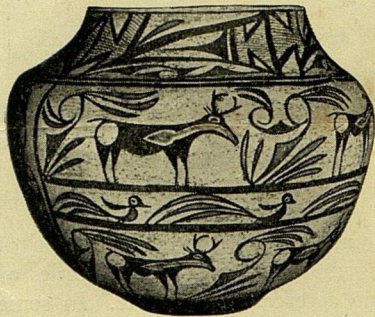
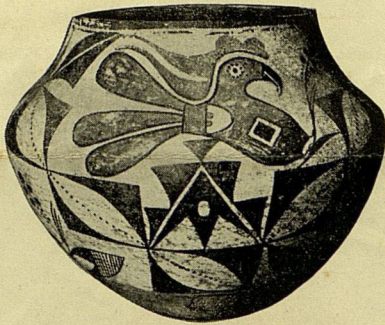


rescuing the Indian from the debasing poverty into which our Christian supervision of the wild tribes allowed him to fall, had met with the expected success. Prosperity and self-respect were returning to the Pueblos. But the newly awakened appreciation of Indian art was having this inevitable result—all the old, most excellent examples of it were being bought up by museums and private collectors, more often by mere casual tourists, who carried priceless pieces out of the country to an oblivion of private dispossession from which they might never be rescued. Soon there would be nothing left by which the Indian Pueblo potters could refresh their inspiration and criticize their own output.

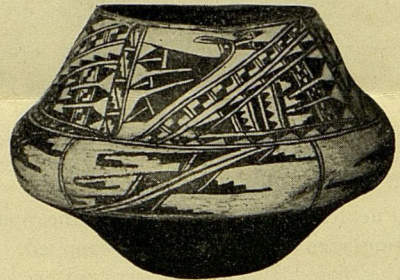
One of the determining distinctions between primitive and sophisticated societies is that the wisdom of the primitive is all handed down by variable and easily interrupted oral tradition. There are no books, museums, or other means of embodying the gains of primitive society, such as are enjoyed by more advanced civilizations. The Pueblos had, in the past, something that served as a consolidation of the experience of their ancients, in the ruined houses and graves of their ancestors. In prehistoric time, if for any reason such as failure of water, exhaustion of the soil, epidemic sickness or liability to hostile attack, a townsite became unten-

living and authentic art, the Indian Arts Fund simply appeared.

On a day when Elsie Sergeant came in from Zuñi with a lovely *tinaja*, which had become broken in transit and was about to be thrown away by the servant, the idea of an Indian museum for Indians was born. The *tinaja* was skillfully patched together; other examples were added to it by purchase; everybody who had a really illustrative example offered it as a contribution. Interested visitors, introduced to the incipient collection, temporarily deposited in the basement of the state museum, added to the potentiality of the fund. What a thrill there was on the days when Mrs. Meredith Hare and Irene Lewisohn each left one hundred dollars in the hands of the trustees! A hundred dollars will go a long way in the hands of experienced collectors who, having already established working relations with the Indians, were allowed to search the Pueblos for priceless heirlooms, sacred vessels of extinct cults, hundred-year-old storage jars from forgotten, dark, subterranean chambers. Many valuable pieces were also recovered in the little mud-walled Spanish towns, where they had been for generations in the hands of long-established colonial families. The Indians themselves entered with gusto into the



Examples of Pueblo Indian art: Above, an Acoma jar with bird design. At the left, a typical Zuñi deer design; at right, an ancient Zuñi water jar, about 1500 A. D. Below, a fine example of polychrome jar from San Ildefonso.



able, the population of that town rose over night and left it, often with all its pottery—as being too perishable to carry easily—standing on the hearth and in the accustomed niche. Pots, ritually “killed” but otherwise perfect, were also placed in and about the graves of the dead. Thus in their great tribal treks, which made a circuit within the bounds already described, the Puebloños were continually coming upon excellent and informing examples of the works of their ancients. Possibly this incidental substitute for the museum, had something to do with the sustained quality of Pueblo design. But now ruins are being searched, graves opened, the whole country combed by a new type of “pot hunters” who often destroy as much as they take away. With nothing to feed the stream of living tradition, it became quickly evident that the decorative quality of native design would grow thin, lose interest and value. So, in the fall of 1922, out of the whole cloth of this realization on the part of the artist friends of the Indians, in the desire to preserve for them and for us the treasure of an unexplored but still



search. Two authentic pieces from the abandoned pueblo of old Pecos came to light; another from Pojoaque. Jemez—which has made no pottery except coarse cooking pots, for three hundred years—dug up the root of its ancient craft and produced a group of *tinajas* decorated according to its veridical tradition. Local collectors turned in what they had; curio dealers yielded to the spell and contributed many notable examples which came into their hands. An offer of a suitable museum site was added to the fund. All together, the Santa Fe collection has become the most complete and illuminating

exhibition of aboriginal ceramics in existence.

The plan of the slightly organized but perfectly coordinated group behind the Indian Art Fund—coordinated by knowledge and appreciation—is to collect first the threatened examples of the historic period of Pueblo decorative art. The completion of the prehistoric record can be made later. There are still untouched ruins and secret graves, many unrifled repositories of the past.

The historic period begins with the discovery (by the



Hopi snake dance. Painting by an Indian, Fred Kabotie, from the exhibition of Corona Mundi, International Art Center, New York

Puebloños about the time of the Spanish *entrada*) of a flat, unglazed pigment, easily applied, perfectly controlled in the firing. The earliest potters had experimented with glazes, through a series of six easily recognizable formulas, none of which was entirely satisfactory. These glazes were never applied to the whole surface of the vessel, but only as a medium of decoration, and as such were lumpy and blurred at the edges, a source of annoyance to the orderly and ritualistically minded aboriginal. Moreover, the clumsiness of the medium restricted the decorative scheme to broad bands and blunt masses. And all this time the Mongol-minded Puebloño was longing for delicate line and sweeping curve. His need—a deep-seated human need—for a more expressive medium, led him to the discovery of various colored native earths, mixed in some cases with vegetable juices, which could be applied with the fluency and precision of India ink. Indeed, the black slip, composed chiefly of burnt earth and the sap of the Rocky Mountain bee plant, with which designs are drawn on red and white surfaces, resembles surprisingly the medium of the Chinese artist. But the chief advantage of these applied slips was that they would fire without alteration of their quality or defacement of the design. After this discovery and invention, the expansion of Pueblo ceramics was in the direction of the evolution of design rather than manufacturing technique. Within a few generations, decoration passed from simple, rather thick lines and geometric mass, to delicate cross-hatching and intricate subtle curves. Probably the invasion of white life, with its iron and other metal

pots and pans, had something to do with the restriction of form to the few aboriginal utensils for which the kettles of the white man afforded no acceptable substitute. In some of the older ruins and cliff dwellings, a much greater variety and invention of form are indicated than can be found in the pueblos today. But the art of decoration as an expression of the decorator's inner thought, received scarcely any check until the pressure of white life had all but destroyed the Indian's self-respect and the native sources of inspiration from within. Correspondingly, the recent revival of interest in Indian art has been followed by new shoots of decorative endeavor, putting forth leaf and flower.

PERHAPS the most intriguing aspect of Amerind design is that, though scholarly minds are at work upon the problem, we have as yet no more than an inkling of its inner law. Because all racial decorative schemes have so far shown a progressive relation to the evolving tribal consciousness by which, quite apart from local influences, we are able to recognize them as distinctively Egyptian or Etruscan or Mycenaean, we confidently assume that there is some such native principle governing the progressions of American Indian decoration. That each of the twenty-three pueblos has, with practically the same elements, arrived at distinctions which enable the collector to place a single specimen as Santo Domingo, Sia or Cochiti, we know at sight, without knowing very much about the interior process by which the distinction was achieved. The elements of Pueblo design, abstracted from familiar aspects of nature,

fall into four general groups: skysigns, such as sun, moon, clouds and falling rain; earth signs—mountains, trees, animals, the growing corn; air signs—birds, butterflies, lightning, the plumed serpent, guardian of the springs. The fourth group—of what we might call geometrical elements, which can in almost every case be shown to be conventionalized and more completely abstracted derivatives of the first three—stands for ideas, such as the universe, the way of life, the life force. But this is scarcely a beginning, since, in the process of reduction of a unit of aboriginal design to what is modernly called significant form, a bird may be reduced to a feather, a beak, a crest, or a mere essential bird line. A plant is present in its leaf form, a cactus in its spine, the great corn plant in a row of dots for grains, a fructifying storm in a cloud curve, with a straight line for falling rain. Even when you have recognized it, you will not know whether the highly conventionalized bird element is really meant for a bird or for a prayer, since all the creatures of the air are messengers and mediators between gods and men; or whether the butterfly design is a butterfly or the spirit of pollination. All you can be certain about is that the relations of all these elements are controlled by Indian truth and logic.

I do not mean to say that every decoration arises from an original perception of truth, or that every detail can be made to render up an item of esoteric symbolism. Designs are handed down in families or are personally selected on grounds of taste and tradition without any reference to their psychological source. But when the aboriginal potter works from an original creative impulse, he works in the language of an aboriginal interpretation of a completely interdependent and responsive universe in which birds and thoughts fly to and fro between earth and heaven, and lightning is a plumed serpent as near to the source of sky waters as the snake of the desert is to the infrequent waterholes.

The writer, whose study has been more about aboriginal poetry than about pots, feels certain that the psychological

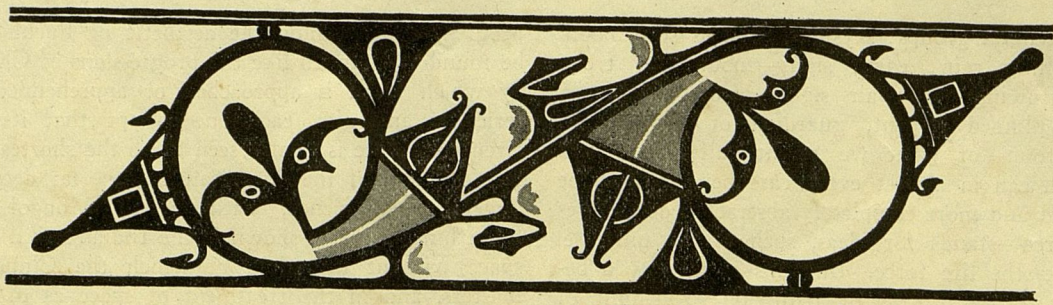
progressions governing the aesthetic of Pueblo design will be found to be much like the progressions of Chinese poetry, by which truth is approached or apprehended through a series of analogies, each one so apt that its charmingly circuitous route is finally seen to be the shortest way home. For the soul of the American Indian, far deeper than his American experience, witnesses to Mongol derivations. Something of this is shown in the Indian's skill at occupying space without filling it, at which the Chinese are past masters, and in the treatment of space as of equal value with the mass of the design.

Another device of the Pueblo potter to secure that balanced distribution of mass and space which satisfies his own aesthetic demand, is to cut into the body of the design with decorative elements of less representative value—cross-hatching, or one of his characteristic abstractions, such as the world altar, or the checker-board pattern which symbolizes the ritualistic "middle" where it is his immemorial quest to dwell. In this practice there are certain analogies to the ancient Chinese trick of painting an ideograph inside of the body of a design. But this Mongol suggestion must not be pushed too far. What stands out most clearly in the most surpassing examples, is a free, direct response to an American environment, as in the design of interlacing leaves of corn, black on white.

TO Kenneth Chapman, who has devoted more time to it than any other, we owe most of the light we have on Pueblo aesthetics. Among his interesting discoveries is one in which the relation of the parts of a design are themselves ritualized into a pattern which may or may not be symbolic. An arrangement in which two similar wings of a design open out from a central axis, is called a butterfly design. Recently, Julio of San Ildefonso produced a Tewa cosmogony of the most-used units of Tewa design, arranged as a bird. Another popular arrangement might be called The Universe, since it pivots about the checker-board



Hopi basket dance. Painting by the Indian, Fred Kabotie, from the exhibition of *Corona Mundi*, International Art Center, New York



Design from an old Zia jar

Amerind and American

The radiant color, entrancing light and year-round working conditions have made Santa Fe a center for modern artists as well as for the descendants of ancient and even pre-historic potters and designers.



Grotesques, Santo Domingo dance. Painting by John Sloan

Courtesy the Kraushaar Galleries, New York