

born of clay



"What we see here are bridges of space and time: I look at an Aztec or Inka piece and know that it could just as well be a contemporary Pueblo piece. What is tradition today was contemporary yesterday, and it can still be both contemporary and traditional.

Jody Folwell
(Santa Clara Pueblo)

Indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere have been making pottery for thousands of years, and for many Native people ceramics maintain a sense of profound meaning and purpose. The 301 remarkable pieces in this exhibition span 5,000 years and four distinct regions—the Andes, eastern North America, Mesoamerica, and the southwestern United States. These clay creations are explored as the products of ongoing, complex societies and individual artistry.

Born of Clay includes the ideas of eight potters from the four regions. These contemporary artists tell us that despite differences in the composition, form, and decoration of pottery, Native potters share respect for ancestral traditions, a belief in the sacredness of clay, and an appreciation for the changing use of ceramics. Their voices reveal stories of continuity and change across millennia.

above: Mixtec potters, ca. 1898. Cuquila, Oaxaca, Mexico. Frederick Starr Collection.
Photographer unknown. N17010

Born of Clay: Ceramics from the National Museum of the American Indian is on view at the Heye Center through spring 2007.

Support for the exhibition has been generously provided by Barbara and James Block.

For public programs, please check the NMAI Calendar of Events at www.AmericanIndian.si.edu.

George Gustav Heye Center
One Bowling Green
New York, NY 10004

Heye Center hours: 10 AM to 5 PM every day, except December 25. Thursdays to 8 PM.
Admission: free.
The museum is fully accessible.

For recorded information about exhibitions, museum programs, and services, call 212-514-3888.

To become a Charter Member of the National Museum of the American Indian, call 1-800-242-NMAI [6624] or email aimember@nmai.si.edu.

The book **Born of Clay: Ceramics from the National Museum of the American Indian**, 96 pages and featuring more than 225 illustrations, is available in NMAI shops and online at www.AmericanIndian.si.edu.

Visit NMAI's website at www.AmericanIndian.si.edu.

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COVER

left: Late Mississippian globular bottle, AD 1450–1600. Rose Place, Cross County, Arkansas. Modeled and incised ceramic. 17/4224

right: Maya tripod bowl depicting a bird, AD 1–650. Campeche, Mexico. Modeled and painted (pre- and post-firing) ceramic. 24/7762

Object photographs by Ernest Amoroso and Walter Larrimore, NMAI.



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CERAMICS

from the National Museum of the American Indian

 Smithsonian
National Museum of the American Indian

Connections in Clay

"I started making pots to concentrate on the past, to feel the ancestors, and it was like a healing process. Now when I make a pot, I can see the lives of my ancestors: what they suffered losing their land, their children, and their language. Going back is very important."

—*Jereldine Redcorn (Caddo/Potawatomi)*

Exhibitions at NMAI rely on the strength and authority of Native peoples' contemporary perspectives, experiences, and knowledge—which the museum calls *Native voice*. The eight contemporary potters invited to partner with curators at NMAI spoke eloquently of their ceramic and artistic traditions. Together, they developed four themes to represent the similarities, connections, and philosophies that they share as Native potters:

Reflections of Our Lives: Constructing Narratives

"The clay allows us to transmit our knowledge and our desires. It also helps us recall our grandparents. . . . We can hear the messages our grandparents left for us, and when we use the same designs, we project them into the future." —*Exaltación Mamani Amaro (Quechua)*

Clay Is Our Life: Materials and Techniques

"Each of us is privileged to be a potter, to be working with the Creator's materials. If you take care of the clay, it will take care of you. If you try to force the clay, it doesn't work; it has its own mind." —*Al Qöyawayma (Hopi)*

All My Relatives: Continuity, Change, and Creativity

"Our pottery is as dynamic as we are. . . . As pottery moves forward, it gains new uses, new buyers, and new artists. It changes and we change." —*Peter B. Jones (Onondaga)*

Born of Mother Earth: Knowing Our Worlds

"All potters are born of Mother Earth, and . . . we are brothers and sisters in the clay. No matter where some of these pieces are from, we can identify with their common ideas of men and women, birth, and our humanity." —*Eleazar Navarrete Ramírez (Nahua)*

Portrait of Maria Martinez (San Ildefonso Pueblo), adding a clay rope to a pot's walls, ca. 1935. New Mexico. Photographer unknown. P32021



The following potters contributed to this exhibition:

Exaltación Mamani Amaro (Quechua)
Jody Folwell (Santa Clara)
Peter B. Jones (Onondaga)
Rubén Agurio Martínez Martínez (Nahua)
Irma Rodríguez Moroco (Quechua)
Al Qöyawayma (Hopi)
Eleazar Navarrete Ramírez (Nahua)
Jereldine Redcorn (Caddo/Potawatomi)



above: Nazca canteen depicting water and fish, AD 100–600. Nazca Valley, Department of Ica, Peru. Modeled and painted ceramic. 11/2807

right: Late Mississippian (Fort Walton culture) double bowl, AD 1350–1550. Choctawhatchee Bay, Point Washington, Walton County, Florida. Modeled and incised ceramic. 17/3810

far right: Tile masks, ca. 2002. Made by Nora Naranjo-Morse (Santa Clara, b. 1953). Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico. Modeled and painted ceramic. 26/5270

The Andes: Embracing Tradition

Almost 6,000 years ago, the ancestors of today's Andean Native people settled in Ecuador and Colombia. They began making pottery, and this technology spread. Similarities in early ceramics suggest that a large part of the region shared a complex religion and ideology. Over time, though, communities developed unique traits based on environment and population. Beginning around 1000 BC, as large urban centers developed, potters made significant technological advances and introduced new vessel forms and decorative techniques. The Inka, the last Andean empire (AD 1400–1532), standardized ceramic production. After the 16th-century arrival of the Spanish, potters made pottery mainly for use in the home. Today's potters continue to use many of the same techniques and motifs common 500 years ago—a testament to Andean cultural continuity.

Eastern North America: Rivers of Interaction

In eastern North America—from the St. Lawrence Seaway south to Florida and west to Oklahoma—the earliest ceramics were made along the Georgia coast about 2500 BC. Throughout the region, pottery-making signaled the transition from hunting-and-gathering lifestyles to larger settled communities. Beginning



about 2,500 years ago, eastern Native people built earthworks and mounds connected by river-based trade and information networks. Later, Mississippian cultures in the heartland built North America's first cities. After the arrival of Europeans between 1500 and 1700, most communities stopped making pottery and adopted brass kettles and other containers. In the past several decades, Native artists from this region have worked to bring back their ceramic traditions.



Mesoamerica: Great Civilizations of Mexico and Central America

Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica covered a vast area from present-day southern Mexico to Guatemala, Belize, and parts of Honduras and El Salvador. Over a span of 4,000 years, ceramics reflected the tremendous economic, political, and social changes that Mesoamerican peoples experienced. Egalitarian societies gave way to city-states around 200 BC, the greatest being Teotihuacán, Monte Albán, and the Mayan cities. Beginning in AD 900, the region experienced increasing militarism and extensive migrations as leaders formed new political and trade alliances. Eventually, the Aztec spread their empire across Mesoamerica. The

Chupicuaro female figure, 400–150 BC. Chupicuaro, Guanajuato, Mexico. Modeled and painted ceramic. 24/7600

arrival of the Spanish in 1519 led artists to incorporate technologies, motifs, and forms from Europe into their work. Today, the descendants of Mesoamerican peoples continue their ceramic traditions with new perspectives, such as mixing Catholicism and traditional Native worldviews.

Southwestern United States: Continuity and Change

Pueblo potters of the Southwest work in a world filled with meanings and choices, and these philosophical underpinnings have sustained their pottery traditions for nearly 2,000 years. More Pueblo potters may be working today than at any other time in the culture's history. The sur-

rounding non-Pueblo world can entice members of the community away, but pottery serves as a buffer against outside influences. Pottery has always served as a primary means for Pueblo people to convey who they are to themselves and the outside world. Ceramic iconography has remained remarkably consistent for centuries because it mirrors and encompasses Pueblo values and consciousness so closely. Over the centuries, hundreds of styles have emerged only to disappear. Today's ceramics reflect numerous diverse influences—from utilitarian needs to the aesthetic demands of 21st-century collectors.

