

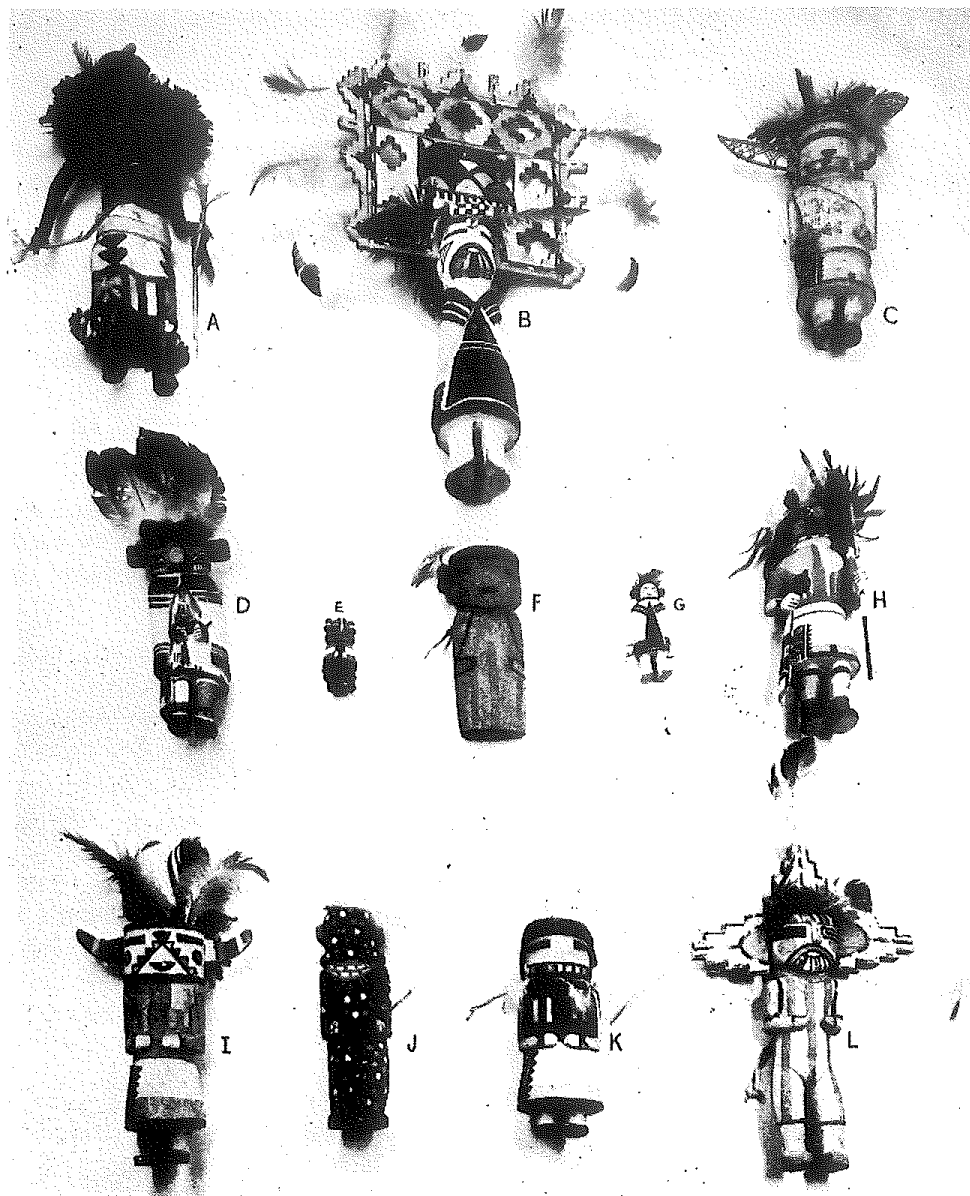
DENVER ART MUSEUM

1300 LOGAN STREET, DENVER, COLORADO

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KACHINAS AND KACHINA DOLLS

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1. **KACHINA** (kah-chée-nah) is a word in the Hopi (Hó-pee) Indian language. There are various spellings (katsina, kalcina, katzina, catcina) all pronounced alike.

2. **USE OF THE WORD.** Kachina is used by the Hopi in three ways: as a name for a large class of supernatural spirits; for masked dancers impersonating these spirits; and for small painted wood dolls carved in the likeness of the masked dancers (see cover).

The word has long been used in English and also by practically all other Pueblo Indians.

3. **KACHINA SPIRITS.** The Hopi believe that these beings, numbering at least 250, live during half of the year (July to January) on San Francisco peak and other high mountains in Arizona, and spend the rest of the year, January to July, with the tribe in its 9 villages on high plateaus in northeast Arizona. They are believed to serve as connecting links between men and the very important gods. Most of them are thought of as friendly helpful beings, but some are ogres and monsters. There are both male and female spirits.

4. **KACHINA DANCERS.** Through the winter and spring the Hopi have 5 main religious ceremonies, each lasting 9 days, and a larger number of smaller ones lasting 1 day. At these ceremonies there appear men wearing masks representing male and female kachina spirits. In general these masked performances are of two types: in one, a line of dancers, all in the same costume appear in a village square and repeat a few simple formations many times through a day; in the other, men wearing masks of many types are all over a village, sometimes dancing, sometimes visiting houses, etc. in small groups.

5. **MASKS AND BELIEFS.** The Hopi believe, as do other Indians, that when a man puts on a mask representing a spirit he becomes that spirit. The people, especially children, are not supposed to recognize dancers as friends or relatives, but only to see in them the gods come to visit.

Structurally the masks are of two types: those covering only the face in whole or part; and pail or helmet shaped ones covering the entire head. These basic forms are decorated with paint, feathers, fur, horns, eyes, noses and other trimmings in bewildering variety. Reference 5 gives full details. For comparative notes see Leaflet 65-66.

The masks are the important parts of the dancers' costumes and show the greatest variation. With some exceptions the rest of the costume is the same for any kachina and is made up, for male dancers, of moccasins stained red-brown or green, and an embroidered cotton kilt held in place with two wide belts which also support a fox skin hanging from the waist behind. Bodies and legs are bare and painted in various designs. Those who take female parts wear the ordinary black wrap-around dress with a red wool belt of the Pueblo woman, several types of shawls, and usually high white deer skin boots.

6. **KACHINAS IN OTHER PUEBLOS.** Belief in kachina spirits, and the custom of impersonating them by masked dancers, are common in nearly all of the pueblos. The cult is strongest among the Hopi and Zuni at the west end of the Pueblo area, and decreases in intensity as one moves east, to disappear before reaching Taos and Picurís (San Lorenzo), the easternmost of the Pueblos.

In the Hopi villages and at Zuni the outdoor masked dances are open to visitors, though ones held indoors in kivas (kéé-vahs), rooms set apart

for ceremonies, are closed to the public. In all other pueblos, however, masked dances are all closed to non-Indian spectators even if held outdoors. The only dances which can be seen in these villages are those in which kachina masks are not worn.

7. MASKS IN ANTIQUITY. It was once thought by some scientists that masks for kachinas were introduced by Indians from Mexico who entered the Southwest with the Spanish. But the discovery of two sets of prehistoric wall paintings in underground ceremonial rooms disproved this theory. These paintings show figures wearing masks, in some cases identical with those in use today. Spanish missionaries tried unsuccessfully to outlaw masked dances, but the kachina cult with its masks is still firmly established and active.

8. KACHINA DOLLS are small carved and painted wood images representing the masked kachina dancers. The Hopi word *tihu* (teé-hoo) is sometimes applied to them. (See cover.)

9. HISTORY. Present incomplete evidence indicates that the custom of making these dolls is rather a modern one. The oldest ones which can be definitely dated were collected as recently as 1879. Though thousands of perfectly preserved wooden objects have been found in prehistoric ruins, not one of these is a kachina doll. The Spanish authors do not mention them, at least in terms recognizable to us. How, when and where the custom of doll-making began are entirely unknown, but Hopi men have stated that many of the kachinas were developed in the later 1800's. The idea of kachina spirits and masks is ancient, but the making of dolls seems to be less than 100 years old.

10. MANUFACTURE. The dolls are normally made of cottonwood root, a soft white wood common in the Southwest. They are carved with pocket knives, chisels, saws, etc. of White manufacture. Ears, noses, horns, head-dresses, etc. are usually separate pieces attached with glue or tiny dowel pins. Feathers are tied on with cotton string and the complex designs of the different masks are painted on. The heads are carved as though the masks were in place. Formerly native mineral colors were used after a coat of white clay had been applied. But for many years commercial poster paint or opaque water colors have been used. Reference 5 has a series of color photos showing the steps followed in making dolls.

11. MAKERS. Any man may make the dolls, but usually the work is done by older men who become expert in the craft.

12. STYLE CHANGES. Dolls made before or around 1900 are very simple in form, with cylindrical or oval bodies and heads and sausage-like arms or legs. (C, K and L). The heads are always much oversize, even more than masks would make them. Poses were stiff and only life-like to a very limited degree.

As time passed realism developed more and more. I, J, K are dolls made about 1916 which show signs of these changes. Now heads are often natural size, and body proportions and limbs are quite natural in appearance. In addition to their life-like look modern dolls show brighter and more detailed painting than was formerly done. The technic of carving is much finer in recent dolls (D and H) than old ones. D and H were made in 1948.

On the older dolls sex organs were often indicated, though not breasts. (L). These details are no longer carved.

13. **SIZE RANGE** runs from 2 or 4 to 24 or, rarely, 30 inches or more. The average doll is about 8-10 inches high. Much of the height of the taller dolls is due to the very large flat headdresses (B) usually called by the Spanish word *tablita* (tab-lée-tah). (B is 14 inches tall, E is 2 inches.)

14. **PURPOSE.** The dolls are definitely not idols, nor are they made specifically to be used as playthings. Their purpose is to teach children something of the practices and beliefs of the native religion and with this in mind they are hung from the rafters or otherwise displayed in the home. In actuality they often serve as toys, for the little girls carry them like doll babies, play house with them, or bang them around till they are reduced to ruin.

The dolls are made before the major masked dances mentioned in section 4 and given by the kachina dancers to children during intermissions, along with food and other gifts.

15. **VARIETY** is too great for even listing in this short leaflet. The cover picture shows some of the main types. Reference 5 gives a systematic breakdown of all classes.

16. **DOLLS AT OTHER PUEBLOS.** The custom of making kachina dolls is also followed at Zuni, but only with extreme rarity in other villages. Zuni dolls (A) can easily be distinguished by having movable arms and garments made of actual cloth, not just shown by painted designs on the wood as the Hopi do. Reference 2 gives many facts and pictures about Zuni kachinas.

17. **IMITATIONS.** In recent years crude dolls made by roughly carving 2x4's have been made for sale. The flat sides make them easy to recognize. Very small dolls for lapel pins and a whole range of other sizes are made for the tourist trade (E and G). Some of these are of fine quality but have no connection with the original use of the dolls as gifts for children at great masked ceremonies. Except for the crude 2x4 types and the very small examples it is, however, hard to tell what might be called real kachina dolls from those made for sale.

Compiled by F. H. Douglas from examination of many collections and from the following references:

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