

Tonita Peña and the Politics of Pueblo Art

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In a 1941 article titled “Indian Art,” the artist John Sloan described Pueblo painter Tonita Peña (Quah Ah) as “one of the most productive and at the same time most natural and sensitive of the Indian artists. She is self-taught, uneven, and has a weakness in being too responsive to popular demand. In other words, being a woman, she is very practical.” He had seen a small watercolor of “corn-ceremony dancers” (fig. 1), a scene likely taken from Peña’s home pueblo of Cochiti, where variations of the dance are performed annually.¹ Peña depicts the three figures with crisp contour lines and painstaking details, such as the needles on the dancers’ spruce sprigs, the beads of their necklaces, and the strands of feathers on the banner. While this dance would have featured hundreds of participants, the painting shows a representative few.² The dance represents an expansive set of Pueblo concerns. Corn Dances are performed not only to promote the successful planting, growing, and harvesting of corn but also to ensure fertility and well-being throughout the Pueblo world. Since all entities—humans, plants, animals, places, everything—are equally respected and innately connected in Pueblo epistemologies, this dance constitutes the broader Pueblo worldview. In fact, the commonly used “Corn Dance” label is a misnomer that Pueblos likely adopted at about the turn of the twentieth century when tourists began visiting the pueblos; it was a way of describing this dance ceremony in terms more comprehensible to Euro-Americans.³ Sloan had been such a tourist and depicted this ceremony in his *Dance at Cochiti Pueblo, New Mexico* (fig. 2). Whereas he followed Euro-American perspectival conventions of a fore-, middle-, and background, Peña used different strategies. Her figures dance across the void of a blank page, the intricacy of their movements offset by the unmarked expanse on which they seem to float.

Peña’s composition is typical of her oeuvre and resembles many secular, nonutilitarian paintings produced by her fellow Pueblo watercolorists. Hailing from San Ildefonso, Cochiti, and Zia Pueblos in New Mexico and Hopi in Arizona, these artists took up the Euro-American medium of watercolor on paper at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴ By 1920, Anglo anthropologists, artists, and philanthropists had begun to purchase their work, promoting it as an “authentic” Indian art in which, according to one critic, “typical Indian designs and motifs are here transferred to the new medium.”⁵ Most of the watercolors feature dancers in an unarticulated space, as in Peña’s image of the corn dancers. Painters who deviated too far from this compositional formula were criticized for showing Euro-American stylistic influence. As the curator Holger Cahill stated in 1922 in “America Has Its ‘Primitives’: Aboriginal Water Colorists of New Mexico Make Faithful Record of Their Race,” the best Native watercolorists avoided the formal qualities of “his white brother” to

- 1 Tonita Peña (Quah Ah), *Untitled (Corn Dance)*, before 1941. Gouache on board, 14 × 12 in. Josephine Altman Case Collection, Lamar Dodd Art Center, LaGrange College, LeGrange, Ga. Published with the permission of Joe Herrera Jr. on behalf of the Peña family. Photo digitally enhanced to remove physical damage
- 2 John Sloan, *Dance at Cochiti Pueblo, New Mexico*, 1922. Oil on canvas, 22¼ × 30¼ in. Delaware Art Museum, Gift of the John Sloan Memorial Foundation, 1997, Delaware Art Museum/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



produce “an instinctive expression of the Indian’s aesthetic life in a new dimension.”⁶ The Pueblo painters performed a kind of autoethnography, creating imagery that fit the expectations of the Anglo art market for primitivism while remaining faithful to their own cultural customs. To borrow a phrase from the art historian Ruth B. Phillips, they “turn[ed] modernist primitivism into indigenous modernity.” For these works were modern, albeit reflective of a facet of modernism that has been overshadowed by narrow Euro-American definitions of the term.⁷

The “multiple modernisms” framework that Phillips and others have put forward is an effort to decolonize academic studies of modernism. It asserts that Indigenous artists like Peña should not have their work forced into a priori narratives of modernism, primarily written by and about Euro-Americans. Rather, scholars should think through the art of the late-nineteenth through twentieth centuries more inclusively. If modernism breaks with the past and searches for the new and radical, then multiple modernisms allows for reference to and continuance of earlier traditions. While modernism locates the production of art in the metropolises of Europe and the United States, multiple modernisms orients to local art centers around the world (some quite remote by modernism’s standards). Whereas modernist artists—in search of the new, coming from Euro-American locations—turned to the visual traditions of Indigenous peoples for “primitive” inspiration, Indigenous modernists borrowed from Euro-American aesthetic modes and re-appropriated the primitivist imagery of their non-Native peers. Peña and her fellow watercolorists forged Pueblo aesthetic customs that were new—yet tied to preexisting cultural mores. They produced the majority of their work from their pueblos and negotiated Anglo expectations of primitivism in works created with Euro-American materials. Their practices evince the multiplicity of modernist art modes. Peña’s gender further warrants the use of

the multiple modernisms theory in regards to her work. Historically, modernism was largely the purview of *men*, whereas multiple modernisms incorporates feminist revisions challenging patriarchal and colonialist structures.

By the time he wrote “Indian Art,” Sloan had been promoting American Indian artwork, particularly Pueblo watercolors, for more than two decades. His language in the article, however, is symptomatic of the way he and others viewed Peña, the sole woman of the earliest generation of Pueblo watercolor painters: in gendered terms. All the Pueblo painters faced racial stereotyping, but Peña also had to deal with gender clichés in both Anglo and Pueblo contexts. This article considers one of her series to focus on her unusual position in this group, contending that Peña’s gender influenced the production of her work as well as its reception by Anglos and Pueblos.⁸ While texts like Sloan’s betray a gendered rhetoric in keeping with period reception of most work by women artists (Native or not), Pueblo cultural traditions regarding gender roles must also be taken into account.⁹ Such traditions come through in Peña’s subject matter and stylistic choices. Like most of the early Pueblo watercolor painters, she portrayed ceremonial dances more often than any other subject, followed by genre scenes, primarily of women making pottery.¹⁰ Within Pueblo culture, pottery production is an area of traditional knowledge and skill for women, one that Peña herself had learned. This may explain why her images of the subject are more comprehensive than those of her male colleagues.¹¹

This newly adopted Euro-American practice of watercolor painting was comparable to the custom of painting sacred figurative images on kiva walls—a male activity, per Pueblo convention. Consequently, Pueblo societies deemed watercolor painting more suitable for men than for women. Peña was thus an anomaly. The void within which her corn dancers perform is characteristic of her work and demonstrates the extreme care she took not to expose secret Pueblo knowledge. Male Pueblo painters were not immune to accusations of revealing secret information, and as the scholars Sascha T. Scott and Jessica L. Horton have shown, they turned to similar strategies for concealing privileged Indigenous knowledge. But Peña’s gender made her particularly susceptible to criticism, contrary to art historian J. J. Brody’s claim that “there is no indication that anyone thought it unusual for a Pueblo woman to paint pictures on paper, even though the new art was more like traditional Pueblo men’s painting than women’s.” I build upon the work of art historians Marilee Jantzer-White, Cynthia Fowler, and W. Jackson Rushing III, who have addressed the challenges Peña faced as a woman watercolorist.¹² I further assert that while her unarticulated backgrounds suggest she sought to avoid compromising Pueblo secrets, Peña’s inclusion of stylistically representational images of people and objects is evidence of a micro-rebellion against Pueblo customs that designated men as the painters of figurative imagery, while women were expected to paint abstract, conventionalized designs. Considering abstraction per Pueblo aesthetic customs, my analysis moves beyond the historical modernist conception of abstraction as a universal language, instead looking to its role in a culturally contingent and gendered practice.

The terms “Pueblo,” “woman,” and “artist” are key to Peña’s identity, and taken together, they point to intersectional concerns that emerge in her work, just as my own descriptors—“Anglo-American,” “woman,” “art historian”—are relevant to the ways I approach this material. Peña balanced Anglo patrons’ expectations of Indianness, Pueblo protocols regarding what can be depicted, and gender norms set by both Anglo and Pueblo societies, all while maintaining a critical sense of aesthetic agency and epistemological power. Her imagery and the issues surrounding its production and reception point to the diversity of modernist stylistic modes, subject positions, and political motives within early Pueblo watercolor practices, while connecting her work with Pueblo artists who came before her and those working today.

- 3 Tonita Peña (Quah Ah), Bowl, 1934. Clay and paint, 7 1/16 x 11 7/16 in. School for Advanced Research, Santa Fe, N.M., SAR.1993-1-1. Donated by Ida M. Shaw, Gift of the artist to the Shaw family. This image has been approved for publication by Joe Herrera Jr. on behalf of the Peña family; Governor Joseph L. Herrera, Cochiti Pueblo; the Indian Arts Research Center at the School for Advanced Research; and Clarence Cruz and Mary Evangeline Suina, cultural representatives for the Indigenous knowledge of Pueblo pottery. Photo: Addison Doty

Peña and Pueblo Pottery

Pottery is deeply embedded in Pueblo ontologies. Contemporary Santa Clara Pueblo potter Tessie Naranjo believes “the making of pots embodies a cultural continuity that not only links us to our ancestors but calls forth the presence of our old Tewa cosmology. . . . The notion of container is crucial to the world view of the Pueblo. The lower half of our cosmos is a pot which contains life. It is the womb of the mother.” She further relates vessels’ forms to the pueblo plaza that is bounded by houses and surrounding mountains. Pottery metonymically reinscribes what Santa Clara anthropologist Edward P. Dozier characterized as the “concentric ecological zones emanating outwards from the center of the pueblo.”¹³

Born in 1893 at Tewa-speaking San Ildefonso Pueblo, Peña came from a family long lauded for its pottery. Her maternal grandmother, Maria Tona Arquero Vigil, was one of the best-known potters at San Ildefonso. One of Vigil’s four children, Martina Vigil

Montoya, and her husband Florentino Montoya, gained renown for their ceramics, with Martina coiling and shaping the pots and Florentino ornamenting them with polychrome designs. Traditionally, every step of the pottery-making process had been completed by women, but this gendered division of labor—women forming vessels and male relatives painting them—was becoming typical at the beginning of the twentieth century. (Today, men and women participate in all steps.) Peña learned both aspects of pottery production from her aunt and uncle, first at San Ildefonso and later at Keres-speaking Cochiti Pueblo, where they moved in 1905.¹⁴ One of Peña’s vessels from the early 1930s features a graphic black design on a white background, reflecting her familiarity with the conventions of abstract ornamentation (fig. 3). Yet unlike many of her fellow watercolorists (several of whom also painted pottery), Peña never used such abstraction in her images, which remained resolutely representational throughout her career.





4 Tonita Peña (Quah Ah), *Making Pottery*, ca. 1922. Watercolor on paper, 14½ × 22½ in. Courtesy of the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture/Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, N.M., 24305/13. Published with the permission of Joe Herrera Jr. on behalf of the Peña family

While her watercolor paintings do not replicate the compositional abstraction of pottery designs, Peña did depict the pottery-making process and the actual vessels. One of her earliest extant watercolors, *Making Pottery* (fig. 4), shows a woman seated on a wooden bench, using a yucca brush (a yucca leaf that has been chewed until its end has frayed into clean, separated fibers) to paint a design along the lip of an otherwise plain white pot. At her feet are nine other vessels, of which three have been painted; one holds her brushes and the dark pigment. The seated figure may represent Peña herself; according to her son Joe Herrera, Peña used her own face as a model for the women in many early works. He also observed that the pottery in her watercolors is often based on vessels she shaped and decorated, although Jonathan Batkin, a historian of Pueblo pottery, identifies the designs in *Making Pottery* as characteristic of Peña's uncle Montoya.¹⁵ Regardless of the exact derivation, the picture would have reminded viewers that women can—indeed, traditionally did—paint, not just shape, Pueblo vessels.

A series of six undated paintings (produced prior to 1937) further show Pueblo women's mastery of pottery painting. They also illustrate the effort and skill required to produce the clay, shape and smooth the vessels, and fire the finished products—parts of the process Pueblo women continued to carry out even after men started painting pottery. The series is thus crucial to understanding the gendered nature of Peña's art production, and the following analysis serves to explain the process for readers unfamiliar with Pueblo pottery.

To produce the material used for Pueblo vessels, potters dig dried clay out of quarries. Most potters first make an offering; sprinkling cornmeal is a common gesture. Contemporary Ohkay Owingeh potter Clarence Cruz emphasizes the humility with which one must approach the material; “you ask permission, you say a prayer to give it thanks, and you state your purpose and your reason for being there.”¹⁶ Potters sift the clay to remove impurities (e.g., stones and twigs), mix it with temper (a gritty, sandlike material that keeps the clay stable during drying and firing), and add water. They then knead the clay before coiling and shaping it into a pot. In *Women Working Clay, Shaping Vessels* (fig. 5), Peña’s first painting of the series, the woman on the left is kneading and the woman at far right is coiling the clay. The latter has patted out a base, placed it in a *puki*—a bowl or plate that supports the clay as it is shaped—and is in the process of building the walls of the pot.¹⁷ At center, a third woman smooths the sides of a much larger vessel, also supported by a *puki*, as are four nearby vessels. A small pot next to the woman coiling and another one behind the large vessel at center hold fist-sized lumps of clay, which will be used to roll out more coils. The two pots nearest the woman at left appear to hold the water and the clay with which she works, and a third, slightly larger pot to her right has a gourd ladle hooked around its lip. The image thus collapses several steps in the earliest stages of pottery production into one picture. A process that would take several days is illustrated in one scene, and the finished pots containing pottery-making supplies point to both the raw materials from which these vessels are created and the objects brought forth by the women’s labor.

5 Tonita Peña (Quah Ah), *Women Working Clay, Shaping Vessels*, early 20th century. Casein on paper, 14 × 22 in. Detroit Institute of Arts, 37.208.1. Published with the permission of Joe Herrera Jr. on behalf of the Peña family. USAPhoto ©The Detroit Institute of Arts/Gift of Miss Amelia Elizabeth White/Bridgeman Images





6 Tonita Peña (Quah Ah), *The Air Dried Vessels are Polished by Rubbing with Pebbles*, early 20th century. Casein on paper, 14 × 22 in. Detroit Institute of Arts, 37.208.2. Published with the permission of Joe Herrera Jr. on behalf of the Peña family. USAPhoto © The Detroit Institute of Arts/Gift of Miss Amelia Elizabeth White/Bridgeman Images

The materials and the vessels of this women-controlled mode of cultural production are living substances imbued with regenerative power per Pueblo epistemologies. Carl E. Guthe, an anthropologist who surveyed pottery making at San Ildefonso in 1921, noted that “it is certain that there must be involved in the making of pottery and particularly in its decoration, a mass of esoteric beliefs and practises. The Pueblos, however, are so loath to refer in any way to the mystical side of their existence . . . that it seemed best to steer clear of all allusion to such matters.” Instead, he delivers a report primarily based on “the purely technical side of the potter’s art.”¹⁸

The second image is titled *The Air Dried Vessels are Polished by Rubbing with Pebbles* (fig. 6), a somewhat misleading label, as only one of these women uses a polishing stone, and some of the women are slipping, not polishing—indicating that museum staff or a collector bestowed the titles on the watercolors, not Peña.¹⁹ Cochiti potters used rags or small bits of leather to polish their works, whereas potters at San Ildefonso used stones until the early twentieth century, when Peña’s aunt Martina introduced Cochiti cloth-polishing to her former San Ildefonsan neighbors. She also introduced them to the Cochiti white bentonite slip, which we see the figure at far left applying to a dried pot. The woman applies the slip, a thin mixture of water and clay, with a cloth—not a stone. A large pot in front of her awaits slip application; another two are already finished, as they are white except for the interior of the larger vessel and a small band of unslipped surface at the bottom of both pots. The two women at right nod to San Ildefonso customs, one applying red slip to the bottom band, the other using a stone to polish the red-slipped band. Montoya abandoned



7 Tonita Peña (Quah Ah), *The Vessels are Decorated*, early 20th century. Casein on paper, 14 × 22 in. Detroit Institute of Arts, 37.208.3. Published with the permission of Joe Herrera Jr. on behalf of the Peña family. USAPhoto © The Detroit Institute of Arts/Gift of Miss Amelia Elizabeth White/Bridgeman Images

this feature after moving to Cochiti; instead, she left the lower section unslipped to reveal the clay color or covered the whole pot with white slip, like the woman in pink in Peña's scene.²⁰ Three pots at her feet have been entirely slipped in white, and she is slipping or polishing the vessel she holds with a cloth. In including pots with red bands in addition to vessels completely slipped in white, and referencing both cloth and stone-polishing, Peña reveals an inter-Pueblo exchange of method, material, and style in her scene.

The next in the series, *The Vessels are Decorated* (fig. 7), shows the four women painting designs on the slipped and polished pots. The largest vessel demonstrates the process: the woman painting it has outlined shapes that she returns to infill with black. Guthe asked women at San Ildefonso about their painted designs, reporting that such inquiries were “wholly fruitless,” because if “there are definite meanings associated with the designs upon commercial pottery, the inhabitants of San Ildefonso have become past masters of the art of concealment.” At most, potters would explain some part of the imagery but never its full meaning.²¹ Outsiders could safely view the designs, but overzealous questions about their symbolism would be shut down.



8 Tonita Peña (Quah Ah), *They are Set up on Props for Firing*, early 20th century. Casein on paper, 14 × 22 in. Detroit Institute of Arts, 37.208.4. Published with the permission of Joe Herrera Jr. on behalf of the Peña family. USAPhoto © The Detroit Institute of Arts/Gift of Miss Amelia Elizabeth White/Bridgeman Images

Imagery aside, the San Ildefonsan red-slipped band appears along the bottom of the largest vessel in Peña's painting, and it is echoed in all but one of the pots being painted. A single vessel appears to have an entirely white exterior, despite slight overlapping from the pot in front of it, giving credence to the hypothesis that Peña includes some pots entirely slipped in white to reflect her aunt's later Cochiti practice. The bird on the largest pot is typically San Ildefonsan, while the other designs are Cochiti, according to Cruz's assessment of the painting. As seen in the first painting, some pots hold brushes and paints. Of particular note is the green dress worn by the woman at far right; a delicate web of fine blue strokes indicates both its patterning and the folds resulting from the way the woman sits. Peña's adeptness at this level of detail became one of her hallmarks.²²

They are Set up on Props for Firing (fig. 8) shows the women placing their decorated pots, propped up by rocks and possibly strips of iron, over a fire. Smoke curls from the site as a preliminary fire, fueled by cedar logs, dries the ground and forms



- 9 Tonita Peña (Quah Ah), *Firings in the Open Air*, early 20th century. Casein on paper, 14 × 22 in. Detroit Institute of Arts, 37.208.5. Published with the permission of Joe Herrera Jr. on behalf of the Peña family. USAPhoto © The Detroit Institute of Arts/Gift of Miss Amelia Elizabeth White/Bridgeman Images

the bed of hot ashes seen in the next image. A pile of large, flattened dung patties appears in the foreground, and as one of the women places the manure around the firing site, the oldest woman approaches with more fuel and manure. The women use the dung to build a roofed oven over the pots, as seen through the roaring flames in *Firings in the Open Air* (fig. 9). The actual firing would last for about half an hour, after which the women will remove the dung patties and the hot vessels with the shovels and long pokers. The vessels will be placed on the props being set up by the woman in purple. After the pots cool, the women will take them off the props and wipe them down with a clean, dry cloth to remove the ash and dust, and then their creations will be ready for domestic use or sale.²³

The sixth and final image, *Women Weaving and Supervising Kiln* (fig. 10), is mistitled; it actually depicts the women putting their completed pottery to use in making *piki*, a tissue-thin, corn-based bread. To the right, two women grind corn; a basket of unground kernels is in front of them, and the black and white pot may contain culinary ash to mix in with it.²⁴ Behind the basket and pot are several ears of corn. A basket of ground cornmeal lies between these women and the fireplace at center. A third woman tends a pot of cornmeal, cooking over a crackling fire. At left, a fourth woman bakes the *piki* by spreading the batter on a flat stone over an open fire. Much like the production of pottery, *piki* making was considered women's work, and Peña would have been intimately familiar with this domestic task.²⁵

- 10 Tonita Peña (Quah Ah), *Women Weaving and Supervising Kibn*, early 20th century. Casein on paper, 13 7/8 x 22 1/2 in. Detroit Institute of Arts, 37.208.6. Published with the permission of Joe Herrera Jr. on behalf of the Peña family. USAPhoto © The Detroit Institute of Arts/Gift of Miss Amelia Elizabeth White/Bridgeman Images





In addition to portraying the steps in the pottery-production process, Peña's paintings of women decorating the vessels remind viewers that Pueblo women had long been familiar with watercolor-like materials. To make the paints, weeds are boiled down and the rendered liquid is left in the sun to solidify into what is called *guaco*. The painter then breaks off a chunk of guaco and dissolves it in water to use for decorating pottery.²⁶ Guaco thus parallels commercial Euro-American watercolor paint, which is often sold as cakes of pigment to be mixed with water. Some contemporary patrons took note of the similarities: Alice Corbin Henderson—a poet who settled in Santa Fe and frequently wrote about the American Indians she met there—recalled an encounter with a New York critic who “remarked naively that it was astonishing that the Indians were producing such good work in what, to them, was a new medium.” She went on to explain: “But of course the only innovation was *paper*. For the Indians had been using water colors, made with native mineral or plant substances, on pottery, dance masks, altar paintings, for centuries. The only difference was that they now got their colors already ground, in a tin box.”²⁷

Connections between Pueblo pottery and watercolors extend from materiality to marketability. Until the mid-nineteenth century, Pueblo women primarily made pottery for their own use, but by the time Peña took up the practice, most Pueblo ceramics were made for sale to outsiders. (She likely showed the pots in her series being put to traditional use because Anglo patrons preferred such scenes over imagery that betrayed evidence of cultural hybridization.) Peña benefited from witnessing her aunt and uncle's business savvy in selling their wares. The Montoyas had a room designated for pottery storage in their Cochiti home, and they not only sold directly to tourists and anthropologists from their storeroom, but they periodically packed up wares and made the two-day trip to Santa Fe to deliver pottery to dealers in town. Peña likely took cues from them when she later sought the best ways to market and sell her watercolors. This Pueblo family's paradigmatic turn to selling artwork was inextricably tied to the effects of settler colonialism in the region. Dozier observed that Anglo settlers arriving in the late nineteenth century disrupted subsistence economies and led to trading posts and a cash economy to which the Pueblos had little choice but to adapt. To bring in money, many of them began producing art for sale to outsiders.²⁸

The Development of Pueblo Watercolor Painting

Peña's first foray into creating art with Euro-American materials was when she was still a resident of San Ildefonso. In 1900, Esther Hoyt, a newly appointed non-Native teacher at San Ildefonso Public Day School, distributed crayons, watercolors, and paper to her students and encouraged them to depict Native subject matter. Peña would later recall that Hoyt told the children to “think how the people danced in the plaza, and how they felt when they danced, and paint that.”²⁹ Records do not exist for the school prior to 1902, but Peña's biographer indicates that she was enrolled from about 1899 to 1905, during the time Hoyt distributed art materials.³⁰ Peña (at age ten) is listed in the records for 1903, as are Alfredo Montoya (Wen Tsireh, age eleven) and Awa Tsireh (Alfonso Roybal, age fourteen), who would also gain fame as watercolor painters. By 1905, Oqwa Pi (Abel Sanchez, age five) and Romando Vigil (Tse Ye Mu, age four) were also registered at the school.³¹

That the careers of so many significant Native painters originated in a one-room schoolhouse run by the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA), a government organization dedicated to American Indian assimilation, is surprising. Assimilationists believed that the best hope for American Indian survival involved replacing Native customs and traditions with those of mainstream Anglo-Americans, or, in the words of a sinister maxim of the era: “Kill the Indian, Save the Man.”³² Assimilationists attempted to ban American Indian ceremonies and dances, and instituted schools where teachers acted as assimilationist agents. The OIA forbade the teaching and practice of American Indian arts in their schools until 1930, but a number of teachers in and around Santa Fe flouted this rule, including Hoyt. Yet despite encouraging her pupils to draw the dance ceremonies in which they all participated, Hoyt revealed her assimilationist position in letters she sent to her superiors. In one from 1902, two years after she took up her post at San Ildefonso, she boasted that dances and accompanying rituals were on the wane.³³

Brody suggests that the tension between Hoyt’s assimilationist aims and her pedagogical strategies can be defused by considering that she used officially sanctioned drawing classes “as a means of getting children who could barely speak English to communicate about things that mattered to them Hoyt recognized the vital, expressive role that religious ritual still played in the lives of her charges.”³⁴ Perhaps for Hoyt, picture production was an exercise to develop a rapport with her students.

While Peña was enrolled in Hoyt’s class, her work caught the attention of the anthropologist Edgar L. Hewett, founder and director of the Museum of New Mexico (MNM) in Santa Fe, who offered to provide her with watercolor paints and paper.³⁵ Peña ceased attending Hoyt’s classes in 1905, so she could not have been more than thirteen when Hewett first took note of her work. Peña’s early watercolor painting was fostered by both Hoyt’s classroom encouragement and Hewett’s museum patronage, and thus, from the outset, took place within the social spaces that the literary and cultural theorist Mary Louise Pratt has termed “contact zones.” These spaces are sites of colonial encounters and resulting imbalanced power relations, which nonetheless allow for “subordinated or marginal groups [to] select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture” in an autoethnographic process of transculturation.³⁶

In 1908 Hewett hired several San Ildefonso workmen to assist in an archaeological excavation. Aware that they painted the decorative designs on their wives’ pottery (and in some cases encouraging them to do so), Hewett soon asked them to take up watercolor and paper to record petroglyphs and cave paintings unearthed at the dig, and he continued to commission such works. Initially Hewett characterized these images as anthropological documentation, but by about 1920 he seems to have taken a more nuanced view of their aesthetic merits. This was likely due in part to his increasing interactions with New York-based artists who began to spend time in Santa Fe, as well as exchanges with Indian School teachers who encouraged student drawing and painting, but, unlike Hoyt, viewed the resultant works as art.³⁷

“Art not Ethnography”

In about 1919, Hewett met Elizabeth DeHuff, another non-Native teacher who asked her Pueblo students to “paint a dance picture.” DeHuff observed that her pupils showed no hesitation, and “immediately from memory the boys marvelously covered

their blank papers with singing men beating drums and with dancers in accurately reproduced symbolic costumes.”³⁸ DeHuff seemed to view the Pueblo paintings as artworks. In 1919 she showed them to Hewett, who agreed to display the works in an alcove of the MNM.³⁹ After visiting the installation, a reviewer for the museum’s magazine, *El Palacio*, remarked: “The symbols and emblems are correct to the smallest detail although drawn from memory rather than from living models. The entire exhibit seems to prove that with the Pueblo Indian art is racial rather than individual and that beautiful results are obtained if the Indian is given free scope to express himself.”⁴⁰ This reviewer hit upon three perceptions of the paintings that would continue to influence Anglo audience’s interpretations of the work: describing the images as art, insisting nonetheless upon their “racial” anthropological accuracy, and implying that the students were given free rein in terms of method and subject matter. In fact, like most artists, they frequently took artistic liberties, and assertions of their exactitude are overblown. Moreover, teachers like Hoyt and DeHuff and patrons such as Sloan and Hewett frequently suggested subject matter, with the goal of encouraging “authentic” Indian art. Perhaps paradoxically given this emphasis, the students were also well versed in Euro-American stylistic strategies thanks to how-to art books used in the Indian day schools as well as Anglo newspapers, magazines, posters, and photographs that circulated in the pueblos.⁴¹ Nonetheless, the *El Palacio* review of the student show is significant in its description of the works on view as *art*.

All the works in the 1919 exhibition were purchased by Mabel Dodge (Luhan), a wealthy arts patron who had recently moved to New Mexico. A few months later she showed the works to Sloan when he first arrived in Santa Fe. Sloan had recently been elected president of the Society of Independent Artists (SIA), and he and Dodge developed a plan to exhibit Pueblo watercolor paintings in the society’s next annual show at the Waldorf Astoria hotel in New York City. After consulting with Hewett, Sloan assembled a group of works that included Dodge’s recently purchased paintings and various others that Hewett had collected over the years. As Rushing observes, the significance of the show “cannot be overstated,” as “it represented the first time that art by living Native American artists was exhibited in the eastern United States as art and not curio, craft, or ethnographic material.”⁴²

Peña’s work did not appear in the 1920 or the 1921 SIA show, which also included Pueblo paintings. By 1920 Peña was a twice-widowed mother of three, and since her aunt Martina had died in 1916, followed by her uncle Florentino in 1918, Peña was left without immediate family support. During the difficult months that followed, Peña corresponded with Hewett and other MNM staff regarding the sales of her artwork. She requested payment advances, asked for paints and paper, and described her dire economic situation in carefully composed letters that are among the few surviving examples of Pueblo artists’ correspondence during this period. Dating mostly to the spring of 1921, they provide a glimpse into the settler colonialist market context in which Peña produced her early paintings and the differential power relations characterizing her dealings with museum officials.

In one of her earliest letters, written on January 22, 1921, Peña asked Lansing B. Bloom—then serving as assistant director of the MNM—what kind of dances she should paint and requested money for coffee and flour. She assured him that she would send him paintings in return, closing the letter by reiterating her appeal for money. Whether Bloom responded is unclear, but a few weeks later Peña wrote again, asking for money to pay off her balance at the pueblo store and purchase food. She promised to paint whatever he wanted and added that she would soon deliver a painting that

was almost complete.⁴³ Bloom apparently sent her twenty dollars, for which she thanked him in a letter dated a few days later. Peña attempted to flatter Bloom in her reply, telling him that she “knows when a man is good,” and noting how commendable it was that he felt sorry for “the poor lady” and helped her family get something to eat. In several of the letters, Peña told Bloom that she did not care how much he paid her, as she trusted him to name a fair price.⁴⁴ In subsequent letters, Peña’s attitude became less deferential; in a note written a year later, she informed Bloom that her most recent works were “real nice,” and instead of leaving the price up to him, she declared that each picture cost four dollars.⁴⁵ By the spring of 1922, Peña was beginning to make a name for herself as a professional painter, and the tone of her correspondence reflects her increasing success. In January of that year, Sloan was collecting Pueblo paintings for the 1922 SIA exhibition, and he solicited help from Hewett, who suggested a new painter to him—Peña.⁴⁶ Her reputation grew through the 1920s; references to Peña and her paintings pepper newspapers and journals of the era. In 1925, *El Palacio* announced that some nineteen Pueblo paintings, including Peña’s, had been “shipped to a New York order.” The following March, the *New York Times* informed readers that “several Indian dances” painted by Peña were being shown at the Anderson Galleries alongside the works of fellow Pueblo artists Awa Tsireh, Fred Kabotie, and Velino Shije Herrera (Ma Pe Wi), and Euro-American modernists such as Henri Matisse and Marsden Hartley. Peña’s works were subsequently exhibited in 1927 at the Corona Mundi International Art Center in Manhattan and in 1930 at the Brooklyn Institute Museum.⁴⁷ The Pueblo paintings on exhibition in Brooklyn were lent by Amelia Elizabeth White, a philanthropist who accumulated an enormous collection of American Indian art, including modern paintings.

The following year White assisted Sloan, Hewett, and other prominent philanthropists, artists, and scholars in planning the *Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts*, a show that opened on December 1, 1931, at the Grand Central Art Galleries in New York. This show included historical and modern American Indian art from across the United States, and it was groundbreaking in that it categorized everything shown as “art not ethnology,” with selections made based “entirely with consideration of esthetic value.”⁴⁸ This insistent labeling was part of the organizers’ project to convince Anglo audiences of the value of American Indian art and make them willing to pay more money for higher quality work. It also furthered the organizers’ argument that art museums, not just museums of anthropology or natural history, should collect American Indian artworks.⁴⁹

The exposition organizers aimed to recalibrate conceptions of certain American Indian works as fine art objects across a variety of media, categorized in the brochure as painting (meaning watercolors), basketry, weaving, beadwork, pottery, jewelry, and sculpture. Yet they seemed to think that redefining American Indian watercolor painting in these terms necessitated a particularly heavy emphasis on the traditional and innately racial aspects of the works, likely as a way to preclude accusations of inauthenticity stemming from their use of non-Native materials. To this end, they described the painters as “young men steeped in an ancient tradition and discipline,” whose works—despite their Euro-American medium—were “satisfactorily Indian” thanks to the manner in which “these young Indians have applied to the painting of their pictures the discipline of line and color developed through many centuries.” The organizers nodded to the painters’ modernism, but unlike today’s proponents of multiple modernisms acted as disciplinary gatekeepers: “The Indian[s] . . . modernism is an expression of a continuing vigour seeking new outlets and not, like ours, a search for release from exhaustion.”⁵⁰

Gender Trouble

While show organizers characterized the American Indian painters as “young men,” of the forty-four Pueblo watercolors chosen for the inauguration of the exposition in December 1931, four were produced by a woman—Peña. Her *Eagle Dance* was one of eleven Pueblo paintings illustrated in *Fine Art and the First Americans*, a publication written by the anthropologist and art historian Herbert Spinden and released on the occasion of the exposition (fig. 11).⁵¹ *Eagle Dance* was again reproduced in the art critic Rose V. S. Berry’s review of the show, but the texts accompanying it reveal the gender bias that circumscribed the Anglo art world’s reception of Peña and her work, just as the organizers’ casual elision of her contribution indicated her anomalous position.

Berry, like most critics who discussed Peña’s works, pointed out that she was “the one woman painter among the Pueblos” and noted, “Her work is the most popular, and that may bring about its downfall.” Although Berry then granted that for the time being Peña “is still holding her production up to a high standard,” mentioning the potential for decline may have been connected to the artist’s gender. Berry’s description of Peña’s work as possessing a “delicacy and lightness” can be read as a gendered encomium, particularly when compared to the language she used to describe the male Pueblo painters. She characterized Oqwa Pi as “the cowboy artist of the Pueblos,” praising his works’ “splendid action” and describing him as “tremendously clever,” and she observed that Velino Shije Herrera’s “action is superb.”⁵² Furthermore, Berry did not express concern over the male artists’ success leading to a decline in their art.

The gendering of her rhetoric was relatively subtle, however, especially compared to that of Sloan. In “Indian Art,” Sloan glumly commented that “tourist purchases, misdirection in the schools, and imposed European influences have damaged the healthy roots of Indian art,” although he admitted that the changes he viewed as negative were “perhaps increasing sales!” He was especially critical of Peña. In the quotation with which I began this article, Sloan cited her “weakness” as “being too responsive to popular demand,” and linked this responsiveness to gender: “Being a woman, she is very practical.” Though he admired one of her more complex Corn Dance paintings,

he warned, “The constant necessity of pleasing purchasers is interfering with progress in art The Indian artist must eat and too often must paint what he is told to paint. There is reason for fear that this pressure may cause the end of a great art.”⁵³ By couching this discussion in the context of Peña’s work (use of the masculine pronoun notwithstanding), Sloan suggested that Native women were more likely to succumb to “pleasing purchasers”—an accusation that has long been leveled at women artists of various ethnicities. Moreover, while acknowledging the practical concerns of the Pueblo painters, most of whom came from communities struggling with widespread economic distress, he denied their agency, suggesting that they adopted styles and strategies (with which

- 11 Tonita Peña (Quah Ah), *Eagle Dance*, before 1931. Location unknown. Published with the permission of Joe Herrera Jr. on behalf of the Peña family. Reproduced from *Fine Art and the First Americans*, vol. 2 (Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts, Inc., 1931), 4
- 12 Unknown photographer, Awa Tsireh, ca. 1933. From Joan Meyer, “Pueblo Painters,” *Mission Fields at Home* 5, no. 4 (January 1933): 52
- 13 Unknown photographer, Tonita Peña and child, ca. 1933. From Joan Meyer, “Pueblo Painters,” *Mission Fields at Home* 5, no. 4 (January 1933): 53





he disagreed) solely because of economic rather than aesthetic considerations. Sloan's myopic rubric insisted that "great art" could not accommodate both and neglected to account for the complicated and wide-ranging motivations that led Peña to paint. Multiple modernisms theory underscores how Euro-American modernists appropriated freely from Indigenous cultures while Indigenous artists were criticized for borrowing from non-Native sources. It also asserts that modern art encompasses practices originating from different and often unequal conditions—including commercial conditions.⁵⁴ As a Pueblo woman who produced paintings partially in response to market demands, Peña's modernist practice necessitated that she negotiate competing outside interests that simultaneously supported and constrained her art.

The press Peña received after the 1931 exposition reveals ongoing gender bias. Reviewing her first solo show—apparently the first traveling exhibition of a living Native woman's art—correspondent Arthur Strawn characterized Peña as "The Squaw Who Broke Into Newport With Her Paintings." The pejorative title might seem to draw from stereotypical assumptions of Native violence, but Strawn's subtitle invoked a different cliché: "Tonita Pena, New Mexico Indian and the Mother of Six Children, Quietly Accepts Her Artistic Success and Spends Much of Her Profits on Native Jewelry." He highlighted her maternal identity, the penchant for jewelry often ascribed to women, and described Peña as responding to her achievements in the reserved manner traditionally deemed appropriate for women. Strawn reiterated these gendered descriptors in his article, which characterized Peña as a twice-married, thirty-four-year-old mother of six, whose "active, full life" renders "the painting . . . only a pleasant incident in her crowded existence." Strawn continued: "She has been painting since she was 8 years old, but that has in no way interfered with her career as a mother and housewife. She looks upon her painting as a pleasant way of earning money, and fits it casually into her daily routine."⁵⁵ Despite Peña's resounding artistic success, Strawn insisted that her art production was a "pleasant incident," a pastime she indulged when not occupied with her maternal and domestic duties. The patronizing trivialization of women's art as mere hobby applied to Anglo and Native women alike.

In "Pueblo Painters" (1933), the journalist Joan Meyer took two artists as case studies, Awa Tsireh and Peña, both of whom are depicted in photographs accompanying the article. Awa Tsireh is shown in a painting smock, holding his palette and brush, standing before one of his works (fig. 12). Peña, by contrast, is pictured before her home, holding one of her children (fig. 13). Meyer outlined Awa Tsireh's development as an artist, noting that one of his teachers recalled that she "knew he had talent, perseverance, and found a real joy in expressing himself in the medium of water colors."⁵⁶ Meyer then glowingly described one of his Eagle Dance paintings, taking it as evidence of his "skill with the brush." She also nodded to Awa Tsireh's business acumen, crediting his "economic independence" to "a fair amount of business ability." In her description of Peña and her work, on the other hand, she remarked that Peña "is the mother of seven children" whose "duties as wife and mother have not interfered with the development of her talent." But Meyer neglected to discuss any of Peña's paintings, and while portraying Awa Tsireh's practice as stemming from his talent and joy in painting, with his economic success due to his business acumen, she characterized Peña's

practice as “turning her pictures into cash, which in turn helps to procure the much-needed food and clothing, [which] proves a helpful stimulus in expressing her talent.”⁵⁷

Yet this imagery and rhetoric does not square with Peña’s own attitude toward her domestic responsibilities. Pablita Velarde (Tse Tsan), a younger Santa Clara artist for whom Peña served as a mentor, remembered asking Peña what made painting so enjoyable for her, to which Peña apparently laughed and replied: “Well, it’s better than washing clothes, or taking care of children, or fighting with my husband.”⁵⁸ She was at least partly joking, and according to recollections of those close to her, Peña skillfully balanced her artistic career with her domestic responsibilities.⁵⁹ But Anglo critics privileging the latter over the former is problematic. She began painting long before she gained an audience for her work, and years before anyone considered her to be an artist in the Anglo sense of the word. Her aims went beyond “turning her pictures into cash,” even if that cash was at times much needed.

Peña’s gender also affected the Pueblo response to her work. While pottery had long been considered a female activity, watercolor painting was a new practice, and Pueblo communities soon seem to have characterized it as a male pursuit, neatly fitting the practice into preexisting structures of gender complementarity wherein men and women have distinctly different roles. In his outline of the Pueblo worldview, San Juan (now Ohkay Owingeh) anthropologist Alfonso Ortiz asserted that Pueblos “set careful limits to the boundaries of their world and order everything in it” via a system of dualities, from seemingly mundane binaries of hot and cold, and raw and cooked, to grander cosmological divisions between winter and summer, and the sun as father and earth as mother.⁶⁰ Indeed, clay’s connection with the feminine earth is one reason pottery was historically categorized as women’s work. Men had historically been the Pueblo community members to produce imagery within their kivas. These round, partially subterranean structures are ceremonial chambers found in every pueblo, and men who have been initiated into the ritual knowledge of their Pueblo paint murals of symbolic significance on the kivas’ plastered interior walls. The painters typically use yucca brushes akin to those used in pottery painting, applying paint composed of ground mineral pigments. While pottery painting is usually quite stylized and abstracted, mural imagery tends to be more figurative and representational. The way the murals were produced—painting on flat walls—and the type of pictures that appear in them—realistic, figurative imagery—meant that mural paintings were in many ways the closest Pueblo art form to watercolor painting. Men traditionally produced those murals, leading me to reason that watercolor painting seemed more suitable to men than women, per the manner in which Pueblo art making was coded via gender.⁶¹

Cultural mores regarding medium and style aside, elders worried that the content of the watercolors—particularly the scenes of ceremonial Pueblo dances—might allow outsiders a glimpse into sacred customs that were meant to be kept secret. Pueblo ontologies of secrecy include external secrecy that protects esoteric knowledge from outsiders, and internal secrecy that stratifies knowledge such that even within the Pueblo community, only initiated members have access to the most sensitive information. The first must be contextualized historically. As Spanish forces colonized Pueblo lands starting in the sixteenth century, Franciscan missionaries’ brutal conversion tactics drove the Pueblo to conceal previously open ceremonies. As Cochiti scholar Joseph H. Suina puts it: “Religious items, locations, ideas, activities and leaders became well-guarded matters within the village. Secrecy became synonymous with preservation. . . . Eventually, much of what was considered religious was taken underground and guarded at all cost.” In ensuing years, secrecy enabled the Pueblos’ cultural competency; they outwardly participated in Spanish and later Mexican and U.S. cultural frameworks while internally preserving their Indigenous customs.⁶²

Today, rules restricting outsiders' access to knowledge continue to protect Pueblo communities, but Suina observes that "the most frequent and irritating infractions are committed by professional photographers, writers and scholars." As a non-Pueblo scholar writing an article on Pueblo aesthetic traditions circumscribed by secrecy in part due to the inappropriate actions of my predecessors and peers, I take my cue from the art historian Mary H. Nooter. When she explored concepts of secrecy in African art, she did not reveal that which is secret in communities of which she was not a member, but instead looked to "the ways in which works of art serve to demarcate the realms of secrecy, to constitute certain information or bodies of knowledge as secret, and thereby contribute, in an active and integral way, to the constitution of social reality."⁶³

Secrecy does constitute social reality in the pueblos; the stratification of internal knowledge within the pueblo informs and upholds systems of power (with power here defined in both spiritual and political terms). As San Felipe Pueblo/Hopi/Tewa/Navajo scholar Cynthia Chavez Lamar observes, "secrecy allows select individuals to exercise power over others, because their religious knowledge also tends to confer social and political status," and she further underscores how Pueblo knowledge "is accessible to individuals by varying degrees, with most Pueblo people never knowing or understanding certain classes of information." Chavez Lamar stresses the deep responsibilities of knowledge-bearers "for the well-being of their communities and the people therein." While all community members know something about sacred information, most do not have access to the details, and so they look to initiated elder members of the community to determine what is appropriate for outside view. When faced with questions they consider intrusive or inappropriate, many Pueblos will fall silent or repeat some version of the phrase "I cannot say." Chavez Lamar asserts that "silence is articulate," for "what Pueblo people know defines them. . . . [and] what Pueblo people choose to withhold, is information that constitutes Pueblo cultures." Kahnawake Mohawk anthropologist Audra Simpson defines such theoretically generative limits as "ethnographic refusal." She notes that for Indigenous peoples, "refusal worked in everyday encounters to enunciate repeatedly to themselves and to outsiders that 'this is who we are; this is who you are; these are my rights.'"⁶⁴

Revealing esoteric Pueblo information to outsiders can be dangerous for reasons to which the uninitiated are not entirely privy; doing so puts the entire pueblo (and beyond) at risk and can lead to the informant's exile. Yet the rules governing what is appropriate for outside view are not always clear. Different pueblos take varying stances on what should be kept secret, attitudes can change over time, and sometimes community members and even elders within the same pueblo will disagree on what is allowed. Moreover, Pueblo culture is hierarchical, with status and access to knowledge determined by age, social standing, and, significantly for Peña, gender. Typically, only older males are initiated and trained in their pueblo's most sensitive information. Women, children, and other uninitiated members know only as much as is necessary to participate in ceremonial events.⁶⁵ This posed a problem when it came to the Pueblo watercolor painters; uninitiated members might inadvertently depict imagery that they did not realize was not for outside view, because the very *nature* of this secret knowledge was itself held secret. The watercolorists were thus put in a difficult position. Chavez Lamar notes that "for an untrained individual to treat such knowledge casually entails the possibility of playing with supernatural powers that he/she may not be prepared to handle"—a risk treated seriously by Pueblo artists then and now, few of whom would knowingly reveal esoteric information. But as Chavez Lamar observes, "at times, Pueblo people have difficulty determining if they have committed an act that reveals the sacred" and artists "must continually negotiate competing value systems—the personal/individual; the tribal/

communal; and the art market/public—making the lines that they draw for themselves somewhat indistinct.”⁶⁶

Peña’s painting career was considered a particular threat because gender plays a role in access to esoteric knowledge. “Pueblo female artists who visually represent their cultures will always come under greater scrutiny than men do,” Chavez Lamar observes, adding “Women’s place in Pueblo society is slowly changing [but] the culture dictates that men have the right to certain knowledge and women do not.”⁶⁷ According to Herrera, some Cochiti Pueblo community members questioned whether his mother had transgressed the boundaries of appropriate representation in 1940, by which time she had been painting dances and other aspects of Pueblo life for nearly forty years. Peña was alleged to have betrayed Cochiti secrets despite the many steps she took to ensure that she would not reveal too much in her work. A number of her compositions are genre scenes showing community activities like pottery making, which are unlikely to contain restricted imagery. When she did produce images of ceremonial dances, Peña depicted either those open to non-Pueblo audiences or the public portions of dances that also entail a private segment; she avoided painting secret rituals. According to her grandson Joe Herrera Jr., she would also slightly change details in her dance compositions so that they were not exact renderings.⁶⁸ Finally, like most of the Pueblo watercolorists, Peña abstained from situating her figures in recognizable and thus potentially revealing spaces, instead positioning them against blank backgrounds. Nonetheless, Cochiti community members demanded she cease painting, and Joe Herrera reported, “they almost stopped her. . . . But my father was an officer and he said, ‘Wait a minute. You are making drums, and they are sacred. You are making pottery bowls that resemble our sacred ones. You are making some bows and arrows. And you sell them for commercial purposes. All of us will have to stop doing these for sale.’”⁶⁹ Herrera’s stepfather was Peña’s third husband, Eпитacio Arquero, who was governor of Cochiti at the time. His point was taken, and the sale of drums, pottery, bows and arrows, as well as paintings of public ceremonies, continued.⁷⁰ The episode points to both the central role that art sales had come to play in the pueblo’s economy and to ongoing concerns about the information disclosed.

Years later, another of Peña’s sons, Sam Arquero, recalled that while his mother was trying to preserve traditions, “the tribal members didn’t see it that way, at that time. And the other thing too was that especially the male folks take exception to a woman knowing all these things, all the details that go into certain things.”⁷¹

Voids and Silences

Maintaining the secrecy of the most sacred Pueblo dances was particularly crucial in the 1920s, when assimilationist reformers escalated their attempts to ban these ceremonies. In 1921, the commissioner of the OIA banned American Indian dances, claiming a broad list of offenses, including “immoral relations between the sexes,” and ceremonies that brought “the Indians together from remote points to the neglect of their crops, livestock, and home interests” or promoted “shiftless indifference to family welfare.”⁷² Denouncing in particular “the secret dance, from which all whites are excluded,” as “perhaps one of the greatest evils,” one OIA official speculated, “What goes on at this time I will not attempt to say, but I firmly believe that it is little less than a ribald system of debauchery.”⁷³ Not privy to the ceremonies, the official envisioned the worst. His inability to conceptualize a worldview in which certain knowledge must be kept private points to a major difference between Pueblo and Anglo epistemological approaches, and foregrounds what Laguna Pueblo scholar Paula

Gunn Allen calls the “nearly neurotic distress in the presence of secrets and mystery [that] underlie[s] much of modern [Anglo] American culture.”⁷⁴

Pueblo leaders and their Anglo preservationist supporters mounted an ultimately successful defense against the dance ban, and many scholars connect the works of the Pueblo watercolor painters—who paradoxically pictorialized the dances when maintaining their secrecy seemed most paramount—to this resistance. The art historians David W. Penney and Lisa A. Roberts note that “the watercolors . . . were powerful antidotes to the assimilationists’ misrepresentations,” because they “rendered the ceremonies harmless and innocent.”⁷⁵ Their implied suggestion that the Pueblos had to justify their cultural traditions to Anglo outsiders points to the power imbalance between Anglo and Native communities, and underscores the difficulties Pueblo peoples faced in ensuring the continuance of their traditions. The art historian Marilee Jantzer-White connects this concern over cultural continuity to Peña’s work specifically, arguing that her paintings “emerged as a site of resistance against government efforts at assimilation, reaffirming the importance of ceremonial dances as crucial for Puebloan cultural survival.”⁷⁶ In using the terms resistance and survival, Jantzer-White anticipates the more recently popularized concept of “survivance,” which alludes to the challenges that Native peoples have faced in attempting to simultaneously survive and resist colonialist forces. The term rejects narratives of domination and victimry that describe Native peoples’ experiences through tropes of victimization, instead making room for the consideration of Indigenous agency even in the face of overwhelming opposition.⁷⁷ The Pueblo watercolor painters certainly practiced tactics of survivance; they painted for the market while retaining a sense of aesthetic agency, used Euro-American materials to produce works that were deemed authentically Indian, depicted Native dances when these ceremonies were being both acclaimed by preservationists and attacked by assimilationists, and disclosed exoteric aspects of their culture while concealing esoteric components. This last tactic proved aesthetically tricky, as it required the painters to hide Pueblo knowledge in plain sight within their images.

A major strategy of concealment to which every early Pueblo watercolor painter turned involved the pictorial mobilization of the void, a term I use because it implies emptiness, a lack of something that might have been there but is not. Peña and her colleagues *avoided* background details, leaving their composition *devoid* of specific context. The void also implies nullification, rendering a document—or image—ineffectual, meaning that the picture cannot be fully read by outsiders. Early scholars of Pueblo watercolor paintings, however, compared the widespread compositional use of blank backgrounds not to socio-political concerns but to the flat formats of more traditional Pueblo art such as petroglyphs, pottery, and mural painting. Their considerations of such precedents are certainly not incorrect; recalling his mother teaching him to paint, Joe Herrera said that he “learned how there is no actual ground or lines that were indicated in the paintings—the figures were dancing on the ground, but it is just like in a space. . . . that is the way it was done even in the petroglyphs, pictographs and the murals.”⁷⁸

Recently, art historians have focused on the political implications of the voids, and my analysis of Peña’s work draws upon this scholarship. In her study of Kabotie’s paintings, Horton states that his “spare, groundless forms implicitly acknowledge that sacred places, like the coded religious knowledge activated at these sites, are not reproducible.” She further suggests that the blank spaces pull the works into our contemporary moment, allowing the paintings to withstand “gaps in time as well as space,” moving viewers by inviting their active participation. The works become evidence of Pueblo survivance by continuing to solicit reaction in the present.⁷⁹ Scott asserts that the “silences” in Awa Tsireh’s paintings “encourage [Pueblo] viewers to fill in the ‘blank’ space with the knowledge that they bring to the image. At the same time, the unarticulated backgrounds restrict the

amount of information that unentitled viewers, such as outsiders, can glean from the paintings, thereby guarding knowledge.”⁸⁰

To these interpretations, I would add that Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) offers another way of thinking through the watercolorists’ works. TEK refers to the ways Indigenous communities possess a cumulative, place-based knowledge of their environment and everything in it, passed down from generation to generation through stories, songs, and dances. The ceremonial dances that Pueblo communities guarded so carefully are reflective and constitutive of TEK; they evince the ways Pueblos view the world around them, and also educate younger Pueblo members in TEK. According to Santa Clara scholar Gregory Cajete, TEK is a key aspect of what he terms “Native Science,” which he defines as “first and foremost a relational orientation, knowledge base, and process for sustaining people, community, culture, and place through time and generations.” Cajete stresses that knowledge and intelligence must be ascribed to all things: “a plant, an animal, a mountain, or a place may be said to have intelligence, its own mind and psyche, which is unique to it and with which our human intelligence continually interacts.” All beings are related, all beings have a role to play, and all beings are equally worthy of respect.⁸¹

Returning to Peña’s *Corn Dance* (fig. 1), we should attend to the veneration the dancers offer this crop, as well as the relational position of corn. As Cajete notes, Pueblo children have always “learned the nature of the sources of their food, their community, and their life relationship. They learned that everything in life was a matter of kinship with all of nature.” Cajete also underscores the significance of ceremonial dances in upholding respectful relationships: “In their dances and related traditions Indigenous people celebrate relationships to the plant and animal world by effectively becoming one with their spirits or their world.” Dances maintain harmony in the Pueblo world. The consequences that a dance ban could have on Pueblo communities were dire; for instance, if the Corn Dance was not performed, widespread infertility might follow.⁸²

Since Pueblo culture is centripetal, with the center of the cosmos typically located at the central plaza of the pueblo, most dances concentrate on this physical and conceptual central space.⁸³ Pueblo painters removed geographic markers of this symbolic location, and in doing so disrupted the scenes’ holism. Given the innate relationality of Pueblo TEK, this aesthetic strategy also protected the entities depicted in their compositions. The voids pictorially refused the invasive gaze of non-Pueblo viewers, thereby enacting a visual rehearsal of the “articulate silence” and “ethnographic refusal” theorized by Chavez Lamar and Simpson.

Scott also considers the “anticolonial implications” of the blank backgrounds, suggesting that the emptiness rejects Anglo conceptions of space as a conquerable asset. She contends that in the Pueblo paintings, concealment acts as protection, sheltering ancestral Pueblo lands from the voracious westering eye of the United States, whose leaders continued to encroach upon western reservations. The watercolorists’ modernist modes of art production may have departed from earlier Pueblo practices, but their images underscored the survivance of Pueblo ceremonial dances, and by extension Pueblo culture, while the voided backgrounds protected cultural knowledge and might be further read as a visual refusal to concede their lands.⁸⁴

Yet several early Pueblo watercolor painters did experiment with three-dimensional space, seemingly belying the unwritten rule against contextual detail. Such scenes (the extant ones, at least) did not show the dances, however; instead, they pictured genre scenes of Pueblo life, which were unlikely to reveal sensitive information. Awa Tsireh’s *Women Firing Pottery in Pueblo* (fig. 14), for example, shows three women surrounding an open-air kiln. The scene is reminiscent of Peña’s paintings of Pueblo pottery production,

14 Awa Tsireh (Alfonso Roybal), *Women Firing Pottery in Pueblo*, ca. 1921–22. Watercolor on paper, 11 ½ × 19 ⅝ in. Courtesy of the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture/Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, N.M., 35442/13. Published with the permission of Gary Roybal on behalf of the Roybal family

15 Awa Tsireh (Alfonso Roybal), *Decorating Pottery*, ca. 1919. Watercolor on paper, 14 ¼ × 11 ½ in. School for Advanced Research, Santa Fe, N.M., IAF.P14. Published with the permission of Gary Roybal on behalf of the Roybal family. Photo: Addison Doty



but whereas her potters work in a void, Awa Tsireh has sketched in a detailed backdrop. He did not often work in this way; images like *Decorating Pottery* (fig. 15) are more typical not only of his practice but also those of other genre painting watercolorists, including Peña. The blank backgrounds of these works would have appealed to Anglo patrons, who came to view this style as authentically Indian, while appeasing Pueblo elders, who would have considered the voids safer in terms of the preservation of cultural knowledge, even in innocuous genre scenes.

16 Awa Tsireh (Alfonso Roybal), *Untitled (Serpent)*, ca. 1922–25. Watercolor on paper, 8½ × 14¼ in. Courtesy of The Museum of Indian Arts and Culture/Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, N.M., 35414/13a. Published with the permission of Gary Roybal on behalf of the Roybal family

17 Julian Martinez (Po-Ca-No), *Avanyu*, ca. 1923. Watercolor, ink, and pencil on paper, 15 1/16 × 16 3/8 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Corbin-Henderson Collection, Gift of Alice H. Rossin, 1979.144.85. Published with the permission of Barbara Gonzales on behalf of the Martinez family

Gendering Representation and Abstraction

A number of Pueblo watercolor painters represented the production of Pueblo pottery in genre scenes that show women shaping, painting, and firing the vessels. To the best of my knowledge though, no early Pueblo paintings depict men participating in the making of Pueblo pottery. Even images of the one part of the process in which men had begun to regularly participate by the early twentieth century—painting the pots—show women performing this task. For Peña, depicting women painting pottery may have been a way of inserting herself and her experience into the paintings. Jantzer-White suggests that her paintings are evocative of phenomenological memory, embodiments of her experience as a Pueblo woman. She observes that Peña portrayed women’s dances more frequently than most Pueblo painters and emphasized the female roles in mixed-gender dances because these were the ones she best knew.⁸⁵ Jantzer-White’s assessment

could certainly be extended to Peña’s paintings of women decorating pottery. How then to interpret men’s images of Pueblo women making pottery and how to account for the absence of men in these scenes? This kind of gendered image making may be explained by deep-rooted Pueblo cultural conventions; although men had taken up pottery painting, some still viewed it as women’s work.

Nonetheless, Pueblo men were willing to take their watercolor paintings in a conventionalized, abstracted direction reminiscent of pottery painting. Unlike Peña, whose works remained representational throughout her career, Awa Tsireh produced a number of watercolors in which he modified abstracted pottery designs. In *Untitled (Serpent)* (fig. 16), a graphic design features a bird or snakelike creature composed of a black outline and decorative features, as well as flat panels of color. Julian Martinez also translated his pottery designs to watercolor paintings, as in *Avanyu* (fig. 17), an image of the water serpent he so frequently used to decorate his wife’s pottery, albeit in much brighter colors here.

The closest that Peña ever came to such abstraction was in a group of works that show single and grouped vessels within a closely cropped, blank space. The paintings *Untitled (Five Cochiti Pottery Designs)* (fig. 18), *Untitled (Cochiti Pottery Design)*, and *Untitled (Seven Cochiti Pottery Designs)* (before 1940, School for Advanced Research), could be said to express a degree of flattening abstraction. However, the stylized patterning is securely contained within the contours and on the surface of those vessels; she does not allow the forms to slip off the delineated containers into the blank space around them, as Awa Tsireh and Martinez do. Moreover, Peña does not make use of bright





18 Tonita Peña (Quah Ah), *Untitled (Five Cochiti Pottery Designs)*, before 1940. Paper, paint, and gouache, 12½ × 14 in. School for Advanced Research, Santa Fe, N.M., Gift of unknown donor, IAF.P192C. Published with the permission of Joe Herrera Jr. on behalf of the Peña family. Photo: Jennifer Day

colors, although she frequently painted her dancers in such hues. Instead, here are pottery's recognizable black, white, and red tones. Rather than evincing an uncharacteristic leap into abstraction, then, these works are typical of Peña's representational tendencies and almost read as still lifes, the inventories of which have been suspended in a vacant space. The intricate, conventionalized designs speak to Peña's own pottery painting (as seen in fig. 3) and resemble the pots depicted in Peña's *Making Pottery* (fig. 4) and *The Vessels are Decorated* (fig. 7). In all but one of the images in the six-part pottery-making series, she includes an abstract cartouche, reminiscent of pottery decorations, directly beneath her Tewa name, Quah Ah, the signature she used to identify these watercolor paintings. This cartouche-signature combination underscores the connection between the two artistic modes in her oeuvre and her investment in both.⁸⁶

Peña's pottery production series is the linchpin in my interpretation of her oeuvre, because it connects her watercolor painting, a medium that Pueblo women were discouraged from practicing, with her deep understanding of pottery making—knowledge not entirely available to most Pueblo men of the era. In my research, I have come across just one series that similarly breaks pottery production into tasks, this one by a male artist. In Velino Shije Herrera's three-part suite, *Making Pottery* (fig. 19) and *Painting Pottery* (1928–30, Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, Laboratory of Anthropology) show four women shaping and painting pots, and *Firing Pottery* (1928–30, School for Advanced Research) portrays a woman adding dung patties to a smoking kiln as a second moves fired vessels aside. Kneading, slipping, polishing, and constructing the firing site are not seen. Herrera did not participate in painting pottery, which may account for his elisions. But none of the male watercolorists came close to achieving Peña's specificity; even men who decorated vessels were not familiar with the holistic process of pottery production. When Cruz viewed Peña's pottery series with me, he proclaimed the images particularly significant because it was a Pueblo person—a potter herself, no less—who recorded this process for posterity, in contrast to the countless photographs of Pueblo potters taken by outsiders. He also remarked on the importance of the older woman in the images: "She was probably the grandmother or the mother . . . the traditional potter who they have learned from." His emphasis on the matriarch is typical of contemporary male potters; they pay homage to Pueblo women.⁸⁷

19 Velino Shije Herrera (Ma-Pe-Wi), *Making Pottery*, ca. 1928–30. Gouache on Whatman board, 14½ × 22 in. School for Advanced Research, Santa Fe, N.M., IAF.P2. Published with the permission of Ulysses Reid and Governor Frederick Medina on behalf of Zia Pueblo

Perhaps male painters like Velino Shije Herrera and Awa Tsireh chose not to represent men painting pottery to avoid showing men undertaking women's work, but also out of respect for the women's realm. Male painters may have been more likely to know secrets regarding ceremonial dances and other rituals, but Peña had access to





20 Tonita Peña (Quah Ah), *Untitled (Navajo Landscape)*, 1930s. Masonite and paint (possibly oil), 15 3/16 × 27 in. School for Advanced Research, Santa Fe, N.M., Gift of Amelia Elizabeth White, SAR.1978-1-297. Published with the permission of Joe Herrera Jr. on behalf of the Peña family. Photo: Addison Doty

sacred knowledge regarding pottery. Her images might be viewed as a celebration of women's knowledge in a medium not typically associated with women. If so, Peña's pottery series can be seen as metapictures, paintings that probe the parameters of painting—in both pottery and watercolors—and the culturally circumscribed authority of their painters. She stressed pottery's role in the survivance of Pueblo women's epistemological power while insisting on her right to articulate it in a new medium that offered her further visual avenues.⁸⁸

Another outlier in her oeuvre, even more than the still lifes of pottery, is an untitled work depicting a Navajo country landscape (fig. 20). This is Peña's only known painting to include a fully contextualizing background, deploying Euro-American perspectival strategies in her depiction of an American Indian scene.⁸⁹ Dark mountains loom in the background against a glowing New Mexico sunset. In the foreground, a Navajo woman carries firewood and a coil of rope as she makes her way to a nearby hogan. It seems significant that the only known instance of Peña filling her customary blank background with a full landscape occurs in a scene of Navajo, rather than Pueblo, life. Since Pueblo elders would not punish community members for revealing information about other American Indian communities (or other pueblos, for that matter), Peña likely felt safer experimenting with three-dimensional space using imagery sourced from outside the Pueblo realm. Awa Tsireh, whose *Women Firing Pottery in Pueblo* depicts a Pueblo scene, could be bolder in his stylistic experiments; as a man, he was more likely to have access to information about what should not be represented and could calibrate his paintings accordingly.⁹⁰ It is improbable that Peña's Navajo scene or Awa Tsireh's Pueblo scene reveals secret information, yet Pueblo elders would have been more apt to suspect that Peña would inadvertently do so because she was not privy to the circumscribed knowledge that a Pueblo man was more likely to

know. As a woman working in a medium deemed unsuitable for her gender, Peña had to be very careful in what she chose to represent and how she chose to do so.

Her staunchly representational mode, however, may be evidence of a subtle rebellion against gendered Pueblo aesthetic mores, in which abstraction—the traditional stylistic mode of pottery decoration—is conventionally held to be feminine, while realistic representation—that of kiva murals—is coded as masculine. In an early analysis of Peña’s work, the anthropologist Clara Lee Tanner argues that “she was the first [Pueblo] woman to throw off the shackles of sex-determined art forms and express herself in new and multitudinous ways. Traditionally, women were restricted to certain forms of craft art. In turn, those very crafts restricted them to more geometric art styles. Tonita painted as she wished.”⁹¹ By adopting the representational mode historically deployed by Pueblo men in their kiva murals, Peña asserted her right to be a painter. In a tantalizing aside, the anthropologist Charles H. Lange reported that Peña was “said to have done murals” in one of Cochiti’s kivas later in her life.⁹² Whether or not she participated in kiva mural painting, she inarguably paved the way for subsequent Pueblo women artists, many of whom, including Velarde, cite her as an inspirational forebear. Indeed, perhaps Velarde—to whom Peña referred as the “daughter that I have chosen”—best summarizes the unique position Peña occupied as the only Pueblo woman watercolorist of the period: “Painting-wise there was only Tonita Peña. She was the rebellion way back in the early 1920s. She gave me the inner strength that I needed to dare the men to put me in my own place or let me go.”⁹³

Notes

I am deeply grateful to Tonita Peña’s grandson Joe Herrera Jr. and great-granddaughter Kate Herrera Jenkins for discussing Peña’s work with me, and to Clarence Cruz for speaking with me about Pueblo pottery. Additional thanks to Katherine Manthorne, Jolene Rickard, W. Jackson Rushing III, Robin Veder, and the anonymous *American Art* reviewers for their suggestions.

- 1 John Sloan, “Indian Art,” *Rotarian* 58, no. 3 (March 1941): 19. Pueblo artists had Pueblo names given to them by elder relatives at birth and Spanish names at their Catholic christenings; I use the names by which they became best known. Peña was given the Pueblo name Quah Ah, which translates to “white coral beads,” and the Spanish name María Antonia Peña, Tonita for short. Samuel L. Gray, *Tonita Peña: Quah Ah, 1893–1949* (Albuquerque: Avanya Publishing, 1990), 7–8; and Jeanne O. Snodgrass, comp., *American Indian Painters: A Biographical Directory* (New York: Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 1968), 143. See also Charles H. Lange, *Cochiti: A New Mexico Pueblo, Past and Present* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1959), 335–53; and Edward P. Dozier, *The Pueblo Indians of North America* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 183–84.
- 2 Tonita Peña’s son, Joe Herrera, described paintings of dance ceremonies as

“not whole, as far as the number of figures. . . . You only paint, maybe, two or three singers, whereas we have sixty to eighty singers with one drummer in the ceremonies.” Herrera quoted in Tryntje Van Ness Seymour, *When the Rainbow Touches Down: The Artists and Stories Behind the Apache, Navajo, Rio Grande Pueblo, and Hopi Paintings in the William and Leslie Van Ness Denman Collection* (Phoenix, Ariz.: Heard Museum, 1988), 144.

- 3 Don L. Roberts, “The Ethnomusicology of the Eastern Pueblos,” in *New Perspectives on the Pueblos*, ed. Alfonso Ortiz (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1972), 252.
- 4 On the nineteen pueblos in New Mexico, see the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center website, indianpueblo.org/19-pueblos/pueblos. Six speak Tewa (Ohkay Owingeh, Santa Clara, San Ildefonso, Nambe, Pojoaque, Tesuque), four speak Tiwa (Taos, Picuris, Sandia, Isleta), one speaks Towa (Jemez), seven speak Keres (Cochiti, Kewa, San Felipe, Santa Ana, Zia, Acoma, Laguna), and one speaks Zuni (Zuni). On the Hopi (who speak Hopi) in Arizona, see the Hopi Tribe page of the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona website, itcaonline.com/member-tribes/hopi-tribe.
- 5 Margaret Breuning, “Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts,” *New York Evening*

Post, December 5, 1931, S3, clipping, box 43, folder 4, John Sloan Manuscript Collection, Helen Farr Sloan Library and Archives, Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington. On the concept of “authenticity,” see James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988); and Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2005). The term “Anglo” is frequently used in scholarship on the Southwest to refer to non-Indigenous, non-Latinx Americans of White European descent (whether or not these peoples identify with the Anglo-Saxon tradition). See David W. Penney and Lisa A. Roberts, “America’s Pueblo Artists: Encounters on the Borderlands,” in *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century: Makers, Meanings, Histories*, ed. W. Jackson Rushing III (New York: Routledge, 1999); Sascha T. Scott, *A Strange Mixture: The Art and Politics of Painting Pueblo Indians* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2015); and Dozier, *Pueblo Indians of North America*, 101. While it is always preferable to refer to specific communities—Pueblo, narrowing further to San Ildefonso Pueblo, for example—there are times when a wider-ranging term is needed. I have chosen “American Indian,” “Native,”

- and “Indigenous,” following the lead of Devon Abbott Mihesuah, a Choctaw historian and writer, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou scholar of Indigenous education invested in decolonizing research methodologies. Mihesuah, *So You Want to Write about American Indians? A Guide for Writers, Students, and Scholars* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2005), xi–xii; and Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2012). See also Robert J. Muckle, *Indigenous Peoples of North America: A Concise Anthropological Overview* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2012), 4–8.
- 6 E. H. Cahill, “America Has Its ‘Primitives’: Aboriginal Water Colorists of New Mexico Make Faithful Record of Their Race” *International Studio* 75, no. 299 (March 1922): 82.
 - 7 On primitivism and expectations of “authenticity,” see Leah Dilworth, *Imagining Indians in the Southwest: Persistent Visions of a Primitive Past* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996); Ruth B. Phillips, “Performing the Native Woman: Primitivism and Mimicry in Early Twentieth-Century Visual Culture,” in *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity*, ed. Lynda Jessup (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2001), 26–49; and Elizabeth Hutchinson, *The Indian Craze: Primitivism, Modernism, and Transculturation in American Art, 1890–1915* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2009). On autoethnography, see Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” *Profession* (1991): 35. Ruth B. Phillips, “The Turn of the Primitive: Modernism and Indigeneity in Settler Art Histories” (paper presented at Annotating Art’s Histories: Exiles, Diasporas, and Strangers, Institute of International Visual Arts, London, July 6–7, 2006), 3, cited in Heather Igloliorte, “Hooked Forever on Primitive Peoples’: James Houston and the Transformation of ‘Eskimo Handicrafts’ to Inuit Art,” in *Mapping Modernisms: Art, Indigeneity, Colonialism*, ed. Elizabeth Harney and Ruth B. Phillips (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2018), 90.
 - 8 Early references to Peña’s practice include Dorothy Dunn, *American Indian Painting of the Southwest and Plains Areas* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1968), 210–11; J. J. Brody, *Indian Painters and White Patrons* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1971), 99–101; Clara Lee Tanner, *Southwest Indian Painting: A Changing Art*, 2nd ed. (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1980), 132–35; and Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting: Tradition and Modernism in New Mexico, 1900–1930* (Santa Fe, N. Mex.: School of American Research Press, 1997), 113–18.
 - 9 In this article, “tradition” encompasses references to prior cultural customs as well as their active adaptations to suit the needs of modern life. For a Native studies perspective, see Stephanie Nohelani Teves, Andrea Smith, and Michelle H. Raheja, “Tradition,” in *Native Studies Keywords*, ed. Teves, Smith, and Raheja (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 2015), 233–42.
 - 10 Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting*, 67.
 - 11 Moira Vincentelli, *Women Potters: Transforming Traditions* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2004), 100–110; and Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting*, 19.
 - 12 Scott, *A Strange Mixture*, 153–79; Jessica L. Horton, *Art for an Undivided Earth: The American Indian Movement Generation* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2017), 107–14; Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting*, 115; Marilee Jantzer-White, “Tonita Peña (Quah Ah), Pueblo Painter: Asserting Identity through Continuity and Change,” *American Indian Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (Summer 1994): 369–82; Cynthia Fowler, “Gender, Modern Art, and Native Women Painters in the First Half of the Twentieth Century,” in *American Women Artists, 1935–1970: Gender, Culture, and Politics*, ed. Helen Langa and Paula Wisotzki (New York: Routledge, 2016), 41–56; and W. Jackson Rushing III, *Generations in Modern Pueblo Painting: The Art of Tonita Peña and Joe Herrera* (Norman: Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, Univ. of Oklahoma, 2018). Scott, Horton, and Rushing partially predicate their arguments on conversations held with the Pueblo artists’ descendants and other living community members—a model I follow.
 - 13 Tessie Naranjo, “Pottery Making in a Changing World,” *Expedition* 36, no. 1 (1994): 47; and Dozier, *Pueblo Indians of North America*, 208.
 - 14 Gray, *Tonita Peña*, 7–8; Snodgrass, *American Indian Painters*, 143; and Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting*, 19, 7–8, 12–13.
 - 15 Gray, *Tonita Peña*, 61; and Jonathan Batkin, correspondence with the author, in Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting*, 211.
 - 16 All references to Clarence Cruz are from a conversation with the author, November 11, 2020.
 - 17 Carl E. Guthe, *Pueblo Pottery Making: A Study at the Village of San Ildefonso* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1925), 19–20, 27.
 - 18 Ibid., 17. Given the relevance of the location and date of Guthe’s fieldwork to my research on Peña, I rely on many of his observations.
 - 19 When Amelia Elizabeth White gave the “Pottery Makers Series” to the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) in 1937, four of them arrived with labels from White’s Gallery of American Indian Art, featuring alternate titles: “Pottery Makers” for the second, fourth, and fifth images, and “Women’s Work” for the third. The current titles appear in the accession log, but it is unclear who made these designations. Amelia Elizabeth White to DIA, March 27, 1935, accession file, 37.200–274, Registration Department, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Mich. White’s gallery (originally called “Ishauu”) opened in 1922, and she was instrumental in planning the 1931 *Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts*. In 1937, she closed the gallery and bequeathed her Native arts collection to several institutions, including the DIA. See Gregor Stark and E. Catherine Rayne, *El Delirio: The Santa Fe World of Elizabeth White*, ed. Jo Ann Baldinger (Santa Fe, N. Mex.: School of American Research Press, 1998).
 - 20 Jonathan Batkin, “Martina Vigil and Florentino Montoya: Master Potters of San Ildefonso and Cochiti Pueblos,” *American Indian Art Magazine* 12, no. 4 (Autumn 1987): 33–34.
 - 21 Guthe, *Pueblo Pottery Making*, 85.
 - 22 Tanner, *Southwest Indian Painting*, 134.
 - 23 Guthe, *Pueblo Pottery Making*, 30, 71–73, 77.
 - 24 Linda Murray Berzok, *American Indian Food* (Westwood, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2005), 100; and Harriet V. Kuhnlein, “Dietary Mineral Ecology of the Hopi,” *Journal of Ethnobiology* 1, no. 1 (May 1981): 87–88.
 - 25 Gray, *Tonita Peña*, 38; Patricia Janis Broder, *Earth Songs, Moon Dreams: Paintings by American Indian Women* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 14; and Joe Herrera Jr., conversation with the author, May 1, 2020.
 - 26 Guthe, *Pueblo Pottery Making*, 25–26.
 - 27 Alice Corbin Henderson, “Indian Artists of the Southwest,” *American Indian* 2, no. 3 (Spring 1945): 26.
 - 28 Peña’s aunt and uncle sold works to Jesus Sito Candelario, who owned the “Original

- Old Curio Store,” as well as Juan Olivas, an itinerant dealer, both in Santa Fe. Jonathan Batkin, “Tourism Is Overrated: Pueblo Pottery and the Early Curio Trade, 1880–1910,” in *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*, ed. Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1999), 283, 288–89; Helen R. Lucero and Suzanne Baizerman, *Chimayó Weaving: The Transformation of a Tradition* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1999), 41; and Dozier, *Pueblo Indians of North America*, 109.
- 29 Gray, *Tonita Peña*, 12; Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting*, 3; and Peña quoted in Henderson, “Indian Artists of the Southwest,” 25.
- 30 Gray, *Tonita Peña*, 12; Broder, *Earth Songs, Moon Dreams*, 12; and Penney and Roberts, “America’s Pueblo Artists,” 25.
- 31 Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting*, 39.
- 32 Richard H. Pratt, “The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites” (1892), in *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the “Friends of the Indian” 1880–1900*, ed. Francis Paul Prucha (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1973), 260–61. See also Tom Holm, *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs: Native Americans and Whites in the Progressive Era* (Austin: Texas Univ. Press, 2005).
- 33 Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting*, 39; and Winona Garmhausen, *History of Indian Arts Education in Santa Fe* (Santa Fe, N. Mex.: Sunstone Press, 1988), 30.
- 34 Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting*, 40.
- 35 Gray, *Tonita Peña*, 12, 52; and Broder, *Earth Songs, Moon Dreams*, 12.
- 36 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 6; and Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” 36. On transculturation, see also Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet de Onís (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1995), 97–103.
- 37 Sascha T. Scott, “Ana-Ethnographic Representation: Early Modern Pueblo Painters, Scientific Colonialism, and Tactics of Refusal,” *Arts* 9, no. 6 (January 2020): 1–24; Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting*, 44–47; Alice Marriott, *María: The Potter of San Ildefonso* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1948), 155; and Margretta S. Dietrich, “Their Culture Survives,” *Indians at Work*, April 15, 1936, 20–23.
- 38 Elizabeth DeHuff quoted in Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting*, 82.
- 39 Seymour, *When the Rainbow Touches Down*, 20; “March 29,—Opening of exhibit of dance and ceremonial drawings by pupils of U.S. Indian School,” in “Museum Chronology,” *El Palacio*, April 7, 1919, 135.
- 40 “Opening of exhibit,” *El Palacio*, April 7, 1919, 143.
- 41 Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting*, 29, 32.
- 42 W. Jackson Rushing, *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde: A History of Cultural Primitivism* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1995), 15; and Seymour, *When the Rainbow Touches Down*, 21.
- 43 Tonita Peña to Lansing B. Bloom, January 22, 1921, and February 15, 1921, both from box 4, folder 13, Edgar L. Hewett Collection, Fray Angélico Chávez History Library (hereafter Hewett Collection).
- 44 Tonita Peña to Lansing B. Bloom, February 18, 1921. See also March 19, 1921, and May 8, 1921, box 4, folder 3, Hewett Collection.
- 45 Tonita Peña to Lansing B. Bloom, April 7, 1922, box 4, folder 6, Hewett Collection.
- 46 Edgar Hewett to John Sloan, January 10, 1922, box 4, folder 6, Hewett Collection.
- 47 “Indian Ceremonies,” *El Palacio*, June 1, 1925, 240–41; “Rothbart Art Pieces to be Sold This Week,” *New York Times*, March 14, 1926, E2; “Painters and Exhibits: Modern Art Collection,” *El Palacio*, May 15, 1926, 215–16; Joseph Miller, *New Mexico: A Guide to the Colorful State*, ed. Henry G. Alsberg, rev. ed. (1940; repr., New York: Hastings House, 1962), 162; and “Bklyn. Exhibit Of Indian Art Opens Fe ft.1,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, January 28, 1930, 7.
- 48 Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts brochure, 1931, Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts file, Amelia Elizabeth White Collection, School of American Research, Santa Fe, N. Mex.; Jennifer McLerran, *A New Deal for Native Art: Indian Arts and Federal Policy, 1933–1943* (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 2009), 243n75; and John Sloan and Oliver La Farge, “Introduction to American Indian Art,” in *Introduction to American Indian Art: To Accompany the First Exposition of American Indian Art Selected Entirely with Consideration of Esthetic Value* (New York: Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts, 1931), 1.
- 49 Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting*, 182.
- 50 Sloan and La Farge, “Introduction to American Indian Art,” 7.
- 51 Herbert J. Spinden, *Fine Art and the First Americans* (New York: Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts, 1931), 2:4.
- 52 Rose V. S. Berry, “American Inter-Tribal Indian Art” *Art and Archaeology* 32, nos. 5–6 (November–December 1931): 159, 157, 188. See also Joan Meyer, “Pueblo Painters,” *Mission Fields at Home* 5, no. 4 (January 1933): 54.
- 53 Sloan, “Indian Art,” 19, 21.
- 54 Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel, “Introduction: The Global Horizons of Modernism,” in *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity*, ed. Doyle and Winkiel (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2005), 13; and Elizabeth Harney and Ruth B. Phillips, “Inside Modernity: Indigeneity, Coloniality, Modernisms” in Harney and Phillips, *Mapping Modernisms*, 4, 17.
- 55 Squaw is a derogatory term for Indigenous North American women. Rushing, *Generations*, 8; Arthur Strawn, “The Squaw Who Broke Into Newport With Her Paintings,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 1, 1933, 5. Peña was actually thrice-married by this point in her life; Strawn omits her deceased second husband, Felipe Herrera. For more gender-biased reviews, see Howard Devree, “In the Art Galleries: Briefs on Exhibitions,” *New York Times*, January 26, 1936, X10; and “30 Shows,” *Time*, November 16, 1936, 48.
- 56 Sister M. Bernardine of St. Catherine School quoted in Meyer, “Pueblo Painters,” 52.
- 57 Meyer, “Pueblo Painters,” 51, 52.
- 58 Pablita Velarde (recalling Peña’s words) quoted in Gray, *Tonita Peña*, 52.
- 59 *Ibid.*, 34.
- 60 Severin M. Fowles, “Our Father (Our Mother): Gender Ideology, Praxis, and Marginalization in Pueblo Religion,” in *Engaged Anthropology: Research Essays on North American Archaeology, Ethnobotany, and Museology*, ed. Michelle Hegmon and B. Sunday Eiselt (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2005), 27–51; Devon Abbott Mihesuah, *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2003); and Alfonso Ortiz, “Ritual Drama and the Pueblo World View,” in Ortiz, *New Perspectives on the Pueblos*, 140–45.
- 61 Julie Solometo, “The Context and Process of Pueblo Mural Painting in the Historic

- Era," *Kiva* 76, no. 1 (Fall 2010): 83–116; and Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting*, 24.
- 62 Joseph H. Suina, "Pueblo Secrecy: Result of Intrusions," *New Mexico Magazine* (January 1992): 61; and Dozier, *Pueblo Indians of North America*, 50, 115–18.
- 63 Suina, "Pueblo Secrecy," 63; and Mary H. Nooter, "Introduction: The Aesthetics and Politics of Things Unseen," in *Secrecy: African Art that Conceals and Reveals* (Munich: Prestel, 1993), 20.
- 64 Cynthia L. Chavez, "Negotiated Representations: Pueblo Artists and Culture," (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of New Mexico, 2001), 82–83, 74, 87; and Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2014), 106.
- 65 Elizabeth A. Brandt, "On Secrecy and the Control of Knowledge," in *Secrecy: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. Stanton K. Tefft (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1980), 127; Chavez, "Negotiated Representations," 73–87; Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh, "Sketching Knowledge: Quandaries in the Mimetic Reproduction of Pueblo Ritual," *American Ethnologist* 38, no. 3 (August 2011): 452–56; and Scott, *Strange Mixture*, 168–69.
- 66 Chavez, "Negotiated Representations," 86, 102, 103–4.
- 67 Chavez, "Negotiated Representations," 108, 109–10.
- 68 Jantzer-White, "Tonita Peña," 372; and Dozier, *Pueblo Indians of North America*, 182–85, 196–97; Joe Herrera Jr., conversation with the author, May 1, 2020.
- 69 Joe Herrera quoted in Seymour, *When the Rainbow Touches Down*, 144.
- 70 Lange, *Cochiti*, 179.
- 71 Sam Arquero quoted in Jantzer-White, "Tonita Peña," 373. Joe Herrera Jr. echoes Sam Arquero's sentiments. Joe Herrera Jr., conversation with the author, May 1, 2020.
- 72 Charles Burke, Circular No. 1665: Indian Dancing, April 26, 1921, reel 40, Indian Rights Association records (Collection 1523), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. See also Lawrence C. Kelly, *The Assault on Assimilation: John Collier and the Origins of Indian Policy Reform* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1983); Margaret D. Jacobs, *Engendered Encounters: Feminism and Pueblo Cultures, 1879–1934* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1999), 178–209; Jacqueline Shea Murphy, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2007), 81–107; and Tisa Wenger, *We Have A Religion: The 1920s Pueblo Indian Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2009).
- 73 C. J. Crandall, "Reports Concerning Indians in New Mexico: Report of Superintendent in Charge of Pueblo, Santa Fe, N. Mex., August 19, 1905," in *Annual Reports of the Department of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1905: Indian Affairs* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1906), 273.
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- 76 Jantzer-White, "Tonita Peña," 374.
- 77 Gerald Vizenor, ed., *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2008).
- 78 Joe Herrera quoted in Seymour, *When the Rainbow Touches Down*, 149. On early scholarship, see Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 217; Tanner, *Southwest Indian Painting*, 97; and Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting*, 189. On patrons' expectations, see J. J. Brody, "Pueblo Fine Arts," in *Southwest*, ed. Alfonso Ortiz, vol. 9 of *Handbook of North American Indians* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979), 607; Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting*, 107; and W. Jackson Rushing, "Modern by Tradition," in *Modern by Tradition: American Indian Painting in the Studio Style*, ed. Bruce Bernstein and Rushing (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1995), 31–36.
- 79 Horton, *Art for an Undivided Earth*, 98, 106–7.
- 80 Scott, *Strange Mixture*, 164.
- 81 Gregory Cajete, "Native Science and Sustaining Indigenous Communities," in *Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Learning from Indigenous Practices for Environmental Sustainability*, ed. Melissa K. Nelson and Dan Shilling (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2018), 16, 18. For multiple views on TEK, see the essays in this anthology.
- 82 Cajete, "Native Science," 23, 24–45; and Ortiz, "Ritual Drama," 143.
- 83 Roberts, "The Ethnomusicology of the Eastern Pueblos," 251.
- 84 Scott, *Strange Mixture*, 164–65.
- 85 Jantzer-White, "Tonita Peña," 375–77. For similar arguments about male painters, see Horton, *Art for an Undivided Earth*, 98; and Scott, *Strange Mixture*, 163.
- 86 On the cartouches, see Rushing, *Generations*, 11–12.
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- 88 Barbara A. Babcock, "At Home, No Women Are Storytellers: Ceramic Creativity and the Politics of Discourse in Cochiti Pueblo," in *Creativity/Anthropology*, ed. Smadar Lavie, Kirin Narayan, and Renato Rosaldo (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1993), 70–99.
- 89 For other works with some background imagery, see *Cochiti Lady Breaking Bread in the Oven* (ca. 1922, Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art), *Victory* (ca. 1943, location unknown), and *Life in Cochiti* (ca. 1943, private collection).
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- 91 Tanner, *Southwest Indian Painting*, 135.
- 92 Lange, *Cochiti*, 53.
- 93 Maureen E. Reed, *A Woman's Place: Women Writing New Mexico* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 2005), 240; and Velarde quoted in Sally Hyer, "Pablita Velarde: The Pueblo Artist as Cultural Broker," in *Between Indian and White Worlds: The Cultural Broker*, ed. Margaret Connell Szasz (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 279–80. On Peña's legacy, see also Rushing, *Generations*, 16–17.