Pueblo Potters, Museum Curators, and Santa Fe's Indian Market

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In 1962 Lorraine Vigil, a potter from the Tesuque pueblo of Nambe in New Mexico, almost won Best of Show at Santa Fe's Indian Market with a large, polished macawean clay jar. Several factors worked against her winning. First, she is from a village with a short pottery history as delineated by Indian Market, one that is not currently recognized as a pottery-producing village as are, for example, San Ildefonso and Santa Clara. Second, the pot was made of macawean clay which is usually associated with utilitarian pottery, and "utilitarian" carries the negative connotation of not being art pottery. In the end, as the judges admitted, the pot lost because it was not considered "art."

This assessment of Lorraine Vigil's pot raises a number of questions about Indian potters, their pottery, and the marketplace. Let me explore these questions through a narrative of the history of Indian Market and of the role of potters, and musem curators have played in the making of this highly successful Santa Fe institution.

Indian Market

Indian Market is an annual August event on the Santa Fe Plaza and surrounding streets (Fig. 1) and features the work of over 1000 artists. The Southwestern Association for Indian Arts (SWAIA) sponsors the Market, which they estimate bring $100,000 people and $1.55 million in revenue to the city of Santa Fe.

The Market traces its history to the Santa Fe fiesta and Indian Fair (Fig. 2), both developed to promote Southwest tourism. The first Indian Fair was held in 1922 as part of a Santa Fe Fiesta; it was set up indoors and all entries were juried (Fig. 1). Prizes were awarded to help educate potters and buy on what was considered to be the best pottery. The Fair continued with the same formula until 1931, when it disappeared from Santa Fe.

In 1986, Indian Market proper was created by Maria Chabot and Margaretta Dietrich of the New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs. They moved the event outdoors, under the portal of Santa Fe's Palace of the Governors, and allowed potters to sell everything they brought (Fig. 3). Specifically, Chabot wished to re-create a Mexican village market, judging remained a critical component of these Markets.

Through the early 1960s, Indian Market stagnated, barely maintaining itself due to lack of interest and volunteers, then, with the increased interest in American Indian cultures in the late 1960s, Indian Market was rejuvenated. Since then, every year's success has eclipsed the previous year's unprecedented sales and attendance. SWAIA's total budget has risen from $2,354 in 1970 to $52,482 in 1990. Its, remarkably, $84,394 in 1992. The 1994 organizational budget tops one million dollars. What accounts for this terrific success?

People come to Indian Market because they are able to buy directly from the artists (Fig. 4). They come to see the art, and they come to meet the artists. Indeed, Market became "Indian Market" in the 1970s as the SWAIA stepped further into the background to allow the artists themselves to speak about their work, instead of speaking for them. "It is their show," whatever the prior for sitting in a booth in the summer sun and through summer crowds, potters feel this direct contact makes it "worth it" when the "rewards are honestly assessed."

Today's potters increasingly have the opportunity to relate their pots' meanings directly to the buyer. Patrons expect potters to divulge the symbolic (sacred and profane) meanings of a pot when it is sold. The willingness of potters to share this information may derive from their need to maintain a relationship to their pottery on a religious or spiritual level, since pottery is no longer a part of their daily experience. The artists interpretations circulate fairly widely now in the press and in exhibition catalogues. These self-representations have served to strengthen Indian Market.

Nonetheless, Indian Market may be characterized as "edited accessibility," a highly packaged version of Pueblo culture, appropriately adapted for presentation to a world that desires contact and is fascinated with the notion of the "Noble Savage." The pottery of traditionality evokes the image of the "good" native—the spirituality, the respect for the land, and so on, not of contemporaries competing for the same livespaces (jobs, homes, land). Indian Market is a joint show; the sense of "difference" is maintained in Indian Market by the carefully mediated selection of artists and protection of the event from squatters.
invaders, imitators, and the non-ethnic (non-Nativo). Indian Market is like a "bazaar," a sanitized approach to history through staged authenticity. Furthermore, by being held in Santa Fe, Market helps keep customers out of the pueblos, which might be too risky an adventure for some buyers. Buyers are spared the distress of walking into modern Pueblo homes and finding people living not tribal lives, but rather contemporary ones like their own, complete with living room furniture and televisions. Thus the Anglo's sentimental about Pueblo culture is protected—a sentimentality that stems from a belief that Pueblo people embody "the ancient wisdom of tribal man, whose strength lay in the subjugation of ego-identity to communal identity, in social reciprocity, artistic creativity, and aesthetic communal intercultural with cosmic powers." (Frost 1990:50).

Potters also find rewards in Indian Market. Pottery making offers them a way to profitably fit an old pattern to contemporary needs. Moreover, making pottery for sale to non-Indians has helped preserve Pueblo culture (Fig. 6). For example, at Santa Clara over 500 people living in the village identify themselves as potters (Natzjo, pers. com. 1992). Since they cannot be in the pueblo they are able to participate in community events as the need arises and to be near family. This work situation also allows them to live as much as possible outside the constraints of American society. Pottery has helped preserve the community by providing its members with a means to enter the American cash economy while staying at home, instead of traveling to urban centers for employment. "It is a piece of earth that allows Pueblo people to have a piece of independence." Potters say that pottery making allows them to express their "Santa Claran," both to "Mother Earth for the clay" and to the non-Pueblo buyer. It also permits them to maintain the reciprocal relationship central to the communal life of the pueblo, a reciprocity they extend to their work. Potters say in prayer, "You're giving me this clay to make a pot, and I acknowledge that if you give this I have to give you something back." The gift of cornmeal symbolizes this exchange, this "relationship from the very beginning to this the time the pottery is completed." For "in spite of the product being used just for art and for sale the biggest thing that it does is that it allows Santa Clara to express its values." Furthermore, Pueblo pottery's success has "served to inform the Puebloos that their inherited talents and the mature fruits of their old culture are at last gaining merited recognition from their fellow countrymen" (Simmons 1976:222). As one potter expresses it, "It [clay] has created a life for me."

Figure 3. Santa Fe Plaza during the annual Indian Market. One thousand artists sit in canopied booths selling pottery, paintings, jewelry, baskets, Kachina dolls, clothing, sculpture, and miscellaneous other arts and crafts. Some artists can make their year's income during the two days, but the better potters, for example, generally make about $10,000, approximately one-third to one-half of their annual income.

Figure 4 (below). 1992 Indian Market. By 7:00 a.m. hopeful buyers are lined up, waiting for artists to arrive with their prize-winning pieces. Although Indian Market rules state there are no sales prior to opening at 8:00 a.m., collectors will do anything to purchase an award-winning piece, including standing in line from 3:00 a.m. Saturday morning. There are a handful of artists who have sold out their booths by 10:00 a.m. Saturday.

Lonnie Vigil's Pot Again

While Lonnie Vigil's Rainbow jar was judged the best pot in the 1992 Indian Market (Fig. 7), it was not judged Best of Show because it somehow failed as art. What then, is Pueblo art? Pueblo people are popularly represented as peaceful, civilized, domestic and artistic; the Pueblo past has been glorified. As part of this idyllic vision, Pueblo pottery of the past is widely considered to have been uncompromisingly beautiful; it has served as a vehicle for displaced Western nostalgia, what Rodriguez has called the "artistic mystification" of ethnicity in the Southwest (1964:83). Vigil's modern unpainted nudeces clay ceramics are a

Figure 5. Pottery vendors from San Juan and San Ildefonso pueblos sitting in front of the Fine Arts Museum at a late 1930s Santa Fe Fiesta. While Indian Fair was created as part of Santa Fe Fiesta in 1922, the Fair was dropped from Fiesta in 1941. In 1956, the Fiesta Council asked the New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs to arrange for potters to sell their wares during Fiesta. This tradition continued until 1962.

Courtesy of the Museum of New Mexico, neg. no. 17852.
rupture with the equation of Pueblo potters with beauty and of Pueblo painted pottery with art.

The concept of "pottery as art" is best linked to Kenneth Chapman's influential ideas about historic pottery. "Historic" is loosely defined as the period before 1880, when the Americanization of the Southwest begins, or, more broadly, when American Western expansion ended. Chapman was one of the founders of the Indian Arts Fund collection, curator at the Museum of New Mexico and Laboratory of Anthropology, professor of art at the University of New Mexico, and, for 60 years, a student of Indian pottery. His pottery studies emphasize the stylistic analysis of painted design systems and the reconstruction of their evolutionary sequence. A continuation of Chapman's scholarship can also be seen in Francis (Frank) Harlow's work. In "Historic Pottery of the Pueblo Indians 1790-1880," for example, all the historic

Figure 7. Lesnie Vigil (Nambe) holds the piece which was judged to be the best pot at the 1962 Indian Market. However, the pot was second in the Best of Show judging. Vigil is helping change people's minds about whether undecorated misenque states can be considered "art."

Figure 8. Three Nambe misenque pots, collected by Thomas C. Donaldson between 1860 and 1863 and purchased for the University of Pennsylvania Museum in 1901 by Stewart Colton. Like those of the Heard Museum and the Southwest Museum, the Southwest collections of the University of Pennsylvania Museum include both painted "art" wares and unpainted utility wares.

EM m023.0227b, 0227a, and 0227h, H of pitcher 1881.

Figure 6. Santa Clara woman posing with pottery, April 1929. "Lufina Baca." As Santa Clara agricultural lands were compromised by loss of water rights, erosion from overlogging, and squatters moving in, women began making pottery to sell for cash. Increasingly after 1950, a cash economy replaced the New Mexico bartering economy. Santa Clara became a favorite stop for tourist buses and cars because the potters produced many smaller, less expensive items than other pueblos.

Courtesy of the Museum of New Mexico, neg. no. 30344.
Tradition and Innovation

Can a micaceous clay pot help redefine Pueblo art? Probably so, because the potter of today's Indian Market is such that a single high award almost instantly changes buyers' and potter's definitions. To have impact, however, a pot must work from within the rules to redefine them by providing new meanings and understandings of the concepts of tradition and innovation. Today's Santa Clara black pottery may not be traditional because its lineage can be directly traced to Kapat black, a dull gray, polished but unimpainted ware first developed by Towa potters around 1600. Many of today's shapes and designs, the high polish, and the carving of the designs were developed during this century (see Naranjo, this issue). There is little similarity between Nancy Youngblood's contemporary miniature swirling melon bowls and either the Kapat black ware of the early historic period or Marta Martinez's early 20th century black-on-black wares (Fig. 10). But because we can trace the lineage of Youngblood's pottery and therefore document its difference as innovation within tradition, she is a traditional potter. Analyzed in this way, pottery is a sequence of styles and history. Tewa micaceous ware pots once a staple of Tewa villages (Litha 1921, 1925; Hill 1982:601), can also be shown to be traditional. Lonnie Vigil's pots therefore are also innovations within tradition.

Most Tewa pottery entered in Market today is judged under the traditional pottery divisions (Fig. 11). Indian Market, the judges, and the potters have been inclined to emphasize continuities between modern pottery and indigenous Pueblo traditions, linking authenticity of pottery to an expression of a particularized world view. Also implied in the term "tradition" is the sense that Pueblo people are able to preserve things of value and that their culture therefore is vital, of substance, and worthy of respect, especially as compared, for instance, to the raw nature or "primitiveness" of the cultures of Navajos, who are consistently portrayed as recent arrivals in the Southwest.

"Traditional" has two meanings when used to refer to pottery in the context of Indian Market. The first has to do with a potter's materials and techniques: for example, traditional materials are clays and slips which are found in the Southwest, and traditional techniques include, outdoor open firing, but not the use of electric kilns. "Traditional" does allow, however, for the modification of pottery firing through the use of metal tools, tin cans, metal sheeting, domestic animal manure fuel, and lighter fuel.

Figure 9. Santa Clara pottery on display at a 1920s Indian Fair. Pottery was displayed and judged by pueblos, with each pueblo's pottery eligible for a $5 First and $2 Second Prize. The small paintings hanging on the wall appear to be the type done in the Pueblo day schools. The clothing was the result of embroidery projects designed to teach Indians money-making skills while providing them with Anglo household abilities.

(ran as "old") pottery pieces illustrated are painted and polished wares, for "what is impressive is that Pueblo pottery making had evolved to an advanced art, far beyond the stage of simple utilitarian wares." (Frank and Harlow 1974:5); Chapman's The Pottery of San Ildefonso Pueblo (1976) exemplifies his perspective. It is a sanitized view, only a single page is given to cooking pots, while pottery design motifs dominate the book. In a book about pottery, there is not a single photograph or drawing of an entire pot. All the individuality, all the "handwriting"—the unsteady lines and calligraphy—have been removed from the renderings of pottery motifs (H. J. Brody, pers. comm. 1993). Chapman has created a perfected world of art which to this day is held out to Pueblo potters as their archetype.

Chapman, more than any other individual, is responsible for Santa Fe's public collections of historic Pueblo pottery, housed at the School of American Research and the Museum of New Mexico. These collections have provided the repertoire of models and examples of
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lost. People began to sell themselves as 'Indian.'

Ultimately, traditional pottery has come to be a monotonous Pueblo culture for both the Pueblo and non-Pueblo objects purchased at Market are removed from their specific context and made to stand for an abstract whole, "Pueblo Culture," thereby losing a sense of space, time, and individuality. Buyers with no other information accept the definitions they find in pottery. Potters, too, expect buyers will recognize in their pots the link between the potter and the Pueblo world.

No other art form so clearly represents all Pueblo people; indeed, Pueblo are most often defined to the outside world in terms of pottery styles. Pottery and potterery exercise a source of cultural respect; potting is a meaningful activity defined by its relationship to indigenous values and by an assertion of personal and sociopolitical identity expressed in rights to place (i.e., New Mexico, Rio Grande, Jemez Mountains in particular, and the Southwest in general). Aspects of these meanings have always been a part of Pueblo culture within the world, but only in the past 20 years have potters fully realized the potential symbolic power of ceramics. While potters make it clear that money is the principal reason for making pottery, they regard the pots as more than commodities. The pot is part of their ideal spiritual heritage, embodying their balanced relation with the environment, family, community, and cosmos.

In essence, pottery's collective meanings can be edited for the Pueblo and non-Pueblo worlds. Because the success derived from pottery making has no place in the traditional life of the Pueblo villages, the allure and fame attained through pottery belong in the American world. Potters put aside their fame at home, move away from their communities. Potters are expected to perform their community obligations and, furthermore, move money as they earn, the more they expect to contribute back to the village.

In its second Indian Market sense, "traditional" is used interchangeably with "historic" to allude to an aboriginal period. When used this way, it reduces aesthetic judgments about pottery to "old pots are beautiful" and thus saves an idiom for what is considered good about pottery and potters. The label "traditional pottery" serves as an instantaneous expression of appreciation, understanding, and criticism of newly made pottery.

Potter's make their own use of tradition when they consciously choose or rely on museum pottery collections for design repertoire, or when they retrace their individual lineages, for example, "granddaughter of Maria Martinez" or "fourth generation Santa Clara potter." Some critics of Indian Market potters, however, suggest that the pots entered are not as traditional as they are commercial. This comes particularly close to what one potter calls "selling their culture." Some believe the selling of pots and the subsequent reliance on income from pottery sales have changed the meanings attached to pottery. "When done for money, the nurturing—what is Santa Clara and community—is being lost. People began to sell themselves as 'Indian.'

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Bibliography


