

NATURE DETECTIVES

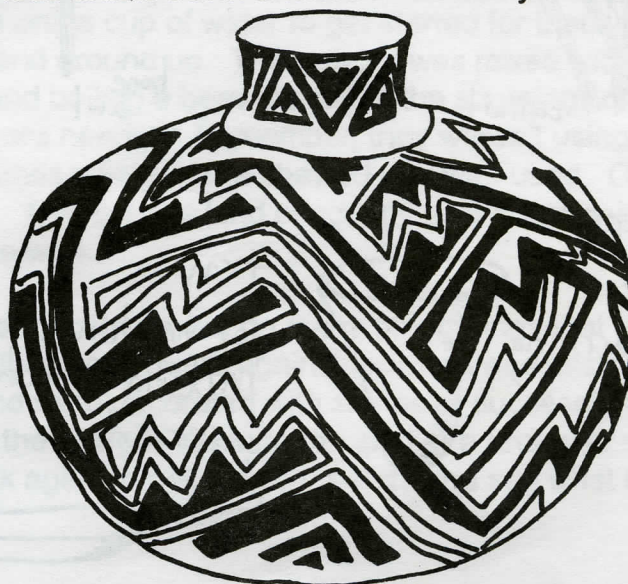
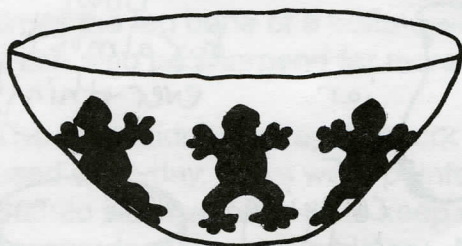
FALL 1995

EVERYDAY ART

In ancient times Native Americans made everything they needed by hand - their homes, clothing and toys, their baskets, bowls and pots, their tools, weapons and ceremonial objects. They made all these things with natural materials - animal hides, bones, stones, clay and grasses. Sometimes they decorated the things they made. This was the beginning of art.

The designs of Native Americans were inspired by nature and their own dreams and life experiences. An Anasazi woman thinking of how her corn plants needed rain would paint clouds, lightning, and frogs on her pottery bowls. The cradle board for an Arapaho baby often had a round ornament of dyed porcupine quills. This red, black and white circle symbolized the baby's head as well as the tipi. The colors represented the child's red blood, the black hair of youth, and the white hair of old age. The circle was divided into four sections for the four directions - east, south, west, and north. By making the cradle the mother created a prayer that her child would live a long and good life in harmony with the world.

Today we collect paintings done by famous artists but in ancient times everyone was an artist, creating their own usable art.



Made With Clay



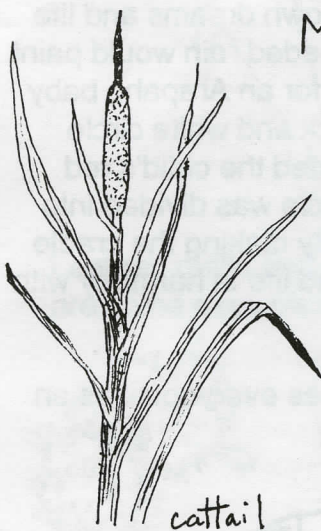
Hi! I made this pot for my family to carry water from the stream. For thousands of years people have used clay from the earth to make pots, bowls, jugs and even toys. Once my grandmother made me a family of pottery dolls. Sculpted clay is very beautiful and strong too.

I made this pot by rolling out ropes of clay. Then I stacked them on top of each other and sealed the spaces between with a clay and water mixture called slip.

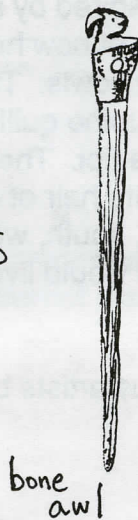
If the pot dried at this stage it would become brittle and break. To strengthen the pot I placed it in a hot open pit fire. After firing, it is very strong and ready to use. I decided to paint my pot to make it colorful. The lightning design I used is different from the designs of other tribes.

A Basket a Day

With the exception of tool-making, basket weaving is the oldest of the craft arts. Anasazi women gathered plants and wove them into baskets that they used every day.

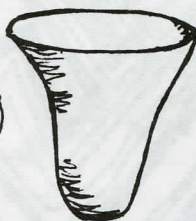


Materials:
cattails
yucca
beargrass
bullrushes
sage
willow



Tools:
stone knives for cutting, smoothing & splitting plant materials
fingernails & teeth for splitting
bone awls for punching holes & pulling plant materials through

Shapes:
cone
for carrying loads



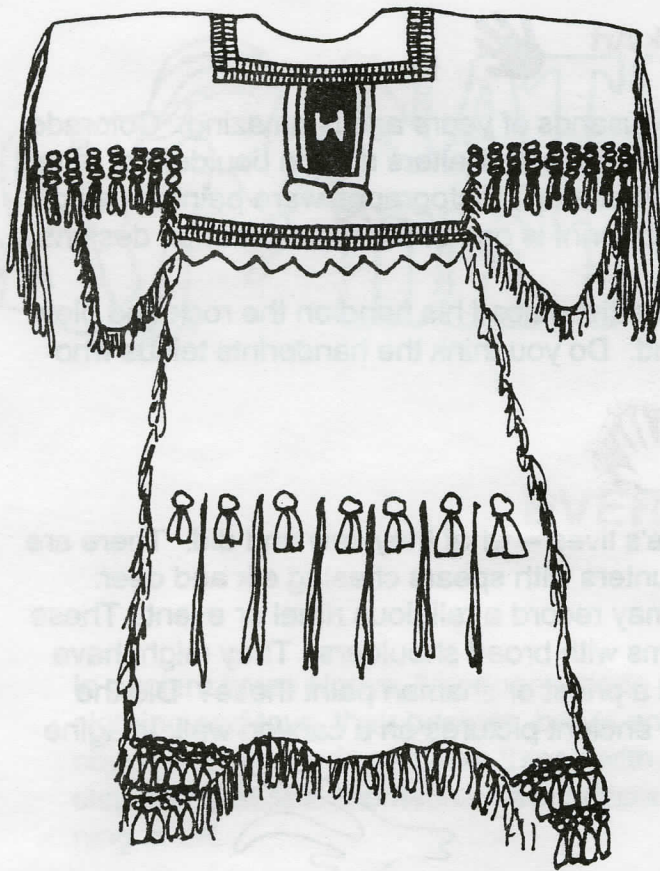
tray
for washing,
mixing, parching
& serving
food



jar
for
carrying
& storing
water

bowl
for almost
everything!





What a Lovely Dress

Native Americans used animal hides to make clothing. At first the skins were stiff and rough. To make them into soft leather, Indians soaked them in water, then scraped them with a piece of bone or antler. Then they were dried and stretched and scraped again. Next came the gooey part. The hides would be rubbed with a mixture of animal brains and fat. After polishing with pebbles and being pulled through a small sinew loop over and over again, the animal skins were soft and smooth. Leather at last! It was used to make all kinds of clothing, as well as tipis, moccasins, bags, beds and quivers.

To sew two pieces of leather together, an Indian punched holes with a sharp bone awl and threaded sinew (buffalo tendon) through.

Decorations were added by sewing on porcupine quills, shells, bits of metal, and small stone beads. Quills were flattened with teeth or fingernails before they were sewn on. Many times they were boiled with plants to color them. Glass beads were brought by settlers as they traveled west in the early 1800's. After that the colorful beads were used more often than stone beads and quills. Shells and metal pieces sewn around the bottom of a dress made a wonderful jingling as the Indian danced.

What a Mess

Have your parents ever said "that's too messy" when you ask to get out your watercolors? Next time describe what a mess Native Americans must have made when they painted. It took a lot more than a box of watercolors and a cup of water to get started for them. First, colored earth and plants were gathered and ground up. The powder was mixed with glue - not Elmer's either. It came from boiling and boiling a beaver's tail or the scrapings of an animal hide. Then, of course, brushes were needed. Remember, they weren't using a set of paints that came with a brush. Sometimes a twig with a chewed end was used. Other times the leg bone of a buffalo was used. This bone is kind of spongy so it holds paint and it can also be sharpened for more accurate work.

The artist didn't display the work on paper or canvas, but on many other things that were used everyday. Tipis were painted with designs to guard against sickness and misfortune. Buffalo skins were used to keep warm and were decorated with stories of successful hunts or records of the tribe's history. Many of the designs came to the artist in a dream or vision and were not copied by anyone else. Ask again to get out your paints and see what the answer is.





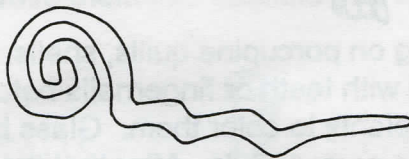
Rock Art

To find the handprint of someone who lived thousands of years ago is amazing. Colorado Indians long ago made pictures on canyon walls, in rock shelters and on boulders of basalt and sandstone. Petroglyphs were chipped with stones. Pictographs were painted using bones, brushes and even hands. A simple handprint is one of the most common designs.

Sometimes you find a reverse handprint. The artist placed his hand on the rock and blew paint through a hollow reed all around his hand. Do you think the handprints tell us who lived in a place generation after generation?

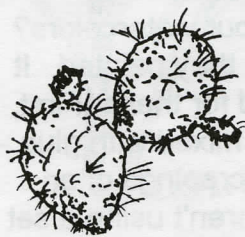


Other pictures tell us about the ancient people's lives -- what they saw and did. There are lizards, snakes and corn plants. There are hunters with spears chasing elk and deer. Some rock art is found in sacred places and may record a religious ritual or event. These are magical pictures of large human-like forms with broad shoulders. They might have birds for heads or wings instead of arms. Did a priest or shaman paint these? Did the people dance and pray here? If you discover ancient pictures on a canyon wall, imagine for yourself the story they might tell.

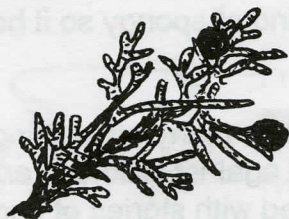


Natural Dyes

Leather, quills and basket materials were often colored by boiling them with plants. Here are some examples of the colors different plants give.



Prickly Pear fruit
makes a rose color.



Juniper
makes
yellow-tan



Indian
Paintbrush
makes
yellow.

Nature Detectives - You're an Artist Too

Experiment with ancient art techniques. See page 9 for details.

