

June OOM

Awatovi Birds

Dextra Quotskuyva 1990 G 259

Decorative Arts and Utilitarian Objects, Ceramic/ Ceramic pigment

Hopituh Shinumu-Tewa (Hopi) U.S. Southwest region



Dextra Quotskuyva (b. 1928) is a Native American potter and artist often considered the most famous Hopi potter living today. She's the great-granddaughter of Nampeyo, (1860-1942) a Hopi potter who revived Sikyakti pottery in Arizona. Her mother and grandmother were among the most influential Native American potters of the past half-century, and she descends from a distinguished ancestral line of potters, beginning in prehistoric times. Sikyakti are the ruins located on the First Mesa of the Hopi reservation that were excavated in 1896, recovering 16th and 17th century pottery. Dextra studied all the known pieces of Nampeyo and the old Sikyatki pots in museums and photographs and she takes these traditional designs and uses them in imaginative new ways, giving them a look all its own. Her works are highly sought after and difficult to obtain. She is a mentor to popular potters such as Steve Lucas and Jacob Koopee, as well as her daughter Hisi Nampeyo and grandson Lowell Cheresposy.

Dextra is known for her novel decorations and her combination of traditional with contemporary. Following tradition in every aspect of construction and firing has always been a rule with her. She gathers her own clay from the nearby earth, abiding by age-old Hopi-Tewa traditions in constructing her vessels. To shape and finish her pots, she uses hand-coiling and traditional tools such as gourds to shape the pots and river pebbles to polish the clay, and trimmed strips of yucca for painting. She is among the last potters to build her own *puki*. This shallow, bowl-type device acts as a form on which she starts the vessel, and it supports it during the coiling and shaping process. To make a *puki*, she compresses wood ashes mixed with water into a basin. For the firing process, she uses sheep dung as fuel. She is a master of the firing process. She fires only one or two pots at a time, reducing the risk of damage to their surfaces, should one vessel accidentally touch another.

To prepare her paints, she gathers Rocky Mountain beeplant and tansy mustard. She boils the plants, strains the concoction, and dries it by wrapping it in cornhusks for a year or more. She gathers chunks of hematite on walks in the countryside and uses them for her dark brown paint. She uses kaolin from the abandoned Hopi site of Awatovi, adding white to her palette. Although her pottery is rooted in ancient traditions of her people, like all great innovators, she uses her material to impart creative interpretations unique to her. She goes much further than just re-creating images made famous by her great-grandmother Nampeyo.

Sometimes her painted designs originate in dreams or visions, and other times it's a particular life experience. She never repeats a vessel design, as she regards each pottery piece as almost an animate being with its own individual character. She was proclaimed an "Arizona Living Treasure" and she received the first Arizona State Museum Lifetime Achievement Award in 1998.

Awatovi is a National Historic Landmark in Navajo County, Arizona. In 1540, Coronado's men visited this village and what now remains are the ruins of a 500 year old pueblo. It's within the bounds of the Hopi Indian Reservation. Awatovi was the first of the Hopi villages to be conquered by the Spanish and was one of its largest and most important villages. In 1629, Spanish friars built a mission over the main kiva, following the practice of "supremacy" where a church would be built over the most important site to the "heathen" religion. By the end of 1700, the extreme hostility of most Hopis to Christian converts

at Awatovi led to the destruction of the pueblo. The attackers killed all the men at Awatovi and scattered the women and children among the other villages. The site was never reoccupied.

Dr. J. O. Brew of the Peabody Museum (Harvard U.) excavated the site in 1935 and uncovered a large amount of aboriginal material: pottery, stone, bone artifacts. Today, the fields and gardens near Awatovi are cultivated by the descendants of the women and children who survived the destruction of the village in 1700. They live in the First and Second pueblos, where Dextra continues to make her home.

For our piece, *Awatovi Birds*, the artist re-imagined a portion of a mural in the ancient ruined village of Awatovi. The bowl has a warm honey colored slip and a bird motif. The form is a seed jar pot, a shape Dextra likes to work with. She explains that she put the two slits in the side so as not to be bound by tradition, and instead, to look for new paths of creativity.

Questions:

1. What words would you use to describe this bowl?
2. What might this pot feel like if you could touch it? How do you think that the artist accomplished these textures?
3. What could have been the inspiration for the images seen here?
4. If you had this pottery in your own home, where would you place it? How might you use it?

Awatovi Birds could be used for:

Made in America

Artists' Choices

How Was it Made?

Ancient Influences on Art

Decorative Arts: Beauty in the Useful

Women in Art

Art Since 1950

Submitted by Paula Sanan

TITLE:
Awatovi Birds

ARTIST:

Dextra Quotskuyva

DATE:

1990

MEDIUM:

Ceramic, pigment

DIMENSIONS:

4 1/2 x 15 in. (11.43 x 38.1 cm)

CREATION PLACE:

North America, United States, Southwest region

CREDIT LINE:

The John R. Van Derlip Fund

ACCESSION NUMBER:

91.3

LOCATION:

G259

In the early 1900s, Nampeyo's eyesight started to fail, so she began to focus on building the vessels and left most of the painting up to Lleso and her daughter, Annie Healing. Pottery making is a family enterprise among Pueblo villages, which has allowed for Nampeyo to pass her legacy on to subsequent generations. Dextra Quotskuyva, Nampeyo's great-granddaughter, has been an extremely successful potter. Quotskuyva takes her inspiration not only from her great-grandmother but also from her own life experiences. For this piece, *Awatovi Birds*, the artist re-imagined a portion of a mural in the ancient ruined Hopituh Shinumu village of Awatovi.