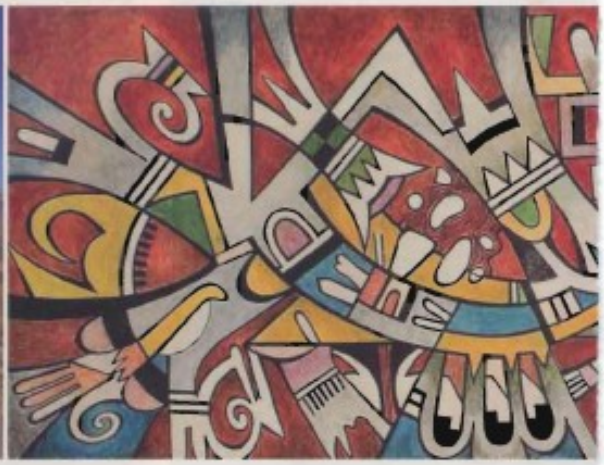


THE Hopi Way

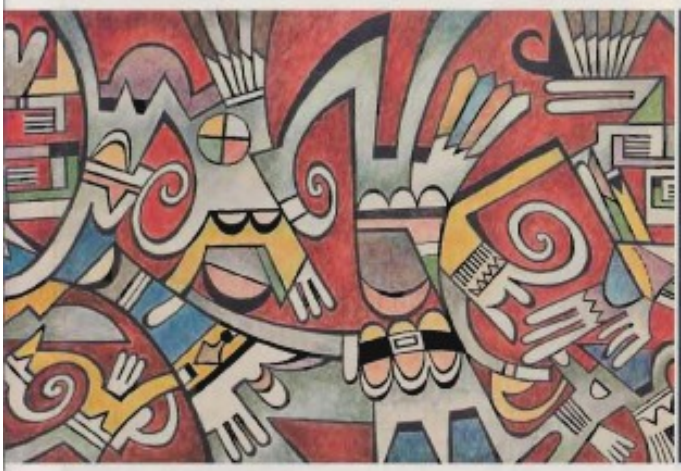
BY PATTY TALAHONGVA (HOPI)

My earliest memories of the Hopi mesas of northeastern Arizona are of the dark, star-filled sky. I was three years old. My father would drive to his mother's home on Second Mesa and I would wake up to the cold and sometimes snowy ground. We'd come to live in Denver through the federal government's relocation program, which was designed to assimilate American Indian families into so-called mainstream society. Yet the ties to Hopi remained strong, and we would make this 14-hour drive several times every winter so father could participate in the sacred kiva ceremonies. My grandmother would stay up late waiting for us, ready to feed us warm *noqkwivi* stew and *piki* bread. I would eat and then fall back asleep under her heavy handmade quilts.

Today as I make the four-hour drive from my home in Phoenix to my ancestral homeland, I always anticipate the first glimpse of the San Francisco Peaks. They signal I'm getting closer, and I can't wait to see the mesas and honk my horn as I pass the homes of relatives, letting them know I'm back.

The Hopi mesas are simply home to me. Yet modern Hopis, as well as our ancestors, have captured the attention of anthropologists, archeologists and writers. It is well known and documented that the Hopi reside in the oldest continuously inhabited places in North America. Still we remain misunderstood, or, as some might say, mysterious. The term *Hopi* cannot be translated into something as simple as the word "peaceful." It is a way of life that is demanding and full of responsibility, humility and prayer. Cuss words do not exist in the Hopi language. The worst thing you could call someone is *ka-Hopi*, meaning they are everything that is not Hopi.

Though the Spanish sent Catholic missionaries among us in the 17th century, our remote location served to largely protect us from cultural and religious conversion. We remain committed to the Hopi ways and are among the most culturally intact of any Native peoples in the Americas.



From left: Walpi Village on First Mesa with the San Francisco Peaks in the background. Photo by Owen Seumptewa, courtesy Heard Museum. "Awatovi Prayers," (detail) by Michael Kabotie, (Hopi), 2003, pen and pencil on paper, 22" x 90," courtesy Heard Museum. Ferrell Talahongva looking over his dolls. Photo courtesy Patty Talahongva.

Hopi religion is not separate from daily life; every action is supposed to be a ceremony, a testament to who we are as Hopi people. For many Hopis, the culture remains strong today, but there have been plenty of changes in traditions—some influenced by the government, some by society and others by commercialism.

More than 11,000 people are enrolled in the tribe, and nearly half of those live on the reservation today. The tribal government, schools, medical facility and a handful of small businesses and organizations employ some of these folks, but many people rely on the sale of their arts and crafts as their sole income or to supplement their earnings. Even Hopis working and living off the reservation rely on their arts and crafts for income.

Some of these arts play a significant role in Hopi society, such as the katsina doll. These were carved for young girls, to teach them the purpose of each particular katsina and how it affected the child's life and the life of their village. But as non-Hopis became intrigued with the katsina dolls, Hopi carvers found a new audience and a source of income, creating a struggle as to whether or not Hopi culture was for sale.

ARTISTIC STRENGTHS

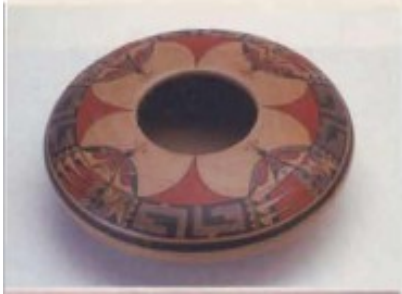
Traditionally, the women from First Mesa made pottery, while the women from Second Mesa and Third Mesa were responsible for making baskets. Men from all of the villages were the weavers. Sadly, few Hopi men still weave the manta dresses, kilts, sashes and other traditional clothing items. Missionary women introduced sewing and quilting to Hopi women, and today quilting has become an important art form among Hopi women. Today, several Hopi men have become well known for their pottery making, and some women are gaining reputations as good katsina doll carvers. Two art forms relatively new to Hopi are jewelry and painting.

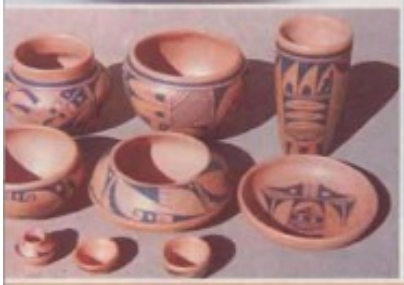
Whether their art is for ceremonial purposes or for commercial sale, most artists will tell you they keep the spirit of the art in mind as they create. If you are a potter, even the act of digging out the clay from the ground is a ceremony. When you take something you have to give something, such as an offering of cornmeal, to acknowledge the earth's gift of clay. If you are a katsina carver, collecting cottonwood tree roots becomes a ceremony, as does the actual carving of the doll.

I come from a long line of artists. My maternal grandmother, Rosalie Talashie, made pottery for 40 years, from 1930 to 1970. She was known for her steady hand at painting the fine designs. Her father, Lalo, was renowned for his weaving, even exhibiting at a World's Fair.

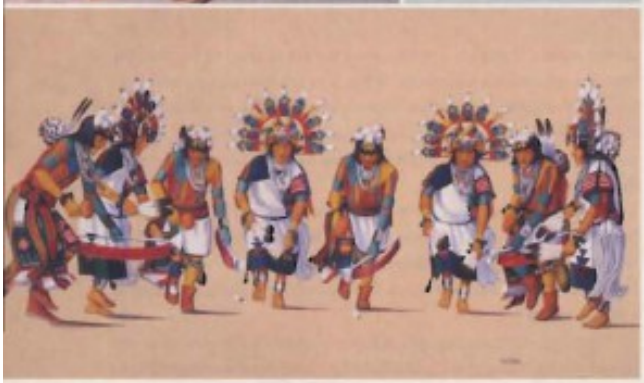
Through my maternal grandfather's family I am related to the famed potter Nampeyo (c. 1860–1942). Nampeyo studied designs on old pottery shards found at the old village of Sikyátki. Using those ancient designs and adding her own creative flair, she made unique pots that caught the attention of collectors. She enjoyed immense fame at the turn of the 20th century, which has only grown in the decades after her passing. Today her descendants, including Dextra and Hisi Quotskuyva, continue to impress buyers with their delicate work. As a child, I helped my mother Nan Talahongva mix clay, strain it, set it out to bake in the sun, and then finally make the pots. Unfortunately I didn't inherit any of Nampeyo's talent, so today my art is my writing.

And it's a challenge to write about Hopi art because there are so many talented people. In Hopi we would say, *Pas kurs um tuhisa*, meaning "You're so ingenious or creative." In this humble attempt to give an overview of Hopi artists, past and present, keep in mind that it would be impossible to name every single artist! There are so many who do excellent work but are not as well known, for a variety of reasons. If you visit the Hopi reservation, you will see small businesses in the homes of Hopi artists. Plenty of those folks may choose to sell only on the reservation and not enter art shows at all.





From top: Pottery by Dextra Quotskuyva Nampeyo, courtesy Heard Museum. Pottery by Nan Talahongva, courtesy Patty Talahongva. "Butterfly Dance," by Fred Kabotie (Hopi), 1925, watercolor on paper



POTTERY

Nampeyo's Tewa name means Snake Girl. Her first collectors were tourists who would take the train to Holbrook, Arizona, and then endure a grueling wagon trip to the Hopi reservation about 60 miles away. Nampeyo was inspired by the large and elaborately painted older pottery found at Sikyátki. Her great-great-granddaughter Hisi Quotskuyva says the family has stories about the large pots Nampeyo made and how she was asked to demonstrate at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago. Nampeyo had a big family, and today many of them still make pottery. "It's passed down from generation to generation," says Quotskuyva. "My kids are 26, 21 and 18, and they all know how to make pottery."

Like their great-great-grandmother, Quotskuyva favors the old designs. "I keep mine more traditional," she says. "I like hummingbirds. I like butterflies. I usually put my own designs to those designs." She also likes going behind the scenes at museums, where she takes photos of pottery designs and duplicates those, adding her own touches.

"My mom Dextra's designs are more from her dreams and how she interprets them," she explains. "Her pottery is always different, and she has a name for each [piece]." Quotskuyva calls her mom a perfectionist and says she's even seen people cry because her designs move them so much.

That may not surprise Janice Day. She owns the Tsakurshovi art shop on Second Mesa and comes into regular contact with Hopi artists from all the mesas. "All the good potters are from First Mesa," Day says. She notes a few well-known names like Lawrence Namoki, whose pots are both sculpted and carved by hand and then painted to enhance the raised designs. "The etching is really nice," says Day. She also mentions Karen Abeyta and Garrett Maho, and offers some advice. "You better buy Maho now, because he's going to be famous." Another famous descendent of Nampeyo is Jacob Koopee (see Jan./Feb. 2006 issue), who has won numerous awards for his pots. His designs include animals, katsinas and geometric lines.

Most potters prefer to use red clay when polishing their pots. This gives the bowls a range of colors from light brown to deep red. Others, like Dawn and Fawn Navasie, work with a white clay wash. "To me that's real hard because you have to know how to do that in order for it to be even," says Quotskuyva. She admires them for having the skills and patience to do that. "You have to layer it on and know how much to put on. And then being able to fire it and not burn it or change the white to either a fire mark or grey—that's hard! You can't control fire."

When it comes to Hopi pottery, Quotskuyva says buyers should keep in mind the history and connection to the ancestors that pottery represents. "We're still using the same methods from hundreds and hundreds of years ago. It's not something we put together real fast," she says. "The potters should be real proud of that! We haven't lost that, and hopefully the next generation can carry it on too."

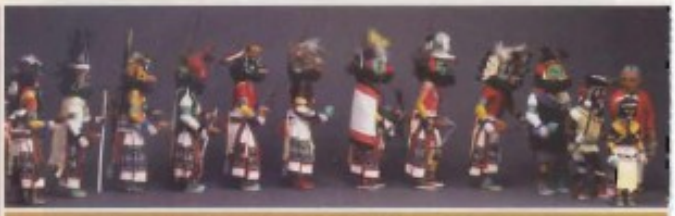
PAINTING AND JEWELRY

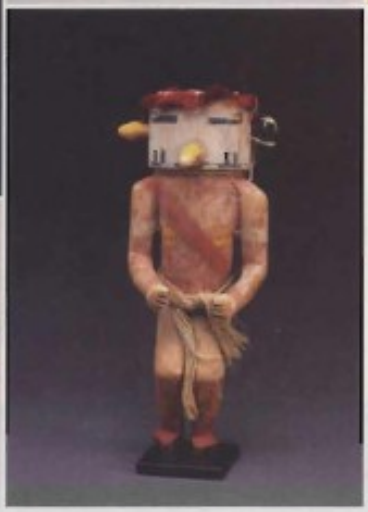
When it comes to Hopi painting and jewelry, one name pops up instantly: Fred Kabotie (1900–1986). "I think one of the things about him is that he used the arts to enhance the religious life of the Hopi," says his son Michael Kabotie, a jeweler, painter, writer and lecturer. "He was about the preservation of Hopi values." Kabotie says that was the basis of his father's art, and it comes out in the katsina scenes and domestic scenes he painted on murals, as well as in his work as an illustrator, teacher and writer.

In 1949, Fred Kabotie and Paul Saufkie started the Hopi Silversmith Cooperative Guild. This opened the door for many more Hopis to create what became the overlay style. A design is cut into one piece of silver and then soldered over another piece of silver. The design is then oxidized, which makes it stand out in the silver. Fred Kabotie's mark on Hopi art continues to this day, and, it's safe to say, will continue into the future.

It's also interesting to note that Fred Kabotie's Hopi name was *Nakavonua*, which means "from day to day." His name represents his father's Sun Clan. It was shortened to the nickname *kavoti*, which refers to "tomorrow." From that came the name Kabotie.

"I think his biggest influence to me was to be aware of all the voices in the world and how the art sort of becomes like the Hopi ceremonies of clowning and critiquing," Michael Kabotie says. "We're





Left to right, (from top): Bracelet by Charles Loloma, c. 1975. Coil plaque with Crow Mother katsina design, c. 1969, by Roberta Naminaha. Katsina doll set (detail) representing a mixed katsina dance, 1984, by William Quotskuyva. Silver overlay necklace with turquoise stone by Morris Robinson, 1950s. Tasavkatsina, katsina doll, c. 1880. Wicker plaque. All photos by Craig Smith, courtesy Heard Museum.

all human, and in order to dialogue on a respectable level I journey into arts and try to make contact across boundaries, ideological boundaries. Some of the same problems we go through … some of the same enlightenments. That's what gets me into trouble! In order to be enlightened … first you have to be endarkened!"

Another student of Fred Kabotie's was Charles Loloma. His first art was painting, and he helped Kabotie reproduce murals from Awatovi for the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Loloma was just 18 years old at that time. He started focusing on jewelry in the 1950s and was the first Hopi to use precious and semi-precious stones. Like Kabotie, Loloma respected his Hopi culture and would put his art on hold in order to attend to ceremonial duties. Many Hopi artists today still do that.

As a teacher, Loloma's most famous student is his niece, Verma Nequatewa (Sonwai). She jokes that people say her art is more Charles Loloma than Charles Loloma. Like her *taha* (uncle), she uses precious stones and gold. "She's a really good colorist," says Michael Kabotie. He sees the Hopi culture and the dances influencing her work. "The colors dance together—that's cooperation."

For many collectors, these names are well known. But Day says there's additional talent on the reservation. "I like Ruben Saufkie, Antone Honanie and Lucion Koinva," she says. "We're selling Lucion's rings like crazy." Buyers can also find pieces from Roy Talahaftewa and Gerald Honwytewa in her shop.

KATSINA DOLLS

My father, Ferrell Talahongva, spent many nights carving katsinas at our kitchen table. He would smoke and offer a prayer as he worked, knowing that his creation would bring in money to take care of his six children. He carved mostly for collectors across the country and in Europe. Sometimes he would sing the songs of the katsina he was carving, and we would enjoy the music and the smell of freshly carved cottonwood. I remember watching him create a sculpture of three Hopi clowns climbing up a piece of cottonwood, each one carefully carrying a slice of watermelon in its hand, with a big smile on its face. The piece would perhaps seem whimsical to an outsider, but it was filled with the lessons Hopi clowns are meant to teach the people: how not to behave.

Today there are dozens of extremely talented Hopi katsina doll carvers. Clark Tenakhongva carves in the old style. His dolls are painted with natural pigments, giving them an ancient look and feel. Delbridge Honanie is another outstanding living carver. "It's all connected with ancestral energy," says his friend and fellow artist Michael Kabotie.

BASKETS

When it comes to baskets, look to the women of Second and Third Mesa. There are three types of Hopi basket: sifter, wicker and coiled. At Second Mesa, Joyce Saufkie, Remalda Lomayaktewa and Rhetta Adams are known for their baskets. Day says she carries their baskets at her shop.

From Third Mesa, she rattles off the names of Dorleen Lalo, Allie Selestewa (an elder), Dora Tawahongva and Mary Louise Sekayumptewa. Whichever method the woman uses, it's hard not to appreciate the math involved in calculating the dimensions of each basket's intricate design. One can also appreciate the many hours invested in collecting the materials and cleaning, prepping and dying them before work actually begins on the basket.

Creating art by nature is A labor of love that some might see as dangerous. As Kabotie puts it, "You scratch it, cut it and torture it, then you come out with something beautiful!"

DAVE SMITH / COURTESY HEARD MUSEUM

Hopi woman making piki, 2002.

Hopis at the Heard

You'll always find many talented Hopi artists at the annual Heard Museum Guild Indian Fair & Market, but this year's event, on March 7 and 8, will pay special tribute to Hopi women and the Hopi matrilineal culture. The recognition ties in with March's designation as National Women's History Month. In Hopi culture, when a couple marries, the man is supposed to move to his wife's clan land and build her a home. Any children they have will belong to the mother's clan, ensuring the survival of that clan.

The Heard tribute will include a presentation of a group of Hopi women in the museum's courtyard who will demonstrate their basket weaving and pottery making. "I'm really, really excited about this part of the fair," says Barbara Johnson, Heard Fair chairwoman. Johnson has been a volunteer at the Heard for 10 years. She says each year one of the most popular demonstrations is making piki bread. This is the traditional paper-thin bread of the Hopi made from blue corn batter spread by hand over a rock heated by a fire. The large sheet is then folded into a roll about 12 inches long. Make sure to take the time to watch the demonstration and taste the piki bread.

Also, on view through March 29 at the Heard Museum North Scottsdale is *We Are About Beauty: Hopi Artists, Hopi Art*. The exhibition's title comes from a quote by famed Hopi jeweler Charles Loloma, and the exhibition displays a recently restored Loloma mural that is believed to be his only surviving one. This large painted watercolor on a muslin-like material depicts a Hopi buffalo dance. The exhibition contains more than 25 paintings and drawings by Hopi artists, some of which have never before been shown, including works by Neil David, Fred and Michael Kabotie, Dan Namingha, Otis Polelonema and Ramona Sakiestewa. For more information, visit www.heard.org.

Patty Talahongva (Hopi) is Corn Clan. Her Hopi name is White Spider Girl, derived from her father's Spider Clan. Her roots go back to the ancient village of Walpi.