

THE ARTS & CRAFTS MESSENGER

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A Peek at Initiatives in Art and Culture and the 11th Annual Arts and Crafts Conference: Enduring Legacies—The Arts and Crafts Movement in Seattle and Environs

by Cynthia Shaw-McLaughlin



The Pierre P. Ferry house is one of Seattle's finest examples of the English Arts and Crafts style —Photo: Cynthia Shaw McLaughlin

When I first learned that the 11th “Initiatives in Art and Culture” conference was going to take place in Seattle in late September this year, I was overjoyed by the idea of returning for a more in-depth look. Having breezed through Historic Seattle’s Bungalow Fair several years ago before boarding the train to Portland to attend a National Trust Conference, I had taken in a few key sites around town. But this time, recalling Lawrence Kreisman’s inaugural presentation delivered at CACS’ 2008 Winter Symposium about the Arts and Crafts Movement in the Pacific Northwest, I already felt “at home”.

Founded by Lisa Koenigsberg back in 1999, this annual traveling symposium is best described as a total immersion in the Arts and Crafts movement and all that it embodies. A graduate of Johns Hopkins and Yale with advanced degrees in American Studies, history and philosophy, Lisa previously served as Program in the Arts Director and Adjunct Professor of Arts at New York University’s School of Continuing and Professional Studies (SCPS). Today, along with various other colloquia in and around the country, she independently organizes and oversees this annual pilgrimage to carefully vetted destinations.

After missing the first four conferences (in New York, Pasadena, Chicago and Boston respectively), I finally jumped on the bandwagon for the Oakland event. Whether it was the lure of the title—“In Full Flower: The Arts & Crafts Movement in the San Francisco Bay Area”—or the overall “California” experience that won me over, I was irrevocably impressed. The people were interesting. The talks were scholarly. The field trips were sensational. Not only did we tour works by Charles and Henry Greene (the Fleishhacker and Thorsen residences), Bernard Maybeck (the University of California Faculty Club, the Roos House and the Palace of Fine Arts) and Julia Morgan (the Berkeley City Club), but we were wine and dined in many of these landmarks as well.

The next five events were held in St. Louis, Minneapolis, Buffalo, San Diego and Cincinnati. Once again, in between lectures about the local history and heritage, we journeyed to significant cultural sites, including museums, galleries, commercial buildings, private residences and gardens. Most of these trips have been written up in detail in earlier CACS newsletters if you’d like an in-depth report. My take on these trips is that, because the conference itinerary is designed to take you to places you will probably never see on your own, you come away with an invaluable “insider’s perspective” on each city.

Speaking strictly about Seattle, if you can picture yourself surrounded by kindred spirits, lingering in the English-inspired surrounds of Alfred Bodley’s Ferry residence, sauntering through the Highlands’ gardens overlooking Puget Sound, or strolling past the scents and sights of fresh fish and flowers at the Pike Place Market, you’ll get a glimmer of what this particular event was all about. While there is always someone new to meet and something yet to be learned at these gatherings, it is the behind-the-scenes glimpses of the “aesthetic lifestyle” that I covet—and I’ve never been disappointed. Which is why “Initiatives in Art and Culture” (an enduring legacy in its own right) has developed something of a cult following, and why I am already yearning for 2010.

To learn more about the Seattle conference and the overall program visit www.artinitiatives.com. ☺



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January Symposium to focus on the Art and Craft of Navajo Weaving

As shown in this issue of *The Messenger*, Gustav Stickley was an advocate of the place of Native American craftsmanship in the arts and crafts home. Our 2010 Symposium, Saturday, January 23, will spotlight this subject with a day-long hands-on workshop and an evening presentation entitled, "Trends in Contemporary Navajo Weaving: An overview of the evolving art of Navajo weaving, from the Santa Fe Indian Market to the sheep corrals of the Navajo Nation."

Mary Walker, the owner of Weaving in Beauty in Phoenix, Arizona, is dedicated to enhancing the appreciation and knowledge of the craftsmanship of the Navajo people of the American Southwest. Mary's presentation will be about the people, the textiles, the market and the exciting new developments by contemporary artisans practicing this age-old craft.

During the day, Mary will conduct a workshop, from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M., providing detailed, individual instruction for working in this 400 year-old art form. All participants will receive a specially built hand loom and the necessary yarn to produce a beautiful woven piece for their homes. Lunch is included and all pieces will be exhibited at the evening dinner and presentation.

The 14th Annual Symposium from 5 P.M. to 8 P.M. at Boettcher Mansion includes a catered reception and dinner, CACS' annual Board meeting and guest presentation. Please call 720-497-7632 for details about the workshop and evening event. Cost of the workshop is \$160 (which includes the evening event) and \$40 (\$50 non-members) for the evening event alone.

"I am not Navajo or Native American, but I have been privileged to participate in the Navajo culture for most of my adult life. I am honored to be considered an in-law by several Navajo families and pleased to help promote Navajo textile arts. My main business is the cleaning, repair and appraisal of Navajo textiles. I also coordinate classes for my Navajo friends who would like to teach. They are paid fees comparable to those received by fiber arts instructors teaching private workshops.

"I have admired Navajo and Pueblo weaving techniques since the 1970's and in the past 10 years I've been fortunate to find good teachers and enough stolen time to learn more about these elegant methods of producing beautiful and enduring textiles.

"My work is strictly private and I don't sell it. I do work on a volunteer basis with some efforts to assist Navajo weavers in marketing their work and with the 'Ndahoo'aah program at Monument Valley High School. This has led to doing a little speaking and teaching, although I think this is better done by Navajo and Pueblo weavers. My goal is to promote appreciation for indigenous weaving as an art form, and in some way to help a new generation weave into the millennium." —Mary Walker from her web site

A Trip to Navajo Lands by Kathy Strathearn

Looking down into a Great Kiva at Chaco Canyon



This past August, I had an opportunity to visit the Navajo Indian Reservation for an Advanced Navajo Weaving Workshop. Our workshop was based in Window Rock, Arizona, but our adventures took us many other places on the reservation.

On our way to Arizona, we explored Chaco Canyon National Historical Site in New Mexico. It is an enchanting place filled with Anasazi ruins from 1000 years ago. Heading down the path to our first ruin, all signs say to stay on the paths, but I was intrigued when a horny toad (more appropriately called Horned Lizard) crossed in front of me. My instincts sent me in hot pursuit. I almost had him in my grip when, in the corner of my eye, I saw movement. It was a baby Diamondback rattlesnake. I think the spirits of the ancient Anasazi people were warning me to stay on the path!

Many ancient people lived here in the canyon. It is a spiritual and peaceful place now—a place where ancient people came to trade, to socialize and to live. It is believed that drought drove them from their homes here.

I would not recommend a trip to Chaco Canyon in August, but we were blessed with cloudy skies and tolerable temperatures. It would take at least three days to thoroughly explore the entire site and one day I plan to go back and do just that.

Moving along to the Navajo Indian Reservation, we spent a day in Ganado, Arizona, at the Hubbell Trading Post. The local Navajo people were holding a "Sheep is Life" gathering. There were many demonstrations, one being how to clean the wool once the sheep is sheared. Everyone lent a hand, including Senator John McCain!

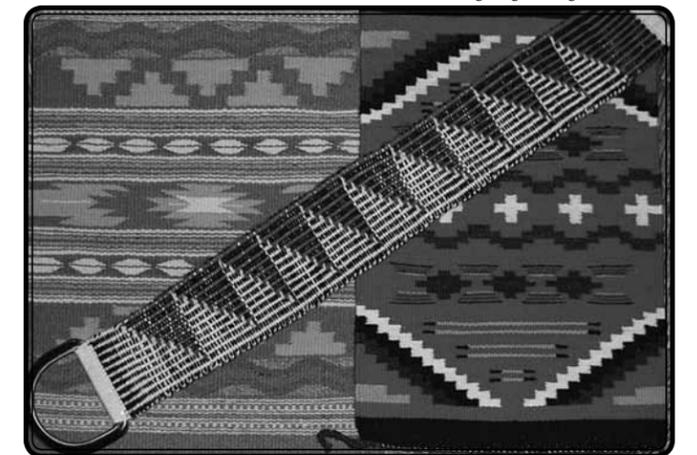
At the gathering a young Navajo man demonstrated how to make a saddle cinch. I watched carefully and made one at our workshop the following day. Other demonstrations included spinning with the lap (or hip) spindle; a talk about different breeds of sheep and the fleece they provide; how to butcher a sheep and a talk about how every part of the sheep is useful. Churro sheep are the preferred sheep of the Navajo people because its long fleece gathers little dirt and debris, spins beautifully and weaves even better, and its meat is so tasty. Local cuisine was offered for lunch: Navajo tacos, fry bread and mutton stew. (Yumm—Did they cook up that sheep I just saw them butcher?)

Being inspired, and since this is supposed to be a weaving workshop, we scurried back to Window Rock and started weaving. My newly learned technique is called Raised Outline. Navajo weavers are able to use this technique on any of their designs—Teec Nos Pos, Storm Patterns, etc. I learned it while weaving my saddle cinch, which is pictured below along with two other of my recent weavings. The Raised Outline is on the diagonal lines where the wool goes over two warp threads. To accomplish this technique, you must also do what is called "Coal Mine," which to me gives the weaving a railroad track look. It was actually developed in an area on the reservation called Coal Mine. The second piece I wove during the workshop would be called Wide Ruins. It is woven with pastel vegetal-dyed yarn (meaning natural dyes vs. chemical or commercial dyes). The weaving has no borders and is simply stripes with a variety of designs.

We also had an opportunity to visit Totsoh Trading Post in Lukachukai. The owners of the trading post treated us to a box full of silver and beaded jewelry that has been stored since the 1970's. I found a beautiful necklace of coral beads (the real ones that are not available any longer) and trade beads. It is a classic piece and one of a kind!

As always, the visit to the Navajo Indian Reservation was too short. The Dine' are wonderful people and welcome us to learn about them and their culture. It is always a truly wonderful experience. ☺

Weavings by Kathy Strathearn



Indian Blankets, Baskets and Bowls: The Products of the Original Craftworkers of this Continent

Reprinted from
The Craftsman magazine, February, 1910

The Blanket Weaver. —Edward S. Curtis, 1907

IN connection with the handicrafts which are cultivated because of their artistic or commercial value, and also because there is at the present time a reaction toward hand work that tends to provide a market for the products of the craftworker, the mind turns naturally to the only real handicraft this country knows, that of the Indian. While we admit that Indian products are becoming more or less fashionable, we yet venture to assert that very few people realize their beauty and value from an artistic point of view as well as that which comes from interest we find in them as an expression of the life, customs and character of a fast-vanishing race.

We call the Indian work our only real handicraft because it is the only one we have that is the spontaneous growth of necessity and therefore an absolutely natural expression of the individuality of the maker. No one ever went to the Indian and said: "Make this pattern of blanket or this shape in your pottery, or use this or that design in your basketry or silverware, because it is quaint and artistic or because someone else did it centuries ago and there is a demand among certain people for such things now." The white craftworker can hardly escape from the suggestion of secondhand ideas, but the Indian who is affected by them must have degenerated sadly under the influence of civilization, so that his work as a craftsman is hardly worthy of the name. We are not thinking of the Indians of the younger generation who are taught sloyd and needlework at the Government schools—these are not craftworkers and never will be—but of the old men and women of the tribes who have held to their ancient religion and their ancient ways and who still dread and resent keenly the encroachment of the white man upon their time-honored beliefs and customs.

Naturally, in thinking of the Indian as a craftworker,

the peaceful and industrious tribes of the desert come first to our minds because they alone make things which can be used in the home of the white man as well as in their own hogans and kivas. The making of needed articles, of course, is common to all primitive peoples, but in the case of the warlike Indians the products of their crafts were adapted solely to their own use and have little value outside except as curios. But the blankets, baskets, pottery and silver work of the Hopi, Navajos and other Indians who live in their pueblos and cultivate their fields from generation to generation, have a charm as well as use which is appreciated keenly by the white man, so that these things are eagerly sought by him. This appreciation has caused extensive imitation of Indian handiwork, but such is the primitive sincerity of the genuine thing that it cannot easily be imitated, and the result of such attempts has been to turn out a mass of trash that no self-respecting Indian would acknowledge as his own work or that of any of his tribe. The Indian craftsman has a sincere reverence for his art and prides himself greatly upon such skill as he may possess, and, however crude his taste may be in the kind of wares he selects in the trader's shop, he will tolerate no imitation stuff when it comes to his own crafts. A Pima basket weaver would consider himself disgraced if he turned out a basket that would not last a lifetime, and the Navajo silversmiths will work with no metal but pure silver and will use no design that is not an expression of religious symbolism or some natural force or phenomenon. As to the blankets, the difference between the real Indian blanket and the imitation is so marked that only the veriest tyro could be deceived.

The first Indian weavers were the Hopi, who had been weaving for generations when the Spaniards first entered their villages in the year 1540, and found them weaving

fabrics from their home-grown and hand-spun cotton. Wool was unknown, for the sheep had not yet been introduced into the country. This art of weaving was one greatly envied by the neighboring tribes, especially the Navajos, who were always the hereditary enemies of the Hopi. After a war between the two tribes had dragged along for years with much suffering on both sides. A treaty of peace was concluded and the principal condition imposed upon the Hopi by the conquering Navajos was that they should teach the latter the art of weaving. The Hopi complied because they could not very well help themselves, and today their great rivals as handicraftsmen are the Navajos.

It is three hundred years since the Navajos learned blanket weaving by force of arms, yet in the case of both tribes the weaving today is done precisely as it was then, save that wool is used for the blankets and heavier garments, instead of cotton. Great as was the harm done by the Spaniards, their invasion was beneficial at least in one respect, for it taught both Hopi and Navajos the use of wool, which furnishes both warp and woof of the genuine Indian blanket. It is well known that among the Hopi the men are the weavers, but with the Navajos the women do the work, taking months or even a year or more for the completion of a single blanket. The looms are set up in the open, under a tree if there happens to be a tree sufficiently near at hand, and the designs are all taken from nature or from the symbolism of their nature religion.

It is the quality of sincerity that gives the Indian blanket its peculiar value when used as a rug, portiere or couch cover in a Craftsman room, or in any one of the rooms so characteristic of the West. No form of drapery harmonizes quite so well with plain, sturdy forms in woodwork and furniture and with the mellow tones of the natural wood, as do these Indian blankets, for the reason that they are simply another expression of the same idea. Anyone who has ever been in a typical country house or bungalow in southern California, Arizona or New Mexico will realize precisely what we mean, for the fitness of these blankets for such uses is so keenly appreciated that the craftsmen are kept busy supplying the white man's demand. As the blankets will last for a generation and will stand almost any kind of use, it is easy to see why they naturally belong in houses of a rugged, hospitable character, especially as the primitive forms and geometrical lines of the design are absolutely in keeping with the whole decorative scheme of such a house. An appealing human touch is given by the fact that no two Navajo blankets are ever woven alike and never is one found to be perfectly symmetrical down to the last detail of its pattern. The reason for this is the superstition of the Navajo squaw against making a perfect pattern, which to her mind would imply the perfect completion of her work and consequently the ending of her life. Like most Indian superstitions, this one embodies a truth so universal that it is felt and acknowledged by everyone who has thought much about life and its mysteries, and this touch of sympathy and comprehension is a clue to the bond that exists between all, white men and Indians alike, who live close to the unseen.



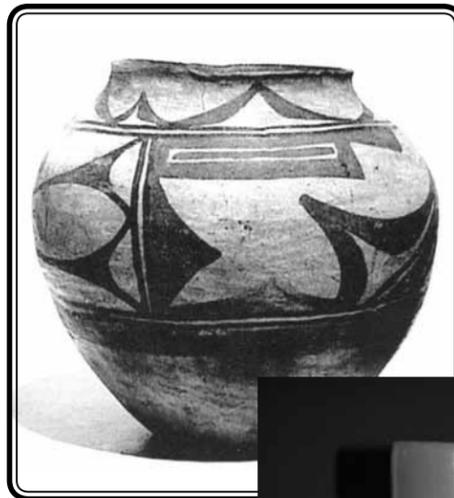
Navajo weavers near old Fort Defiance, 1873. —Photo: Timothy O'Sullivan

The same general character distinguishes the Indian baskets. Basketry is a form of handicraft more generally practiced by Indian tribes than any other. From the pueblos of New Mexico to the Pacific coast and extending thence into Alaska, we find a multitude of different types, each one characteristic of its makers. The best baskets, however, are made by the Pimas and the Apaches, who excel in this art as markedly as the Hopi and Navajos excel in the making of blankets. These baskets, showing the same natural symbolism and the same instinctive feeling for form, color and design, are as much at home in the white man's house as are the much-desired blankets. The real Indian basket is something to bring despair to the "arts and crafts" basket maker, because it is a form of handicraft as nearly perfect as any that exists. These baskets are woven from willow, which is gathered at a certain season of the year by the Indian squaws, peeled and stored. When taken out for use it is placed in water for a certain time to be made sufficiently pliable. The process of making the baskets is exceedingly slow and laborious and a weaver will often spend more than a month on a single basket. The groundwork is woven in the natural color of the fiber, a light dull yellow, while the pattern, which is made from the peeled bark of a native plant commonly known as "devil's claw," is usually a dull rusty black. The finest of these bowls are waterproof and they are in all manner of shapes.

The third great craft of the Southwestern Indian is the making of pottery, which is undoubtedly the oldest of all the Indian arts, for examples of it are found in almost all the ruins that remain as records of prehistoric times. The Indians of the pueblos are the master potters, and their handiwork is of infinite variety both as to form and ornamentation. Each tribe has its own peculiar method of

—continued on page 6

working, and all differ in such details as the methods of preparing the clay, of making the vessel and of firing, while the variety of forms and decorations used is almost endless. The pueblo potter uses no wheel and the forms he makes are his original creations of eye and hand. The clay is ground and mixed with powdered potsherds. The bottom of the new piece is molded on a form such as the bottom of a jug or bowl and on this the clay, rolled out into a slender coil or roll, is fastened. By process of careful coiling, the vessel to be made is gradually put into its beautiful form, then smoothed with a gourd rind and dried in the sun. After it is dried it is covered with a wash put on with a piece of rabbit skin, and when again dry the exterior surface is given a beautiful finish by being rubbed down with a smooth polishing stone, an article that is frequently handed down from one generation to another as an heirloom. The decorations in natural Indian colors are then applied by means of a brush made from yucca fiber. Finally the piece is burned in a rude kiln or oven and at length comes forth, a remarkable example of the ceramic art. The making of a piece of pottery has in it the same mystic element that goes into the weaving of blankets and baskets. While the piece is burning the Indians attribute the hissing sound caused by the heated moisture in the bowl to the spirit which is embodied in the bowl or jar. The break in the lines decorating many Indian pieces of pottery is purposely left there by the maker to release the spirit of the bowl if it should be broken. 🍀



Santa Ana Pueblo polychrome pottery, c. 1810



San Ildefonso Pueblo Pottery Vase by Blue Corn, c. post-1940

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