

A River Apart

The Pottery
of Cochiti &
Santo Domingo
Pueblos

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Introduction

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MULTIVOCALITY, COMMUNITIES, AND MUSEUMS IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

Water is a rare and essential element in the arid Southwest. Two major rivers and their tributaries—the Colorado River and the Rio Grande—have shaped both the landscape and the distribution of indigenous villages. Neighboring New Mexico pueblos on the banks of the northern Rio Grande—just a river apart—the communities of Cochiti and Santo Domingo join a ceramic tradition extending back almost 1,500 years. For centuries, the women—and more recently the men—of both pueblos have made pottery for use in their homes and ceremonial spaces, for sale as tourist curios at roadside stands, and for placement as objects of longing in high-end galleries. The materials, construction techniques, painted designs, and intended functions of each piece of pottery made in these two villages intimately reflect each community's social, religious, and institutional values as well as the land that supports and nourishes them. Over the past two centuries, countless of these carefully

constructed pieces, isolated from their original contexts, have become aesthetic and sociocultural specimens of beauty and utility in art and anthropology museums throughout the Western world. Historically, these institutions have preserved the pieces as iconic representatives of dying cultures whose histories they reconstructed in exhibitions and publications.

The Pueblos themselves have preserved their histories by the telling and retelling of myths and legends, and through the ceremonial performance of songs and dances. They have recorded their histories upon the landscape with the settlements and artifacts they constructed and abandoned during generations of migration and change. These indigenous “museums” of the Southwest were and are part of a living landscape (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2006) subject to time and environment, as well as to the movements and interpretations of contemporary Puebloans.

The authoritative voice of Western museums resides in the classification and definition of people through representations of material culture. Usually,

these are indigenous people, or cultural “others,” meaning that presentation and interpretation of cultural diversity in museums has always been problematic. Over the past two decades, and notably since the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), third- and fourth-world communities, attempting to establish and maintain a sense of self and to assert their social, religious, political, and economic rights from within the dominant Western culture, have challenged the right of established institutions to control the presentation of their cultural artifacts and community identities.

In traditional museum exhibitions, Western cultural points of view have assumed a universal significance—historically, European and American museums have presented the authoritative view of the “expert” outsider looking in and “explaining” indigenous cultures. Typically, this approach portrays Pueblos and other indigenous peoples as something out of the past and fixed in time. Many contemporary museums have begun to explore the challenge to their authority through an interpretive theory known as multivocality.

Multivocality, which entered anthropological discourse in the 1980s adjunct to the postmodern movement of the 1970s, is an approach to interpreting material culture in a manner that seeks to represent and reconcile contested meanings (Foucault 1970; Lyotard 1984, 1992; Crapanzano 1992). Within the context of multivocality, anthropologists and their subjects, and museums and the cultures they represent, participate in an exchange of perspectives and beliefs. Multivocality, as applied to museum anthropology, advocates a plurality of voices in the production of knowledge and emphasizes that there is no single “correct” viewpoint within this theoretical framework. The postmodern museum curator questions accepted concepts and engages with other points of view.

Postmodern theorists advocate bridging the gap between anthropologists and their subjects by giving credence to the views of the observed. They have posited that it is impossible for anyone to have objective and neutral knowledge of another culture. This view comes from the notion that each of us interprets the world in a unique way, concordant with our cultural background, the language we speak, and our personal experiences. Opposition to this approach contends that postmodernists eschew empirical data and scientific method in favor of a humanist political model based on empathy with third- and fourth-world peoples. Opposing viewpoints also reject the overly relativistic stance they predict as the outcome of this position. In anthropological discourse, postmodernism is an ongoing debate, especially in regard to the definition of anthropology as a scientific or humanistic discipline (Spiro 1996; D’Andrade 1995).

The postmodern anthropologist replaces the metanarrative—an abstract theory or idea which orders and explains all knowledge and experience—with multiple theoretical perspectives or narratives. In much the same way, the intent of this collection of essays is to examine and interpret, from several different perspectives, the pottery traditions of Cochiti and Santo Domingo pueblos. As a critical analysis of various aspects of Pueblo pottery, the collected essays are meant to present perspectives while giving the reader enough room to develop his/her own viewpoint. The essayists provide information related to reading and interpreting material culture in general, and Pueblo pottery specifically. Each author’s singular way of thinking about Pueblo pottery comes from a range of disciplines—anthropology, art history, practice of art, and museum studies.

The river that marks the physical division between Cochiti and Santo Domingo also can be seen as a metaphorical demarcation between the dissimilar

responses of the two pueblos to outside influences, between insiders and outsiders, and between the varying perspectives explored by the six essays in this volume. The honesty and passion in Antonio Chavarria's essay belies what I often hear from Santa Fe residents and museum visitors: their feelings that behind Pueblo secrecy is a hollowness harboring only political aspirations. Chavarria's characterization of Pueblo pottery as "shifting and changing" is the tie that binds the multiple perspectives of the essays in this volume—although all the essays are directed at the same target, they reach their goal by following different paths. Even the painted designs on pottery have "multiple levels of meaning," Chavarria informs us, and choosing one interpretation over another "gives short shrift to the complexity of the art and cultures." A museum curator from the pottery-producing Pueblo of Santa Clara, Antonio Chavarria emphasizes the artist's point of view in his study of southwestern pottery. The artistic tradition he writes about recognizes those potters who understand their work as creating and continuing life, rather than making inanimate objects. Chavarria notes that archaeologist, ethnologist, collector, and dealer must all work within an understanding that pottery is made from Mother Earth—it is from the earth that Pueblo people form and sustain their lives; thus, when artists gather and use a material which literally and metaphorically makes life, they are involved in the creation of people, family, relations, and the continuity and vitality of life itself.

Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh investigates a part of ceramic vessels rarely seen in exhibitions and catalogs—the underside. There he finds written a hidden story about the production and consumption of Pueblo pottery over the last century. In his essay Colwell-Chanthaphonh considers the origin and significance of artists' signatures on Pueblo ceramics to illuminate what signed (and unsigned)

pieces can tell us about the relationships between individual and community, fine art and folk art, and matter and spirit. He explicates the recontextualization of Pueblo pottery by exploring the history of signatures in Western art and the ramifications of transferring this European fine art tradition to previously unsigned Pueblo pottery. "No longer were objects honored for their contribution to the community or the degree to which they venerated the ancestors, but rather for their achievement of individual creativity and mastery of the craft," he writes.

Bruce Bernstein's personal and professional relationship to Pueblos and Pueblo pottery is at the thematic center of his two-part essay. While storytelling is not the usual *modus operandi* of anthropologists, Bernstein in Part I relates personal experiences to shed light on the ways Anglo-Americans, or outsiders, perceive the Pueblos, as well as how the Pueblos perceive outsiders. After more than two decades of living and working in the Southwest, he recognizes the central importance of pottery to Pueblo life—Native societies use the ceramic arts to teach others about themselves, as well as to strengthen their families, their communities, and their resolve for survival. In Part II, Bernstein reflects on anthropology's contributions to the understanding of this artistic tradition, while questioning the efficacy of the academic approach in isolation from Pueblo perspectives. Keeping this in mind, Bernstein proposes new ways to simultaneously interpret scholarship and engage indigenous artistic communities.

Painter and Cochiti community member Mateo Romero expresses his opinions about museums, and the scholars associated with them, in graphic and poignant terms. He recognizes that museums are one way to educate people about cultural heritage, but questions the extent to which Western museums present their collections as ethnographic truth and the means they have employed to amass

them. As a Native artist from Cochiti, he addresses issues of cultural rights and the role of art in ownership and management of cultural knowledge. Today Romero and other indigenous artists are redefining stereotypical imagery as a means of reasserting self-identity: reclaiming the past to build the future.

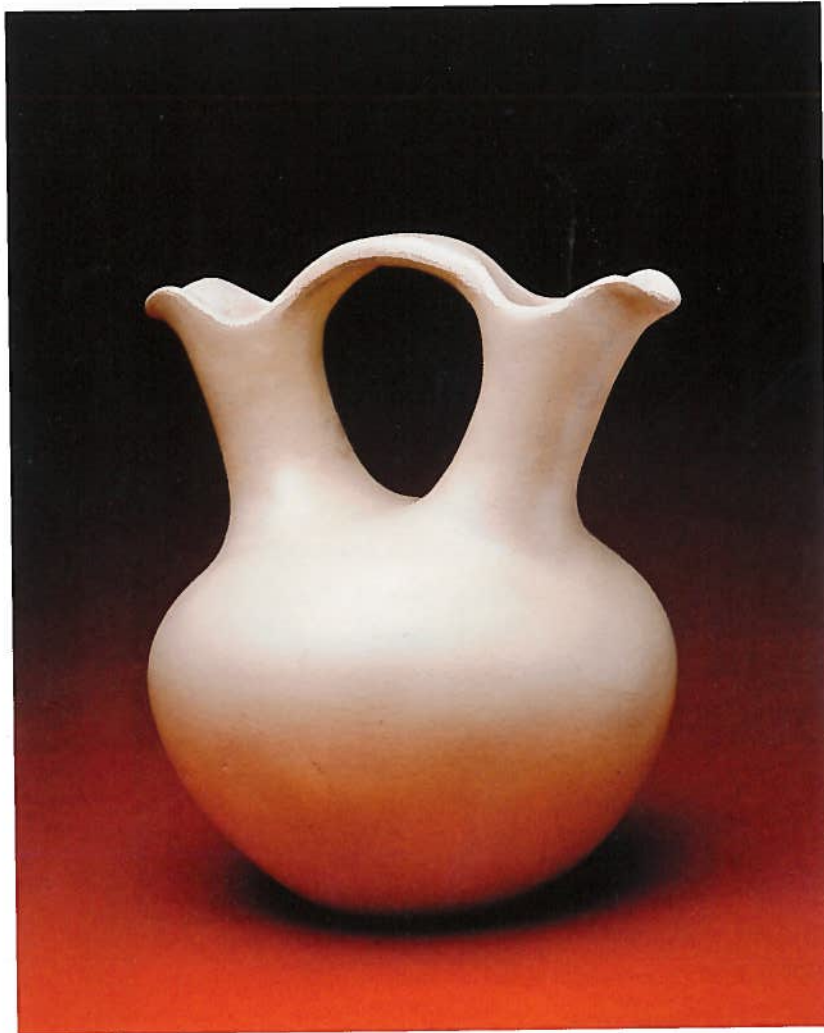
J. J. Brody writes from a personal perspective shaped by sixty years of academic training and professional work as, successively, a visual artist, archaeologist, art historian, museum professional, and university professor. His interest in the closely linked pottery traditions of Cochiti and Santo Domingo is filtered by an immersion, since about 1954, in the 1,500-year history of Pueblo art, especially the medium of painted pottery. His perception as an art historian is that the visual arts, including painted pot-

tery, are nonverbal communications constrained within a medium, expressive of history, and structured by local social contexts. While Bruce Bernstein introduces the difficulty of painting on a curved surface in Part I of his essay, Brody hypothesizes on exactly how it is done and constructs an overarching aesthetic philosophy that explains its application.

THE PUEBLOS OF COCHITI AND SANTO DOMINGO—A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Living in the Southwest's harsh environment, a marginal area for agriculture, meant that Ancestral Puebloans migrated constantly in search of sustainable farming conditions. The Keresan-speakers of the present-day Rio Grande Pueblos are descendants of the Ancestral Pueblos of the Four Corners area. They trace their origin to the underworld, from which they emerged from an opening called a *sipapu*. According to tradition, over a very long period of time they migrated from the *sipapu* to an area north of their present location, where they constructed cliff dwellings at Rito de los Frijoles, or Tyuonyi. Long before their first contact with Coronado in 1540—the start of the historic period—the Keresan people had moved to a number of autonomous villages along the Rio Grande. In 1540 when the Spanish arrived in the region, they encountered over 40,000 indigenous people living in nearly 100 villages. In reference to their village lifestyle, the Spanish named the people “pueblo” or “town-dwellers.” Cochiti and Santo Domingo are two of the twenty pueblos now extant in the Southwest. Although Puebloan peoples never constituted a single tribe—each Pueblo village is an autonomous political entity—they have engaged each other continually—trading, visiting, and intermarrying (figs. 1–3). While the people of some Pueblo villages spoke the same or similar languages, others spoke entirely unrelated languages. Amongst today's twenty pueblos there are five unique language groups—

figure 1
Wedding Vase
Santo Domingo
and Santa Clara
Monica Silva
1960
31.0 x 38.0 cm



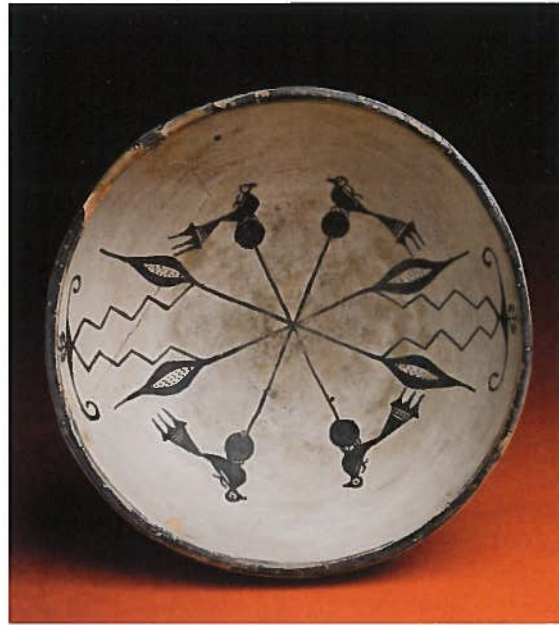
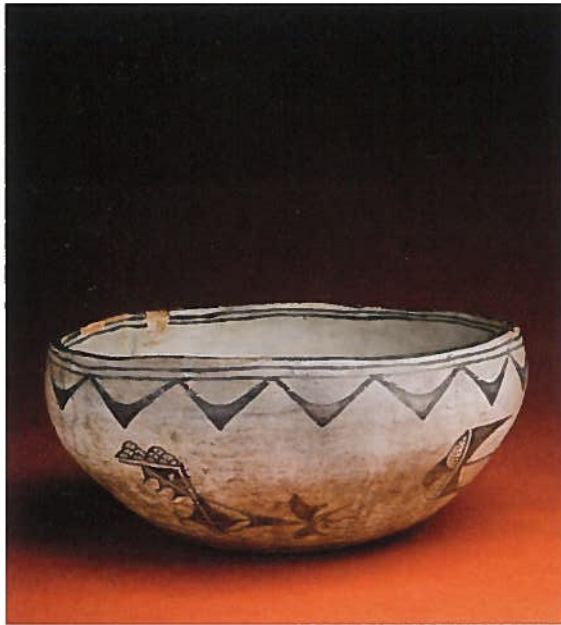


figure 2
Bowl (two views)
Cochiti and
San Ildefonso
Tonita Peña
ca. 1920
12.6 x 29.1 cm

bottom left:
figure 3
Mermaid Figurine
Cochiti and Acoma
Rita and Ivan Lewis
1987
16.3 x 9.0 x 26.2 cm



Cochiti and Santo Domingo people are Keresan speakers, along with the Pueblos of Acoma, Laguna, San Felipe, Santa Ana, and Zia.

The traditional homeland of the Puebloans is the high arid plateau country of northern Arizona and northwestern and central New Mexico. Their village lifestyle is made possible in this harsh environment by irrigation-based farming. (Before Span-

ish contact, their cultivars included maize [corn], beans, squash, cotton, and tobacco.) The strong societal bonds that ensure the cooperation of the large numbers of people needed to support village life are evident in the social, political, and especially religious organizations that persist today. In this world where the success or failure of crops is critical yet uncertain, a central element of the yearly religious

Tonita Peña, ca. 1930.
T. Hannon Parkhurst,
photographer. Courtesy
Palace of the Governors
(MNM/DCA), 46988.

cycle emphasizes rain in both its physical and spiritual manifestations. Strict adherence to religious life is believed to result in a bountiful harvest.

Both Cochiti and Santo Domingo are theocracies with secular governments appointed by religious leaders. Religious life, the center of Pueblo existence, revolves around the Catholic Church as well as the *kivas* and society houses that are the focal points of traditional religious practices. Roman Catholicism has maintained a strong presence at both pueblos since its introduction during the first Spanish expeditions in the mid-1500s, so that each pueblo's annual calendar of religious activities represents a blending of Catholicism and Native reli-

gious beliefs. Today, at Santo Domingo (and to a lesser extent at Cochiti) there is a general and persistent reticence to discuss or reveal internal Pueblo life, the legacy of centuries of religious and social oppression by colonizing peoples.

On the west bank of the Rio Grande, Cochiti is northernmost of the eastern Keresan groups. The Cochiti people have occupied their present village, about 25 miles southwest of Santa Fe, since at least 1700. Currently, they administer 53,779 acres of land and have jurisdiction over the adjoining Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument. The total population at the 2000 census was 1,502. Cochiti's annual feast day, San Buenaventura's Day, is celebrated on July 14 with a performance of the Corn Dance. The Cochiti people traditionally are agriculturists, and today some of their land is under cultivation in the form of family plots. A portion of the water from the Rio Grande, which flows through pueblo lands, is stored behind Cochiti Dam, making it possible for the pueblo to develop a Farm Enterprise Plan, which includes the restoration of large acreages of traditional farmland. Although historically Cochiti has had no private economic enterprises, in 1995 the pueblo acquired the Town of Cochiti Lake and created the Cochiti Community Development Corporation. This initiative has been a primary revenue source for the community.

On the east bank of the Rio Grande, about 35 miles southwest of Santa Fe, Santo Domingo is the largest of the Rio Grande pueblos. As with the Cochitis, the Santo Domingo people have occupied their present village since at least 1700. Currently they administer approximately 75,000 acres of land. The total population at the 2000 census was 3,166. Santo Domingo's annual feast day, Saint Dominic's Day, is celebrated on August 4 with a performance of the Corn Dance, artisan booths, and a festive carnival. Ironically, although Santo Domingo is probably the most conservative and insular of the pueblos, it is also among the best known. Santo

top:
View of Cochiti Pueblo,
ca. 1880. John K.
Hillers, photographer.
Courtesy Palace of
the Governors
(MNM/DCA), 3964.

bottom:
View of Santo Domingo
Pueblo, ca. 1920. T.
Harmon Parkhurst,
photographer. Courtesy
Palace of the Governors
(MNM/DCA), 2812.



Domingo's location—directly on or near established roads from the Camino Real of early Spanish times, to the railway and the state and federal highways of today—has contributed to its high profile and, reflexively, to its conservative stance toward innovation and change. Except on feast day, the presence of outsiders at the pueblo is generally discouraged.

For more than four hundred years now, pressures from Euro/Anglo-American communities have had a profound effect on the evolution of Pueblo pottery. We know that outside influence on Pueblo material culture from 1540 to American rule in 1848 was considerable. However, a definitive picture of Pueblo pottery during this period has never



American Museum of Natural History curator George Pepper packing Cochiti pottery for shipment east to the museum, 1903. Courtesy National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, N32657.



View of Santo Domingo Pueblo, ca. 1880. John K. Hillers, photographer. Courtesy Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, Z-1919. The Santa Fe Railroad tracks and horse-drawn wagons used for transporting artifacts and supplies for a James Stevenson collecting expedition are shown in the foreground. Between 1880 and 1925, eastern museums mounted major collecting expeditions to the Southwest pueblos with the mission of creating systematic and encyclopedic ethnographic and archaeological material culture study collections. The expedition recorded here may be the one organized by the Bureau of American Ethnology, which included James Stevenson, Matilda Coxe Stevenson, Frank Hamilton Cushing, and photographer John K. Hillers.

been developed as whole vessels from that period are rare for a number of reasons. One is that pottery was used at the pueblos as long as it was serviceable and then discarded in the village trash heap. A second significant reason is that because almost all the pueblos occupied since the Spanish reconquest of the 1690s are alive and vibrant villages today, archaeological excavations have been limited. Consequently, even fragmentary vessels made between the conquest and 1879, when museums began to collect and preserve them, are scarce.

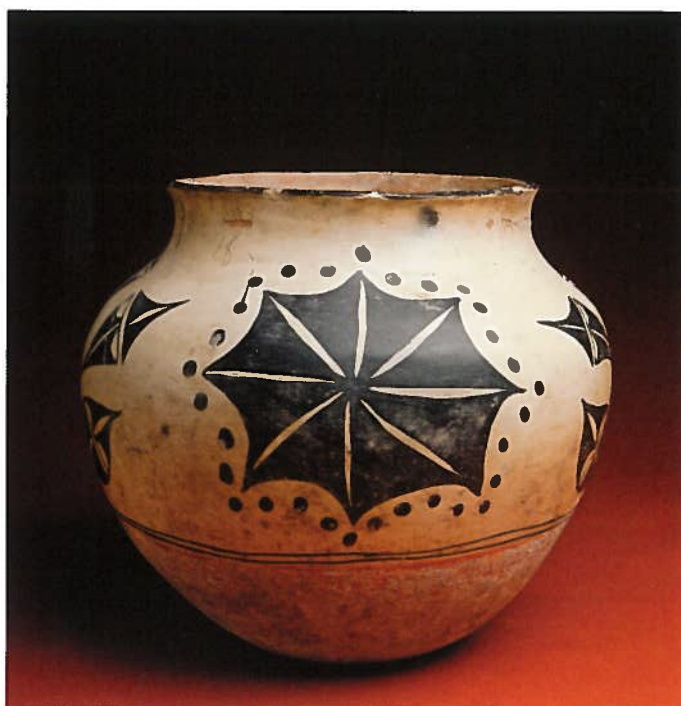
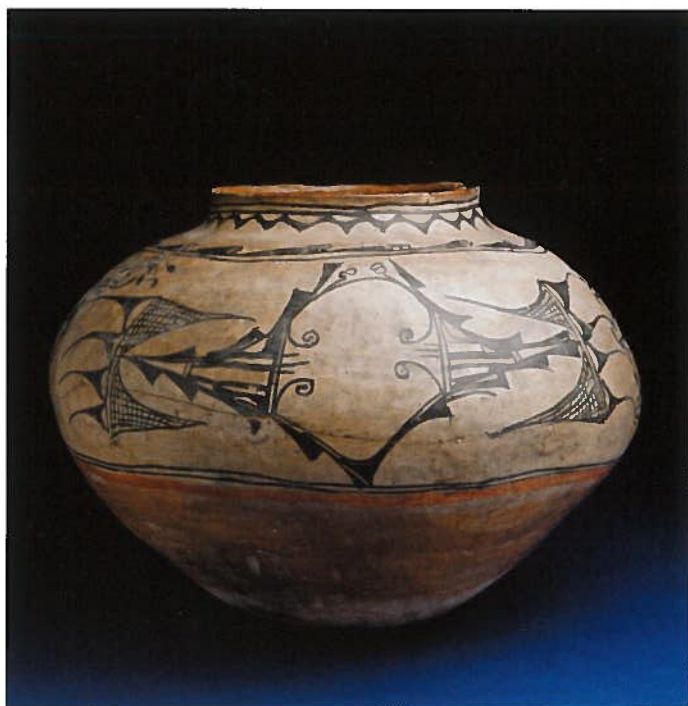
By the mid-nineteenth century, the pace of social, political, and economic change had accelerated. Competition for land between the Pueblos, Hispanic communities, and new Euro/Anglo-American immigrants put increasing pressure on indigenous populations. With the arrival of American rule in 1848, the Puebloan land base and water rights were further impinged, and disastrous disease epidemics that began with first contact with outsiders continued to cause population decline. With the Spanish and early Euro/Anglo-American settlers, the Pueblos had continued a traditional economic system of subsistence, barter, and exchange. In exchange for the new consumer goods, Pueblo potters had developed pottery types specifically for settler households, including pitchers, cups and saucers, and candlesticks. With American rule, Pueblo people became consumers instead of producers for the first time in their long history. People accustomed to a gifting, bartering, and a subsistence economy were forced to become dependent on the new cash economy and manufactured goods. American rule also brought the railroad, then automobile travel, and with them a booming tourist industry. Potters rethought the forms of their utilitarian wares and developed new styles, such as figurines and miniatures, for the burgeoning tourist market. Beginning in the 1920s, Santa Fe museum personnel—most significantly Edgar L. Hewett and Kenneth Chapman—began developing initiatives to “im-

prove” the craft they saw as degraded by the introduction of tourist wares. Today we see their influence in the judging of pottery at annual summer events including the Southwest Association for Indian Art’s Indian Market, the Eight Northern Pueblos Arts and Crafts Show, and the MIAC/LAB’s Native Treasures Indian Arts Festival. While these events promote “high-quality” pieces, contemporary potters throughout the Southwest continue to produce a wide variety of wares, from pieces for use in Pueblo homes and for community ceremonial events to wares which fall on a continuum from inexpensive tourist pieces to fine art.

CURATORS, COLLECTORS, AND CATALOGS

Contemporary Pueblo ceramic wares are the result of centuries of a fluid and adaptive tradition. These wares reflect diverse influences: continual migrations necessitated variation in materials; dietary and household changes required functional shifts in shape and size; and multiple markets—such as other pueblos, other Native communities, Hispanic and Euro/Anglo-American villagers, and, more recently, tourists and high-end collectors—resulted in adaptations that would appeal to these varied buyers. Over the last two centuries, the Pueblo pottery market has been an important contributor to the continued vitality of village life by bringing needed income to communities, and by giving potters a way to support their families while living and working at home. Throughout the historic period in the Southwest, outsiders have appropriated Pueblo cultural and natural resources for personal, political, and monetary gain.

Curators, collectors, and the exigencies of imposed cataloging systems recontextualize Pueblo pottery as museum artifacts, often losing sight of their indigenous identities in the process. Because of this, it is important to cast an ever critical eye on the circumstances of collecting, the assumptions and



motivations of curators and collectors, and the changing meanings and values attached to Pueblo pottery in museum collections over time and space. Today those of us who work in Southwest regional museums—and who are in the unique position of living, working, and socializing on a daily basis with the very alive and very real people represented by our collections—have to recognize their legal and ethical right to determine how their traditional knowledge and products are to be interpreted and represented, as well as their right to demand some kind of recognition and compensation for their appropriation by others. An often-repeated story told

by former curator of ethnology Edmund Ladd, which he swore was true, illustrates the tight control museums have exercised over representation of America's indigenous populations. Tourists, returning from a visit to the several northern New Mexico pueblos, were convinced that the museum peopled the villages as a living exhibit. "They don't really live there, do they?" the tourists asked. To combat a widely accepted and romanticized view of Indian people as the mysterious past occupants of abandoned ruins, the essays in this volume seek to present Cochiti and Santo Domingo as the dynamic and living cultures that they are today.

figure 4
Jar
Cochiti
Artist Unknown
ca. 1880
40.0 x 55.5 cm

figure 5
Jar
Cochiti
Artist Unknown
ca. 1900
29.4 x 32.8 cm