

# Neo Traditional: Making History Now

*Tammy Garcia's August 2012 Pottery Collection and Sale*



Natural clay with turquoise  
and coral heishi inlay  
10" h x 8" d

**Tammy Garcia**, once again, produced an exceptional pottery show this past August for our annual celebration of contemporary Native American Art. Long at the forefront of a revolution in Pueblo pottery, Tammy continues to deliver stunning pottery vessels that successively raise the bar on technical prowess and expand the expectations of what is possible to achieve in natural clay. Her unbounded creativity masterfully manifests through the exactitude with which she handles the medium. The process involved in creating a body of work of such high-caliber is incredibly time-consuming and demands absolute precision—therefore, it is not surprising that the **ten vessels presented this year took her nine months to produce.**

Tammy's diverse new exhibit showed a broad range of inspiration, drawing upon years of research and experimentation. Most of the new vessels featured elaborate lids, or stoppers, which Garcia notes were very difficult for her to execute in the early days of her career. After years of refining her techniques, the lids this year were a crowning achievement and, in fact, she challenged herself further by making the lids before the jars—thus, the underlying jars actually took their design cues from the lids. Not only was this a first for Tammy, but it was also a major technical risk. Quite frankly, Tammy is no stranger to risk-taking and she continually reaps the rewards for such bold endeavors.

This year's collection featured imagery derived from both traditional Pueblo pottery vernacular, including motifs of water, clouds, butterflies, and eagles, along with an early 20th Century Modernist-informed aesthetic by, most notably, the Spanish Cubist painter, Pablo Picasso. She also appropriated designs associated with jewelry stamps, popularized by the Fred Harvey Company in the 1920s

FIGURE A  
Natural clay and  
Bisbee turquoise  
9" h x 7" d

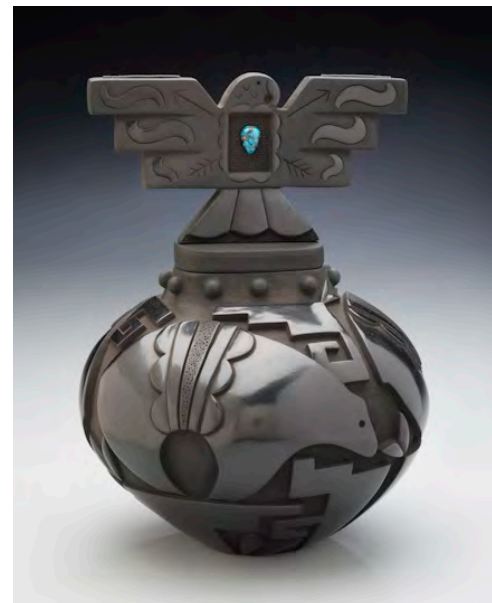


FIGURE B  
Natural clay and  
turquoise heishi inlay  
7" h x 4" d



FIGURE C  
Natural clay, Bisbee turquoise,  
and jet heishi inlay  
8" h x 8" d



FIGURE D  
*Da Tribute*  
Blown glass and turquoise  
with clamshell, coral, and  
turquoise heishi inlay  
10" h x 14" w x 9" d



and 30s, which featured vintage motifs of Thunderbirds and crossed arrows. It is only through Tammy's keen conceptual vision that seemingly disparate references can fuse together seamlessly on a single work. For example, one of the stunning globular seed pots in the show (see figure C) features four highly-stylized geometric turtles, each positioned symmetrically on the cardinal directional points of the jar. Other designs of leaves, shells, geometric steps, and water patterns, rise in and around the turtles, completing the diverse elements found on this jar. Further, inlaid embellishments of high-grade natural Bisbee turquoise and strands of rare Jet heishi add pops of color, while methodical pin-pricked stippling in the negative spaces adds textural complexity. ***The art world has not seen such intricate, original, and innovative Pueblo pottery since the zenith of Tony Da's career in the mid-1970s.***

Tony Da's virtuosity and clear purpose in his pottery opened the door for younger generations of potters, like Tammy Garcia, to investigate and develop new ideas. It is no wonder that Tammy counts Tony Da as a great inspiration in her artwork and, on many occasions, created works in direct reference to him—like bear fetish (see figure A) and turtle forms (see figure D), in particular. Even the use of inlays and varying colors of slip in her pottery are really demonstrations of her knowledge of his artistic career. Also not to be counted out as an inspiration for Tammy is Joseph Lonewolf. Joseph crafted elaborately incised miniature pottery forms by scraping and carving away the clay surface to reveal layers of complex designs and patterns. She has gathered ideas from his body of work, like the texturing of surfaces behind the main designs, and applied them to her own vessels. One of Tammy's many acquired skills has been the ability to absorb the techniques of her great predecessors while concurrently declaring the clarity of her own voice and vision.



**FIGURE E**  
 Tony Da  
*Bear Fetish*  
 Natural clay, turquoise,  
 and heishi  
 5" h x 7.25" w x 4" d



**FIGURE F**  
 Tony Da  
*Lidded Pottery Jar*  
 Natural clay, turquoise,  
 and heishi  
 dimensions unknown





FIGURE G  
(view one)  
natural clay, 11" h x 8" d



FIGURE G  
(view two)  
natural clay, 11" h x 8" d



The single most commented on piece in the show (and, the first one purchased out of the sold-out sale) was a very avant-garde redware lidded jar that depicts Picasso's classic Cubist female figures (two views of jar on the preceding pages). Delving deeply into her extensive library, Tammy found an early exhibition catalogue of drawings by the modernist master that spurred her to recreate the shapes in three-dimension. She flaunted her fascination with Picasso's seemingly distorted portraits and allowed her creative curiosity to lead her into a new realm of undiscovered territory—a realm where French aristocratic women wear Pueblo Mantas (shawls) and read books illuminated by Pueblo pottery lamps. In this tour de force, Garcia wove centuries of European and Native American art history together, proving that some of Picasso's most iconic images can exist naturally, and in complementary fashion to, Pueblo iconography—all effortlessly presented by Garcia on a single jar.

Blue Rain Gallery owner, Leroy Garcia (husband to Tammy), freely admits that Tammy has always kept him on his toes, especially in terms of marketing and selling her work, and this year's pottery show was no exception. Just as the pottery itself is ground-breaking, Leroy finds the price-points on Tammy's pottery to also be ground-breaking. There is great difficulty in properly assessing what the market will bear in terms of prices, especially when there are few other current Pueblo potters to compare with Tammy. A great starting point is to use historic references in the Pueblo pottery market like Tony Da's work, along with other elder pottery matriarchs like Maria Martinez, Margaret Tafoya, Nampeyo of Hano, and Dextra Qyotskuyva, to name a few. The entire gallery staff, who have decades of

FIGURE H  
Natural clay  
10" h x 8" d



FIGURE I  
Natural clay and  
Bisbee turquoise  
9" h x 5" w x 2" d



**FIGURE J**  
Natural clay, Bisbee  
turquoise, and  
turquoise heishi inlay  
9.5" h x 8.5" d



**FIGURE K**  
Natural clay and  
turquoise heishi inlay  
6.5" h x 5" d



**FIGURE L**  
Natural clay, crystal, and  
lapis heishi inlay  
10" h x 6.5" d

collective experience in all areas of the art business, participate in the discussion of how to best market Tammy's work—the lively discourse, which this year ran into the wee hours of the night before the sale, involved talk and comparative analysis that reached past the boundaries of the Native American art world into the greater realms of contemporary American and European modern art. Considerations were particularly inclusive of Tammy's previous sale prices, bearing in mind assessments of the amount of work and detail among the batches of pottery. But, the reality always remains clear for all involved in the evaluations: most of the references employed in the process can only relate to specific aspects of Tammy's

artwork—not one of them can encompass the variety and depth of Tammy's entire artistic achievement, even at such a young age.

As such, new records are set for the prices on Tammy's pottery each year—making her, undeniably, one of the most collectible living Pueblo potters today. The pottery sale is a spectacle unto itself, although never outshining the actual vessels themselves. So then, there should lay little doubt in the fact that a show filled with pottery vessels that are unrivalled is a much anticipated event, with hundreds of collectors and enthusiasts packing into the gallery and vying for a handful of available works over the span of a couple of hours.