, but on an individual level Native Americans want to look at their experiences from the positive perspective. A big part of survival is being positive.

How unusual is the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture in the museum community?

Pat House: MIAC has a unique leadership role in the larger museum community. *Here, Now and Always* is a benchmark for cultural museums, but more importantly it's a model for positive change.

Our museum isn't going in the typical



ABOVE: RECONSTRUCTED ROADSIDE TABLE IN "HERE, NOW AND ALWAYS"; TRADING POST, CA. 1942. MNM NEG. NO. 59350. LEFT: BASKETRY HAT (JICARILLA APACHE, MAKER UNKNOWN), CA. 1920.

direction of a cultural museum, but curatorial collaboration is an idea whose time has come. MIAC has done a terrific job with this new concept. By asking questions, like why are we doing what we're doing and what are we going to learn from this, and continuing the dialogue among ourselves and others, we strive to improve the museum and increase our understanding of each other.

Continued on page 47

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Here, Now and Always *Continued from page 39*

Sarah Schlanger: I think this exhibit frees us up to do a lot of focus exhibits, such as contemporary and purely historical exhibits, that we haven't been able to do before having an overall introduction to the Southwest. *Here, Now and Always* serves as a background to the people of the Southwest and a jumping off point for other exciting projects.

What are this museum's plans for delivering the museum's programs and resources to the community?

Pat House: *Here, Now and Always* is only the beginning.

We've already started an outreach program that is vital to our mission. We are working with schools, and collaborating with cultural museums and centers throughout the Southwest in an effort to share resources and information that promotes mutual growth and development. In developing the next phase, we will have more public brainstorming sessions where feedback from the surrounding community will be actively sought.

The Living Traditions Education Center that's scheduled to open in the museum in the summer of 1999 will offer an array of educational programs and create a forum to discuss Native American issues. It will

serve as a resource center for exhibitions and programs to rural Native America, Native and non-Native museums and cultural centers, and provide additional galleries to exhibit the art and material culture from the collections of MIAC.

And an exciting development of this expansion is a recently funded museum studies program that will be named the Ed Ladd Museum Study Center, to honor our longtime curator who is at the heart, soul and conscience of *Here, Now and Always*. ■

Emily Van Cleve is a free-lance writer living in Santa Fe.

Funding for the Amy Rose Block Wing and the permanent exhibition Here, Now and Always came from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the State of New Mexico, the museum fund raising-efforts, and from private individuals, organizations and foundations.

The new wing's name memorializes the daughter of invaluable museum supporters Richard and Nancy Bloch; Amy Rose Bloch was 27 years old when she died of leukemia in 1981.



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