

## Contemporary Hopi Arts and Crafts

### Hopi Pottery

Hopi potters draw on a tradition going back centuries. The ancestors of the Hopi made gray utility ware as long ago as A.D. 700. The ancient potters developed black on white styles, black on red, and finally polychromes. In the late 1800s, outsiders began to appreciate the artistry of Hopi potters. This new demand sparked what has been called the revival period for Hopi pottery.

The ancient potters passed their skills on to succeeding generations, many of whom are Hopi potters today. Although First Mesa is the most well-known for its pottery, Hopi potters can be found throughout the Hopi mesas. All authentic Hopi pottery is handmade by the coil and scrape technique. Hopi potters do not use a pottery wheel or make mold-poured pottery. They use the same techniques as their ancestors, hand-painting the designs with yucca leaf brushes and using natural materials provided by their environment. The pots are then fired in open firing areas.

To learn about Hopi pottery, we suggest you read some of the fine books available about this ancient art. They are listed in our [Recommended Reading List](#).

### History

The Hopi call their ancestors, *Hisatsinom*, "People of Long Ago." The public and most anthropologists refer to these people as the "Anasazi," a word that has become popular in the general literature. Early *Hisatsinom* are called the Basketmaker people. The Basketmakers were a hunting and gathering people who became increasingly sedentary as their reliance on agriculture increased. As early as A.D. 700, the Basketmaker people began making plain pottery.

Increased corn-based agriculture and increased occupation of multi-roomed pueblo dwellings was accompanied by an increase in the quantity and variety of pottery manufactured by these people. From Pueblo I through early Pueblo III (A.D. 800 to 1300), pottery with black painted designs on white slip was being made everywhere in the Pueblo world. Two of the early black on white styles from the Hopi mesas were Kana-a and Black Mesa. These were followed in the Pueblo II era by Dogoszhi and Sosi. Later styles that were made in early Pueblo III were Flagstaff, Tusayan, and Kayenta. Each has its own distinctive and identifiable design motif.

Four red ware traditions were also developed at this time. These designs were usually black, though sometimes white, on a background of red or orange slip. These were San Juan Red Ware, Tsegi Orange Ware, White Mountain Red Ware, and Show Low Red Ware.

In the Pueblo III period (about 1300), polychromes first appeared. Pueblo potters began to express a wide variety of colors, design styles, and vessel forms. The culmination of the Hopi polychromes was Sikyatki Polychrome, which flourished from A.D. 1400 to 1600. Later polychrome in the Hopi area included Payupki, Walpi, Polacca, and San Bernardo types. In the late 1800s, outsiders became interested in Hopi pottery, and a revival in pottery production was sparked by the work of Nampeyo and other First Mesa potters. They reproduced the beautiful Sikyatki Polychrome styles and handed down their skills. Most contemporary pottery is made on First Mesa.

## More About Modern Hopi Potters

Modern Hopi potters make their pottery in the traditional manner. The clay is hand dug on the Hopi mesas and hand processed. The pots are carefully hand constructed using the coil and scrape techniques their ancestors taught them. The paints used are from naturally occurring materials. For example, black paint is made by boiling Beeweed for a long time until it becomes very dark and thick. It is then dried into little cakes which are wrapped in corn husk until ready for use. It is called *guaco*.

The intricate and beautiful designs are painted free hand using a yucca leaf brush. The pots are then fired in the open air out on the mesa using sheep dung and cedar as a heat source. Prehistoric potters did not have domestic animals to provide dung, but modern potters prefer it for its rapid, even heat.

Some Hopi pottery is ceremonial in nature and not intended for public consumption. You will not find this kind of pottery for sale in reputable galleries and shops. Most prehistoric pottery has been taken from burial contexts, and the Hopi people find non-Hopi ownership of these pots offensive. It is better not to buy prehistoric pottery.

## Hopi Jewelry

Hopi life and religion are reflected in their jewelry. Designs have a religious or secular meaning and can be highly symbolic or realistic. Designs are usually based on ancient sources such as potsherds, petro glyphs, or *Katsinas*.

The overlay technique is characteristic of most Hopi jewelry. The design is cut out of a flat piece of silver; the background is textured and oxidized to turn it black. Often stones such as jet, coral, or turquoise are used to add emphasis to the outstanding silver craft produced by the Hopi.

To insure authenticity, Hopi jewelry is marked by the artist's clan, signature, or village. The Hopi Arts and Crafts Silvercraft Cooperative Guild located on Second Mesa is a non-profit membership organization that helps members promote their arts and crafts. The Guild has been instrumental in training individuals who now sell their own work in private shops located throughout the mesas. Jewelry sold through the Guild is marked with the sun symbol and the clan mark of the individual artist. Further information can be obtained by contacting this organization.

## Hopi Basketry

Hopi basketmakers are some of the finest artists in this medium in North America. Today, while many Pueblo peoples no longer weave baskets, Hopi women continue a centuries-long tradition of basketry. They are also innovative artists, developing new methods and designs from traditional ones. Red, yellow, and black are the usual colors skillfully arranged to produce katsina, animal, blanket, and geometric designs. The natural colors of plant materials used to construct the baskets serve as a background for the designs, contrasting with the vivid colors of commercial dyes. The symbolism and tradition in Hopi basketry designs link each unique handmade basket to other parts of Hopi life, past and present. In particular, basketry designs reflect aspects of Hopi religion and [agriculture](#). For the Hopi, just as the basket's fibers are woven together, so are all the pieces of Hopi culture: none is unrelated to another.

## History

Although basketry does not appear as abundantly as pottery in the archaeological record, many pieces have been uncovered that suggest connections between Hopi and other cultures of the southwestern United States. *Hisatsinom*, Hohokam, and Mogollon cultures, pre-historic peoples of the Southwest, are likely influences upon the Hopi.

Coiled Hohokam and Mogollon baskets share similar construction with Hopi coiled baskets. These types of Hohokam, Mogollon, and Hopi baskets are woven by wrapping bundles of plant material with a single piece of plant fiber. Other cultures of the Southwest use(d) rods instead of bundles, and today Pimans and Papagos along with Hopis are the only ones in the Southwest who still employ the bundled coiling method.

*Hisatsinom* are considered the ancestors of the Hopi. Not surprisingly then, *Hisatsinom* style basketry dating from A.D. 500 was handed down to the Hopi. In particular, the Hopi plaited ring basket is a part of an *Hisatsinom*-Pueblo tradition of uninterrupted basketmaking fifteen centuries old.

## Techniques

Three basic techniques, plaiting, wicker, and coiling, are employed by Hopi basket weavers. More than one method is sometimes used in making a single basket, providing an array of visual effects.

Each technique calls for certain plant materials. Wicker baskets are made from *sivaapi* (rabbit brush) and *suuvi* (sumac), while plaited baskets are made from *siwi* (dune brush) and *suuvi*. Coiled baskets are woven with *mo:'vi* (yucca) and *sivaapi*. Other organic materials are sometimes used as substitutes, but all are gathered from the natural vegetation in northern Arizona.

Basketry specialization between the Hopi mesas probably occurred in the 1800s. Coiled baskets became the specialty of Second Mesa, and wicker became the specialty of Third Mesa. These specializations remain, although plaiting is in use throughout the mesas. In this way, all Hopi basketry shares a distinct style grounded in Hopi tradition stretching back many centuries into the past.

## Uses

Continuation of the long tradition of basketry demonstrates the importance of basketry in Hopi culture. Baskets are used in many activities on the mesas and are sold to visiting art collectors and tourists. Different types of baskets have unique uses. The most common categories of baskets are plaques, trays, and bowls, serving a variety of everyday and ceremonial functions.

Plaques are either coiled or wicker, and trays are most often plaited twill. As a part of the wedding ceremony, plaques are traditionally made by the bride's family for the groom's family. These plaques are repayment for the bridal robes woven by the men of the groom's family. Tray varieties include peach trays used for sifting parched corn and piki trays used to serve or carry piki, the paper-thin, traditional Hopi bread made from blue corn meal.

Bowls, deep form baskets such as burden baskets, are woven by using coiling or wicker techniques. The burden baskets once woven by men were used to haul loads on the back of a person or animal. Peach baskets were commonly used to carry fruit up the mesas. And, a third type of bowl shaped basket is the wastebasket, a result of market demand.

While some functions of baskets in Hopi life have remained the same for many years, clearly new functions have also developed. Like the Hopi people, themselves, functions of basketry are grounded in traditions of the past and are selectively adaptive to the changes of today.

## Hopi Katsintithu katsina Dolls

Small brightly painted wooden dolls are what come to mind when people hear the word *Katsina*. These dolls are actually called *tithu* by the Hopi people. They are referred to as *katsintithu* when a more specific term is needed.

*Katsina* primarily refers to the supernatural beings who are believed to visit Hopi villagers during half of the year. *Katsinas* have the power to bring rain, exercise control over the weather, help in many of the everyday activities of the villagers, punish offenders of ceremonial or social laws, and, in general, to function as messengers between the spiritual domain and mortals. *Katsinas* are spiritual messengers.

The *tithu* are given to girls and new brides on dance days during which gifts are given by the *Katsinas*. The children take them home and through them learn what each *Katsina* looks like. The *tithu* are used to teach children about the different Hopi *Katsinas*.

"From a Hopi perspective, [*tithu*] that are carved by people who are not Hopi are not *katsina* dolls. A Hopi carver tries to fashion a doll that conforms . . . to the attributes of the *Katsina*, as taught in religious training. A skilled carver knows the attributes and distinctive characteristics of a particular *Katsina* and conveys the essence of the *Katsina* in the carved figure . . . Dolls carved by those not familiar with Hopi religion [do] not convey the proper feeling [and, to Hopis,] they look wrong. Eagle and wolf 'kachina' carvings are two forms popular with non-Hopi carvers, [like the Navajo,] and their customers, perhaps because they are more readily identifiable to a non-Hopi. These [non-Hopi] carvings may be distinguished by fierce snouts, lots of fur, and added touches that are essentially meaningless within Hopi culture." (Adapted from *Following the Sun and Moon: Hopi Katsina Dolls*. Heard Museum. Phoenix, AZ).

## Painting, Sculpture, and Photography

What non-Hopis have called art, *katsintithu* carving, basketry and pottery, Hopis consider as ceremonial and/or functional traditions, natural to everyday living. It is interesting to note that there is no Hopi word for "art." Much of what non-Hopis call art is actually sacred imagery to the Hopi people. A goal of the HCPO is to educate both the Hopi and non-Hopi public on the controversy that surrounds the commercialization of this sacred imagery. Hopi contemporary works integrate the Hopi lifeway into a variety of mediums such as painting, sculpture, and photography.

## Contemporary Hopi Painting

Hopi painting, traditional or contemporary, usually involves some creative freedom. The primary difference between contemporary and traditional styles is that contemporary art forms were probably learned in a formal situation, like a school, and express individual expressions for objects of beauty. Traditional art forms have been passed from Hopi to Hopi over many generations.

In the 1930s, Dorothy Dunn developed the "studio style" at the Santa Fe Indian School. The artists studied basic painting forms to learn new techniques and styles and continued to rely on subjects grounded in

traditional indigenous values. The style was flat and one dimensional with simple figures and line-type movement. Subjects were semi-abstract forms in decorative water colors, depicting common events.

Hopi jeweler, painter, and potter, Charles Loloma, a staff member at the Institute of American Indian Art in Santa Fe, saw the blending of traditional points of view with contemporary expression as the goal of Indian painters in the 1960s. The Institute and Mr. Loloma have accomplished this goal and have had a monumental influence on contemporary Native American art and artists. Today Hopi painters draw from a great wealth and depth of history, visions, dreams, ancient rituals, and the knowledge and pride of being Hopi.

## Contemporary Hopi Sculpture

Contemporary Hopi sculptors have been greatly influenced by Charles Loloma and the Institute of American Indian Art in Santa Fe. Hopi sculptors have challenged tradition and experimented with new materials such as copper, limestone, marble, soapstone, and bronze. The sculptors of today, like other Hopi artists, have learned to overcome difficulties and disadvantages by hard work, using specialized equipment such as chisels, grinders, goggles, polishers, sanders, scrapers, and breathing masks.

## Hopi Photography

The first photographs taken by Hopi people were snapshots to merely record family events. Hopi photographers today make a conscious effort to work with cultural responsibility. They must deal with conflict between obligations to Hopi people and personal artistic goals.

The goals and accomplishments of Hopi photographers vary. They range from seeking to understand and explain life to studies in personal dignity and cultural perseverance. Others invite viewers to look in the shadows and see the textures, patterns, children, buildings, and mystery.

Most recently, the HCPO and the Hopi Tribal Council granted permission to Jens Jensen, a professional photographer from Denmark, to do a photography project at Hopi. His work will be part of a traveling exhibit later this year.

Erin Younger tells us, "In Hopi photography as in Hopi Life, references and obligations overlap. Images lead into stories, stories into the past, the past into prophecies, and prophecies back to the present." Difficulties of being an independent artist and still remaining a member of the Hopi community will continue. There is always a balancing act between the Hopi community and the individual goals of the artist, whether painter, sculptor, or photographer.

The [Cline Library Photo Collection](#) at Northern Arizona University has a large collection of photos on line related to the Colorado Plateau. Included are many images of Hopi land, people, and arts and crafts. The archive can be searched in a number of ways.