WHAT CONTINUES THE DREAM:
Contemporary Arts and Crafts from the Powwow Tradition
When Indians were placed on reservations, there was a bloom of artwork...because the only freedom they had was in their minds. It was an incredible time. They were conquered and abused, no longer wanted on the face of the earth, and they took off and created great pieces of artwork. It was just tremendous. I'd like to see something like that shown as a tribute, not just to Native Americans, but to mankind, to what can happen when you want to survive. When you physically feel unable to, what makes you sing? What gives you hope? What continues the dream?

—Alfreda Mitre, Southern Paiute


WHAT CONTINUES THE DREAM: Contemporary Arts and Crafts from the Powwow Tradition

A special thanks to all the Native American artists featured in this exhibition!

Rattle
Kenny Anderson
Southern Paiute

Medicine Bottle
William Astor
Washo/Northern Paiute/Western Shoshone

Dance Collar
Arlene Austin
Northern Paiute

Powwow Princess Crowns, Medallion
Dean Barlese
Northern Paiute

Girl’s Powwow Fan
John Bear
Choctaw/Apache

Grass Dancer (mixed media)
Wayne Allen Burke
Northern Paiute

Horse Motif Dance Stick
Adam Fortunate Eagle
Chippewa

Porcupine Hair Roach
Ken Paul
Northern Paiute

Bracelet
Lynnaya Comas
Washo/Northern Paiute/Wintu

Color print (untitled)
Gordon Gibson
Northern Paiute/Western Shoshone

Elk Antler Medallion
Burton Pete
Northern Paiute

Feather Motif Necklace,
Dance for Life (mixed media)
Cassandra Leigh Darrough
Northern Paiute

Drumstick
Donald “Ike” Hicks
Northern Paiute/Western Shoshone

Medicine Pouch, Moccasins, Rattle,
Women’s Regalia Set
Angie Quintana
Western Shoshone

Dreamcatcher
Deanna Domingo
Southern Paiute

Cell Phone Holder
Linda Johnson-Comas
Washo/Northern Paiute

Shoshone Rose Motif Belt and Loom
Debra Reed
Shoshone/Northern Paiute/Ute

Basket Motif Necklace
Ryan Dunn
Northern Paiute/Western Shoshone

Miniature Hand Drum
Steve Mike
Western Shoshone

Hand Drum
Michael Rojas
Terascan

Gift Baskets
Rebecca Eagle
Northern Paiute/Western Shoshone

Miniature Buckskin War Shirt
Bobbie Nordwall
Western Shoshone

Dress, Traditional Style
Francine Tohannie
Western Shoshone
The contemporary intertribal powwow is a relatively new cultural phenomenon in Nevada. It has sprung to life during the past half-century from roots that run deep into Nevada soil and extend far beyond the borders of the state. Each year, powwows are presented statewide on tribal lands ranging from the Duck Valley Indian Reservation on the Nevada-Idaho border to the Fort Mojave Indian Reservation that straddles the state lines between Nevada, Arizona, and California. In many communities, the powwow is an annual event that brings people together to socialize and celebrate community spirit, honor traditional values, engage in friendly competition for prizes and recognition, and share pride of culture and community with each other and with outsiders.

BRINGING THE PEOPLE HOME…

On July 24–26, 2009, Big Bend Ranch was filled with dancers and spectators from many states and from overseas…

*Bringing the People Home* was our goal, and we hope to continue to do so in the years to come.

We have been given this earth to protect and to share, carrying on our traditions while sharing the experience.

Together we build, strive, and persevere. Together we are one community.

—1ST ANNUAL SACRED VISIONS POW-WOW COMMITTEE

POWWWOW: A BRIEF HISTORY

The word powwow is derived from the Algonquian word *pauwau* or *pauau*. It passed into use by English speaking immigrants in the 1600s on the eastern coast of North America. This word was associated with holy men, shamans, priests – elders whose powerful dreams provided spiritual guidance, curative powers, and supernatural insights. Ceremonials, feast days and other gatherings were associated with these individuals. Eventually, the term came to describe almost any ceremony or gathering by Native Americans, and over time its meaning broadened to include any informal “get-together” such as a party, meeting, or group discussion.

BETTER TO MAKE IT...

It’s better to make it than to buy it, because your time is really important. When you honor, it’s better that it’s made by you or your family member.

I make earrings and do beadwork and make dream catchers... and now I know how to make quilts. One of my grandsons died two years ago, and we had a memorial for him and she [Edna Mae Johnson] made a lot of the quilts, and that’s when I decided I wanted to learn. A lot of my family were dancers, too, and if somebody asked them to be head dancer or something, we always liked to give some quilts away for that, too, for giveaways at a powwow.

—KAREN WAHWASUCK, POTAWATOMI


Staff and volunteers worked together to make a moose hide drum for the Las Vegas Indian Center. “The drum is the heartbeat of our Native Nations and it is a cultural tradition and a great honor for native communities to have their own drum,” noted LVIC Executive Director Debra Reed. *Photo by Rebecca Smetselaar.*
Between 1880 and the mid-1930s, the ability of American Indian people to gather in public to celebrate traditional social or religious occasions was being curtailed. The “Civilization Regulations” and related policies were enforced in Nevada and other western states by federal government agents. These policies prohibited Native American dancing, religious ceremonies, traditional gatherings, and other cultural practices on reservation lands and at far-off boarding schools where school age children were being sent to learn “white man’s ways.”

At the same time, the American public was being entertained by “show Indians,” recruited and paid to perform at expositions, fairs, and tourist attractions. Tribes and individuals steadfastly continued to honor cultural and spiritual practices and beliefs, and to pass traditional knowledge on to the next generation, but these activities took place in private and under a cloak of secrecy to avoid the threat of punishment or imprisonment.

**DANCING IN THE FACE OF INJUSTICE**

My portraits embrace the pride, sorrow, and humility that all people experience; Men, women, and children of all cultures embracing triumph, praying for strength, and dancing in the face of injustice.

My portraits celebrate the human condition in defeat and triumph, and the honor of both, the marks that we bear as the signs of competitors.

So, to my family, friends, and those who worship, fight, and dance with honor—

Believe…

—WAYNE A. BURKE, NORTHERN PAIUTE

Historians cite the Ponca Powwow of 1879 in the newly-formed Indian Territory (now eastern Oklahoma) as the first public event to gather members of many different tribes – 67 tribes were resident in Indian Territory at the time – to participate in an exhibition of dancing, drumming and singing, in a circular arena, in the style of the modern day powwow.

By the turn of the 20th century, tribes in other states were using the word powwow to describe similar events that welcomed participation by other tribes and encouraged attendance by the general public. These events featured local dances and regalia mixed with more flamboyant and showy Northern Plains styles. At the same time, tribes continued to gather privately for social, religious, and ceremonial occasions.

MAKING MY OWN...

I was born and raised in Reno, until I was about 16, and then I went to school in Brigham City, in Utah. It's a boarding school. I got to meet other kids from all over. A lot of them spoke their language and had their own tribal dresses and when I looked at myself, being an urban Indian, there was nothing.

So, when I met my husband...his grandma had her own traditional dress, and she was collecting beads and she'd give me lots of beads. And being an artist myself, I could look at something and get the basic design. So being exposed to those different things, with my interest in it, I just started making my own dresses.

– FRANCINE TOHANNIE, WESTERN SHOSHONE

Nevada Folklife Archives # C970601, March 8, 1997, interview by Andrea Graham.
Passage of the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934 marked the beginning of a new era in Nevada’s Indian Territory. Tribes were once again free to organize ceremonies and gatherings openly. While they were adjusting to dramatic changes wrought by this “Indian New Deal,” another challenge materialized – one that would have far-reaching consequences in Indian Country. Nearly 45,000 Native Americans served in the United States Armed Forces during World War II. Another 40,000 men and women left their reservations and migrated to the cities to take jobs in defense-related industries. This was the first mass integration of Native Americans off the reservation into mainstream society in American history.

In 1952, the Bureau of Indian Affairs introduced the Urban Indian Relocation Program and began moving people off the reservation and into jobs in Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Jose, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Dallas. Over the next 30 years an estimated 750,000 Native Americans migrated to the cities. According to census estimates, by the year 2000, 64 percent of American Indians were living off the reservation and in urban environments, compared to 8 percent in 1940.

TO CELEBRATE LIFE…

For years, Native people have danced as a form of prayer and way to celebrate life.

There is a movement among Native people to raise awareness of cancer.
The dancer represents a friend, a family member – a person we all know.
Dance honors the spirit of people.
The shawl honors the spirit of hope, while the many colors of ribbon fringe represent the different types of cancer.

—CASSANDRA LEIGH DARROUGH,
NORTHERN PAIUTE/WESTERN SHOSHONE

“Community Health Representatives Speak Out About Cancer: An Invitation to Listen, A Call to Action,” The Indian Health Service Primary Care Provider, Vol. 34, No. 1, March, 2009
During this period in American history, a “pan Indian” sense of community developed between and among Native Americans from different tribes in similar circumstances. The intertribal powwow evolved as a place where people of all tribal affiliations could come together for fellowship, to honor ancestors and elders, and to share traditional values and pride of heritage with the younger generation.

Today, powwows are celebrated and recognized as powerful expressions of creativity, individuality, community and survival. *We Are Still Here* – the title of a radio program produced for the National Museum of the American Indian's 2002 Inaugural Powwow in Washington D.C. – echoes an often-expressed sentiment as tribes continue to counter the myth of the “Vanishing Indian” that guided 150 years of policy-making in the United States.

**WATCHING MY DAUGHTERS DANCE…**

I was taught the process of skinning the hide off the deer by my father. Hide work is very hard work. You must soak the hide and scrape it entirely. Eventually the work is finally done with consistently working and stretching the hide.

My desire was to complete my first hide to make a buckskin dress for my wonderful wife Danena and my three daughters. I completed this project with much joy and ambition.

My greatest accomplishment was beading my three daughters’ head crowns, belts, leggings, and beaded moccasins.

Watching my daughters dance in local and outside powwows in the beautiful outfits that I designed made me feel very proud.

—Roger Ike, Western Shoshone

Nevada Folklife Archives, Reference Collection.
POWWOW: THE EXPERIENCE

Today's intertribal powwow showcases the creativity, vitality, and artistry of Native American arts and culture in the 21st Century. Drawing from traditional forms and inspired by traditional values, many Nevada residents who take pride in their Native American heritage contribute to these events. They create elaborate regalia, teach young people to perform and compete, learn songs that are appropriate to particular dances or occasions, take seats in the drum circle, and dance in the footsteps of their ancestors.

Handmade arts and crafts are often a featured attraction, and people stand in line at food booths where "Indian Fry Bread" or "Indian Tacos" are served. Individuals and families may "take to the powwow trail," driving long distances to participate as visiting drum groups, enter dance competitions, or sell arts and crafts while visiting with family and friends from other counties or states.

The powwow schedule begins with the Grand Entry, led by an honor guard of armed forces veterans carrying the eagle staffs and flags, followed by honored guests such as tribal officials and princesses crowned at recent powwows. The Head Man and Head Woman lead the dancers into the arena. After a prayer and blessing, all are invited to participate in an intertribal "social" dance. Contest dances follow. If the powwow continues into the evening or lasts several days, additional Grand Entries are scheduled after the dinner break, or to open each subsequent day of the event.

FROM THE HEART
AND WITH HONOR...

We are singers for a few simple reasons.

We sing for the people, the dancers, and those who have come before us, always remembering that respecting the drum, each other, and our beliefs should hold true, above and beyond anything else, and that we should sing from the heart and with honor, rather than for the fame and glory.

— MARTIN MONTGOMERY, WASHO
LEAD SINGER, RED HOOP

Nevada Arts Council Folklife Program,
Correspondence Files, 2010.
Men's competition categories include Fancy Dance, Traditional, and Grass Dance; women compete in Fancy Shawl, Traditional, and Jingle Dance categories. There are many other dances that may be featured, some of them competitive and others that are open to all. In the competitive dances, dancers compete by age group for cash prizes under the watchful eye of the Head Man and Head Woman who have been chosen by the powwow committee. Everyone attending the powwow is welcome to enter the arena and dance when the Master of Ceremonies announces an ‘intertribal’ dance such as the Round Dance.

Most powwows feature a Powwow Princess competition. Competitors may be judged on regalia, dancing, ticket sales, and other criteria. The Princess receives a beaded crown and serves as an ambassador for her community or tribe at other powwows and events throughout the year. Hand drum competitions may also be featured as part of the program.

“The drum” is a group of performers who gather around a large drum to play and sing. The Host Drum attends by invitation, and many powwows feature the different Northern and Southern styles of drumming by having a host drum from each. Drums that have not officially been invited are welcome to make a place for themselves around the circle. They play in rotation, or take turns under the direction of the Arena Director and Master of Ceremonies. Some drums have earned a following on the powwow circuit and offer CDs for sale.

SHARING MY CULTURE…

I danced with a group at the elementary school on my reservation. We did mostly Paiute dances and I wore a buckskin dress made by my great grandmother, but I always wanted to do the more athletic, exciting fancy shawl dance, to compete in powwows. In traveling and sharing my culture, I have found that people are interested in what we, as native people, have to say. Much of the world knows about our past, but they don't know what our everyday lives look like.

I do not believe we are ever going to be fully acculturated, because of our values and how we grow up. We may speak English but our hearts have a language all their own and so do our traditions.

―MICHELLE MCCAULEY, PAIUTE/SHOSHONE/WASHO/QUINAUTL

Regalia are always unique to the individual dancer and constitute a personal expression of artistry, identity, and creativity. “Powwow” means different things to different people, even within families or tribes. The significance of the powwow to an individual may be influenced by tribal affiliations, family connections, spiritual beliefs, personal circumstances, and myriad other factors. Dancers dress in regalia appropriate to specific competitive or social dances, but personalized in ways that have special meaning to the wearers.

Dance regalia may be homemade or purchased, and may utilize traditional or contemporary materials. Patterns and colors are chosen for personal, family, or tribal significance. Some dancers wear heirloom pieces that have been passed down in their families. Many make regalia for themselves and family members. Some pieces are made for sale and purchased locally, at a powwow, or on the internet.

Powwow cannot represent one single “Native American” culture, that does not exist. Powwow represents the blending and mixing of traditions from the many different tribes and cultures present in North America throughout its history. Powwow is an expression of contemporary living communities, not historical ones. As such, it reflects intricate and complex relationships between and among people who honor and celebrate their own tribal culture, heritage and identity. Many different traditions are represented and respected as part of “powwow tradition.”

TO SHOW RESPECT...

At the intertribal powwow, all people are welcome to watch and participate.

If you are enrolled in a recognized tribe, you can have eagle feathers in your dance regalia. For others, because eagles are endangered species, it’s against the law to have them. Different tribes have their own ways, but eagle feathers are often given to people or families by their tribe, to show respect.

So, at a powwow, you pay respect to a dancer who has eagle feathers because he’s earned them, like guys who have come back from the military, from fighting in a war. I was taught to respect the medicine the eagle provides, and that when you receive feathers, everything of your being goes into them.

When I was younger, when I danced in my bustle and head roach, my fan and my dance stick in my hand, before I performed, I tugged on all my feathers and if there was one that was loose, I’d put it back in my bag and then go out there. To drop a feather in the arena, after the grounds have been blessed, I was taught, that’s the most disrespectful thing you can do as far as eagle is concerned.

– John Bear, Choctaw/Apache

Interviewed by Rebecca Snetselaar, May 4, 2010, Henderson, NV.

Dancers at the 2010 Snow Mountain Powwow.
Photo by Rebecca Snetselaar.
Plains Influence: Some of the regalia worn by men at a powwow are historically associated with warrior societies of the Great Plains tribes in the 1800s.

- The man's hair roach in this exhibition is made from porcupine and horse hair on a woven spine, with strings attached to tie under the chin. Feather plumes are added as decoration, or to signify honors earned.
- The showy bustle worn by Fancy Dancers, with feathers dyed in brilliant colors to match the dancer's beadwork, is an adaptation of a relatively austere feather bustle worn by some dancers in the Men's Traditional category.

Beadwork: Colorful and intricate, beadwork takes many forms. Some traditional colors and designs are associated with particular cultures.

- The Shoshone Rose motif on the beaded belt in this exhibition is an indication that the wearer identifies with the Shoshone culture.
- Dancers in the Women's Traditional category may wear a beaded collar that is historically associated with Great Basin tribes. The one in this exhibition is made in "traditional" colors – red, white and blue – and adorned with abalone shell discs.

Buckskin: The use of deer hide in clothing and other pieces of regalia is traditional in the Great Basin and many other areas of the United States.

- Making a dress or a war shirt, like the one represented by a framed miniature in this exhibition, is no small task. Working with hides requires the mastery of special skills and techniques. It can also be a costly undertaking as three to five hides are required to complete such a project.
- The child-size, high-top moccasins in the exhibition are handmade from buckskin that was brain-tanned and smoked "in the traditional way" by the artist's father. Smoking gives the buckskin its maize coloring and imparts the unmistakable essence of wood smoke.
**Nature and Spirituality:** Regalia are often made with animal designs and materials that have special symbolic or spiritual significance to the individual.

- Many elements of regalia are evocative of the natural environment, like the elk antler medallion in this exhibition that is carved to represent the natural landscape of Pyramid Lake, the cowrie shells that adorn the traditional style girl’s dance dress, and the buffalo-shaped medicine pouch.
- Different kinds of feathers are used in regalia, but eagle feathers have special significance. The Bald Eagle Protection Act of 1940 made it illegal to collect them without a permit. Enrolled members of a Federally-recognized tribe can obtain a permit to receive and possess eagle feathers for religious purposes. The feathers they receive can’t be sold, purchased, bartered or traded, but may be handed down to family members or other Native Americans for religious purposes. The flat fan in this exhibition is made with turkey feathers cut and dyed to look like eagle feathers.

**Now I Teach…**

When I was young, I used to watch my great-grandmother Elder Maggie Mose process her buckskin and bead on it. Now I teach because I feel that our art should continue.

Beadwork keeps our culture alive… Shows that we are still proud of our heritage… Reminds us not to forget who we are.

As an artist, I admire all forms of beadwork and continually make new designs and teach others of my unique beading projects.

I am proud to carry on my traditional techniques to my Native sisters and brothers.

—Angie Quintana, Western Shoshone


Bobbie Nordwall taught her granddaughter Mishon Shanley to make a traditional style beaded buckskin war shirt as a Nevada Folklife Apprenticeship project in 2009. This shirt, Bobbie explained, is an “intertribal” style worn by men during ceremonies and dances, including powwow. *Photo by Patricia Atkinson.*
Powwow is making its way onto the information superhighway as enthusiasts share photographs, videos, and experiences with a diverse audience. Virtual tourists can view videos from Nevada powwows to see all the styles of competitive dancing, hear the differences between Northern and Southern drumming styles, find out what “bird singing” sounds like, or learn about beading techniques and designs. Websites like powwows.com provide forums where dancers, singers and artists exchange information and influences. The internet also makes it possible for Native American artists to share their creative expressions and artistic visions with local, national, and international audiences and communities.

POWWOW ETIQUETTE...

- All powwow festivals are alcohol and drug free.
- Please don’t take pictures or use audio or video recording devices during the flag, prayer, or honor songs, or when an individual is honoring a drum through whistling.
- Guests are asked to stand and remove their hats for certain songs, unless the hat has an eagle feather in it.
- It is traditional to show respect to visiting chiefs and elders by deferring to them at virtually all times.
- Do not crowd around the drummers.
- Always ask for permission before making recordings or taking pictures of the dancers in their regalia.
- Children are welcome to enjoy the event but cannot play in the sacred circle.
- Participants are asked to respect the arena director, head dance man, and woman head dancer. If you are unsure who these individuals are, please ask.
- Follow the master of ceremonies statements during the powwow.
- For more information, please visit www.powwows.com.

http://nevadaindianterritory.com/indian_territory_events.html
Just a few generations ago, as they were being isolated on reservations by forces beyond their control, the people of the Great Basin grieved the loss of their traditional way of life, realizing that for themselves, for their children and grandchildren, there would be no way back. What their lives might be like in the future was unimaginable. Those survivors found a way forward. Subsequent generations have persevered, often with limited resources and in difficult circumstances, and continue today to carry on their cultures and traditions. Nevada’s resident Native American artists celebrate that indomitable spirit in their arts, sharing the creativity and vitality of traditional cultures and contemporary communities in an ever-widening circle. Art is everywhere in Indian Territory, and that flowering will continue, as long as there is a song to sing and the dream of another day.

—Rebecca Snetselaar, Curator, What Continues the Dream Folklife Program Associate, Nevada Arts Council

I HEARD MY GRANDFATHER SING...

There are different songs for different dances…and the younger people need to learn to sing the proper song for the proper dance.

I heard my grandfather sing years ago but I never did pick it up until I looked around and I noticed that nobody was learning. So I went to some of the elder singers and asked them if it would be OK if I learned their songs, not get them to sell, not to claim them as my own, but just to borrow them and to use them, when our people did some kind of ceremony or dance. That way, there’d be somebody there to carry them on. Then maybe later on, if somebody wants to learn, we can teach them the songs.

—Marlin Thompson, Northern Paiute

Nevada Folklife Archives # E080701, Sept. 25, 2008, interview by Rebecca Snetselaar.
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COVER PHOTOGRAPH:

Sunset at the Las Vegas Paiute Tribe’s Snow Mountain Powwow, Las Vegas, 2002. Photo by Ronda Churchill.

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WEBSITE RESOURCES

- Nevada Arts Council: http://www.nac.nevadaculture.org
- Nevada Humanities, Online Nevada Encyclopedia, Native American History: http://www.onlinenevada.org/history_of_nevada_diversity/tag=native_american_history
- Nevada Indian Territory: http://nevadaindianterritory.com/index.html
- Powwows.com: http://www.powwows.com/
- Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe Museum and Visitor Center: http://www.pyramidlake.us/pyramid-lake-visitor-center.html
- Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian: http://www.nmai.si.edu/index.cfm
- Stewart Indian School: http://www.stewartindianschool.com/

RESOURCES IN PRINT


PROGRAM RESOURCES

Nevada Folk Arts Roster
http://nac.nevadaculture.org/
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