

***Blankets and Baskets: Weavings from the American West*, July 2, 2004-October 10, 2004**

By the 17th to 18th centuries, native cultures in the American West and their Spanish American neighbors had established widespread trade routes for their weavings. Pueblo women in Arizona created elaborate cotton blankets for their own use and also traded them as far away as the Great Plains. Arizona-made baskets were to be found in California, along with locally made baskets used for ritual purposes or for gathering, storing, and cooking food. Blankets and baskets were traditionally woven by women for utilitarian purposes, and their decoration reflected the cultures of the various makers.

Some of these objects exhibit patterns based on the natural world, such as the Apache and Pima winnowing baskets and the California cooking bowls decorated with butterfly or rattlesnake motifs. Gathering baskets from the Cascades region of Oregon and Washington present depictions of the human figure and imagery borrowed from neighboring Plains Indians. The weavers' spiritual worlds are evident in the ceremonial patterns incorporating sacred images that appear on Hopi plaques from the Southwest or on blankets and baskets from the Pacific Northwest Coast.

After European contact, Indian decorative arts both flowered and changed with new economic realities and the advent of the tourist market. Navajo weavings replaced Pueblo blankets as a mainstay of Native American trade. Old photographs show Navajo blankets being worn on the Lakota Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota in the 1890s. By 1880, native blankets and baskets were being avidly collected, and native makers incorporated into their work motifs and forms reflecting the tastes and preferences of their new customers. This exhibition surveys the Museum's fine collection of historic baskets and blankets made in the 19th and early 20th centuries by American Indian and Spanish American peoples throughout Western North America. Techniques, patterns, and materials reflect the stories, myths, traditions, and histories of those who made them: the woven worlds of the artists.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Hopi; North American Indian
Women's wearing blanket (manta), ca. 1870
Wool; twill
Gift of Mrs. Jesse H. Metcalf 13.1466

Sometimes called a "maiden shawl" by collectors, this style of blanket has a ceremonial as well as a practical role. It was worn by Hopi women in the Basket Dance and by men playing female roles in kachina ceremonies and was also used for these purposes at the Rio Grande pueblos. It is said to be the garment worn by Kachina Maiden, a religious figure depicted on two baskets in the adjacent case.



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Kachinas are deified ancestral spirits among the Pueblo. The donor, Mrs. Jesse H. Metcalf, was the mother of Eliza Metcalf Radeke: both were founders of the Rhode Island School of Design.

Tlingit; North American Indian
Dance blanket, late 1800s
Cedar bark; fur; mountain goat hair
Museum Collection S1986.012

Shredded cedar bark, mountain-goat hair; twined tapestry weave
Ceremonial dance blankets, aprons, and leggings were all made by the Chilkat using shredded cedar bark spun with goat hair in a twined tapestry technique. The patterns are very stylized with animals represented simultaneously in full face and profile. The killer-whale motif in this blanket is one of the most common.

These blankets served an important ceremonial function in Tlingit society and were traditionally reserved for those of wealth and high status. Chilkat men and women shared the responsibilities for making these blankets. The patterns were designed by men, while the women spun the yarns and did the weaving.



Possibly; Haida; or; Tlingit; North American Indian
Rattle-lid basket, early 1900s
Spruce root, bear grass, maidenhair fern; two- and three-strand
twining with false embroidery
Museum Works of Art Fund 43.117

Northwest coast baskets were popular among collectors and tourists. In response to this new market, non-native forms and motifs were developed. The basket with its lid that rattles when shaken is one of these. This example combines an ancient native motif, called “head of the salmonberry,” with a cross motif introduced after 1895.



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Tlingit; North American Indian

Berry basket, early 1900s

Spruce root, bear grass, maidenhair fern; twining with false embroidery

Museum Works of Art Fund 43.117X

Although berry baskets were made for native use in the 19th century, this example, with its incorporation of the Russian Orthodox cross in the design, illustrates the effect of the tourist market on native forms.



Tlingit; North American Indian

Basket lid, early 1900s

Spruce root, dyed bear grass, maidenhair fern; twining with false embroidery

Gift of Edward B. Aldrich 18.047B

The maker of this basket combined a traditional “shaman’s hat” or “spirit around the head” pattern with the use of commercial aniline dyes to color the orange and green bear-grass strands.

Tlingit; North American Indian

Lidded basket, early 1900s

Spruce root, dyed bear grass, maidenhair fern; twining with false embroidery

Gift of Edward B. Aldrich 18.047A

The maker of this basket combined a traditional “shaman’s hat” or “spirit around the head” pattern with the use of commercial aniline dyes to color the orange and green bear-grass strands.

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Kwakiutl; North American Indian

Hat, late 1800s

Spruce root, paint; two- and three-strand twining

Museum Works of Art Fund 44.152

The Kwakiutl probably learned the art of making painted hats from their northern neighbors, the Haida. The hats' imagery is also often derived from the Haida, Tlingit, and Tsimshian cultures. The figure seen here may represent a sea monster. The head, with its prominent nostrils and mouth, is placed at the front of the hat, with the body depicted along each side of the crown.



Navajo; North American Indian

Woman's wearing blanket, 1880-1890

Wool; twill, wedge weave

Gift of Mrs. William C. Loring 24.504

This extraordinary blanket has suffered much wear and tear. Its graphic pattern, colors, and the unusual wedge-shaped pattern of weaving in the brown areas suggest that it may have been Navajo-made for a Pueblo client. Curators have seen nothing else like it in their research.



Navajo; North American Indian

Women's wearing blanket, 1870-80

Wool; tapestry weave

Gift of Mrs. Frances Carpenter 08.126

Soiling at the back of the neck and at the hem of this blanket shows that it was a well-loved item of clothing worn often by its owner. These wear patterns demonstrate how it was draped on the body: wrapped around the shoulder with the pattern of crosses down the back and at the front.



Pomo; North American Indian

Bowl, mid 1800s

Willow, sedge root, dyed bulrush or (bracken) fern root, quail-plume remnants; three-rod shibu coiled

Gift of Mrs. Kenneth F. Wood 43.229

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This large container is an important early example of Pomo basketry. Its size and shape probably indicate its original purpose as a gift or storage basket, meant for ritual exchange between families.

Navajo; North American Indian
Women's wearing blanket (manta), ca. 1880
Wool; twill
Gift of Mrs. John Sloan 42.093

Although attributed by cataloguers to the Zuni, this manta may be Navajo-made. It resembles other Navajo fancy mantas of the period. Its bright red color derives from commercially spun and dyed Germantown (Pennsylvania) yarns and dates the piece to after the Navajo internment at Bosque Redondo (1864-68), when these yarns were first distributed.



Pomo; North American Indian
Bowl, early 1900s
Willow, sedge root, dyed bulrush or fern root, red acorn woodpecker feathers, quail topknot feathers, abalone and clamshell disc beads; three-rod coiled
Gift of Mrs. William Edgar 44.286



Elliptical gift baskets such as these were made for Pomo healers to store and carry medicines and ceremonial objects. The size of this basket and the use of two types of feathers and two types of shell beads in its decoration add to its aesthetic and cultural value.

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Navajo; North American Indian

Man's wearing blanket, ca. 1880s

Wool; tapestry weave

Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth 45.082

The “eye dazzler” blanket with its dizzying pattern of serrated diamonds became popular in the 1880s. The brilliant reds were achieved by using commercially spun and aniline-dyed yarns from Germantown, Pennsylvania, which were initially supplied to the Indians in 1864, after Navajo flocks had been destroyed during the “Long Walk” to Bosque Redondo, near Fort Sumner, New Mexico. Because of Navajo raiding, the U.S. government had ordered the army to move tribal members off their ancestral lands in northwestern New Mexico and northeastern Arizona to an internment area at Bosque Redondo, some 200 miles southeast, where they remained from 1863 to 1868 before being allowed to return to a reservation in their home area. Many years were required to replenish the sheep flocks lost during this period, and Germantown yarns remained popular well into the 20th century.



Navajo; North American Indian

Man's wearing blanket, 1870 - 1880

Wool; tapestry weave

Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 31.183



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Spanish

Sarape, ca. 1870

Wool, cotton; tapestry weave

Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth, Jr. 45.084



Navajo; North American Indian

Man's wearing blanket ("Moqui" style), 1870s

Wool; tapestry weave

Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 31.182

Assigned a somewhat later date than the blanket to the left, this example has a more complex pattern. Like the earlier "Moqui" example, it would be turned sidewise and draped over the shoulders when worn. The blanket was formerly owned by Eliza Radeke, one of the founders of Rhode Island School of Design.



Navajo; North American Indian

Man's wearing blanket ("Moqui" style), ca. 1860-1870

wool

Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth 45.081

Long blankets with horizontal stripes were woven by Navajo women in imitation of Rio Grande sarapes. Called "Moqui" from an early Spanish name for "Hopi," they reflect the multitude of influences on Navajo weavers, from the Hopi (Pueblo) women who taught the Navajo to weave, to the Rio Grande weavers of New Mexico.



Spanish-American

Man's wearing blanket (Rio Grande Style sarape), 1850-1870
wool

Gift of Mrs. Arnold B. Chace, Jr. 43.309

Many influences came to bear upon Navajo weaving from other settlers in the area. During the 17th century, Spanish weavers from Mexico established themselves along the Rio Grande River in New Mexico, pushing the Pueblo people who lived there into Navajo territory. Tradition has it that the Pueblo taught the Navajo to weave at this time. Rio Grande weavers also introduced long-haired "churro" sheep, which became the mainstay of both Navajo and Pueblo weaving, along with indigo dyes and boldly striped patterns, which the Navajo also borrowed for their own blankets.



Navajo; North American Indian

Man's wearing blanket (Chief blanket, phase III), ca. 1865 - ca. 1880
Wool; tapestry weave

Gift of Mrs. John Sloan 42.088

This style of Navajo blanket is referred to as "third phase" because of its pattern of stripes embellished with diamond-shaped lozenges and its date, somewhat later than the blanket to the left but still within the Bosque Redondo period (1864-68). The donor's husband, John Sloan (1871-1951), was one among many American artists, such as Robert Henri and George Bellows, who frequented the artist's colony at Santa Fe in the 1920s and 30s, painted the New Mexican landscape, and became interested in Indian artifacts. The donor, Mrs. Sloan, owned a shop in New York that sold American Indian objects during the 1920s. In 1931, John Sloan collaborated with Rhode-Island-born writer Oliver LaFarge (1901-63) on the traveling exhibition *An Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts* (1931-33). Mrs. Sloan gave their collection of Navajo blankets to the Museum in 1942.



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Navajo; North American Indian

Man's wearing blanket (Chief blanket, phase II), 1855-1863

Wool and cotton tapestry weave

Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth 45.083

By the mid-19th century, the date of the earliest blanket in the Museum's collection, Navajo artists had come to dominate the weaving trade among tribes of the American West. Woven by Navajo women, "chief" blankets were widely traded as garments for men of status (not necessarily chiefs) in many Western and Plains Indian tribes. Worn as a shoulder blanket, the pattern runs vertically down the center back and front, where it is held together by the wearer. The Navajo unraveled red yarns from commercially woven trade blankets and respun them to make threads for weaving during this period, before their internment from 1864 to 1868 at Bosque Redondo, near Fort Sumner, New Mexico, some 200 miles from their ancestral lands.



Navajo; North American Indian

Blanket or rug, ca. 1890

Wool; tapestry weave

Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth, Jr. 45.087

This very finely woven piece appears to have begun life on the loom as a fancy Navajo woman's wearing blanket (*manta*), judging from its tapestry weave and pattern. Mysteriously, warps were looped in to make the piece longer, giving it the dimensions of a rug. The yarns in the piece appear to be commercially spun, suggesting that it is of late 19th-century date.



Tulare; Yokuts; North American Indian

Cooking basket, late 1800s-early 1900s

Deer grass (foundation), sedge root, joshua tree root (rim), dyed bracken fern root; bundle coiled

Gift of Mary A. Newell 20.334

A popular snake motif, the sidewinder, is employed on the three decorative bands around this cooking basket. To make acorn soup, red-hot stones would be dropped into a mixture of acorn meal and water contained within the basket and then stirred around to cook the meal evenly and minimize scorching of the basket.



RISD MUSEUM

Navajo; North American Indian

Basket, early 1900s

Sumac, yucca, pigment; rod-and-bundle coiled

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.048

The distinctive rim finish on Navajo baskets is, according to legend, an imitation of the leaf scales on juniper twigs. This is an unusual basket in that the painted blossom differs in color on the interior and exterior surfaces. It was probably made for a special ceremonial use, not specifically for sale to tourists.



North American Indian

Root storage bag, ca. 1880

Knee-spun hemp, cotton string, corn husk, worsted yarn; twining

Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 31.225

Cayuse root bags tend to have brighter, more innovative designs than those of other Sahaptin groups.

Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 31.225



Umatilla; North American Indian

Root storage bag, ca. 1900

Knee-spun hemp, cotton string, worsted yarns; twinning

Museum Works of Art Fund 44.143

Root storage bags such as this one have been used for generations to gather, carry, and store roots, berries, and other foodstuffs. Bold designs with black outlines, done in worsted yarns, suggest a Nez Perce or Umatilla origin.



RISD MUSEUM

Hopi; North American Indian
Wedding plaque, early 1900s
Yucca, galleta grass; bundle coiled
Museum Works of Art Fund 44.580

Wedding plaques differ from other Hopi baskets in that the central star or flower motif continues to the rim, with no border at the rim. In addition, the foundation bundle of galleta grass is simply cut off and left exposed. Traditionally, the bride or a member of her family weaves this plaque, which is given to the groom. Such life-cycle ceremonies (rites of passage) are an important part of Hopi culture.



Hopi; North American Indian
Plaque, early 1900s
Yucca, galleta grass; bundle coiled
Museum Works of Art Fund 44.579

In Hopi tradition, the eagle, depicted on this small tray or plaque, is the bearer of sacred messages from the people to the kachinas (deified ancestral spirits). Basket decoration often reflects the intersection between the natural and the spiritual worlds.



Hopi; North American Indian
Basketry plaque, late 1800s
Rabbit brush, sumac, or willow, yucca, kaolin, pigment; wicker plaited
Museum Works of Art Fund 44.582

Hopi men and women shared the production of these plaques. Women wove, and men painted the designs. Represented here is Shalako Maiden Kachina, a cloud spirit and bringer of rain. This plaque is an unusually large and very early example of the form.



RISD MUSEUM

Tulare; or; Yokuts; North American Indian

Cooking basket, 1800s

Deer grass (foundation), sedge/willow root, redbud, dyed bracken fern root; bundle coiled

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.332

The banded designs on this cooking basket represent the colorful varieties of butterfly that flourish in this region.



North American Indian

Bowl, early 1900s

Willow, devil's-claw; two or three-rod coiled

Gift of Edward B. Aldrich 18.048

The small size of this miniature basket and the fourteen quadrupeds in the pattern indicate that it was made for sale to tourists.



Wasco; North American Indian

"Sally" bag, 1800s

Native hemp, tule, rush, grass; Z-ply elements, full turn or external weft-wrapped (false embroidery) twining

Anonymous gift 1997.24.21

The pattern of stylized human figures on this bag is known to date back to the pre-contact culture of the region's native inhabitants. The Lewis and Clark expedition collected an example with a similar design on their way westward in 1804. Six of the figures bear a stylized human face similar to one found on ancient petroglyphs in the area, known as a mythical being called She Who Watches.



RISD MUSEUM

Tulare; or; Yokuts; North American Indian

Necked jar, late 1800s - early 1900s

Deer grass (foundation), sedge root, joshua-tree root, dyed bracken fern root; bundle coiled

Gift of Mrs. Kenneth F. Wood 43.233

The diamond rattlesnake pattern that decorates this jar is common in the area. This style of necked jar was often used to hold snakes during ceremonies meant to ward off their poisonous bites. The remnants of red wool along the shoulder of the jar indicate that this may have been woven as a special gift basket.



Kumeyaay; North American Indian; possibly

Bowl, ca. 1900

Dyed and undyed juncus, sumac, grass stems

INV2004.595



Apache; North American Indian

Jar (olla), ca. 1910

Willow, black devil's-claw/martynia; three-rod coiled

Gift of Edward B. Aldrich 18.063

The form of this coiled olla is rooted in a traditional form for a twined container used by the Apache to store seeds, grain, and water. The coil technique for basketry began to be used around 1890 specifically for sale to tourists. The imagery on this example — crosses, quadrupeds, and human figures — was introduced around 1910, also to appeal to the tourist market.



RISD MUSEUM

Susie White, Pima

Tray, early 1900s

Willow, black devil's-claw/martynia, cattail stems; bundle coiled with braided rim finish

Gift of Edward B. Aldrich 18.064

An unusually fine stitch and row count, averaging 16 stitches and 12 coils per inch, combined with the small size of this basket, indicate the considerable skill of the maker and the fact that it was made specifically as a work of art for sale and not for use.

One of the most famous Akimel O'odham makers of miniatures was Susie White, who lived just southeast of Phoenix in the area near the towns of Sacaton and Chandler. She wove small baskets between 1910 and 1950, and this piece may be an example of her early work.



Pima; North American Indian

Tray, ca. 1900

Willow, black devil's-claw/martynia, cattail stems; bundle coiled with braided rim finish

Anonymous gift 1997.24.2

The butterfly design on this tray is not the most common pattern in Akimel O'odham basketry, but like the similar design found in Yokuts basketry, it reflects the closeness of the weaver to her environment.

Western Apache; North American Indian

Tray, ca. 1910

Willow, black devil's-claw/martynia; three-rod coiled

Anonymous gift 1997.24.8

The tray form was used traditionally for winnowing grain or for storage, but became a popular item in the tourist market in the early 20th century. The cross motif, seen in both blankets and baskets, was introduced into basketry around 1910 to 1915 specifically to appeal to the tourist market.



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Yokuts; North American Indian

Oval Basket, 1800s

Deer grass (foundation), sedge root, redbud, dyed bracken fern root; bundle coiled

Anonymous gift 1997.24.9

Dances, such as the one depicted on this basket, were an important part of Yokuts ritual life. Dances were held for seasonal ceremonies and for more mundane reasons, such as to prevent snakebite.



North American Indian

Bowl, ca. 1900

Dyed and undyed juncus, grass stems, sumac, devil's-claw; bundle coiled

Gift of Edward B. Aldrich 18.055



North American Indian

Tray, ca. 1900

Dyed and undyed juncus, sumac, deer grass; bundle coiled

Gift of Edward B. Aldrich 18.065



"Mission" refers collectively to many tribes from Southern California, where Spanish Catholic missions were established in the late 18th century. Indians were gathered into the missions, where they were forced to give up their native customs. Basketry was promoted as a civilizing "industry" rather a response to tribal needs. The baskets made by Indian women in the missions reflect this uprooting. A traditional method (coiling), has been combined with new geometric patterning, unlike the baskets woven by nearby Yokuts tribeswomen with their stick figures and patterns taken from nature.

Pomo; North American Indian

Bowl, early 1900s

Willow, sedge root, dyed bulrush or fern root, quail topknot feathers; three-rod coiled

Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 31.152



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The repeating geometric design and feather decoration of this basket is typically Pomo. Gift baskets such as this one were ritually exchanged on special occasions.

Tulare; North American Indian

Basket Bowl, 1900s

Deer grass (foundation), sedge root, dyed bracken fern root; bundle coiled

Gift of Mrs. Kenneth F. Wood 43.231

This basket is unusual for two reasons: it is more finely woven than the usual Yokuts basket, having 26 stitches and 12 rows per inch, and it has more pattern variation than is normal. The rattlesnake motif in the top band, however, is a typical design of this culture.

