



Making Pottery, Seeking Life

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In this essay about how the artists of Cochiti and Santo Domingo work and the worldview behind their work, I write from my perspective as an anthropology museum professional—Curator of Ethnology at the Museum of Indian Arts & Culture/Laboratory of Anthropology (MIAC/LAB)—and as a Pueblo person—Tewa from the Pueblo of Santa Clara. I concentrate on pottery production, the shifting relationship between tribes and museums, and the role of a museum in preservation. As a Tewa, I respect the private nature of Keresan religious practices and discuss spiritual aspects of pottery making only in the broadest of terms. Readers should note that mine is only one among any number of shifting and changing interpretations.

INDIANS AS ANTHROPOLOGISTS— AND POTTERS, TOO

I have always thought of American Indian people raised in traditional households as de facto anthropologists. Raised in one “culture” with definite rules and behavioral norms, we must also participate in a dominant society whose conventions and expecta-

tions are very different. We learn through participant/observation how that society works and how to negotiate through it. Like anthropologists, Native people seek to understand the perceived “other,” and ultimately learn more about themselves in return. Indian artists experience this dichotomy on a number of levels—they must balance traditionalist community practices, art market economics, aesthetic contradictions, and the competing definitions of Pueblo pottery constructed by collectors, dealers, curators, and art competition judges. My viewpoint is that while these community outsiders give intermittent standing to the indigenous perspective, the game—selling and buying—is played by their rules and on their turf, outside of the pueblos.

This is not to deny the increasing influence of Native voices in the art market. Many artists have formed committees that promote their interests in classification and judging. Yet the dominant aesthetic remains that of the Western eye and the product, pottery, still is developed to fill that niche. Well-crafted, pleasing pots always have been part of the Pueblo aesthetic: a jar that will hold water is a

figure 6
Deer Figurine
Cochiti
Artist Unknown
ca. 1910
29.5 x 9.8 x 30.5 cm
previous spread:
Cochiti girl, 1894–1910
See page 43.

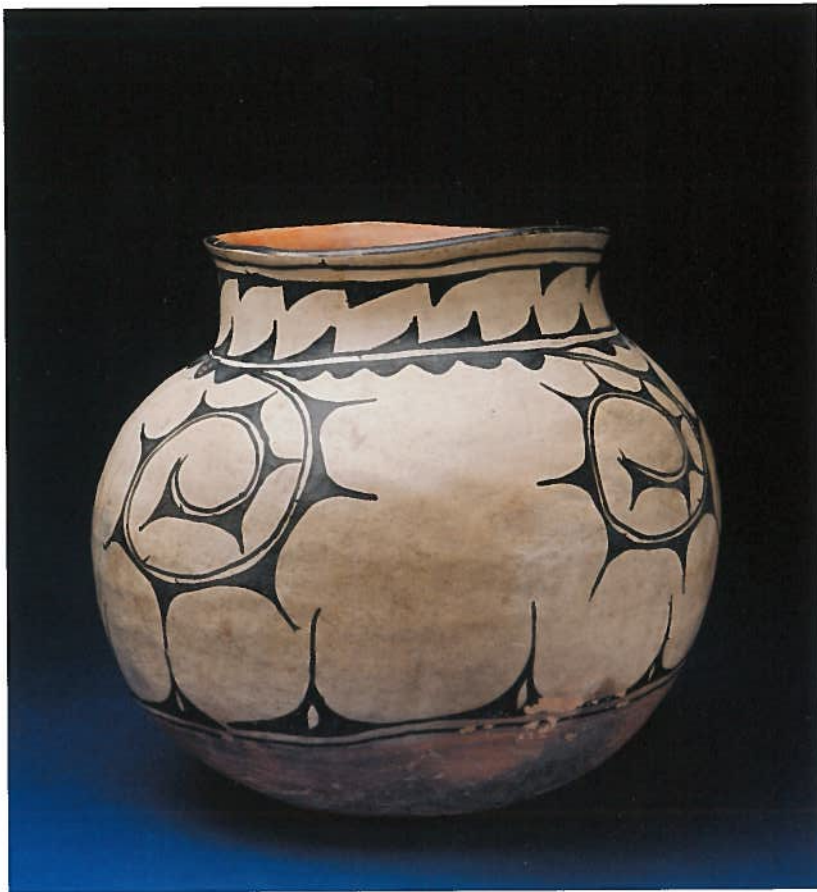


figure 7
Storage Jar
Cochiti
Artist Unknown
ca. 1900–1920
37.0 x 37.5 cm

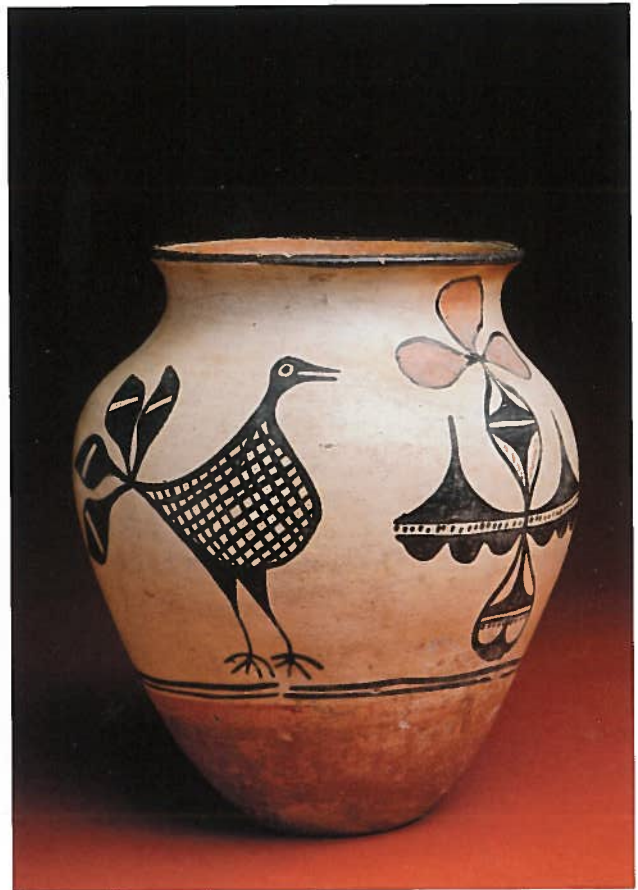


figure 8
Storage Jar
Santo Domingo
Artist Unknown
ca. 1910
26.3 x 23.0 x 25.1 cm

necessity, but so is one that carries the mark of humanity in all its flawed beauty—a shaky line, a scratch, a crack in the slip, a divot, or off-hue firing are all products of aging eyes, weathered hands, and imperfect humans. Looking over museum collections, especially those of MIAC/LAB, I am captivated by the element of human touch visible in pottery. In museum collections, ancient Pueblo pots with asymmetrical bulges and crackled surfaces are declared masterpieces (figs. 7–8); however, if they were entered in Indian art competitions today, they wouldn't make it past the intake table. This focus on finely crafted product has replaced revealing expressions of traditional communities with an art that reveals more about the community for which it is produced. Such is Art.

In the potter's mind, a fired piece ready for sale or household use is not an end product. The process is a journey on which every completed piece marks

a step on the path. For many potters it is the path their ancestors forged; it is how the clay is gathered, how the clay slips are mixed, how the wood is gathered, how the form is shaped, and how the pot is fired. This process—steeped in tradition, cyclical repetition, and cumulative action—is a journey that doesn't end with a prize or a sale. The process and practice is passed on through generations, and even when teachers' lives are interrupted by outside circumstances, we have seen the journey re-created by singular or communal acts. One person may choose to learn pottery making and, after they have grown in skill, will teach others, or a village may fund a pottery-making class to revitalize a traditional practice. Nevertheless, contemporary potters may work with clays and other materials that they did not gather from the earth but from commercial sources. Cochiti potter Diego Romero learned the traditional methods and then branched out on a journey that didn't



figure 9
 Chongo Brothers Bowl
 Cochiti
 Diego Romero
 1994
 13.2 x 7.8 cm

repeat the past but instead explored new materials and artistic expression that would continue to evolve and challenge (fig. 9). In the footsteps of their ancestors, Romero and other contemporary potters are adapting to influences that come from over the horizon. Whether we on the outside call them contemporary, traditional, or innovative, the potters of Cochiti and Santo Domingo are informed by an ancient practice that links their origin, life, and spirit (figs. 10–11).

MAKING POTTERY, SEEKING LIFE

Pottery is family. In the Puebloan view, pots, like people, are creations from the earth. Clay is referred to and thought of as a mother. The literal Mother Earth or, more accurately, Old Clay Earth Mother, is a nurturer of life, and from her gifts people sustain life in all its forms, including pottery. Since their

emergence from within this earth, Indian people, after many trials and migrations, came to create from the earth vessels as aides to both material and spiritual existence. Clay, in its manifesting of life and creation, plays a vital role in Pueblo lifeways. Represented in origin stories, cosmology, songs, and stages of life, pottery is intricately connected to Pueblo existence. The importance of the communal aspect of pottery making cannot be stressed too strongly. Even members of a community who do not shape vessels or paint their surfaces with meaningful designs play a part in this tradition.

Nuclear and extended families gather clay and the associated materials at carefully selected areas close to their communities. Some potters believe the materials interact with each other as people do, based on a common area of origin or familiarity—clays work with slips or paints more readily if they “know” each other. One Cochiti potter is hesitant

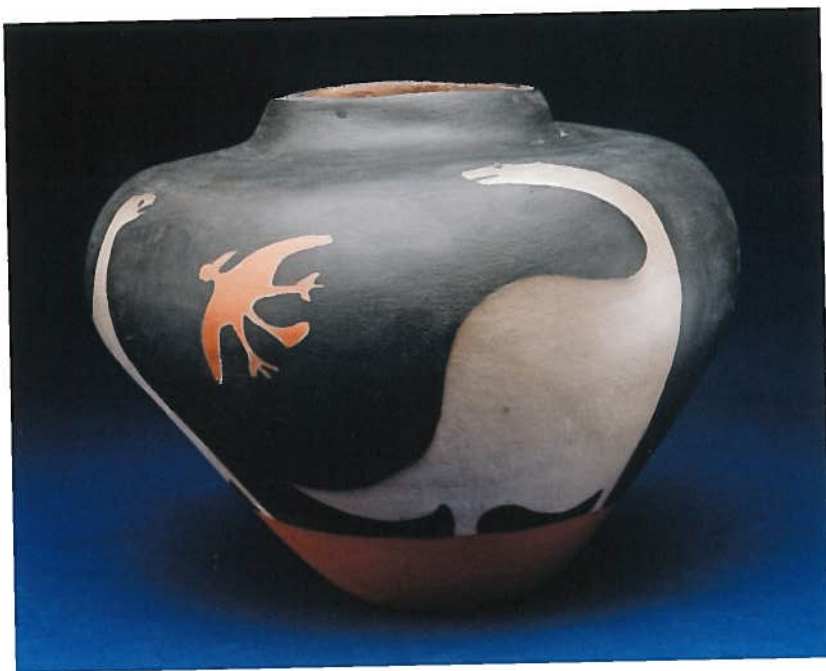


figure 10
Jar
Santo Domingo
Andrew Pacheco
1991
26.7 x 31.2 cm



figure 11
Plate
Santo Domingo
Andrew Pacheco
1991
4.2 x 20.1 cm

to use a North Dakota clay slip with her local clay as she does not know if they will “get along.” (I have personally experienced this lack of compatibility when I tried to use a La Bajada red earth as a plaster for a Santa Clara mud oven.)

Clay is needed to make pottery but, as a group effort, gathering clay carries an aspect beyond that of utility. Gathering clay, slip, stones, and plants for paint and brushes requires an exchange or offering. A family will gather what they need, keeping an active dialog with the earth throughout the process and

asking that they may do well with what they are given. After clay is carried home the family, working together, breaks it into smaller clods for drying on a prepared surface—a large slat of wood, a large screen, or even the top of a camper shell. The dried clods are pulverized into a rough screen to remove any impurities. After multiple screenings through finer and finer mesh, the earth is soaked in buckets to become an early stage of clay.

The family then adds a temper, usually a volcanic ash gathered locally, to the wet clay, handful by handful. The balance of temper and clay is not a fixed measurement, so each clay preparation is unique—the potter knows by feel when the proper balance is achieved. Too much temper can make the clay dry and lacking in the adhesion between coils, too little will allow the clay to shrink too much as it dries and cause the surface to crack. I have witnessed and participated in “over salting,” or adding too much temper. The quick fix is to add more clay if it is on hand and, if not, to steep the current batch in a bucket of water until more clay is available. I must add that before this, the temper is also screened over and over until it is a very fine powder, another



figure 12
Bowl Fragment or Puki
Artist Unknown
ca. 1910
6.1 x 30.0 cm



figure 13
Puki
Santo Domingo
Artist Unknown
ca. 1925
6.9 x 29.8 cm

labor-intensive process that requires help from others. Seeking balance involves multiple hands.

After a proper batch is made, all under the watchful eye of the potter or potters, the damp clay is ready to be used. For larger vessels, the potter uses a mold in the form of a basket or dried clay structure as a foundation. Called a *puki* in the Tewa language, it can be one of a Pueblo potter's prized heirlooms (fig. 13). A good *puki* helps midwife many a jar. From this foundation, the potter creates the vessel by adding coils of clay on top of each other to the desired height. In Keresan pueblos, coils are generally applied above and inside of each other, while in the Tewa region, coils are generally applied above and outside of each other. The coils are then scraped smooth, often with a smoothed section of gourd, the tool of choice as it has a little "give" but is sturdy enough to give form to the clay. Even the figurines for which Cochiti potters are famous are built using this coil and scrape method.

The potter's fingers are the tools used for the vessel's finishing touches. In the MIAC/LAB collections, pots can be found with fingerprint whorls where potters pressed the still damp clay. Robert

Tenorio of Santo Domingo Pueblo can recognize "conversation rims" on jars and bowls of the older pots. Potters in conversation, shaping the rim between thumb and forefinger while they talk, create these rims which bring to mind the communal aspect of pottery, not only in gathering and preparing clay, but also in shaping the forms. Today, many potters work in solitude with the occasional assistant. Lucky are the Pueblo potters who work among others and can exchange ideas, techniques, or gossip as they give life to earth.

After shaping, the vessel is allowed to dry and is inspected for any cracks appearing among the coils. If the flaws are too severe and it is not feasible to continue making the pot, it can be returned to a clay bucket with water and later take on a new shape. Potters speak of clay finding its own shape or becoming what it wants to be. The artist's hand only guides what is already there waiting to take shape on a physical plane. The dry pot is sanded with a fine grit sandpaper to create a surface ready for application of slip. Red or white slips are added to create the painting surface. Slips are added in multiple coats, creating a creamy background to allow the

figure 14

Dinosaur Figurine

Cochiti

Damacia Cordero

ca. 1985

10.2 x 22.1 x 7.8 cm

below:

Cochiti potter Martha Arquero, her husband Clyde Arquero, and her daughter potter April Arquero with figurines made by her mother and teacher, Damacia Cordero, in MIAC/LAB collections storage, 2007. Antonio Chavarria, photographer. Arquero's humorous and mischievous figurines are a family tradition that began with her mother and includes the work of her three sisters: Josephine Arquero, Gloria Herrera, and Marie Laureka.



painted design to stand out. The white slip used at Cochiti and Santo Domingo is now in short supply. The land where it was once gathered is under private ownership, and the clay source for the slip has been lost to development and earth moving. "It's like gold now," says Ambrose Atencio of Santo Domingo. Cochiti potter Martha Arquero remembers being offered a flour sack of white slip for the unheard of price of twenty-five dollars back in the 1980s. Just a few years later, she and her mother Damacia Cordero "went halfers" on a similar sized sack for one hundred dollars. Potters are now using the existing supply and looking for another source. Some have begun using a mixture of slips from other sources, using the local source as the base coat; others occa-

sionally use a mixture of commercial slips and locally gathered clay. The use of “nontraditional” materials, such as commercial slips and paints, brings up the debate on authenticity, which, while not the focus of this essay, is an ongoing issue among everyone interested in Pueblo pottery, most of all among the artists. Some potters I have spoken to feel that using commercial materials makes the product something other than Pueblo pottery. Cochiti potter Elizabeth Trujillo used outside ceramic paints for a short period but was never comfortable with the material. Other artists differentiate between using commercial and traditional materials, and price their pieces accordingly.

Pueblo people meet challenges by adapting. Experimental archaeologists, Native students at New Mexico Tech, and amateur rock hounds are working together in the search for new slip sources or suitable replacements. Elizabeth Trujillo has experimented with slips from Acoma, “it wipes off after the first coat,” and from Hopi and San Felipe with similar results. In the meantime, the dwindling supply is causing a surge of creativity. Inspired by earlier “Aguilar” style designs (fig. 15)—a reverse-painted style of Santo Domingo pottery where large geometric forms of black and red cover most of the white-slipped background—contemporary potters are creating new organic, graphic designs. Lisa Holt

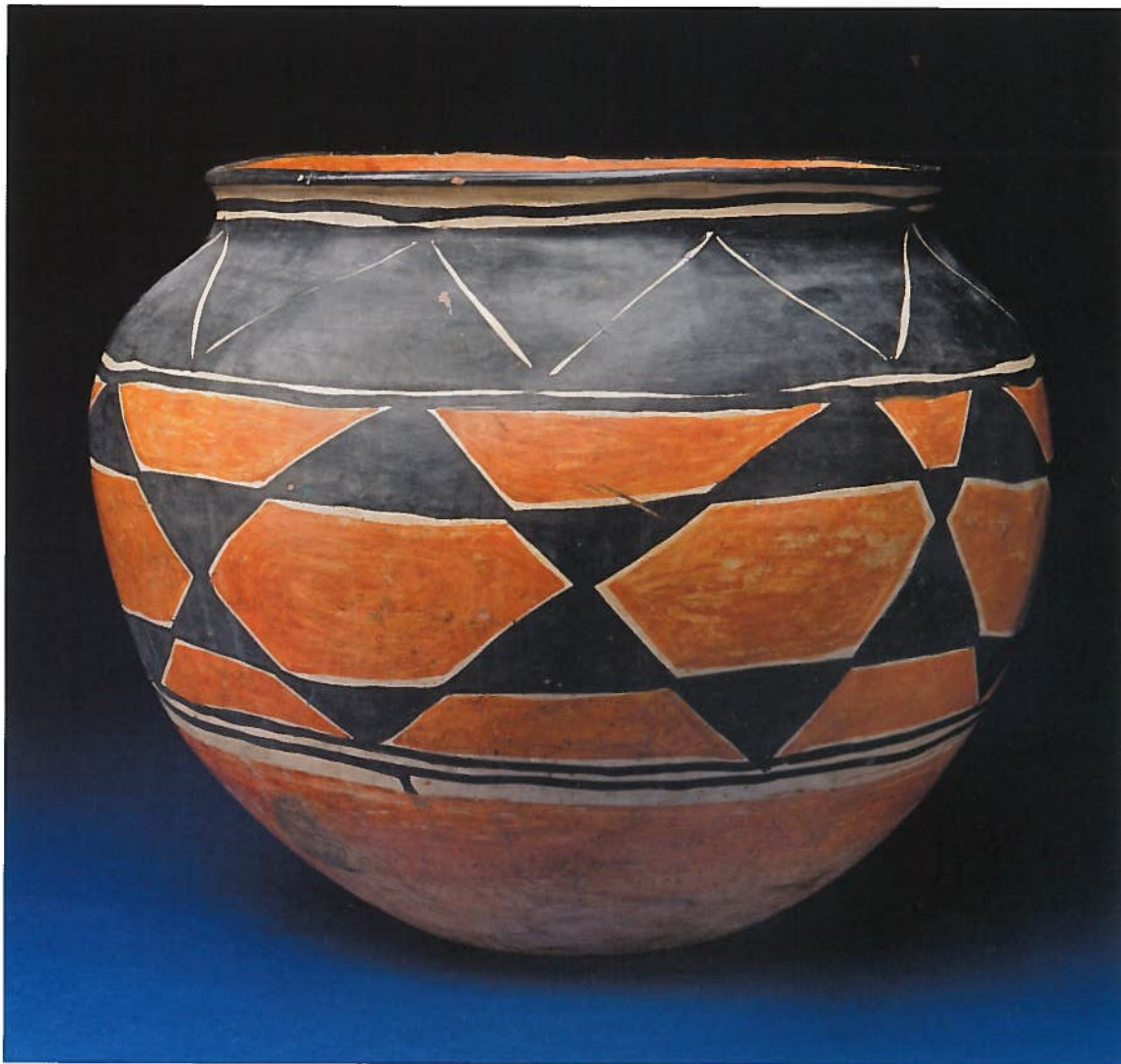


figure 15
Jar
Santo Domingo
Attributed to the
Aguilar Family
ca. 1910
34.5 x 44.0 cm



A Cochiti potter (identified only as Ben Trujillo's mother) painting a pot with a yucca paintbrush, ca. 1900. Mary E. Dissette, photographer. Courtesy Palace of the Governors (MNM/DCA),45452.

(Cochiti) and Harlan Reano (Santo Domingo) are an artistic team working in this emerging style.

The paints that make up the Keresan Polychrome Pottery tradition are both mineral and organic based. The reds, whites, and creams are all clay slips, each color having a different source in the land. Occasionally, red and white slips are mixed to make a tan-color slip. The black paint, which makes for most of the line work in the designs, is carbon based, meaning it is an organic paint that is made from plant material. By far the most common plant used is the Rocky Mountain Beeplant (*Cleome serpulata*). When collected, the plant is thanked for giving of itself and harvested whole. The plants are boiled down into a black paste and allowed to dry into dark, porous cakes. This processing is done outside for the most part as the smell of the boiling sludge can be overpowering. The dried cakes are distributed and stored for future use. Potters also experiment with wild teas, spinach, and other plants to make carbon paint. Robert Tenorio even had success using a tea purchased at Starbucks, but when he tried again with another batch, it was not as successful.

Many Pueblo potters today, not only at Cochiti and Santo Domingo, continue to use a paintbrush made from the narrowleaf yucca (*Yucca angustissima*), the spiny flowering desert plant. They cut the narrow leaves into medium-length strips and chew one end to create the bristles. Using a yucca paintbrush is not like using a similarly sized camel hair brush. The yucca leaf bends to the contour of the surface being painted, enabling long, deliberate strokes. During my own attempts at painting pottery using yucca brushes, I experienced it not as applying paint with brush strokes but carefully laying and dragging a thin line of nearly invisible ink. The paint in its watery form is visible only as a faint gray or blue, the "black" manifesting after firing. Given the challenges of the materials, the brushes, and the only faintly visible carbon paint, I am in awe of the potter's ability to successfully employ ancient techniques. Keresan artists fire their pots within a few days after painting the designs; after a week or so, the blacks will not be as vibrant and will take on gradient hues of gray. Today some potters will use commercial paint or mix it with the beeplant to create a denser black. When this is the case, it must be applied after firing, as the commercial paint will not "fire on."

A FEW WORDS ON DESIGNS

A common question asked of the Pueblo potter is, "What do the designs mean?" Other books and guides will offer up multitudes of interpretations; this essay is not one of them. If there is anything I have learned by observing Pueblo artists it is that symbols incorporated into pottery designs have multiple levels of meaning. Choosing one interpretation gives

short shrift to the complexity of the art *and* culture. When asked about meaning, the artist will often give the most literal interpretation—a loose, basic meaning most palatable to the outsider. This is not disingenuous, but is the artist's way of giving information on a mutually acceptable level. Symbols can be layered with meaning in terms of placement and sequence. In another instance, sometimes on the same vessel, symbols are combined to give multivocal meanings to a society, to a family, or to an individual painter. There are instances where a potter has a very specific meaning in mind when a design is painted and is happy to share with anyone interested. Robert Tenorio has painted designs that tell vivid stories, and designs that are amalgams of symbols from other communities where the message is his appreciation of the talents of his ancestors (fig. 16).

Certain designs are identified with particular pueblos. Though this sense of possession can be a response to market forces, it also comes from the artist's teachers. Design styles or elements are learned and repeated until a novice becomes a teacher and the cycle repeats itself. Some designs are shared or borrowed. There are a significant number of pots in the museum's collections where a specific pueblo or origin is still being debated due to the similarity or oddness of a design that doesn't speak to our notion of a certain village style. Polychromes of the middle Rio Grande can be quite tricky to the museum cataloger and elude easy classification. Designs also can be handed down through generations of one family, or can cross family lines. Inter-marriage is an important catalyst for bringing new forms, designs, and techniques from one pueblo to another. Monica Silva, originally from Santa Clara Pueblo, brought along many Tewa influenced aspects of pottery making when she married into Santo Domingo. Designs can be inspired by older pots seen in museums or stores, can come to mind in the middle of the night, or are momentary thoughts quickly drafted on a piece of paper. Others may result from playing with

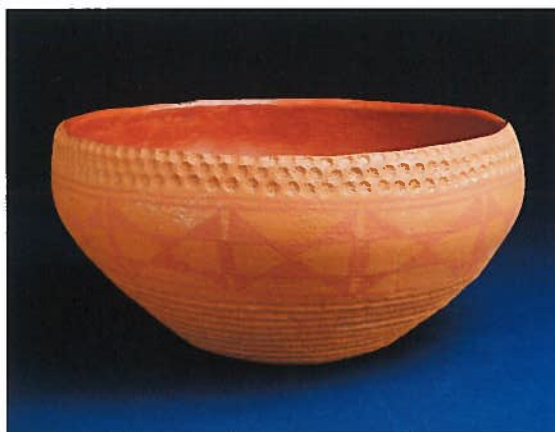


figure 16
Bowl
Santo Domingo
Robert Tenorio
1975
15.5 x 33.1 cm



figure 17
Jar
Santo Domingo
Santana and
Cruzita Melchor
ca. 1976
31.0 x 25.5 cm

mundane daily visual prompts—Elizabeth Trujillo bases some designs on stylized versions of her initials.

Other designs are a result of a village's *gestalt*, and here we come to the striking difference between Cochiti and Santo Domingo pottery. Santo Domingo Pueblo is famous for its perceived conservative nature. Enforced by secular and religious authorities, this conservatism is exemplified both by the cloistered nature of their village and the abstract nature of their pottery designs. Rarely are plants or animals—and never humans—depicted on Santo Domingo pottery (fig. 17). Cochiti, on the other hand, goes all out—plants, animals, humans, clouds, rain, and

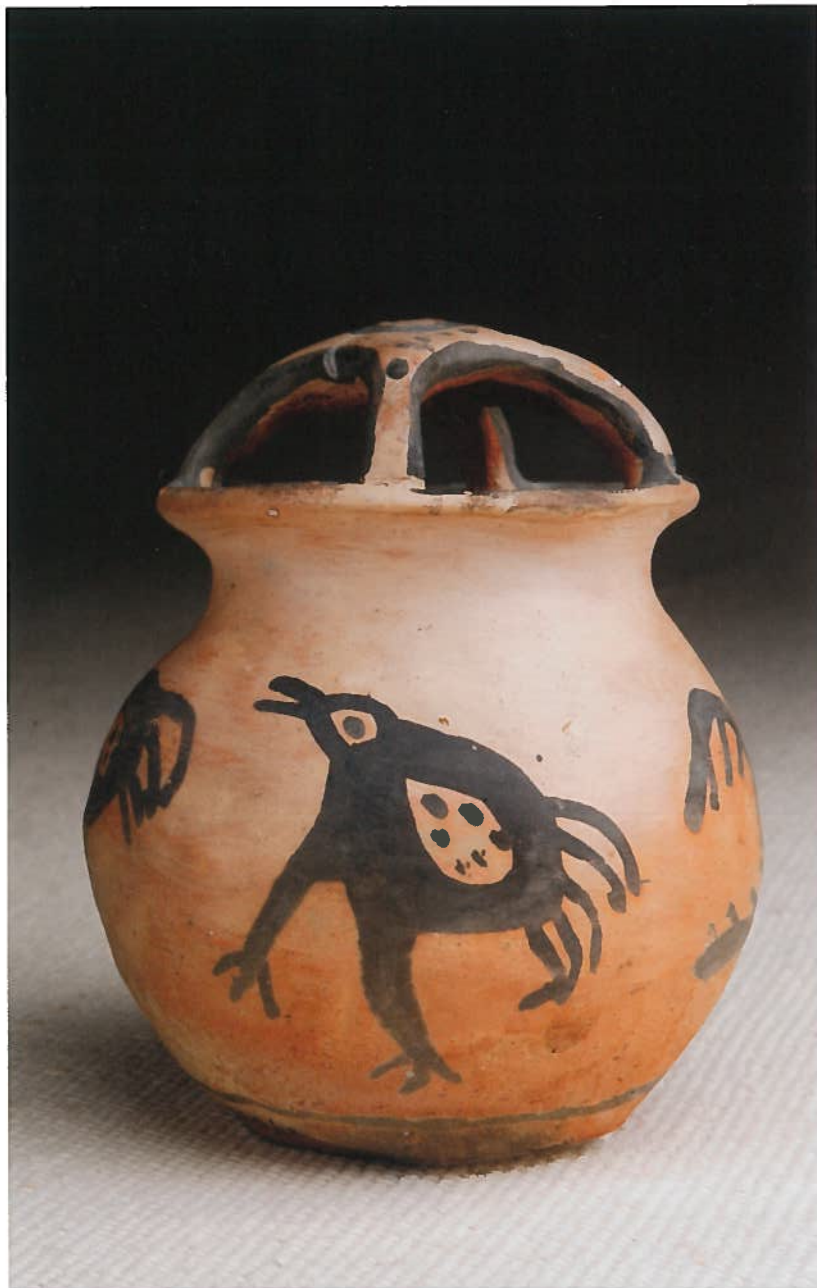


figure 18
Jar
Cochiti
Artist Unknown
ca. 1910
12.5 x 10.0 cm

just about everything else found in heaven or on earth has appeared on Cochiti pottery (fig. 18). Surely this openness of subject and line speaks of a village of modern, freewheeling folks. Taking a closer look, we can see that each statement contains elements of truth, but, in the larger picture, things are much more complicated (compare figs. 19–20).

Santo Domingo is a conservative pueblo but, then again, so is Cochiti. Cochiti Pueblo is a hos-

pitabile village brimming with artistic expressions, and so is Santo Domingo. Santo Domingo welcomes thousands of people to take part, via observation, in very important religious celebrations such as the harvest dances of August 4 performed every year. Every Labor Day weekend, Santo Domingo opens its village to visitors and other Native artists to participate in its arts and crafts fair. Santo Domingo artists and craftsmen are extremely active in the art tourism market of Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Hardly isolated or reclusive, they are major players in the tourist economy of New Mexico. Cochiti has produced some of the most renowned contemporary Indian artists: Virgil Ortiz, his sisters Janice and Inez, the Romero brothers Diego and Mateo, and Cippy Crazyhorse. At Santo Domingo, Robert Tenorio, William Andrew Pacheco, Ambrose Atencio, Ione Coriz, and Warren Coriz create work that shifts preconceived notions of what Santo Domingo pottery is. These artists and others are recognized for creating art outside set notions of “Indian art.” Yet each in their own way works within community values and traditions. Each ascribes sacredness to a medium, such as clay, or to symbols that the artist will treat differently and hold in a unique regard (fig. 21).

Puebloan adaptation to Spanish oppression by keeping religious matters private and internal manifests in different ways in each village and each individual artist. Openness and seclusion are matters of perception or degree, just as designs are. It is perfectly all right if an outsider cannot comprehend Pueblo religion or Pueblo design—sometimes that is the point. Sometimes the lack of specificity in an explanation is not meant to obfuscate or to frustrate, but is the result of the combining and layering of symbols and meaning, each with multiple interpretations, depending on time, place, and person. Ultimately, designs and the pots they are painted on can be accepted and appreciated for what they truly are, expressions of art originating from an ancient American culture.



figure 19
Dough Bowl
Santo Domingo
Artist Unknown
ca. 1915
26.5 x 49.0 cm

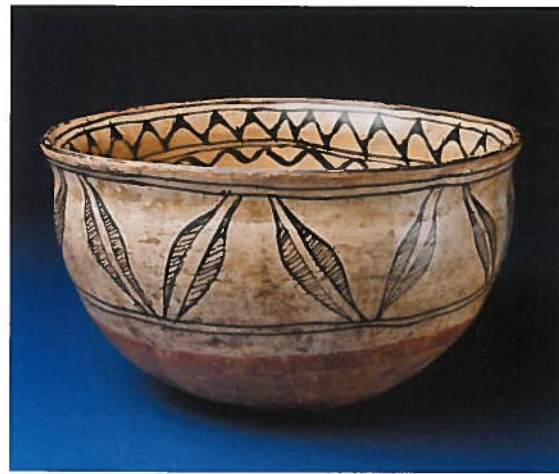


figure 20
Dough Bowl
Cochiti
Artist Unknown
ca. 1860
19.2 x 35.7 cm

TO THE FIRE

In pre-European times, pottery firing included large family or community groups. Pots of every type were fired in pits by the dozens. For many Keresan potters, firing pottery remains a family activity. As with gathering clay, many hands are needed to make a firing happen—wood has to be gathered, tins and other materials for supporting, covering and housing pots have to be found, and enough painted pots have to be ready to go. As with all aspects of the pottery-making tradition, there is a personal and a sacred element to firing. During the firing is when a pot is fully transformed. Taking on color and strength, it reaches a new level of being. A firing is a serious but lighthearted affair—while working with the fire to bring the gifts of earth to life, talk about the work is exchanged, last-minute painting is completed, and food shared.

A small fire is lit to heat the earth, and then the ash and coals are brushed aside to make space for setting up the tins that cradle the pots. Metal milk crates, balanced upon tin cans, are ideal. My grandma used a child's wagon as the cradle for her firing. The pots are placed within and covered with flat tins or heavy screens. Some potters will use slabs of rock or large pottery sherds as well, a method used often in older times. Slats and small broken branches or wood are placed above and below the pottery. Many potters prefer pine or cottonwood; however, at one fir-



figure 21
Bowl
Cochiti
Magdalena Melchor
prior to 1948
6.3 x 23.6 cm

ing in Santo Domingo potters used a supply of warped 2 x 2 boards. Cottonwood bark is excellent for use as the top cover around the tin and wood.

The popping and crackling of the wood, a joyful part of the song of the transformation, is occasionally punctuated by a "pop," usually meaning one thing: a pot has returned to Mother Earth. The loss of a pot in the firing is part of the cyclical process and part of the lessons learned as one becomes a proficient artist. Potters will not compliment or openly admire a pre-fired piece of pottery so as not to make it too irresistible to Clay Mother. This cautionary practice also means that potters will not sell a piece before it is fired. When I was a very young

In this image, probably staged for the photographer, a lone Cochiti potter prepares to fire a pot outdoors with cow dung fuel, 1894–1910. Courtesy National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution. N15622.



In the fire, Santo Domingo, 2007. Antonio Chavarria, photographer.

potter, one of my dinosaur figurines lost a leg during the firing. Only ten years old, I was upset and whined openly. My grandma admonished and at the same time comforted me by saying the dinosaur was liked by Clay Mother so much that she decided to take it, and it was not proper to be upset as our Mother already gives us so much. That I was a

novice potter also had something to do with it, but that too was part of the lesson.

When a pot breaks during a firing, it can damage pottery next to it; because of this possibility some contemporary potters fire their pieces individually. The Santo Domingo and Cochiti potters my colleagues and I have spoken with continue to fire pots in groups in whatever number is on hand. This can be from a relative few to more than a dozen. When asked, they perceive the risk of breaking as part of the practice and believe that in the right heart and state of mind, it is nothing to be overly concerned about. Outsiders lucky enough to observe a firing are amazed at the short firing time: from beginning to end, less than an hour passes. Potters casually remove the pieces from the faint embers with sticks and tongs and, brushing away the ashes, carefully examine them while still warm from the flames. After cooling, some potters coat their pots with a mixture of boiling water and egg whites, swirling it on the interior of a bowl or applying it



figure 22
Jar
Cochiti
Artist Unknown
ca. 1850–1900
40.2 x 6.0 cm

figure 23
Bowl
Santo Domingo
and Santa Clara
Attributed to
Monica Silva
ca. 1960
8.7 x 26.3 cm

like a varnish to the exterior. Additional luster is the product of oil or lard in very small amounts. Now the pottery is ready for its new life. Many pieces are sold to admirers; some are used in the household or within the community. When a visitor buys a Pueblo pot, it is imbued with an individual's talent, a family's labor, and a community's tradition (figs. 22–23).

A CENTURY IN THE MUSEUM

Pots are the same as people—both come from the earth, become part of families, then age and return to the earth. Some are repaired to last just a little longer, others live and work in a household until they are physically unable. This was the life cycle before museums and anthropologists. With the interest in the ancient Southwest by the new discipline





figure 24
Bowl (two views)
Cochiti
Attributed to
Frances Suina
ca. 1920
12.2 x 26.0 cm

of archaeology/anthropology, the lives of pots changed. Older museum collections, like those of the Museum of Indian Arts & Culture/Laboratory of Anthropology, contain pottery once part of families and communities now transformed into scholarly specimens (fig. 24).

Museums and Native people have a long and contentious history. Museums collect artifacts from indigenous communities as a form of cultural preservation, but from *their* perspective without thinking about the consequences to the communities. Yes, the communities participated, but during a time when financial pressures from the newly introduced cash economy, along with population decline in the villages due to several epidemics, led to the marketing of objects of community significance, once used in personal homes or in society houses. They now sit on shelves in isolated storage areas or in exhibit cases, examples of America's cultural patrimony.

From a museum's perspective, collecting older and contemporary works enables scholars to extrapolate the "true nature" of Native peoples. Most important is constructing a portrait of Pueblo peo-

ple before European influence, locked in time and culturally pure—a people who never really existed. The Southwest has always been a place of trade, travel, exchange, and influence. Adapting to whatever comes their way is a preeminent Pueblo trait, if I can be so bold as to assign one trait to an entire people. Adapting to a changing environment, other tribal groups, other cultures, other economic and religious systems, while seeking balance within their cosmology, is what Pueblo people do. Today there are the additional challenges—loss of language and land—that are recognized and addressed by each pueblo individually. Most importantly, Pueblo people are not frozen in the past, nor have they abandoned their culture for the shopping mall and the Internet. We all navigate these treacherous waters using tradition to guide our way and to help us move forward. We strive for political clout, self-determination, preservation of traditional beliefs and practices, and economic development that creates jobs in or near the villages so community members can participate in the yearly cycle of religious and social activities.

Today, the MIAC/LAB seeks to present a broad picture of Pueblo art outside of a framework built out of past biases that defined “real” Indian art. As the twenty-first century presents new challenges to survival of the pueblos, the museum seeks to be a partner rather than a predator. Recent documentation projects in the museum’s collections have brought together artists, academics, and museum staff to reexamine the pottery collection and develop more concise and accurate information. This new documentation can then be shared with the communities of origin. By returning information to the Native communities whose material culture makes up the collections, museums can serve as a place of preservation for the pueblos, preservation based on their needs. Today, when tribes are actively engaged in programs for health, art, and language retention, the museum can be a helpful tool by opening up its doors and sharing its resources. By doing this, it can build a stronger foundation for both museum and community. During her recent visit to the MIAC/LAB collections, I asked Cochiti potter Martha Arquero her thoughts on seeing so many of her mother’s pieces in museum storage. She said knowing that these works of her mother were there made her “feel proud knowing the gifts my mother made are here, and a few things I made are here with her.” When potters visit the museum’s storage areas initial reactions are quiet awe, respect, and admiration of the lasting power of the pottery. There is also a humble pride in the outside recognition of the work of their community or family. Santo Domingo potter Ambrose Atencio quietly walks the aisles, occasionally touching a certain curve or tracing a particular design. Soft comments of, “I like that



one...that shape is hard to do...that’s my mother’s” intersperse the stillness while museum staff stand aside impatiently holding our pads, pencils, and questions. Pueblo pottery speaks, especially to Pueblo potters. Today’s potters listen intently to their teachers, from elder to youth, from ancestor to descendant. They know personally the knowledge, skill, patience, and hard work the pottery in the collections represents. Potters bring a deep and academic appreciation to the museum’s holdings. These last words are those spoken by Elizabeth Trujillo during her visit to the collections in 2007: “It touches my heart to see all these older pots. I think of the old people gone away who put their hands and their hearts on the clay because I *know* how hard it is to do....I ask their guidance to keep on the tradition with my work.”

Cochiti Potter Francis Suina, 1974. David Donocho, photographer. Courtesy Palace of the Governors (MNM/DCA), 157155