

Native Couture II: Innovation and Style

Native American fashion design—mainstream acceptance

Santa Fe, NM (June 18, 2009)—Native American couturiers and the international fashion world knew that Native design had truly arrived on the scene when in February 2009, Native designers Dorothy Grant, Patricia Michaels, and Virgil Ortiz showed during New York Fashion Week, a historic first for Native American designers. It took decades for the work of Native designers to achieve full acceptance in their own communities and more so in the mainstream fashion world. Staying true to their cultural heritage, pushing traditional boundaries, and building upon the work of pioneers like Lloyd Kiva New, today's generation of Native designers creates extraordinary work challenging long-held stereotypes.

Native Couture II: Innovation and Style opens at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture on Sunday, August 30, 2009. This exhibition explores the history of Native fashion from hand-made clothing and accessories of the 1880s that influenced the development of a Santa Fe Style, to today's contemporary Native couturiers. At its root, Indian art is the quintessential original American art. This centuries-long influence of Native American art requires the buyer, or wearer, and the American public in general to ponder the origins of a truly unique American style.

Traditional Native American garments and accessories translate easily to the mainstream couture world – both are personalized and highly embellished. After contact with Europeans, the change in Native American clothing materials and styles had a profound effect on Euro-American clothing. One example of this is “Santa Fe Style,” the subject of one section of this exhibition. Santa Fe style can be seen on individuals throughout the world today thanks to internationally known contemporary designers as Ralph Lauren. New Mexico Native couturiers Pilar Agoyo (Ohkay Owingeh/Cochiti/Santo Domingo), Patricia Michaels (Taos), Virgil Ortiz (Cochiti), and Penny Singer (Diné) take their fashion designs beyond Santa Fe Style and have created a unique style of Native Couture.

The fashion designers in *Native Couture II: Innovation and Style* come from a variety of cultural and educational backgrounds. Native American art often straddles two worlds: traditional and contemporary, yet pushes the design palette into the contemporary sphere. Cutting edge Native American fashion, accessories, and jewelry strongly relate to the lived experience of today's artists. Many contemporary Native designers are multi-vocal, drawing inspiration from unquestionably “Native” elements – pottery symbols or beadwork patterns – from the eclectic to the cutting edge. All of the artists in this exhibition take advantage of this creative license still referencing their cultural roots. There are the classic purses by Dorothy Grant (Haida) and Virgil Ortiz, the freer more eclectic concepts as seen in the work of Penny Singer's blending of a contemporary handbag with a pictorial past, Teri Greeves' (Kiowa) beaded high tops or Pilar Agoyo's metallic vinyl bag with familiar Pueblo motifs. Reaching for the cutting edge are accessories less likely to be worn by the cautious collector, such as Wayne Nez Gaussoin's license plate bracelet or Rose B. Simpson's (Santa Clara) take on a “hoodie.”

Today's mainstream acceptance builds on a history of Native couturiers who have designed clothing for regional and national markets since the 1940s. The creation of Indian wearable art for the mainstream marketplace at this time was a reaffirmation of tribal identity in the face of increasing pressures for acculturation. This was one of many endeavors undertaken to communicate the continued existence and distinct values of Native America to the world at large. In 1946, Lloyd Kiva New (Cherokee/Scottish/Irish) opened a boutique in Scottsdale, AZ. He started designing handbags based on traditional Indian tribal pouches and design motifs and within ten years he had expanded to couture. A striking purple and yellow wool cape in the exhibit is a fine example of New's Scottish heritage while his shirt and fabric samples illustrate his collaborations with two Hopi artists, Charles Loloma and Manfred Susenkewa.

This movement toward greater awareness of cultural traditions became more pronounced in the 1960s. The Civil Rights era saw Native Americans advocating for their rights and cultural autonomy. Finally, in 1962 a school co-founded by New was opened in Santa Fe for Native American students to learn traditional art and design – the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA). This institution provided the cultural foundation leading some to experimentation. Many of today's well-known designers, such as Pilar Agoyo and Patricia Michaels, trained under Kimberley “Wendy” Ponca (Osage) at IAIA and benefited from this art movement.

Ponca encouraged her students to experiment with different fabrics and designs, some of which are part of the exhibition. Agoyo's black and silver vinyl jacket and skirt reflect her Pueblo heritage while making a fabric not usually found in mainstream clothing both comfortable to wear and aesthetically pleasing. Michael's two piece titled *Pueblo Chanel*, is an example of her unique style with a hand painted silk feather skirt topped with a Chanel-cut transparent top of burnt velvet revealing a woven design that is open in the front and back. A center piece of Native Couture is the two piece pleated metallic silver and black skirt that is topped by the *Modern Feather Boa* by David, Wayne and Tazbah Gaussoin.

Fashion designs do not necessarily stand alone and jewelry is used to accent and compliment the design. It goes without saying that Kenneth Begay (Diné) and Charles Loloma were the pioneers of modern Native American jewelry design. Begay's work dating to the early 1940s could almost be mistaken for work by Spratling, the famous Mexican silversmith. Loloma's greatest legacy as a jeweler was his sense of color and his use of exotic stones. Both Begay and Loloma broke with the traditional pairing of silver and turquoise and conceptually opened the door to contemporary Southwest Indian jewelry design.

The next generation of Native American jewelry designers took the art to a higher level of refinement. Two artists who introduced new design concepts into contemporary Southwest Indian jewelry are Gail Bird (Laguna/Santo Domingo) and Yazzie Johnson (Diné). Some of the others who are part of this generation represented in the exhibition

include Michael Kabotie (Hopi), Duane Maktima (Hopi/Laguna), and Jesse Monogya (Diné/Hopi).

Today's generation of contemporary jewelers including, David and Wayne Gaussoin (Picuris/Diné/French), Cody Sanderson (Diné/Hopi/Pima/Nambe), Pat Pruitt (Laguna), Rebecca, Begay (Diné), Dylan Poblano (Zuni), Maria Samora (Taos), Tammy Garcia (Santa Clara), and Lee Yazzie (Diné), have fewer restrictions on their work and are free to explore new techniques and create innovative designs.

Native Couture II features a range of Native American fashion design and jewelry that has been created over the past half century. Even the most avant-garde designs are created by hand using the timeless traditions and techniques of handcrafting wearable art that is authentically Native American. All this can be seen in the new exhibition at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture.

Native Couture II: Innovation and Style opens to the public on Sunday, August 20, 2009 at 1.30 p.m. with a reception hosted by the Women's Board of the Museum of New Mexico.

Media Contacts

Shelby Tisdale, Director
505-476-1251
shelby.tisdale@state.nm.us

Steve Cantrell, PR Manager
505-476-1144
505-310-3539 – cell
steve.cantrell@state.nm.us

###

Located on Museum Hill™, the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture shares the beautiful Milner Plaza with the Museum of International Folk Art. *Here, Now and Always*, a major permanent exhibition at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, combines the voices of living Native Americans with ancient and contemporary artifacts and interactive multimedia to tell the complex stories of the Southwest. The Buchsbaum Gallery displays ceramics from the region's pueblos. Five changing galleries present exhibits on subjects ranging from archaeological excavations to contemporary art. In addition, an outdoor sculpture garden offers rotating exhibits of works by Native American sculptors.

The Museum of Indian Arts and Culture is a division of the Department of Cultural Affairs.

Information for the Public

Location: The Museum of Indian Arts and Culture is located on Museum Hill™, Camino Lejo off Old Santa Fe Trail.

Information: 505-476-1269 or visit www.indianartsandculture.org

Days/Times: Monday through Sunday, 10:00 A.M.-5:00 P.M. Between Memorial Day and Labor Day the Museum is also open on Monday.

Admission:

Sundays: New Mexico residents with ID are admitted FREE.

Wednesdays: New Mexico resident seniors (60+) with ID are free.

Adult single-museum admission is \$6 for New Mexico residents, \$9 for nonresidents; OR \$15 one- day, two museums of your choice (Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, Museum of International Folk Art, New Mexico Museum of Art, and New Mexico History Museum) OR \$20 four-day pass to five museums (includes all 4 listed above and the Museum of Spanish Colonial Art) Students with ID receive a one-dollar discount.

Youth 16 and under, New Mexico Veterans with 50% or more disability, and Museum of New Mexico Foundation Members always free.

Field Trips: There is no charge for educational groups attending the museum with their instructor and/or adult chaperones. Contact the Tours office by phone at (505) 476-1140 or (505) 476-1211 to arrange class/group visits to the Museum.

Direct flights between Santa Fe and Dallas/Fort Worth are now available on American Eagle.

....