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**Subject:** Maria and Julian Martinez pottery 91.177.3

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## **91.177.3 and 86.94.1 MARIA AND JULIAN MARTINEZ POTTERY**

Hi everyone, I included all my research so you can cut and paste based on several themes.  
Gail

### **Ceramic Vessel - Black ware; Po-woh-ge-oweenge (San Ildefonso Pueblo)**



**91.177.3 (on view); early 20<sup>th</sup> c.; 6 x 7 1/2"**

Contrasting surface design of matte or dull black on polished, glossy black, with textural contrast.

### **QUESTIONS:**

What do you think this pot would feel like if you could touch it? Would all the areas feel the same (rough/smooth)? What makes you say that?

This whole pot has been painted black, yet the decorations are easy to see. How do you think this might have been achieved?

Compare and contrast with Rose Gonzales's carved pottery, also black ware from San Ildefonso Pueblo (L82.303.11).

### **PROCESS/SPIRITUALITY:**

The knowledge of a native craftsperson grows out of rigorous apprenticeship in material and methods. Each decision influences the finished look of the vessels. A Pueblo potter for example must learn:

1. Where to find the clay that has exactly the right properties.

Clay is a gift from Mother Earth, and like all of her gifts, it is sacred. Potters may pray before taking the clay; they make an offering of cornmeal, asking permission from Mother Earth to take part of her body to use for pottery to support themselves and their children. Not every woman still leaves behind cornmeal, but all speak with reverence of their medium. (5)

2. What tempering material to choose to achieve a slower, more even dried result when firing the vessel (If potters use pure clay the pots will crack as they dry and shrink for the outside surface dries faster than the inside.)  
Maria Martinez used sand. She sifted the sand through cloth and also sifted the clay through a flour sack before mixing it with water. The clay rested overnight before shaping the following day. (6) Today San Ildefonso Pueblo pays Pojoaque Pueblo for the right to collect this sand.
3. Pots were hand formed (No wheel), coil built, scraped with a gourd piece. The bottom of the pot is formed and placed on a base (puki), which is often the bottom of an older, broken pot.
4. Knowledge of the properties of clay slips. (Slips smooth the surface with a coating of finely ground clay; they add color; some contribute to turning the plant-derived paint black in firing; and they provide the base layer for polishing and painting.) Iron bearing slip was applied and burnished to a sheen while still wet, with a stone in a horizontal, rhythmic motion.
5. Polishing technique.  
Maria polished parts of this vessel with a special polishing stone, perhaps given to her by her mother. Pueblo pottery can shine like river cobbles after a rain shower, but it is not from glazed finish, but from hand-rubbed polish. Polishing takes a precise touch: press too hard, scratch the slip and you must sand it off and do the whole thing again. (5)
6. Knowledge of slips (clay thinned with water). A red clay slip was painted on the portions of a polished pot, with a brush made from a dried yucca leaf that was chewed to shape the fibers. The matte designs are painted on the polished surface as the "background" to the design and provide the contrast after firing.
7. The best weather to fire an outdoor kiln (ambient temperature, the direction and velocity of the wind). Firing days are dry and calm; a hot, clean fire is critical. Potters try to fire a dawn in summer, when the air is still and cool. A gust of wind at the wrong time can drop the temperature and make a pot explode. Air bubbles in the clay can also make a pot "pop". A piece of manure falling onto the polished slip can smudge the pot with "fire clouds". Firing, like every step in the art, is sacred, and risky enough that even some of the less traditional people will make an offering before lighting their fires. Some potters use a firing ground blessed by a medicine man- a secret and sacred place.
8. Pueblo people build a kiln from scratch each time they ground-fire their pots. A grate a few inches off the ground supports the pots and leaves room for kindling underneath.
9. Type of manure to feed the fire. To achieve the lustrous black surface so famous at San Ildefonso, towards the end of firing potters smother the fire with fine horse manure, preventing oxygen from reaching the pots and creating a reducing atmosphere – and considerable smoke. The carbon in the heavy black smoke colors the red clay jet black throughout. Ashes heaped on the manure keep the heat and smoke in even longer and prevent thermal shock. In order to preserve the high polish, the pots are fired at low temperatures and may no longer be waterproof. (I don't know if this one is or isn't waterproof.)
10. When to remove the pots. Over firing makes pots dull. (1.2)

"Out of the silences of meditation come purity and power which eventually become apparent in our art: the many spirits which enter about us, in us, are transformed within us, moving from an endless past not gone, not dead, but with a threshold that is the present. From this time sense, for this experience deep within, our forms are created." Maria Martinez. (10)

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**HISTORY AND OUTSIDE INFLUENCES ON PUEBLO POTTERY:** The Pueblo peoples' strong ties to traditional culture are evident in their extensive, rich pottery traditions. The oldest Southwest pottery in the United States dates to 2500 B.C. Ancestral Puebloans made pottery for use in two primary ways: to be buried with the dead and for daily uses such as cooking and storing grains and water. When the Spanish settled in the Southwest beginning in the seventeenth century, church authorities prevented the Puebloans from burying their dead in the traditional fashion, instead insisting on Christian burial practices. As a result, Pueblo people were forced to concentrate on making utilitarian pottery, only creating a small number of ceremonial vessels in secret. (1)

When the transcontinental railroad reached New Mexico in 1880, Pueblo potters again adapted their production and styles, this time to meet the demands of a new marketplace. Pottery and other traditional art forms were made for commercial sale in addition to local use.

Customarily, Pueblo potters are women, and the pottery techniques and traditions are passed from generation to generation. Maria Martinez's mother taught her daughters, "It was the woman's part of living to hold things together. Men could build up or tear down houses and ditch banks; but women put clay and sand together to make pottery. That was part of a woman's life, to make things whole."

**Po-woh-ge-oweenge** (the Tewa name for) **SAN ILDEFONSO PUEBLO:** The Tewa name means Place Where Waters Meet. The Pueblo is located on the upper Rio Grande below the junction of that river with the Chama. Located in Santa Fe County, New Mexico, 25 miles north of the city of Santa Fe, San Ildefonso Pueblo has been inhabited since around 1300 C.E. The San Ildefonso people trace their origins from north of Mesa Verde in southwestern Colorado. Their ancestors migrated to the Parajito Plateau near their present pueblo site and established the villages of Tsankawi, Otowi, Tynonyi, and Navawi before finally settling in their current location. (2)

A Spanish expedition in 1591 reported the population of the village to be around 2,000 people. Battles with the Spanish, the smallpox epidemic of 1780-1793, and the 1918 Spanish flu epidemic all reduced the Pueblo's population to 90 people in 1918. (Current population is around 600.) (2)

San Ildefonso's traditional agriculture based economy shifted during the mid 1920's to an economy based mostly on its arts and crafts industry. Traditional polychrome pottery which had been made by the San Ildefonso women for hundreds of years experienced a revival in the 1880's due to the coming of the railroad to New Mexico. In 1908, Maria and Julian Martinez were building a reputation for their Tanyo Polychrome pottery. Around 1919, Julian perfected a technique to create a matte black paint on a polished black surface. This technique became the trademark for San Ildefonso pottery. The style became extremely popular with tourists and collectors and also sparked a revival of Pueblo pottery making in other New Mexico pueblos. The making and selling of pottery became an important industry for the San Ildefonso economy. Today most of San Ildefonso's 600 residents make their living by making and selling arts and crafts.

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**MARIA MONTOYA MARTINEZ** (Poveka, Yellow Pond Lily) (1887-1980) is one of the most famous of all the pueblo potters. Growing up in the pueblo of San Ildefonso she learned to make pottery from her aunt Nicolasa Montoya. By the time she was thirteen she had acquired exceptional skill. In 1904 she married her husband Julian Martinez who was an acknowledged painter and they spent their honeymoon demonstrating pottery and native dances at the St. Louis World's Fair. They worked as a team with Maria forming and polishing the pots while Julian did the decorating and painting. In 1918/19 Maria and Julian discovered how to make the now famous black-on-black pottery. She and Julian continued to exhibit their work at exhibitions and World Fairs. In 1925 they won Best of Show at the New York World's Fair and eight years later won Best of Show at the 1934 Chicago World's Fair. They also exhibited at the 1915 Panama California Exposition in San Diego and the 1938 Golden

Gate International Exposition in San Francisco.

By 1915, Maria Martinez's work commanded the highest prices of any Pueblo potter. She began signing her pots around 1920, for the public was willing to pay top dollar for a vessel that had been validated with the signature of the most famous potter. The wealth accrued from their pottery allowed Maria and Julian to live in a way enjoyed by few Native people in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially those who continued to live within their communities. They hired others to do their farming and household chores, and they owned the first car at the San Ildefonso Pueblo.

**JULIAN MARTINEZ:** (1897-1943) In 1907 Julian was hired by Dr. Edgar Hewett the Director of the School of American Research in Santa Fe, New Mexico to help in an archaeological excavation on the Pajarito Plateau. He was excavating in Rio de los Frijoles Canyon whose sites are ancestral to the people of San Ildefonso, and what is now Bandelier National Monument. Here, Julian copied pottery and wall designs from the ruins. Dr. Hewett asked Maria to duplicate a particular potsherd that they were unearthing to settle some technical questions. (6)

Julian was a great innovator and was always experimenting with new paints, clays and pottery techniques. They were encouraged in their experimentation by the Museum of New Mexico, where they lived and worked from 1909-1912. Maria shaped pots, and when he had finished his janitorial duties, Julian painted them, making famous the avanyu, the water serpent design. (8) By 1919 Julian's experiments had led him to the invention of the now famous matte-black-on-polished-black pottery. By 1921, Julian had perfected the process and black-on-black pottery became extremely popular. While Maria became the undisputed best potter of San Ildefonso, Julian became the undisputed best painter of pottery.

Together Maria and Julian were key figures in leading a pottery and cultural heritage revival, not only at San Ildefonso, but at other pueblos as well. Pottery making has become the single most important source of income for many of the pueblos today.

### **SIGNATURES & RELATIONS:**

Museum goers are accustomed to seeing fine historic Native objects on display with no artist's name credited. Yet the finest artists of most cultures and historical eras were likely recognized for their excellence, despite the fact that signing a work of art is not universally practiced. (1.2) Maria and Julian had four sons: Adam, Juan Diego, Popovi Da, and Phillip who were also taught the art of pottery making. After Julian's death in 1943, Maria began working with Santana, Adam's wife, who took over painting and decorating Maria's pottery. After 1956, Maria also worked with her son, Popovi Da.

Signatures on Maria's pottery will vary depending with whom she was working at the time. Early pieces by Maria and Julian (1918-1923) are unsigned. By 1923 Maria began signing "Marie" on pieces made by her and Julian. (She thought white collectors would prefer a more Anglo-sounding name and used "Marie".) Julian's name was first added in 1925 to the signature since he did all the painting of designs and helped with the firing. From 1925, until Julian's death in 1943, the signature was "Marie + Julian". Pieces made from 1943-1954 are signed "Marie + Santana" or "Maria + Santana". When Popovi began working with his mother they would co-sign pieces "Maria/Popovi". Maria also made small pieces without assistance of anyone which are always plain, polished, undecorated pieces and are signed "Maria Poveka". (2)

### **POSSIBLE TOUR THEMES:**

1. Concerning the Spiritual in Art
2. How was it made?
3. Why is the sky yellow? Artist Choices
4. Ancient Influences on Art (black on black)

4. ANCIENT INFLUENCES ON ART (BLACK ON BLACK)

5. Collaborative Art

6. Take Me to the Fair

7. Weddings and Honeymoons

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Gail Gresser-Pitsch

March, 2011

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**RELATED OBJECTS:**



**Maria and Julian Martinez**

**86.94.1 (not on view);**

**early 20<sup>th</sup> c.; Signature 'Marie', in pencil, under base; 6 1/4 x 8 x 8 in.**

**Signature 'Marie', in pencil, under base; 6 1/4 x 8 x 8 in. (Art Adventure Item).** The Avanyu (ah-VON-yu)(water serpent) design was first shown in a group of pots made in 1917 by Marian and decorated by Julian. Adapted from an ancient Mesoamerican deity who was thought to have brought the knowledge of art, science, and agriculture to humans, today the avanyu decorated pottery type is synonymous with San Ildefonso Pueblo. The serpent with a pointed "droplet" attached to the end the horn is a pattern signifying rain or a storm, just as the zigzag issuing from the serpent's mouth indicates lightning. Water is precious in the desert and imagery associated with it carries power. Julian interpreted this as a symbol of thanksgiving for water and rain. (7)

**Rose Gonzales (San Ildefonso Pueblo) (born c.1900- died 1989) (L82.303.11)**

Rose married and moved to San Ildefonso in 1930. Also that year, she began her innovative process of deep carved pottery. Using a knife and chisel she carved out her designs and sanded them to create round forms. She used juniper wood and cow dung in her firing.

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### SOURCES:

- (1) <http://www.artsmia.org/thaw-collection/pdfs/All%20Regions.pdf>  
(1.2) From Understanding the Thaw Collection catalogue: Native American Art History in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, by Janet Catherine Berlo, 2010.
- (2) Through the Eyes of the Pot: A Study of Southwest Pueblo Pottery and Culture. The Morgan Collection of Southwest Pottery, Holmes Museum of Anthropology, Wichita State University. (Website also has examples of the various signatures.)<http://www.holmes.anthropology.museum/southwestpottery/index.html>
- (3) Gibson, Daniel; Pueblos of the Rio Grande; 2001; pp.58-59.
- (4) Bandelier National Monument  
<http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/exhibits/band/overview.html>
- (5) Talking with the Clay, The Art of Pueblo Pottery, interviews with Stephen Trimble (1984-1986); 1988.
- (6) Maria: The Potter of San Ildefonso by Alice Marriott, printed 1987 (based on daily interviews in 1945-46).
- (7) Lost and Found Traditions of Native American Art 1965-1985, by Ralph T. Coe.
- (8) Native American Women: A Biographical Dictionary, editor: Gretchen M. Bataille, 2001.
- (9) Hands of Maria part1.mp4 video on You Tube, by Kansas City Museum of History and Science, 1968. (Shows Maria working! Edited down, would be a great prop.)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7AhX1MhvAG8>
- (10) <http://www.artsmia.org/surrounded-by-beauty/curriculum/Southwest.pdf>

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

1. Art Adventure Guide: Martinez Bowl (86.94.1)
2. Teacher Resources from the Heard Museum of Fine Art, Phoenix (San Ildefonso Watercolor Movement 1900-1910) (Native American timeline)  
<http://www.heard.org/education/curriculummaterials.html>
3. For an illustrated description of Pueblo pottery techniques, visit:  
[http://www.artsmia.org/world-ceramics/hopi\\_seedjar/made.html](http://www.artsmia.org/world-ceramics/hopi_seedjar/made.html)
4. In Santa Fe, on the Trail of New Deal Artists, by Jori Finkel, The New York Times, published: March 12, 2008.





Maria and Julian Martinez pictured outside Santa Fe's Palace of the Governors in 1912.





Maria, 1941 (Photo: Wyatt Davis/Palace of the Governors (MNM/DCA))

