

WOVEN IN BEAUTY FOLLOWS THE PATH OF MASTER NAVAJO WEAVERS

Exhibition Held with Objects of Art & Antique American Indian Art Show

August 11-19, 2016 at El Museo Cultural de Santa Fe

Santa Fe, New Mexico—According to Navajo oral history, Spider Woman passed down the art of weaving to Navajo women, forever setting them on a “path of beauty.”

From August 11–19, the timeless talents and treasures of Navajo weavers are the subject of *Woven in Beauty: 100 Years of Navajo Master Weavers from the Toadlena/Two Grey Hills Region*, a curated exhibition that explores historic and contemporary textile traditions from the northwestern New Mexico region of the Navajo reservation.

The exhibition runs concurrently with two of Santa Fe’s much-anticipated summer art shows—Objects of Art (August 12–14) and the Antique American Indian Art Show (August 17–19)—at El Museo Cultural de Santa Fe in the Santa Fe Railyard. Entry to the exhibition is included with \$15 show admission.

Highlighting a select group of textiles notable for their diversity and artistry, the display offers visitors to both shows an opportunity to learn about the history and heritage of some of the world’s most skilled textile arts practitioners and to see their prized, highly collectible weavings.

“The art of weaving, which many people describe as paintings in wool, is central to Navajo culture,” says Kim Martindale, co-producer of Objects of Art and the Antique American Indian Art Show. “This exhibition presents multiple generations of weavers from the Toadlena/Two Grey Hills area, from those who pioneered the tradition to those keeping weaving alive today.”

Paintings in Wool

Woven in Beauty is curated by Southwest textile experts Mark and Linda Winter, current traders at the Historic Toadlena Trading Post near Newcomb, New Mexico, on the Navajo Reservation. For more than a century, the trading post has worked directly with Navajo weavers to nurture and evolve distinctive textile expressions—including the prized Toadlena/Two Grey Hills tradition examined in *Woven in Beauty*.

Characterized by the use of varying shades of natural sheep’s wool, as well as precise and imaginative designs, the Toadlena/Two Grey Hills weaving style was developed in the 1900’S, a period when demand and prices for Navajo weavings were on the rise. Traders from area trading posts began working with local weavers to develop marketable designs to represent unique regions of the reservation. In time, thirteen regional designs emerged, each named for its local trading post. As Toadlena Trading Post owner George Bloomfield and Two Grey Hills Trading Post owner Ed Davies collaborated with weavers in their region, the Toadlena/Two Grey Hills tradition was born.

Woven in Beauty is divided into ten-year increments to chart the tradition’s evolution through the decades and includes the earliest documented Two Grey Hills rug completed from 1913 as

well as work by Blind Man's Wife, one of the earliest Toadlena/Two Grey Hills MASTER weavers. In contrast to the bright commercial wools utilized by many other Navajo weavers of the period, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills artists developed a signature palette of natural hues—black, gray, beige, brown, cream and white. Handspinning local sheep's wool into extraordinarily fine yarns, the women wove with more wefts to the linear inch, inspiring them to create intricate, often abstract geometric designs—from diamonds, storm patterns and rarer three-column designs and spirit trails honoring their tradition—that spread across the entire weaving with borders around the perimeter.

The weavers' superior spinning and weaving skills and sophisticated design sensibilities resulted in higher-quality weaving that immediately were at once visually stunning and technically refined. The weavers' complex techniques transformed more-typical Navajo rugs into finely woven Navajo tapestries of up to 115 wefts per inch, nearly four times that of typical weavings. Collectors were quickly attracted to these masterworks, using them more as rugs and wall hangings rather than traditional blankets.

Documenting an Artistic Legacy

More than 100 years later, Toadlena/Grey Hills textiles have become ever-more complex, inspired and collectible, thanks to the individuals and families who have preserved their textile tradition and moved it forward. *Woven in Beauty* documents the artistic legacy of individual artists, such as legendary master weavers Daisy Taugelchee and Bessie Manygoats, as well as entire family lineages that have lived and worked in this creative weaving center through time.

"Highly artistic textiles have been carefully chosen as the best representative examples of many of the region's master weavers' works," says curator Mark Winter. "These textiles demonstrate the diversity of the individual weavers' talent. They range from rugs dating to the regional style's historic roots over 100 years ago to some of the best contemporary tapestries being produced on Navajo looms today."

Winter is also the author of 2011 book *The Master Weavers*, a comprehensive 608-page volume on the history of the Toadlena/Two Grey Hills weavers and their most spectacular works. Like Winter's book, *Woven in Beauty* provides an overview of the much-admired technical aspects of the region's weaving tradition as well as detailed genealogical information on many of the master weavers and their families.

As head of the Historic Toadlena Trading Post, Winter and his wife Linda continue the tradition of collaboration established by Bloomfield and Davies, promoting the region's weavers and their highly coveted textiles to collectors and other Indian art aficionados around the globe.

"Today, all of the Toadlena/Two Grey Hill weavers are ancestors of those who worked with those two very inspired traders," he says. "Toadlena continues to maintain a lifestyle that the Navajo and the traders have played out for over 100 years."

***Woven in Beauty* takes place at El Museo Cultural de Santa Fe, 555 Camino de la Familia, in the Santa Fe Railyard. Admission is included with \$15 entry to the Objects of Art and Antique**

American Indian Art show. For more information, interview requests, and photos, please contact Clare Hertel at 505-474-6783 or clare@clarehertelcommunications.com.