

DINÉ (NAVAJO) DOLL

WHAT IS IT?

This doll was donated to the Americas Art Cart by CIF Guide Carmen Gwazdacz. It was handmade by Edith Baker, a Diné woman from Gallup, NM. It was made using traditional materials, and is typical of dolls given to Diné girls by their mothers.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

In Native American tradition, dolls are significant both as playthings and as spiritual and cultural symbols. The materials and techniques used to make each doll reflect important aspects of their respective culture. The Zuni and Pueblo Kachina dolls are religious symbols, representing supernatural beings linked to fertility. These dolls are given to young girls at the annual ceremony for the return of the Kachinas. In the matrilineal Diné society, one traditional custom is for women to make dolls like this one and give them to their daughters as gifts. The velveteen cloth dress, colorful and patterned woven belt and beaded necklaces are examples of traditional Diné clothing. The patterns and colors of each doll are associated with a particular clan. The Diné culture is matrilineal, and residence groups are organized around a head mother. Property, crops and livestock belong to women. Major arts of the Diné, also traditionally female occupations, include weaving textiles and making silver and turquoise jewelry.

HOW IS IT MEANT TO BE USED?

This type of doll was given to young girls as a gift, and it would have also helped them learn about female adult roles and responsibilities in Diné culture. In the mid-20th century, these dolls began to be made to be sold to tourists, as well as for local Diné use.

WHO MADE IT AND HOW?

This doll is hand-sewn by artist Edith Baker, and the facial details are painted by hand. Typical Diné dolls are made of velveteen cloth, small beads, patterned cloth (cotton or muslin), leather, and cotton.

COLLECTION CONNECTIONS:

Other Native American dolls in the collection include Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) dolls and dolls from the Great Plains region. The collection also includes dolls from Kenya. Other works of art from matrilineal cultures, like the Diné, include woven baskets and ceramic bowls.

QUESTIONS OR ACTIVITIES:

What is your experience with dolls? As a child? As an adult?

What did you learn from playing with dolls as a child?