

2013

Affirmation

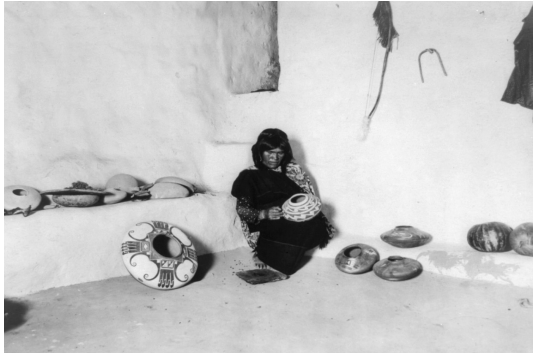
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Anonymous. *Nampeyo, a noted Tewa Hopi potter of the Hano pueblo in northeastern Arizona, decorating pottery.* 1903. Library of Congress, LC-USZ61-2109.

as tourist art. The rest of their value comes from their success as a ‘model’ ... for the authentic experience the tourist desires.” As non-Natives (as most visiting the Bellarmine are) view the art, one could argue that they risk becoming what I will call “visual tourists” *only*, in essence divorcing the art from its production and cultural context – for all intents and purposes contributing to the erasure of Native peoples.

Of course, these Pueblo artists themselves could be seen as – to borrow from Native scholar Philip Deloria – “playing Indian” by giving viewers what they want to see, thus contributing to their own erasure.

But to view Pueblo pottery this way *only* would be reductive: this pottery is not “inauthentic.” Rather, this pottery, though produced for a market, is a sign of the ways in which the Pueblo have engaged colonial desire to serve *their own* economic, cultural, and political purposes against genocide and its ongoing legacy. The pottery objects included in this show, in fact, are testaments to Pueblo culture, which is very much alive. The materiality of and designs on the pottery bear witness to the reciprocity between the Pueblo people, the earth, and the wider universe, all of which must remain in balance, not only for the sustainability of the Pueblo but also for life itself. Stephen Trimble, in *Talking with Clay: The Art of Pueblo Pottery in the 21st Century* (2007) writes:

Pueblo pottery captures the people’s refined sense of order, opposition, and balance. ... When potters outline designs on a slipped and polished vessel, they see with a perspective honed by every aspect of their existence. In every task, Pueblo people start from the boundaries of their world and work toward the center. Again and again, Pueblo potters say that they let the clay take whatever shape it wants, without their conscious control.

The designs on the pottery are in turn “dictated by the form.”

Perhaps this pottery can cultivate in the viewer the humble, life-affirming ethos of the artists.

*Sunrise,
accept this offering,
Sunrise.*

Peter L. Bayers, Ph.D.
Director, Undergraduate American Studies



Affirmation

As you view this Pueblo art, I would invite you to think about the history of Native peoples in the Americas, and more particularly the history of Pueblo peoples, who live in areas that are today called Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. In drawing attention to the historicity of these *states* in my phrase “in areas that are today,” I hope to underscore the fact that Pueblo peoples – and Native peoples within the borders of the United States – live in an ongoing colonial relationship with the federal government, and that the geography of the states in which they live were superimposed on them.



Russell Lee. *Tourist buying Indian pottery from children at Tesuque pueblo, New Mexico.* 1939. LC-DIG-ppmsc-00193.

Native peoples of the United States, of course, are U.S. citizens, but their respective tribes are legally “domestic-dependent nations,” an (in)famous phrase coined by Chief Justice John Marshall, who wrote the majority opinion in *Cherokee Nation vs. the State of Georgia* (1831). This legal ruling cemented the United States’ position as a paternal “father” of Native peoples. As Marshall wrote: “Their [the Cherokee Nation’s] relations to the United States resemble that of a ward to his guardian. They look to our Government for protection, rely upon its kindness and its power, appeal to it for relief to their wants, and address the President as their Great Father.” In other words, the Cherokee – and by extension all Native peoples within the borders of the United States – were (and still are) colonial subjects of an imperial power.



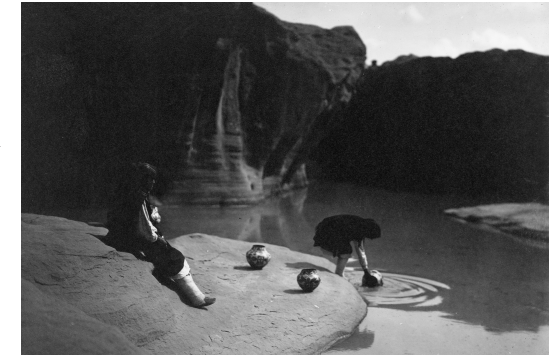
Anonymous. *Pueblo Indian pottery sellers, Indian reservation, World’s Fair, St. Louis, 1904.* 1904. LC-USZ62-108512.

Pueblo peoples have been subjected to the forces of imperialism for more than 500 years as one colonial authority after another – Spain, Mexico, U.S. – sought to usurp their political autonomy. From the perspective of the United States, Indian peoples – like

the Pueblo – were a “problem” that had to be solved. They stood in the way of “progress.” Given that Native peoples could not be physically obliterated, in the late 19th century the U.S. government began the genocidal process of trying to culturally efface them. One of the means used to achieve this nefarious goal was to “encourage” Native populations to send their children to attend Boarding Schools. These institutions, which sought to systematically strip young Natives of their cultures in order to “civilize” them, taught children

(many of whom had been forcibly removed from their families) to be ashamed of their so-called “savage” or “primitive” cultures.

The devastating effects of genocide on the Pueblo are captured by Leslie Marmon Silko’s emotionally powerful masterpiece *Ceremony*, first published in 1977. This novel traces the effects of genocide on a Laguna Pueblo “half-breed” protagonist, Tayo, who idolizes and emulates his cousin Rocky, a product of a Boarding School. Set against the horrors of Tayo’s WW II experience in the Batan death march, the novel analogizes the tragedies of the war with the trauma of the genocide – or “white witchery” – visited upon Tayo. In the novel, the hierarchical values of Western culture are revealed as having separated humans from the earth since, in this value system, mankind seeks to control nature and all of life’s natural processes. Those who embrace Western values thus become “destroyers” of life, according to Silko. Only by rejecting these artificially hierarchical principles and reconnecting with his Native heritage does Tayo begin to heal from the wounds of genocide. He does so by re-establishing a spiritually reciprocal relationship with the earth and all that that entails in a complex, life-affirming ceremony. The novel concludes with a humbling, haunting offertory:



Edward S. Curtis. *At the old well of Acoma.* 1904. Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-46879.

*Sunrise,
accept this offering,
Sunrise.*

The hope of the novel – its belief in cultural renewal and sustainability in the face of genocide – is, I think, reflected in the Pueblo pottery in this collection.

The art in this exhibition was produced for reasons that differ greatly from pieces created prior to the 1870s. Before that time, pottery was made to serve the functional and imaginative desires of the Pueblo themselves through their own respective cultural lenses. Beginning in the final quarter of the 19th century, however, Pueblo potters created pieces specifically for the tourist art market and, as such, worked to meet Westerners’ *expectation* of Pueblo pottery as *art*. Thus, objects were given an aesthetic value consummate with Western expectations of “authentic” Indian *art* (it is enlightening in this context to realize that the Pueblo languages have no word for “art”). As David W. Penney and Lisa Roberts argue in their essay, “America’s Pueblo Artists: Encounters on the Borderlands” (1999), “The objects in and of themselves, their materials, workmanship, and design, represent but a fraction of the value