

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

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In 1992 Lonnie Vigil, a potter from the Tewa pueblo of Nambe in New Mexico, almost won Best of Show at Santa Fe's Indian Market with a large, polished micaceous clay jar. Several factors worked against his winning. First, he is from a village with a short potting history as delineated by Indian Market, one that is not currently recognized as a pot-

tery-producing village as are, for example, San Ildefonso and Santa Clara. Second, the pot was made of micaceous 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 Lonnie Vigil's pot raises a number of questions about Indian potters, their pottery, and the

marketplace. Let me explore these questions through a narration of the history of Indian Market and of the roles judges, potters, and museum 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. 3) and features the

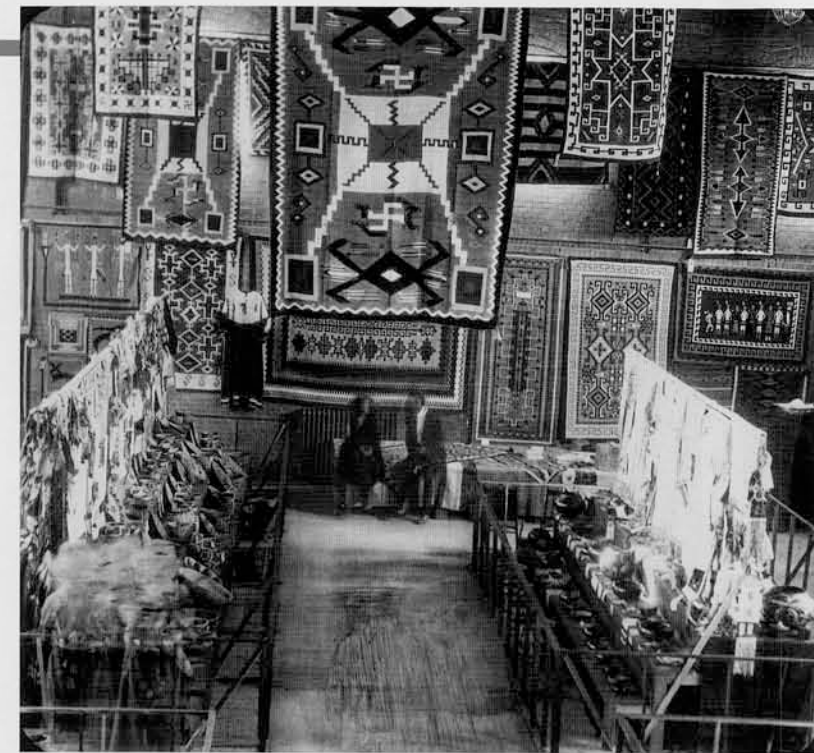


Figure 2. Another view of Indian Fair when it was still part of Santa Fe Fiesta.

UM neg. no. 133993

work of over 1000 artists. The Southwestern Association for Indian Arts (SWAIA) sponsors the Market, which they estimate brings 100,000 people and \$135 million in revenues to the city of Santa Fe.

The Market traces its history to the Santa Fe Fiesta and Indian Fair (see Fig. 2), both developed to promote Southwestern tourism. The first Indian Fair was held in 1922 as part of Santa Fe Fiesta; it was set up indoors and all entries were juried (Fig. 1). Prizes were

awarded to help educate potters and buyers 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 1936, Indian Market proper was created by Maria Chabot and Margretta 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. 5). Specifically, Chabot wished to re-create a Mexican village market. Judging remained a critical component of these Indian 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, each year's success has eclipsed the previous year's unprecedented sales and attendance. SWAIA's total budget has risen from \$2,554 in 1970 to \$52,482 in 1980, to, remarkably, \$845,394 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 price for sitting in a booth in the summer sun and through summer cloudbursts, potters feel this direct contact makes it "all worth it" when the "rewards are honestly assessed."

Today's potters increasingly have the opportunity to relate their pots' meanings directly to the buyers. 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 adjusted for presentation to a world that desires contact and is fascinated with the notion of the "Noble Savage." The pottery of traditional people evokes the image of the "good" native—the spirituality, the respect for the land, and so on—not of contemporaries competing for the same life-spaces (jobs, homes, land). Indian Market is a juried show; the sense of "difference" is maintained in Indian Market by the carefully manicured selection of artists and protection of the event from squatters,

**Note:** The quotations in this article are taken from interviews conducted from 1990–1993. Names are withheld in order to protect the privacy of the individuals.

Figure 1. (opposite page) The 1925 Indian Fair. All entries were juried and admission was charged. To the left of center with his back to the camera is Kenneth Chapman; Anna Shepard stands inside the railing, and Wesley Bradfield and Awa Tsireh stand talking together at the rear.

Courtesy of the Museum of New Mexico, neg. no. 22951

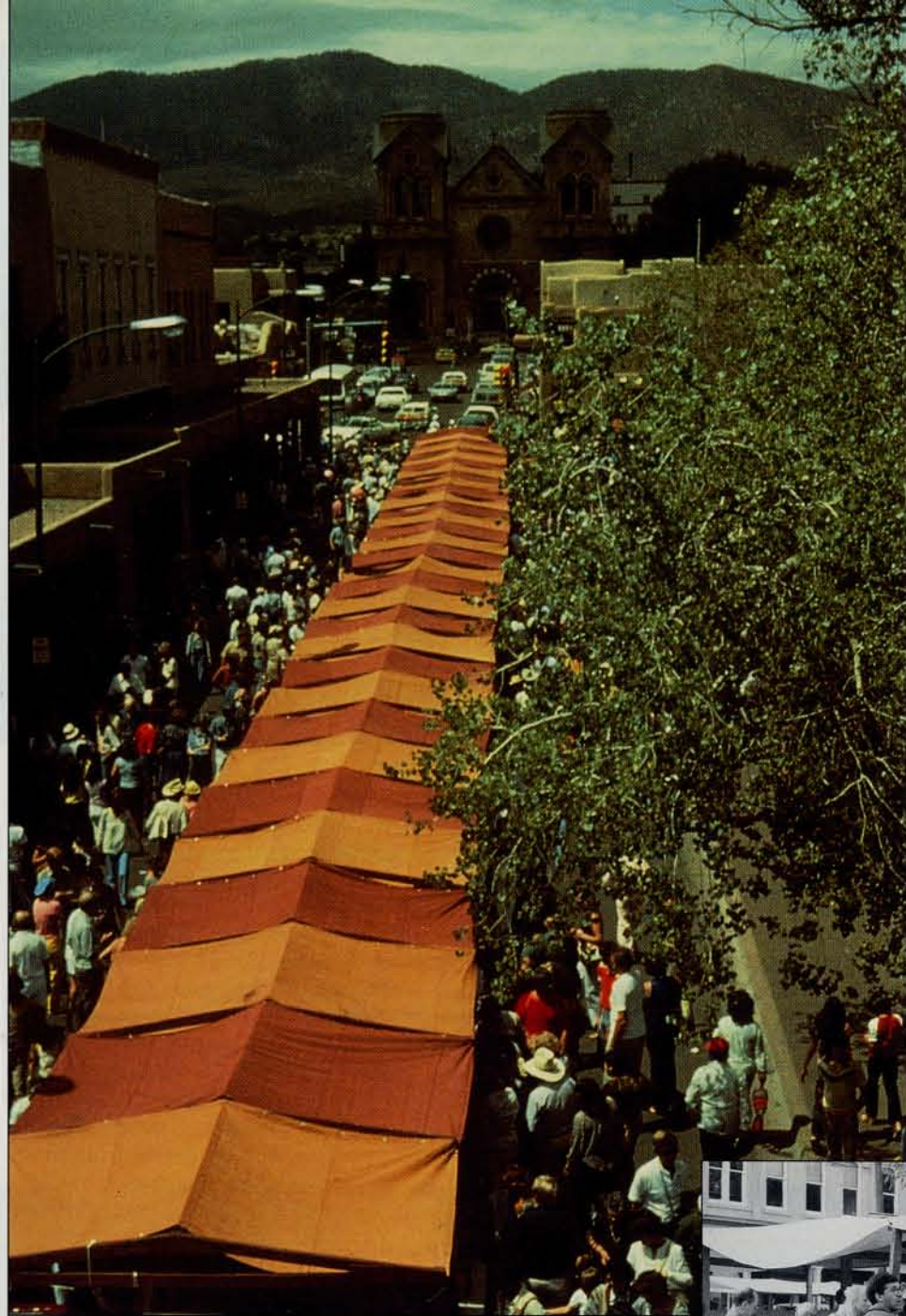


Figure 3. Santa Fe Plaza during the annual Indian Market. One thousand artists sit in canvas-covered booths selling pottery, paintings, jewelry, baskets, Kachina dolls, clothing, sculpture, and miscellaneous other arts and crafts. Some artists can make their year's income during the two days, but the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

Photo by Mark Nohl

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.



invaders, imitators, and the nonauthentic (non-Native). Indian Market is like a "diorama," 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 distasteful reality of walking into modern Pueblo homes and finding people living not aboriginal lives, but rather contemporary ones like their own, complete with living room furniture and televisions. Thus the Anglo's sentimentality 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 submergence of ego-identity to communal identity, in social reciprocity, artistic creativity, and aesthetic communal intercourse with cosmic powers" (Frost 1980:59).

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 300 people living in the village identify themselves as potters (Naranjo, pers. com. 1992). Since they can work 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 Claraness," both to "Mother Earth for the clay" and to the non-Pueblo buyer. It also permits them to maintain the reciprocal relationships 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 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 Pueblos that their inherited talents and the mature fruits of their old culture are at last gaining merited recognition from their fellow countrymen" (Simmons 1979:222). As one potter expresses it, "It [clay] has created a life for me."

### 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 adulatory vision, Pueblo pottery of the past is widely considered to have been uncompromisingly beautiful; it has served as a vehicle for misplaced Western nostalgia, what Rodriguez has called the "artistic mystification" of ethnicity in the Southwest (1989:93). Vigil's modern unpainted micaceous 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 1931. In 1936, 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. 117687

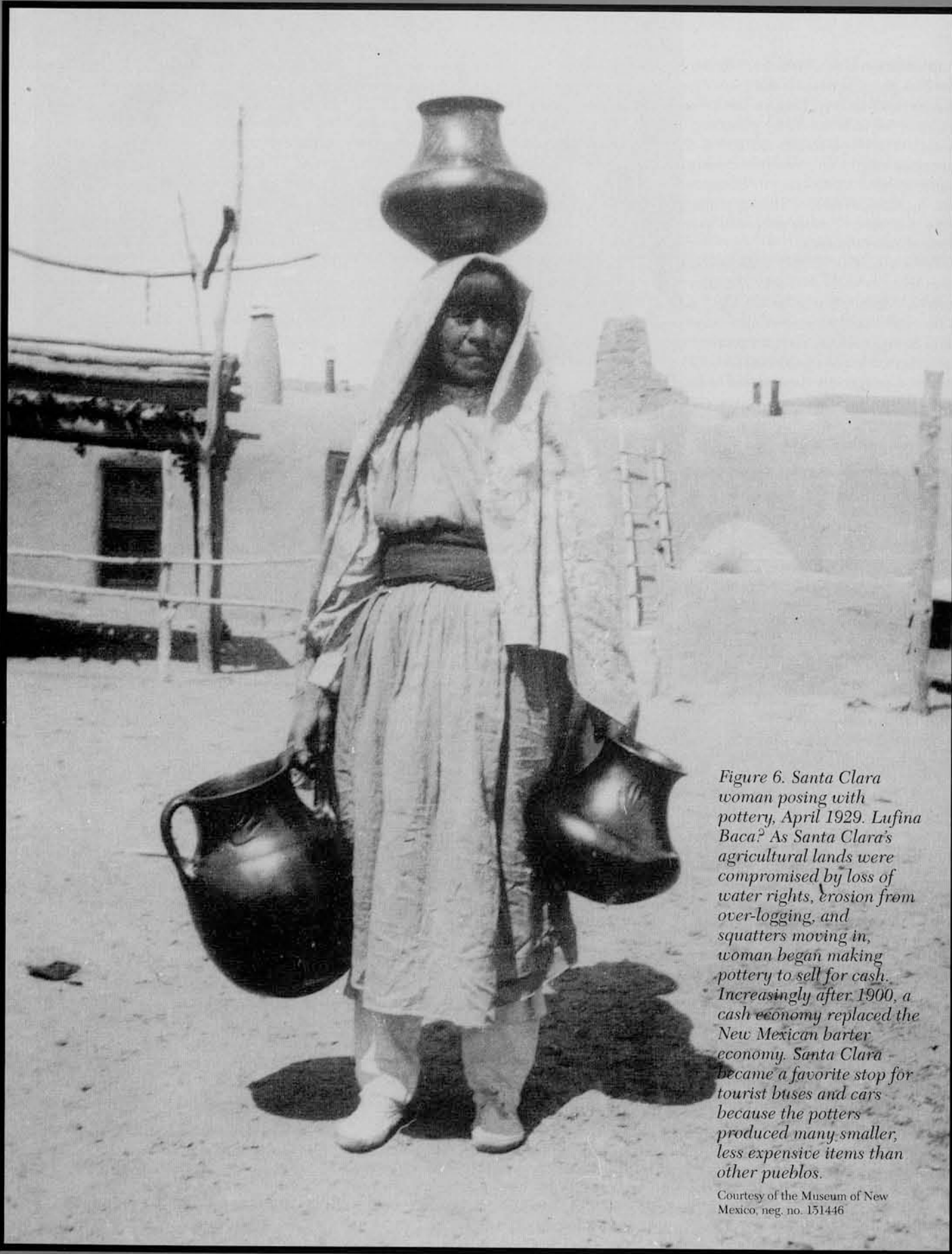


Figure 6. Santa Clara woman posing with pottery, April 1929. Lufina Baca.<sup>2</sup> As Santa Clara's agricultural lands were compromised by loss of water rights, erosion from over-logging, and squatters moving in, woman began making pottery to sell for cash. Increasingly after 1900, a cash economy replaced the New Mexican barter 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. 151446



rupture with the equation of Pueblo pottery 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 collec-

tion, 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 1600-1880*, for example, all the historic

Figure 7. Lonnie Vigil (Nambe) holds the piece which was judged to be the best pot at the 1992 Indian Market. However, the pot was second in the Best of Show judging. Vigil is helping change people's minds about whether undecorated micaceous ware can be considered "art."

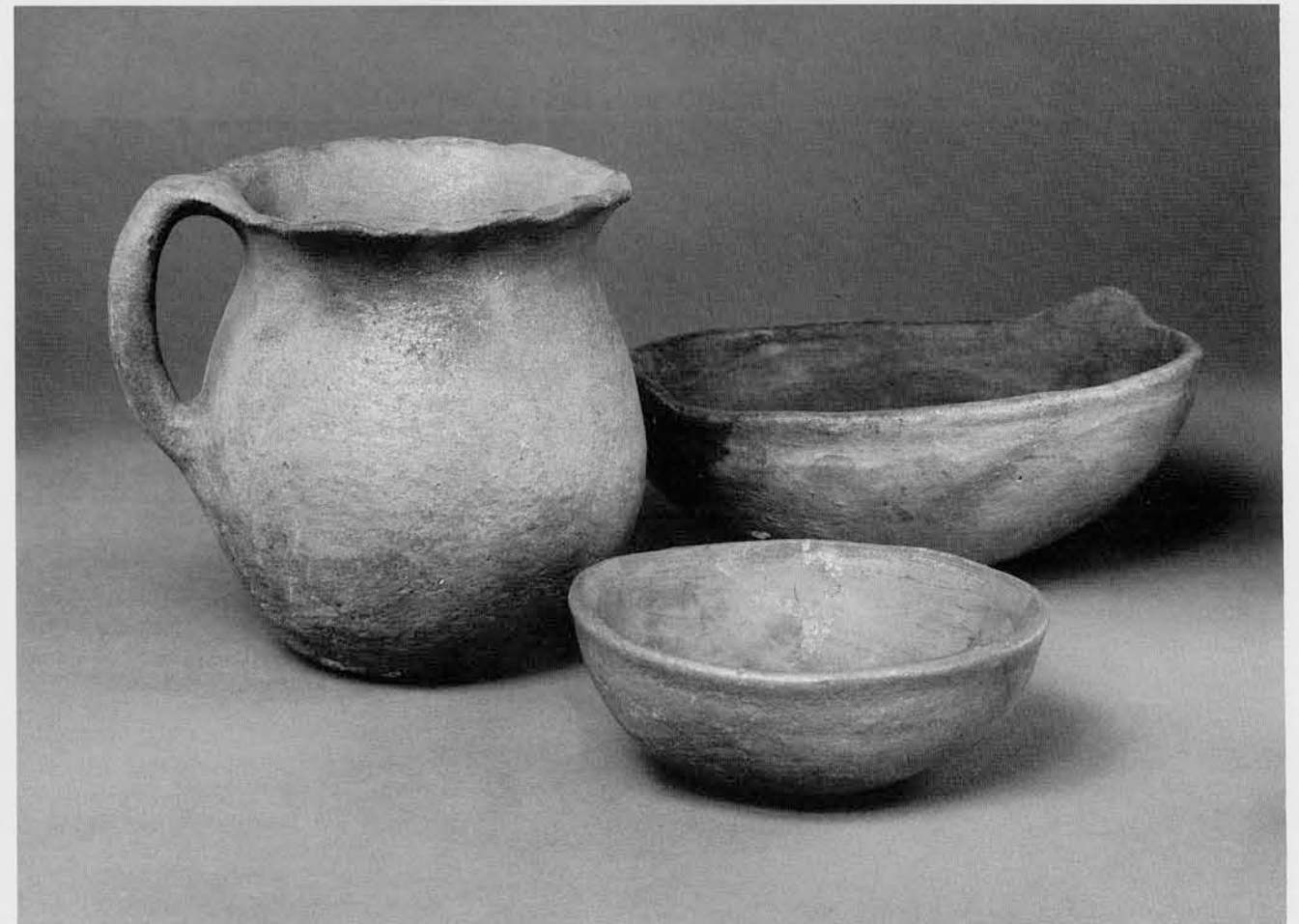


Figure 8. Three Nambe micaceous pots, collected by Thomas C. Donaldson between 1890 and 1893 and purchased for the University of Pennsylvania Museum in 1901 by Stewart Culin. Like those of the Hearst Museum and the Smithsonian Institution, the Southwest collections of the University of Pennsylvania Museum include both painted "art" wares and unpainted utility wares.

UM nos. 38273, 38278, and 38275. H. of pitcher 10.8 cm.

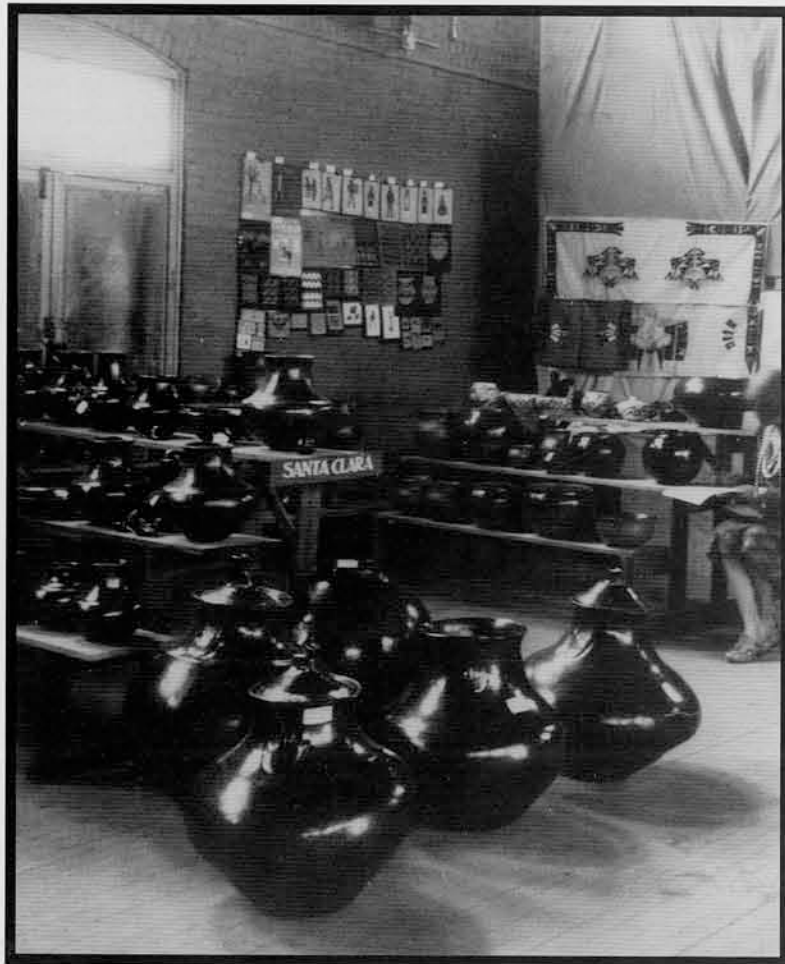


Figure 9. Santa Clara pottery on display at a 1920s Indian Fair. Pottery was displayed and judged by pueblo, with each pueblo's pottery eligible for a \$5 First and \$3 Second Prize. The small paintings hanging on the wall appear to be the type done in the Pueblo day schools. The clothing was the result of embroidery projects designed to teach Indian children money-making skills while providing them with Anglo household abilities.

Courtesy of the Museum of New Mexico, neg. no. 42256

(read 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 1974:8).

Chapman's *The Pottery of San Ildefonso Pueblo* (1978) 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 variability—have been removed from the renderings of pottery motifs (J.J. Brody, pers. com. 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

good pottery for the past four generations of Pueblo potters. The Indian Arts Fund collection at the School of American Research, for instance, was intended to document Pueblo pottery from 1600 to 1880. Pottery was collected by village, yet conspicuously absent from the collection are the cooking pots. What is left are the polished and matte-painted wares, the "beautiful" artistic pottery. The Museum of New Mexico collection provides the same image: missing in this historic record of 3,500 pots are, again, the everyday cooking pots.

Yet we know that painted wares were not the only pots in historic Pueblo villages (Fig. 8). Anthropology collections located at the Hearst Museum in Berkeley and at the Smithsonian Institution make this clear. The Hearst Museum holds pottery gathered by George Pepper for Phoebe Hearst in 1904 (Accession no. 179); Pepper's object was to make a representative collection from each of the Pueblo villages. All of the painted and polished wares, types which were already popular with collectors, are present in an unused condition, as made for sale. The wares showing use are micaceous clay pieces, primarily cooking pots and pitchers. James Stevenson's 1879 Tewa collection made for the Bureau of American Ethnology (Stevenson 1883; Accession no. 9899-1881) similarly provides a more accurate portrait of the variety of pottery once used in the pueblos than that of Chapman and his followers.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, the local collections—those used as models in the development of markets for revival pottery—were carefully edited to exclude utilitarian wares. This, in turn, helped to define pottery as a painted art tradition and to transform it from souvenirs and curios to art through a return to "ancient symbolic ornamentation and decorative motifs that give the old...ware distinction and distinctiveness" (*El Palacio* 1917).

Pueblo art was thus defined by Santa Fe museum curators and anthropologists through the Indian Fair and Market (Fig. 9). These definitions have become institutionalized during a century of use and, today, through their formalization as part of the judging and standards rules of Indian Market. But Indian Market is flexible, and in a relatively short time, unusual pieces—as long as they are based on historic precedent—can come to be accepted as art pottery. Lonnie Vigil's pot has helped to change people's minds.

## Tradition and Innovation

Can a micaceous clay pot help redefine Pueblo art? Probably so, because the power of today's Indian Market judging is such that a single high award almost instantly changes buyers' and potters' 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, for instance, is traditional because its lineage can be directly traced to Kapo black, a dull gray, polished but unpainted ware first developed by Tewa 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 Kapo black of the early historic period or Maria 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 (Guthe 1921, 1925; Hill 1982:861), 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 particular 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 culture 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 firings through the use of metal tools, tin cans, metal sheeting, domestic animal manure fuel, and lighter fuel.

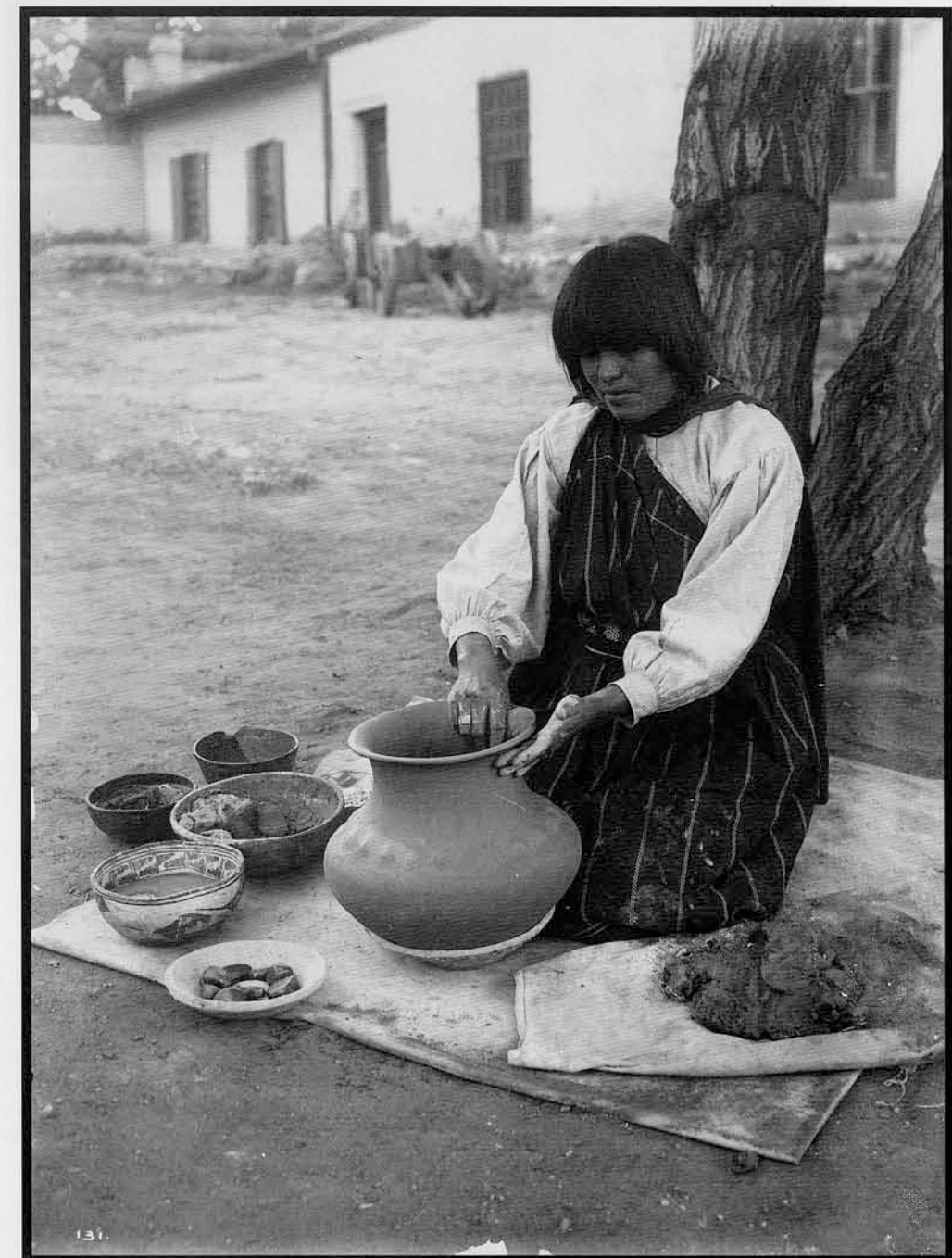


Figure 10. Maria Martinez of San Ildefonso Pueblo demonstrating pottery making in 1912 in the Patio of the Palace of the Governors (New Mexico State Museum building). She and her husband, Julian Martinez, quickly became the favored potters of Museum Director Edgar Hewett and Curator Kenneth Chapman. Her potting skills were superior and her pieces always in demand; for example, at the 1924 Indian Fair she sold \$394 worth of pottery (at \$4 to \$8 per piece) while the next best amount sold was \$90.

Courtesy of the Museum of New Mexico, neg. no. 61764. Photo by Jesse Nusbaum



Figure 11. The large water jar in the foreground by Richard Ebelacker (Santa Clara) was judged Best of Show at the 1991 Indian Market. One piece from each of the categories (pottery, jewelry, painting, textiles and baskets, sculpture, Kachina dolls, and miscellaneous crafts) was selected and voted on for Best of Show, which included a \$1000 premium.

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, Pueblos are most often defined to the outside world in terms of pottery styles. Pottery and potters provide 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 the fairs and markets, 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 principle 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 affluence and fame attained through pottery belong in the Anglo world. Potters put aside their fame at home or face ridicule or ostracism from their communities. Potters are expected to perform their community obligations; and, further, the more money they earn, the more they are expected 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 serves as 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.

Potters make their own use of tradition when they consciously copy or rely on museum pottery collections for design repertoires, or when they recount their individual lineages, for example, "great-granddaughter of Maria Martinez" or "a 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 perilously 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

*"the success derived from pottery making has no place in the traditional life of the Pueblo villages."*

lost. People began to sell themselves as 'Indian.'

Ultimately, traditional pottery has come to be a metonym for Pueblo culture for both the Pueblo and non-Pueblo worlds. Objects purchased at Market are

Indian Market judging has helped create this situation for potters (Fig. 12). As one potter says, "it [judging] promotes ugliness and politics because winning promotes individual acknowledgment." Another potter suggests that the buyers "rely upon SWAIA to tell them who is the best artist" and are not willing to question SWAIA's judgment. The ribbons or winning are what is important, not the \$60 prize money for a first prize. (The \$500 Best of Classification and \$1,000 Best of Show prize monies are exceptions. It should be noted that in 1994 the single \$1000 Best of Show award was replaced with eight Best of Classification awards.) A ribbon tells the world "you've made it." Another artist views the potters as culpable as well, suggesting that "Judging is now understood by Indians as a measure of importance."

In the villages, however, away from Indian Market, potters "still know who they are." They know this because, as they say, "the clay is alive, it...gives me a living." Most potters do not believe that Santa Fe Indian Market is interrupting their village's tradition of pottery making. The process of making pots is a timeless occupation (archaeologists tell us pottery making is 1800 years old in the Southwest), whereas the selling of pottery at Indian Market is novel, a by-product of living the right life, through the clay. Potters explain this attitude as "The clay has breath" and will not let itself be mistreated. At the turn of the century, potters were saying the same thing: "you must treat the clay right; if you do, it will treat you right" (Hill 1982:84). To be singled out is wrong, as is the case with the notoriety gained through winning at Indian Market.



Figure 12. Thousands of objects are accepted for judging on the Thursday preceding Indian Market weekend. On Friday, panels of judges award \$48,000 in premiums to the artists. There are currently 300 categories in which artists may enter their pieces. Pieces are carefully kept in their particular categories by a team of head judges. 1992 Indian Market.

"But," as one potter says, "different sorts of things happen within the community that I think the outside world isn't aware of." And, adds another, "The worlds don't meet at all, they really don't...[W]e might wear the same clothes and we might know how to, up to a point, play the game...[But then] we go home [to our old lives]. I think it's kind of exciting that there is still that as a part of

'our' way."

Pottery is a forceful representation of Pueblo culture. Buyers are struck with its beauty as well as its suggestive qualities of an idealized Pueblo past and present. Indian Market is presently a self-contained and self-perpetuating entity, marketing Indian arts and culture with an unarguable power and presence.

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