

DENVER ART MUSEUM

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DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN ART

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MODERN PUEBLO POTTERY TYPES

LEAFLETS 53-54

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1. INTRODUCTORY. After the invention of pottery toward the end of the period of pre-history called Basket Maker 3, perhaps 1600 years ago, the art spread extensively all over the Southwest. Until well after the Spanish conquest of 1540 the tendency was for the workers in large areas to make one or more kinds of pottery which were characteristic of each area. Each town did not have its individual ware, but produced pieces which resembled those made elsewhere in the area. Exceptions of course existed.

But after the re-conquest of 1690-1700 a new condition arose. Each of the towns which survived the fighting began to make a kind of pottery peculiar to itself. The descendants of these wares are the ones we see today. 18 groups are now making pottery which is to some extent decorated. Undecorated cooking ware is made in nearly all the towns.

This leaflet attempts to give a little information about each of the decorated wares made today. Owing to the limitation of space, unusual forms and designs cannot be discussed.

2. INFORMATION ABOUT THE PUEBLOS, such as location, population and historical notes can be found in double leaflet 45-46.

3. SYMBOLISM, which is the use of design elements to represent ideas, seems not to have existed on very early pottery. From the 14th century on pottery decoration came more and more to be connected with the idea that if objects and forces in nature are drawn on man's handiwork, he will be able to control these forces and objects. As rain was the greatest necessity in the Southwest, most designs which were not purely decorative were made from natural things connected with rain. Heavenly phenomena and earthly creatures who have to do with water form the large proportion of such designs. How much of this old rain symbolism is found on the pottery of today is difficult to say. It certainly exists on pieces used in the ceremonies, but they are rarely seen. The everyday household pottery and that made for sale only are now produced with apparently very little regard for symbolism, the decorations being merely combinations of elements which the practice of several generations has made popular at each pueblo.

4. MIXTURE OF STYLES. Centuries of intermarriage and of visiting between towns has resulted in considerable mixing of design types. Sales of the wares of a town specializing in pottery have helped in this diffusion of patterns. Elements peculiar to a strong pottery making town can be seen on many other kinds of wares. Therefore design alone is not a sufficient guide to identifying a pot. Shape, thickness, clay color, and weight must also be considered.

5. SLIP. This word, which is used frequently in the following paragraphs, means the thin mixture of clay and water which is rubbed over the pottery before the designs are painted on to form a smooth, colored background.

6. DETAILS OF POTTERY MAKING will be found in leaflet 6.

7. ACOMA pottery is the thinnest and lightest in weight of all modern wares. Even if the design gives no clue to the type, it can be distinguished by its delicacy. The base is red to dark brown, the slip is white to yellow-cream. The designs are executed with black, yellow, orange, red and brown paints. The whole area from neck to near the base is usually the design field, though sometimes the neck is considered separately. The design type which is most characteristic of the town is the geometric (A). The entire surface of a piece—always excepting the base—is covered with a profusion of angular and curved forms. Main construction lines can be seen after study, but are not immediately apparent. The second most common type has been influenced strongly

by Tsia. Birds and flowers rule in this class (B). The birds have curving parrot beaks, single or double uprising wings and a few thick tail feathers. Another bird form is copied from the roadrunner. These creatures have small heads on short necks, round bodies with elaborate tails, and short legs. Both bird forms are always in profile. There are usually two birds on a pot, though sometimes three or four, and they are often set beneath a broad curving band, or above and below a band drawn in deep waves. Realistic flower and leaf forms are usually drawn with the birds. Both of these design types have been developed in the last 50 years. Pieces collected in the last century show massive decorations covering only a part of the surface.

The commonest shape is the water jar. Other varieties are small jars and pots, large storage jars, and vases with necks and side handles. Small to medium bowls are not uncommon. Today small jars and bowls, candlesticks, ash trays, etc., are made in quantity for the tourist trade.

8. COCHITI. The best indication of Cochiti pottery (C) is the type of design. The otherwise universal taboo against religious symbols on secular pottery does not hold at this pueblo. The symbols of fertility—such as corn and other plants, clouds, rain and lightning, leaves and checkered fields—strange and impossible birds and occasional human and animal forms are the elements of Cochiti design. Plants with clouds for flowers and birds with clouds on wings and tail are common. The cloud designs are from two to several dozen inverted half circles set in rows above or below a line. If more than two are used they are piled up in a pyramid. Cochiti greatly favors the multiple cloud, which looks like a mass of small soap bubbles. Rows of parallel vertical lines pendant from a horizontal bar are nearby rain, and heavy Y-shaped marks with extremely long tails are distant rain. Solid rectangular figures with steps on one side are much used. They are often painted in pairs. Large unsymmetrical designs occur quite often. Areas of black are frequently pierced with narrow leaf-shaped openings.

The designs are likely to be very carelessly executed, and the arrangement of the elements on a pot is usually uneven and rather haphazard. The use of long, thin elements moving somewhat eccentricly over the surface gives Cochiti design a noticeably "spidery" character.

The base is light tan with a red ring at the top. The slip is yellowish-white if the piece is old and a very light cream-grey in the case of new work. Small food bowls are often a light chocolate brown. Shallow and deep bowls, water jars, large storage jars, and small containers molded in bird and animal forms are the common shapes. Quite large realistic human figurines are a speciality of the town. Bowls are painted on both outer and inner surfaces, other shapes on the outside only.

9. HOPI. For details about the manufacture, history, etc., of this type of pottery, see leaflet 47.

The color of the background is the most outstanding feature of this ware. It ranges from a light cream through yellow and orange to red. Most pieces show these colors in spots gradually shading into each other. This type is unslipped. There are wares with dark red and white all-over slips. The vast majority of the designs are highly conventionalized birds or parts of birds executed in brown-black and red. Masked kachina figures or their masks alone are common on small flat tiles, and appear occasionally elsewhere. Hatching and various geometric designs are used as space fillers. Shallow wide bowls (D) and flattish, wide-shouldered water jars (E) are the most common shapes. Bowls have the principal design on the inside. Recently very tall, slender jars have been made. The flat tiles (F) mentioned above were made in the last

century, died out, and are now being made again. Square and round dippers (F) are made. The pottery is quite thick and soft.

10. ISLETA. The pottery made at Isleta up till about 1880 was plain red. At the time mentioned above people from Laguna moved to Isleta and introduced the present style. Today pottery making is principally devoted to the production of countless poorly made bits of bric-a-brac for the tourist trade. Such pieces as have some pretense to artistic worth have an all-over white slip bearing decorations in red and black. The slip even covers the bottom of the pieces. It is inclined to wear off. The designs are heavy and staring. They are conventionalized plant forms and geometric elements in about equal proportion. There is much heavy hatching. The interior of the deep bowls (G), the most common shape if the bric-a-brac is not considered, is tan with a red band just below the rim. Sometimes the whole interior is red. The ware is of medium thickness. Pieces of pottery signed M. C. on the bottom are the work of Maria Chiwiwi, the best Isleta potter of today.

11. JEMEZ. The small amount of modern pottery which has come from Jemez is the result of a very recent and not very widespread revival. Only a few pieces are available for study. The ware is thick and extremely heavy. A rather slender water jar (H) is seemingly the only form made. There is a broad red base, above which is a yellow-white slip painted with heavy black and red designs of a geometrical nature. Stepped blocks, checks and parallel rows of lines seem to be favored.

12. LAGUNA pottery so closely resembles that from Acoma that its recognition depends on the thickness of the ware, which is much greater at Laguna. The design types are so much alike that until further analytical studies are made no distinguishing points can be seen. There seems to be a leaning toward a tall, narrow shape (J) for the water jar. Pottery making is almost dead at Laguna and its colonies, so that there is little on which to base descriptions except pictures of collections made years ago. These show many animal and eccentric shapes, evidently a speciality of the pueblo in those times.

13. NAMBE. From the very few available specimens it appears that Nambe pottery is an inferior grade of all-black ware. It looks like badly made Santa Clara pottery.

14. PICURIS pottery is not painted, but its color is so attractive that it is included here. It is made from a mica-bearing clay that burns a rich glittering tan, irregularly and handsomely spotted with black from contact with the flames in firing. The ware is hard and thin and gives a fine clear ring when struck. The most characteristic shape is a deep, wide-mouthed cook pot (K). This is often decorated with a wavy clay molding around the neck, and with small loop handles. The molding is an adaptation of Apache technic. Other shapes seen are vases with long double or single necks.

15. POJOAQUE. The very few pieces known to have come from this now abandoned pueblo indicate that an inferior grade of black pottery was made.

16. SAN ILDEFONSO. In variety of wares this pueblo leads the field. Until about 1915 five types were made. Of these, plain polished black and polished red were the oldest. The colors cover the entire surface. The commonest shapes were large storage jars and mixing bowls. These wares look so much like those made at Santa Clara that no way of distinguishing them can be given. This statement does not apply to modern polished black ware, which can very easily be recognized. The third variety is black on buff or cream, the commonest ware of the last century. This has a tan base, a cream slip and

deep black designs. The shapes most seen are ceremonial bowls with terraced rims, globular water jars (L) and large, small-mouthed storage jars. Geometric figures and conventionalized plant forms of a rather large size are somewhat poorly painted and loosely organized. There is a considerable likeness to Cochiti work.

The fourth variety is called polychrome. It flourished in the last century, but is rarely made today. It has a tan base with a red band at the top, and a light cream slip decorated with figures in red and black. The red has a considerable leaning toward purple which is peculiar to this ware. The designs show geometric figures, conventionalized plant forms and very striking birds with highly fanciful flowing tails, wings and crests. Water jars (M) and bowls are the shapes of the older ware. Modern potters have made a great variety of shapes for sale. The fifth of the older types is black on red (N). The base is tan and the slip a dark polished red. The designs, executed in deep black, are rather massive geometric and conventionalized figures. They are united around the rim and flow down over the sides from this common starting point in several large units.

About 1915 a spirit of change swept over the town and a number of new types were invented. From this unsettled period emerged the dominant type of today, the highly polished black with dull black designs (O). This ware, invented about 1919 by the celebrated Maria and Julian Martinez, is the Pueblo pottery best known today to the world at large. Even when undecorated it may easily be distinguished from other black wares by the almost mechanical perfection of its smoothness and by the brilliance of its polish. When decorated it is unmistakable, the dull black and shiny black combination being unlike any other ware. The designs are mostly angular geometric figures executed with matchless perfection by men painters, a very unusual thing in itself. A variation from the angular style is the gracefully flowing form of the plumed serpent which appears on many pieces.

Other varieties which have been made in recent years are white on red, pink outlined with white on red, and black and white on red. In 1931 Rosalie Aguilar invented a new style which has the designs carved in low relief. The color is polished black. Most of the pottery made today is signed on the bottom with the first name of the maker.

All types of San Ildefonso pottery are rather heavy and thick and when struck give out a dull "woodeny" sound.

17. SAN JUAN makes two wares, polished red and polished black, of which the former is the most favored. The deep bowl, usually quite large, is the most common article made. It has a polished red slip extending from the rim down over the shoulder. Below this is the natural tan of the unslipped clay. One type has a narrow concave band of red (P) and another a much broader convex section(Q). Both are without decoration. The polished black (R) may be distinguished from other wares of this color by the fact that the black does not cover the whole surface, but only extends from the rim to a little below the shoulder. The remainder is a dull brown-black. The polished black also shows a brown cast. Jars of several sizes are the common shapes in the black ware.

A very recent innovation at San Juan is a light brown ware in which geometric and floral designs are scratched with a sharp point. This is a modern adaptation of a prehistoric type once made in now ruined towns on the Jemez plateau near San Juan.

18. SANTA ANA. Pottery has been made to a very limited extent at this town in recent years. Surviving pieces from busier times are very scarce.

They show a much worn light slip decorated with red and black. The character of the red designs is the best guide to identifying Santa Ana pottery. They are very broad bands arranged in massive curved and angular patterns. Considerable sections of these bands do not have the black edging which is almost universal elsewhere. The all-black or mixed black and red designs are more complex, with smaller lines and more intricate curves. Many of these latter figures resemble those made at Tsia. Small white circles within black or red masses are common. The usual shapes are deep bowls and water jars (S).

19. SANTA CLARA. Polished black is the common ware at this pueblo. The surface of the pieces is somewhat rough, the shallow corrugations made by the pottery scraper being quite apparent. The color covers the entire surface and is likely to have a slightly bluish tinge. The only decorations are bands and bumps, dents and gouges, raised above, or pressed into the surface. Swastikas and conventionalized bear's paws are indented. Water jars (T) with rather flat bodies, tall necks and flaring rims; large, globular, small-mouthed storage jars; very large deep bowls; and vases (U) with slender double necks connected with a handle are the ordinary shapes. Small vases suggesting those of ancient Greece, and little animal figurines (V) are much made today. Very recently it has become popular to paint the black ware with bright orange designs executed with commercial oil paint after firing. Red ware is sometimes made. It so closely resembles that of San Juan that no way of distinguishing it can be given. For a more extensive description of Santa Clara pottery see leaflet 35.

20. SANTO DOMINGO. Character of design gives the clue to recognizing this pottery, at least in its most characteristic forms. Uninfluenced Santo Domingo pottery shows black geometrical designs on a light cream ground. They are made by drawing bands of squares or rectangles and then cutting off the corners of these shapes with angular or curving masses of solid color. If the angles are used we see polygons of cream surrounded by black triangular shapes, and the curves make irregular ovals of the light color similarly enclosed by black. By dividing the squares into smaller spaces with single or double lines endless combinations of this nature are made. Other designs are massive plant forms, both realistic and conventionalized. A design roughly suggestive by its threefold form of the fleur-de-lis is often seen. Strange birds much resembling those of Cochiti are quite common.

Black on red pottery has been made in small quantities. It has the geometric designs described above. In recent years black and red on cream has almost entirely supplanted the older ware. Flowers and birds make up most of the patterns on this modern pottery (W). In artistic worth it is far below the older variety.

Around the turn of the century a potter at Santo Domingo invented a new style which has not been made since 1915. The ordinary color scheme is reversed, the normally light portions being painted black or red and vice versa. Thus we see on these pots red or black polygons outlined in cream (X).

The most characteristic Santo Domingo shape is shown in the picture (Y). Large, small-mouthed storage jars, and bowls of several sizes are also common. The modern ware for the trade is made in every sort of shape.

21. TAOS pottery is the same in appearance as that made at Picuris. Larger pieces seem to be made at Taos. Sometimes the ware is smeared with pitch to waterproof it. This makes the usually glittering surface a dull dark brown.

22. TESUQUE. Until quite recent times it was supposed that the only pottery made at Tesuque was in the form of the little seated human figures

called "rain gods" (Z). But it has been discovered that formerly a very distinctive kind of good pottery was once made there. The black designs are painted on a light yellow-grey slip. Red is used very rarely. The pottery is of medium thickness. The most characteristic design appears in the picture (AA). The decorations, drawn with a thick black line, are simple and regular geometrical figures and conventionalized plant forms. Curves are more used than angles. Borders with simple repeated figures occur very frequently. Large designs are likely to be surrounded with wavy lines or rows of dots, or to have dots or little spurs set along them (BB). Pointed ovals with a wavy line down the center are quite common. Bowls, jars, and pieces with side and top handles are made. This old style pottery joins Santa Ana in being the rarest of all modern Pueblo pottery.

Today little bowls, ash-trays, bird-shaped dishes, etc., are made for the tourist trade in addition to the rain gods. They are a grey-tan in color and are painted with red, blue and yellow commercial colors after firing.

23. TSIA, SIA or ZIA. Pottery from this pueblo is very hard to describe briefly owing to the great variety of design. The ware itself is the best guide. It is thick and moderately heavy and is made of red clay, the color of which shows at a break. The base is red, the slip is white and the designs are in red and black or black alone. The slip is rather impermanent and either wears thin or darkens. Recently a yellow slip has been in fashion. Large storage jars, water jars, large and small bowls, canteens and small flat tiles are the common forms. The tiles are a new departure.

The Tsia bird is distinctive (CC). It has a small head with a thick, wedge-shaped bill, long neck, round body, single upraised wing, a few big tail feathers and long slim legs. Its color is red or yellow. Realistic deer are drawn. Broad, double red bands laid in big curves are common on water jars. Realistic plants with black leaves and red flowers and berries are very often arranged in graceful sprays. In the non-realistic field we find an elaborate long rectangle set on a bias, with big single hooks curving in opposite directions from the ends (DD). This design is usually black. Large leaf forms with a heavy outer border and a dotted interior frequently occur, as do broad stubby bands in parallel sets and slender, curving triangles in red, black or hatching. Broad, curving meanders are found. A few pieces have been made with horizontal bands of red and yellow squares set cornerwise.

Rich color, solid, well conceived decorative compositions and strong design elements are the rather indefinable features of this pottery. Tsia has long been a pottery supply depot for many nearby pueblos, so its wares are found everywhere and have strongly influenced designers in neighboring villages.

24. ZUÑI. Color and design are the best helps in recognizing Zuñi pottery. The slip is a clear white which darkens with age. It has the appearance of being thick and heavy. On it are painted designs in a dark brown-black and a medium red. The red is used much less than the brown. The base is a dark brown or grey, almost black. On water jars, at the bottom of the slip, there is often a bulge left by the starting mold and never smoothed out. The ware is rather thick and shows dark grey to black at a break. The pieces are very likely to be poorly shaped, perfectly molded vessels being quite rare. Water jars (EE) and large and small bowls are the common forms. The latter are painted inside and out.

Zuñi design has an architectural character not found elsewhere. The design field is strongly marked off into sections within which the designs are placed. The commonest elements, executed in brown-black with slight red trimmings, are deer, crudely drawn and showing a red line from mouth to heart and a white

spot on the rump (FF); little squatty birds with long elaborate tails; large flower-like discs or rosettes (FF); and large hooks with long triangular points on the outside of the curve (EE). The birds are placed in a narrow band running horizontally around the jars below the shoulder. The flowers stretch from neck to base, intersecting the bird band, and the hooks are set in the sections above and below the birds. The deer are placed similarly in relation to the bird band. They are set beneath arching bands trimmed with triangles and crooks.

The neck is not included in the design field except in some recent types. It is decorated with either simple repeated figures or with quite elaborate geometrical organizations. A common type of the latter is a diamond set in a frame of interlocking triangles and hooks, with figures somewhat like automobile bumpers at the ends. This design is also often placed in a vertical position on the body in place of the big flower. Areas and bands of coarse hatching outlined by heavy dark lines are much used. Little crooks blossom out everywhere. On the recent types mentioned above the designs are mostly hooks, feather-like figures and geometric patterns grouped around the rim and flowing down over the body.

Dippers and bowls with terraced figures cut on the rims and painted with frogs, tadpoles, dragonflies, butterflies, heavenly phenomena and corn are pieces made for ceremonial use. They often have semicircular handles. Small jars for the same purpose often have quite realistic frogs, sometimes green, modeled on the surface just below the rim. Pottery owls (GG) are a specialty of the town. Formerly a black on red ware was made and very recently some pieces have appeared with a tan slip.

Poorly modeled pottery with a dark grey-brown base, thick white slip and rather sloppily executed brown-black and red designs arranged in clearly marked sections and of the types described above is sure to be from Zuñi.

Compiled from the following sources by F. H. Douglas;

1. Study of the pottery collections of the Denver Art Museum and of the Laboratory of Anthropology in Santa Fe.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2. The Pueblo Potter—Bunzel. 1929.

PHILLIPS ACADEMY, ANDOVER, MASSACHUSETTS

3. Pueblo Pottery Making—Guthe.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, NEW YORK

4. Pottery of the Southwestern Indians—Goddard. Guide Leaflet 73.

BUREAU OF AMERICAN ETHNOLOGY

5. The Zuñi Indians—Stevenson. 23rd Annual Report.
6. Illustrated catalog of collections obtained from the Indians of New Mexico and Arizona in 1879—Stevenson. 2nd Annual Report.
7. Illustrated catalog of collections obtained from the Indians of New Mexico in 1880—Stevenson. 2nd Annual Report.
8. Illustrated catalog of collections obtained from the Zuñi and Hopi in 1881—Stevenson. 3rd Annual Report.

Acoma, 2, 6; Cochiti, 6, 7; Hopi, 2, 4, 6, 8; Jemez, 6, 7; Laguna, 4, 6; Nambé, 7; Pojoaque, 7; San Ildefonso, 2, 3, 4, 7; San Juan, 6, 7; Santa Ana, 7; Santa Clara, 6, 7; Santo Domingo, 4, 6, 7; Taos, 7; Tesuque, 6, 7; Tsia, 2, 4, 7; Zuñi, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

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