

SHAPING NEW TRADITIONS

KEY TERMS

- Ceramics
- Innovation
- Matrilineal
- Pueblo (Santa Clara)
- Tradition



WEDDING JAR 1950s

Polished earthenware

Margaret Tafoya

Born: Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico 1904

Died: Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico 2001

Mary Louise Gutman Bequest fund

BMA 2013.106

©Artist's estate

CLOSE LOOKING

THIS TWO-SPOUTED WEDDING JAR by Santa Clara Pueblo potter Margaret Tafoya was hand built using coils of rolled clay. It is decorated with the carved image of the Pueblo deity Avanyu, the guardian of water. Its curving lines suggest flowing water and its zigzags resemble lightning released from Avanyu's mouth. Once the deity was carved, the vessel was set aside to dry. Corncobs were then used to smooth the surface, and the long process of polishing began. The pot was covered with multiple layers of slip (a watery substance containing clay), and between each layer's application, the surface was burnished with a smooth stone to create a brilliant, high-gloss finish for which Tafoya is known. After the desired finish was achieved, the pot was fired.¹ The jar is black-on-black ware, meaning that both the decoration and the vessel itself are black.

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

BORN IN THE SMALL PUEBLO of Santa Clara, northwest of Santa Fe, New Mexico, Margaret Tafoya came from a long line of potters. A 1983 exhibition at the Denver Museum of Natural History included more than one hundred pots by six generations of Tafoya family ceramic artists. Her mother, Serafina Gutierrez Tafoya, a renowned potter, was Margaret's biggest influence. Both mother and daughter were known for their abilities to make unusually large vessels—some thirty inches high or more.

Tafoya made only hand-coiled pots using chocolate-colored clay dug from deposits on Santa Clara land. She always prayed to Mother Clay before working, saying, "You can't go to Mother Clay without the cornmeal and ask her permission to touch her."⁴ The clay was taken from an area where her ancestors dug, and she required that her children do likewise. Said Tafoya, "My girls are still doing work from the clay that my great-great grandparents used."⁵ She insisted that her family fire their pots with natural fuels in an open fire. To get the inky black finish associated with Santa Clara wares, Tafoya covered her pots with finely chopped horse or cow manure and allowed the smoke to permeate the vessels' surface.⁶

Tafoya created red-on-red and black-on-black ware decorated with carved, unpolished matte designs that contrast with the highly polished surface. These designs include water serpents, rain clouds, and buffalo horns—all symbols of survival for the Santa Clara. She also carved bear paw designs on the necks of large water jars and wedding vases. The bear paw is significant to the Tafoya family because legend says that during a time of drought in the Santa Clara Pueblo, a bear led the people to a spring and saved them.⁷ The paw is a symbol of good luck suited for a married couple's water-filled wedding jar because, as Margaret Tafoya said, "The bear always knows where the water is."⁸

While grounded in the pottery-making tradition of the Santa Clara Pueblo, Tafoya advanced the ceramic arts through her vision and innovation. She adapted centuries-old vessel shapes and revived techniques that had been discontinued by the late 1800s. Tafoya's influence was profound. Five of her eight children are recognized ceramic artists, as are several grandchildren. In 1984, Margaret Tafoya was named a National Heritage Fellow by the National Endowment for the Arts for her artistic excellence and contributions to America's traditional arts heritage.⁹

ART IN CONTEXT

PEOPLE OF THE SANTA CLARA believe that the serpent Avanyu lives in the Rio Grande and its tributaries. During the month of July, when the Avanyu feeds, Pueblo people do not swim in the water out of fear of being eaten. Respectful of the Pueblo people, the serpent only feeds in July so that the people can use the water freely the rest of the year. Potter Margaret Tafoya's grandson, Ryan Roller-Kha'-Po'-Owingeh, writes, "Many important and trustworthy people among the descendants of the people known as the 'anasazi'² have seen this legendary creature with their own eyes, my great-grandmother Margaret Tafoya being one of them."³ Though seen in the 1920s by Margaret Tafoya, the deity had special significance both culturally and personally for the potter thirty years later, when the jar was made.

A Pueblo wedding jar is traditionally made by the groom's family and presented to the bride at her home. After receiving marital advice from both families, the bride drinks water that has been blessed by a spiritual man from one spout of the jar, turns the vase, and passes it to the groom. He, in turn, drinks from the same spout. The ritual is then repeated with the other spout. The two spouts represent the spouses and the one handle that is formed from the spouts represent their unity. Filled with liquid for drinking and decorated with the image of the guardian of water, Tafoya's jar is an excellent example of the relationship between form and function.

Living in lands now part of New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado are twenty-one Pueblo groups who speak several different languages. Some have matrilineal kinship systems and others are patrilineal.



Ceramist artist Margaret Tafoya holds one of her vessels featuring a bear paw design.

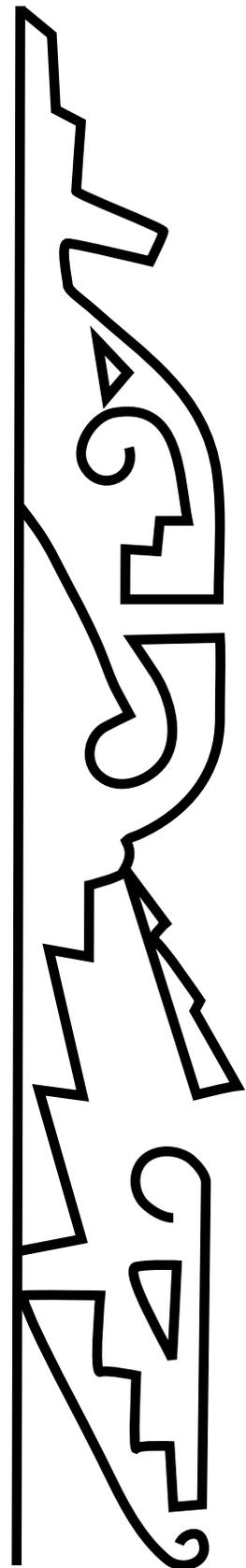
During the time of Spanish colonialism in the mid-1500s, these peoples were living in villages made of adobe, stone, and wood that explorer Francisco Vasquez de Coronado called “pueblos,” meaning “towns.” The word was soon generalized by Spanish colonials to mean the people inhabiting the villages. One of nineteen pueblos of New Mexico, the Santa Clara settled along the fertile Rio Grande in New Mexico. The traditional agricultural economy was based on corn, beans, and squash, often referred to as the “Three Sisters.”

For more than one thousand years, coiled pottery was an important commodity among the Rio Grande pueblos. As traffic increased in the nineteenth century along the Santa Fe Trail, the commercial trade route established between Franklin, Missouri, and Santa Fe, New Mexico, the pueblos replaced handmade pottery with machine-made products to keep up with demand. A revival of traditional, hand-built pottery occurred at the turn of the twentieth century. At this time, the Santa Clara ceramicists began making large, beautifully formed, and finely decorated coil-built vessels that were more artistic than utilitarian. The matrilineal Santa Clara has long been known for its exceptional earthenware traditions that were learned as daughters watched mothers, aunts, and grandmothers create pottery.

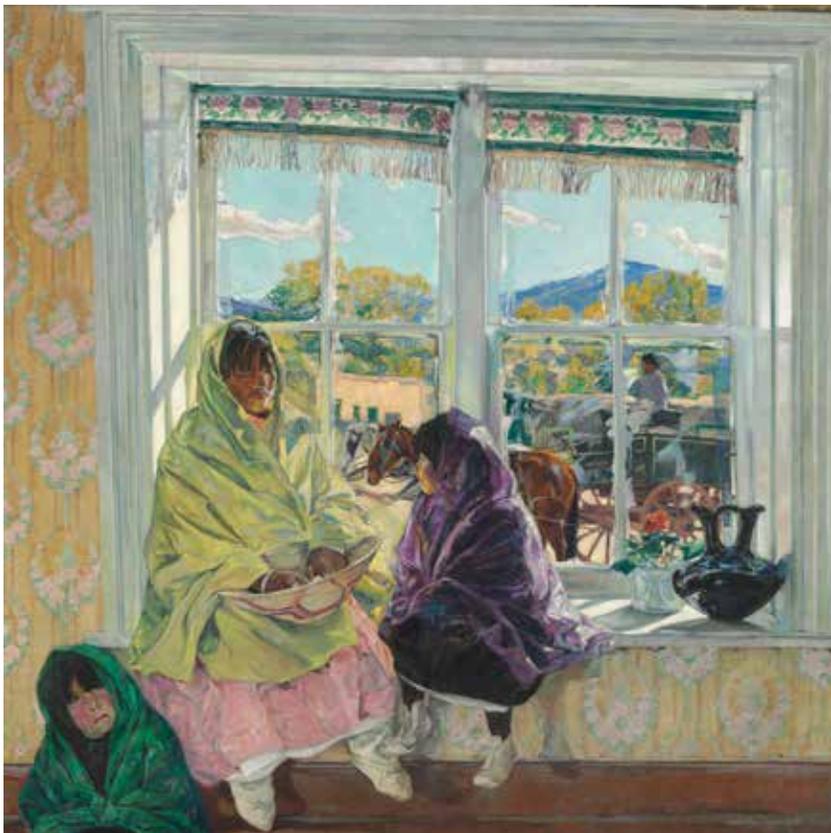
RELATED ARTWORK

ART COLLECTOR AND FORMER CHICAGO MAYOR Carter Harrison, Jr., his brother, and several other businessmen, including meat-packing tycoon Oscar Meyer, formed a group of financial backers to send artists to Taos in exchange for choice paintings they made while in residence there. Artist Walter Ufer, who grew up in Kentucky, was sent to Taos by these sponsors in 1914. He traveled as a guest of the Santa Fe Railroad, whose management was eager to purchase paintings for display in rail stations to increase interest in train travel to the Southwest.¹⁰ Ufer quickly developed a deep interest in the society and landscape of Taos. He built a studio in Taos in 1914 and returned for long stays in 1915 and 1916, before settling permanently in the area.

Ufer perceived the Pueblos as having been oppressed by European Americans for so long that their cultural identities were at risk of becoming lost. He responded by painting everyday life in Taos that he feared was disappearing. Rather than posing subjects in studios, or, as he described it, “exploiting their romantic appearances and sensationalizing their ceremonials,”¹¹ Ufer instead attempted to depict Pueblo peoples in a respectful and realistic way.



Avanyu decoration on *Wedding Jar*.



LUZANNA [LOUSUANNA LUJAN] AND HER SISTERS 1920

Oil on canvas

Walter Ufer

Born: Louisville, Kentucky 1876

Died: Santa Fe, New Mexico 1936

Gift of the Friends of Art, BMA 1931.5.1

In *Luzanna and Her Sisters*, Luzanna Lujan, the eldest of the three girls in the painting, wears a vivid lime-green shawl highlighted in yellow and shadowed in blue. The shawl contrasts against the decorative patterns of the wallpaper and window shades. She tends to something, possibly related to meal preparation, in the woven basket on her lap. Luzanna and one of her sisters were employed by Walter Ufer in his home in an unknown capacity for a few months in the fall and winter of 1919, the year before this painting was made. Beyond the girls, the bright desert sun, which Ufer often depicted at midday, shines on the scene of a horse-drawn cart outside the window. A peach adobe building, yellowish-green vegetation, and a royal blue mountain range contrast against a brilliant azure sky. Ufer used brushes thickly covered in bright pigments that created texture and added silvery white highlights to suggest the shimmer of the intense New Mexico sun.

To the right, on the windowsill sits a clay wedding jar very much like the one made by Margaret Tafoya in the BMA collection. In order to capture the three dimensionality and shiny surface of the vessel, Ufer used highlights of blue, green, orange, and yellow. A red highlight on the pot creates the illusion of the red flower reflected in its glassy surface.

¹ Charles S. King, *Born of Fire: The Life and Pottery of Margaret Tafoya* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2008), 26.

² The Anasazi were an ancient farming culture that grew crops in the area where present-day New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Utah meet. http://www.watertown.k12.ma.us/cunniff/americanhistorycentral/01firstamericans/The_Anasazi.html

³ Ryan Roller-Kha'-Po' Owingeh "Awanyu" <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Awanyu>

⁴ <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/05/arts/margaret-tafoya-96-pueblo-potter-whose-work-found-a-global-audience.html>

⁵ <http://arts.gov/honors/heritage/fellows/margaret-tafoya>

⁶ King, *Born of Fire: The Life and Pottery of Margaret Tafoya*, 28.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁸ <http://arts.gov/honors/heritage/fellows/margaret-tafoya>

⁹ <http://arts.gov/honors/heritage/fellows/margaret-tafoya>

¹⁰ Patricia Janis Broder, *Taos: A Painter's Dream* (New York, NY: New York Graphic Society, 1980), 212.

¹¹ "Art in the Southwest," *El Palacio*, 24, May 19–26, 1928, 404.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1: Exploring transmission of knowledge

Grades: K–2, 3–5

Subjects: English Language Arts, History/Social Studies, Visual Arts

Students will look closely at the *Wedding Jar* using the following questions as guidelines for the discussion. Teachers will record student answers on the white/black board.

- What colors, shapes, lines, textures, space, and forms do you see?
- What is the overall shape of the object?
- How do you think this object might be used?

Teacher will share with students information on the creation, purpose, and imagery of the *Wedding Jar* and introduce students to the artist Margaret Tafoya and her family, focusing on the transmission of ceramics knowledge from Margaret to her children and grandchildren.

In pairs, students will discuss special skills that their parents, grandparents, older adult family members, older family friends, or respected community members have taught them or could teach them in the future. As a homework assignment, they will ask one of these people to share how they learned this skill, and record their responses. The following questions can be used to guide their interviews:

- What is your special skill?
- When did you learn this skill?
- Who taught you?
- Why did they teach you this skill?
- Have you ever taught anyone else this skill?
- Why is this skill important to you?
- Why should other people learn this skill?

Students will then write a three-paragraph report on how their family member or friend learned the skill. Students will share some of the stories they recorded with the class in a group discussion.

ACTIVITY 2: Making a coil pot

Grades: K–2, 3–5

Subjects: English Language Arts, History/Social Studies, Visual Arts

Students will look closely at the *Wedding Jar* and respond to the following questions. Teacher will record student responses on the black/white board.

- What colors, shapes, lines, and textures do you see?
- What is the overall shape of the object?
- How do you think this object might be used?

Teacher will share with students the imagery and technique of the *Wedding Jar*, making sure to share the dimensions of the pot to emphasize the large size.

Students will create a simple coil pot with self-drying clay or, if a kiln is available, firing clay, paints, and glazes.

Basic instructions on how to make a coil pot can be found at: <http://www.deepspacesparkle.com/2013/10/21/how-to-make-a-coil-pot/> or <http://www.asia.si.edu/explore/teacherResources/Connections0108.pdf>

If there is a source of local clay that students can access, they can harvest their own supplies of clay.

Once pots are made, students will reflect on the process using the following questions to guide their discussion as a group:

- What part of making a coil pot was hard?
- What part of making a coil pot was easy?
- In order to make a coil pot the size of the *Wedding Jar*, what are some things you would have to keep in mind?

ACTIVITY 3: Designing a meaningful vessel

Grades: K–2, 3–5

Subjects: English Language Arts, History/Social Studies, Visual Arts

Students will examine the *Wedding Jar* and *Luzanna [Lousuanna Lujan] and Her Sisters*. Starting with the *Wedding Jar*, students will look closely and generate as many descriptive words as they can. Teacher will record the words on the white/black board and share with students information on the *Wedding Jar*, its purpose, and imagery using these resources.

Next, teacher will share the image of *Luzanna [Lousuanna Lujan] and Her Sister* and ask students to look closely at the painting using the following questions to guide their discussion. Teacher will record student responses on the black or white board.

- What colors, shapes, textures, lines, space, and forms do you see?
- What figures do you see in the painting? What objects?
- What are the different parts of the painting that make the composition?
- What do you think is happening in this painting? What do you see that makes you say that?

Share with students information about the painting. Make sure students have seen the *Wedding Jar* depicted in the painting if they have not already pointed it out.

Teacher will divide students into teams of four where they will discuss the following questions:

- What are some vessels or containers that we use in our daily lives?
- How do we use these vessels or containers?
- Are there particular vessels or containers that are used for special occasions? If so, what are they and for what occasions? (For example, a vase to hold flowers that someone might give to their mother on Mother's Day or a box to hold birthday and holiday cards from friends and family.)

Student teams will then share their answers in a group discussion. Teacher will record student responses on the white/black board. Student teams will then collaboratively design a vessel for an important purpose, such as to hold objects that have personal meaning. They will first determine the purpose, then the size, shape, and decoration of the vessel and create an illustration of the design using design elements such as pattern, contrast, etc. They will share their designs with the class in a large group discussion.

STANDARDS AND CURRICULUM

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

English Language Arts

Grade 2

CCSS.ELA—Literacy.SL.2.1 Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

CCSS.ELA—Literacy.W.2.2 Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points, and providing a concluding statement or section.

Grade 4

CCSS.ELA—Literacy.SL.4.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA—Literacy.W.4.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

MARYLAND STATE CURRICULUM

History/Social Studies

Grade 2

2.A.1.b. Explain ways people of different ages and/or cultural backgrounds can respect and help to pass on traditions and customs.

Visual Arts

Grade 2

1.1.a. Describe colors, lines, shapes, textures, forms, and space found in observed objects and the environment.

1.2.b. Use color, line, shape, texture, form, and space to represent ideas visually from observation, memory, and imagination.

1.2.a. Describe how artists use color, line, shape, texture, form, and space to represent what people see, know, feel, and imagine.

2.1.a. Observe works of art and describe how artists express ideas about people, places, and events.

2.2.b. Communicate a variety of reasons for creating artworks, such as feelings, experiences, events, places, and ideas.

Grade 4

1.1.a. Analyze ways that the elements of art, such as color, line, and shape are used to represent visual and tactile texture and movement in artworks.

1.3.b. Select and use principles of design, such as pattern, contrast, repetition, rhythm/movement, balance, emphasis, variety, harmony/unity, and proportion, to give personal meaning to visual compositions.

2.1.a. Analyze selected works of art and describe how different artists express ideas and feelings about human experience.

2.2.a. Identify technologies, processes, and materials used to create visual art.



Wedding Jar, 1950s, Polished earthenware
Margaret Tafoya
Born: Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico 1904
Died: Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico 2001
Mary Louise Gutman Bequest fund, BMA 2013.106
©Artist's estate



Luzanna [Lousuanna Lujan] and Her Sisters, 1920, Oil on canvas
Walter Ufer
Born: Louisville, Kentucky 1876, Died: Santa Fe, New Mexico 1936
Gift of the Friends of Art, BMA 1931.5.1