



As a potter, I express myself through clay by working very closely with the natural elements: earth, air, fire, and water. My hands help to center and transform a soft lump of clay into a durable, useful pot.

Pottery is my connection to all cultures: past, present, and future. Since childhood I have traveled to the Southwest and have been drawn to the Pueblo Indian culture, their pottery, their land, and sky. They are a peaceful, artistic, and religious people who strive for balance and harmony in their lives. The cultural values of Pueblo people are reflected in their pottery.

The modern Pueblo Indians live in villages that resemble those of the ancient Anasazi who once inhabited the Four Corners region. Today there are nineteen pueblos in New Mexico and eleven Hopi villages in Arizona. In New Mexico, each pueblo has a Catholic mission established by the Spaniards several hundred years ago. However no missions were established in the Hopi villages. To this day, clans at each of the pueblos have their own kivas in which ceremonies are performed.

The ceremonial cycle of Pueblo people coincides with the movement of the sun. A major factor in the pueblo ceremonial year is the use of what some term "sympathetic magic" in order to urge Mother Nature to go into its germinating phase.

During the summer of 1982, I traveled alone to the magical Southwest with my camping gear, bike and six boxes of my pottery tucked in my van. While I traveled throughout New Mexico, Arizona and Utah, I allowed nature to take its course as I followed "Indian time," which is "whenever you get there."

My only definite plan was to visit Carmelita Dunlap, the well known pueblo potter and the niece of Maria Martinez. She lives at San Ildefonso Pueblo, the place "where water cuts through," located 20 miles north of Santa Fe. Its 350 residents live in adobe homes built around a plaza. This pueblo has become world famous because of the excellent pottery made by Maria, her husband Julian, and members of their family. For many years, The School of American Research in Santa Fe encouraged Maria and Julian to develop their pottery. In 1919, this Pueblo couple discovered the process for making black-on-black pottery and revived the ancient Mimbres designs for decorating these vessels.

I had first met Carmelita Dunlap in 1972 when my family and I were visiting San Ildefonso. Carmelita and I were able to share our techniques of working with clay and firing methods. I learned that Carmelita had been raised by her aunts Maria and Desideria. They passed on their ancient traditions of pottery making to her.

Maria was a world renowned artisan at 85 years old. I was very privileged and fortunate to have met her when Carmelita's grandchildren led me to her house on the plaza in 1972. I could not help feeling Maria's humble joy as she enthusiastically recalled her experience of demonstration pottery-making in a teepee at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis. The fact that most Anglos assumed she lived in a teepee made her giggle. She reminisced about how her pots were sold for 50 cents then. With this money she bought food and clothes for other families on the pueblo who were in need.

My return to the pueblo 10 years later seemed very natural. I worked alongside Carmelita's family from the moment I arrived. Within the hour, I was on their truck in route to the canyons to dig for clay. Since each family had their special site, I was to be silent about its location. That was easy because every place looked the same to me in this open, arid and barren country.

At San Ildefonso, potters mix sand with clay to prevent pottery from cracking while it is drying and being fired. The day after we gathered the clay, we mixed it with water using the most available equipment-our bare feet. I worked with Carmelita's youngest daughter Carla, who was planning to enter college in Santa Fe soon. That day we became both soul mates and "sole mates." Only two months later, Carla was killed in an auto accident.

After the clay is prepared, the pottery is built with coils which are smoothed out, scraped and sanded. With very few tools, Carmelita hand builds forms of harmonious symmetry. When the pot is dry, a red clay slip is applied to the surface and burnished swiftly with a weathered river rock or agate. Carmelita sacredly uses Maria's rock. Later she skillfully paints motifs of nature's elements in balanced, rhythmic designs onto the shiny surface using a brush of yucca fiber dipped in clay.

Each morning, we would begin the pottery firing at sunrise to avoid winds. It was wonderful to watch the building of the kiln with such simple materials: sheet metal, iron rods, grates and tin cans. By using fire, cow dung, and horse manure, Carmelita was able to transform the beautifully burnished red pottery she placed in the kiln into black on black pottery. The entire process took about three hours. I knew it was time to curtail my questions after I asked Carmelita, "How do you know when to take the pottery out?" Her Zen-like reply was, "Sandy, you know when your kiln is finished...I know when mine is."

Carmelita and I realized that our lives as potters are similar. Whether Indian or Anglo, we experience a union with Mother Earth. As I left the pueblo, we exchanged pottery and other gifts, knowing that our friendship would always be bound by clay.

*Sandy King Martin has been a studio potter since 1970. "An Outward Journey Inward: A Potter's Spirit of the Southwest" is a slide presentations on the history, traditions, and insights that Sandy has gleaned from her special relationship with renown potter Maria Martinez and her family of San Ildefonso Pueblo, New Mexico.*

To arrange for a presentation or workshop contact:



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