



## E-Newsletter | August 2013

### Potters

The arts - music, visual arts, and dance - have been part of human culture for centuries. Women have made significant contributions in each of these areas. In this month's e-newsletter, we highlight three potters - Nampeyo, Maria Montoya Martinez, and Ruth Duckworth.

Hopi potter Nampeyo (whose name means "snake that does not bite") learned the craft of pottery from her grandmother. Nampeyo had seen the shards of earlier Hopi pottery and she was inspired to replicate the high-quality clays and paints used by earlier Hopi generations. In 1875, photographer William Henry Jackson visited the Hopi mesa and took photos of 15-year-old Nampeyo. Ultimately Nampeyo developed her own style, based on traditional designs. A Santa Fe dealer who trades in Nampeyo pottery says, "She could make pots better, finish them better, shape them better, and paint them better . . . She also originated beautiful painted designs and fashioned symmetrical, well-formed vessels. She was the first celebrity potter."



Nampeyo

Another Native American potter, Maria Montoya Martinez created internationally known pottery. Martinez grew up in the San Ildefonso Pueblo, about 20 miles northwest of Santa Fe, New Mexico. Similarly to Nampeyo, she learned pottery skills at an early age from her aunt. In the early 1900's at the pueblo, tinware and enamelware were replacing the more traditional every-day used pottery.



Martinez

Martinez was sought out by archeologist Edgar Lee Hewett, who had discovered examples of black-on-black pottery during his excavations. She was recommended to him because of her renown for making the thinnest pots in the least time. After much experimentation, she was able to recreate the black-on-black pottery style; this pottery has a deep glossy black background and dull black decoration. Her first pots (unsigned) were fired in about 1913 and placed in a museum. After guests expressed interest in

her blackware, she developed her skills as did her husband Julian, who decorated her pots. Martinez passed on her knowledge and skill to many others including her children, women in the pueblo and students. Martinez and Nampeyo are considered the two most famous Native American potters.

From Native American pottery, we now turn to modern art. In 1964, Ruth Duckworth, who became one of the world's foremost ceramic sculptors, came to the U.S. from England to teach at the University of Chicago. A German-born Nazi refugee, Duckworth took up drawing as a youth after a doctor recommended that she remain homebound to improve her health. When she applied to art school, she was asked if she wanted to focus on drawing, painting or sculpting. She insisted she wanted to study all of them, as had Michelangelo before her. Her work is displayed at many universities in Illinois and at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Duckworth created an immense and important body of work; she is a significant figure in continuing the modernist tradition.

These women improved and beautified our lives, recovered and recreated art forms, and we celebrate their many achievements.

**Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America**

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