

**The Pueblo Storyteller: Development of a Figurative Ceramic Tradition.** By Barbara A. Babcock, Guy and Doris Monthan. Tucson: University of Arizona Press. 1986. 201 pp. \$40.00 Cloth.

This handsomely produced volume documents the recent revival and development of Pueblo figurative ceramics by focusing on the modern tradition of making "storyteller" figures begun by the Cochiti Pueblo potter Helen Cordero in the mid-sixties. The authors have achieved a very successful blending of a rigorous appreciation of the historical, cultural, and sociological factors which influenced Helen Cordero and other Pueblo potters to innovate and propagate ceramic works in the storyteller tradition with the expected visual displays of the "art book" genre. The result is a book which should be of significant interest to a rather wide audience including anthropologists, art historians, sociologists of art, and aficionados of Pueblo pottery.

Though the volume, with its 43 black and white figures and its 27 color plates invites comparison to a genre of books often found on coffee tables, the text supplied by Babcock rescues it from being merely a photographic achievement. She poses three organizing questions: how did the "storyteller" develop?, how did it fit into earlier ceramic traditions?, and what was its meaning to the innovator, her followers, and the market? She answers these questions with varying degrees of success. In treating the first, she dutifully documents the making of the first storyteller ceramic by Helen Cordero for a patron, Alexander Girard, in 1964. Babcock explores the mixture of tradition and innovation by tracing the formal similarities of the storyteller to an older type in the Pueblo ceramic repertoire often referred to as "the singing mother." Like the former, the singing mother depicts a seated adult who is transmitting traditional culture via verbal means to a child which she is holding. The first storyteller differs from this more traditional form, which Helen Cordero was making in the early 60's, by depicting a male figure upon which are seated five grandchildren. These innovations were inspired by Helen's recollection of her grandfather, Santiago Quintana, who was known for his verbal artistry throughout Conchiti Pueblo.

But while Babcock succeeds in tracing the mixture of tradition and innovation which comprises the storyteller as ceramic form, she is somewhat less successful in her ambitious attempt to situate it against the background of the history of Pueblo ceramics, especially figurative ceramics, and of general Pueblo culture. Her

historical sketch explores the ancient past of Pueblo ceramics and briefly discusses the cultural association of figurative art with religious effigies used in Pueblo ritual. Continuing her historical sketch, she recounts the suppression of figurative ceramics during the Spanish colonial period and the general decline of this type of ceramics until the present century. In Babcock's view, figurative ceramics have been profoundly shaped by both Spanish and Euro-american contact. One way in which the latter group exerted influence was through the activities of scholars, critics, traders, and other representatives of Euro-american cultural institutions. While traders encouraged figurative ceramics as a kind of marketable tourist art, scholars and critics stigmatized these products, in part, because of their lack of traditional purity. This contact also affected the subject matter of figurative ceramics as potters turned to images of Euro-americans, including carnival workers and opera singers. Ironically the curiosities bought by Euro-American tourists during the late nineteenth century were often expressions of Pueblo curiosity with an alien and increasingly intrusive culture. As museums and collectors became more influential, their disdain for these tourist arts imposed a diminishing interest in them by tourist and potter alike. During the period immediately before the invention of the storyteller, figurative images of Pueblo people replaced those of Euro-americans.

While Babcock's account is informed, concise, and especially relevant as a preparatory step in understanding the storyteller tradition, it ignores some of the more diffuse cultural connections. Certainly it would be beyond the scope of her brief treatment to attempt to impart the subtleties of Pueblo ethos, worldview, and social organization but Babcock seems content to convey very little about Pueblo culture except for the usual admiration of its persistence: [Pueblo Culture] "is distinguished by its instinct for survival and its capacity to revitalize itself (p. 4)." Her strategy of restricting discussions of Pueblo culture to immediately relevant material culture may be justified in terms of selectivity and focus but it unintentionally slights the ideational and spiritual aspects of Pueblo ethos and world view. But while the desirability of including more background on Pueblo mythology, kinship and social organization, and cosmology may be a matter of interpretive preference, the need for a fortified treatment of the significance of Pueblo storytelling is, in my view, undeniable. Though Babcock cites various potters as attributing great significance to storytellers and storytelling, she does little

to guide the reader in understanding these remarks as anything more than expressions of nostalgia or respect for tradition. Surely the storytelling tradition embraces these aspects but it also includes much more. In the past two decades an important scholarly literature has emerged on the storytelling traditions of Native Americans, including those of the Pueblo Southwest. This literature, contributed by such scholars as Keith Basso, Barre Toelken, Dennis Tedlock, and myself, emphasizes the importance of moral instruction, the association of storytelling with fertility and growth, and the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge and values—themes which could have been meaningfully elaborated in an attempt to explicate the cultural and personal associations which make the storyteller such an evocative image for Pueblo potters.

Babcock's treatment of her final theme—the diverse meanings associated with the storyteller by the innovator, her followers, and the market—is also a partial success. She succeeds admirably in probing the significance of the storyteller to Helen Cordero and other Pueblo potters. Though she reserves detailed treatment only for the innovator, her text has many quoted remarks about storytellers, ceramic design and technique, and the personal meaning of pottery making interspersed throughout each chapter from many potters representing a wide variety of pueblos. This device conveys a dialogical flavor by enabling the reader to "hear" many interesting observations and reflections made by the potters themselves. But this section neglects proper treatment of the role of museums, critics, and patrons, thus making it difficult to assess the relative importance of cultural tradition and "market conditions" in explaining and understanding ceramic innovation, propagation, and persistence. Babcock herself suggests comparisons which, if fleshed out, could have been especially significant in providing this valuable knowledge. She compares Helen Cordero to Nampeyo (Hopi-Tewa) and Maria Martinez (Tewa, San Ildefonso) as potters who lead major revivals, (p. 3) but this undeveloped suggestion is not pursued, thus providing future researchers with an especially interesting comparative topic. Related to this is Babcock's failure to explicitly consider recent anthropological work on tourist arts by scholars such as Nelson Graburn. My own feeling is that either of these comparative projects would provide more of a scientific basis for the understanding of "conservatism," in art, belief, and ritual, which is so often uncritically attributed to Pueblo Southwest.

A significant contribution of the Monthans to the present volume is a biographical survey of over 233 potters, from various pueblos, who have produced storytellers or comparable figurative ceramic works. This documentation provides information about the artists' year of birth, the date of their first storyteller, and the potters who taught them, as well as a listing of other potters in the artist's family. Such data will be of use both to collectors and to serious researchers.

In sum there is considerably more to recommend this book than its profusion of illustrations and color plates—however magnificent these are. Barbara Babcock has provided much informed discussion which will be of interest to a wide readership. Though the volume has many strengths, particularly its balance, I feel that many scholars will share my assessment that its flaws are traceable to a relatively narrow preoccupation with Pueblo material culture as the essential preparation for understanding the "storyteller" phenomenon. It is perhaps not entirely heretical to reaffirm that there is considerably more to a Pueblo art form than meets the eye.

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**Handbook of North American Indians: Great Basin.** Edited by Warren L. D'Azevedo. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1986. 852 pp. \$27.00 Cloth.

Warren L. D'Azevedo's, *Handbook of North American Indians: Great Basin*, is a book that attempts to answer everything about a subject that you might care to know, but are afraid to ask. The fact that it just about succeeds in doing so, is a compliment to D'Azevedo's editorial skill as well as to the intentions of the Smithsonian Institution in deciding to publish a 20 volume *Handbook of North American Indian* series.

D'Azevedo's work is number 11 in the series and in effect takes what has frequently been regarded as an ethnographic backwater and puts it into a long deserved limelight. Arguably, no other culture area of North America has been as ill-treated as the Great Basin. Many of the early adventurers who wandered across Utah and Nevada could not appreciate the beauty of the land, and were contemptuous of those who could. Mark Twain alone, with