

Navajo Silver, Navajo Aesthetics

Louise Lincoln

In principle, works of art originating in a foreign culture are best approached on their own terms: through the eyes of their makers, their users, and their first admirers. Such an approach hardly seems revolutionary, and yet it is difficult to look at the art of unfamiliar, often distant, cultures in such a way. This method requires extensive background knowledge on the viewer's part; injudiciously applied, it may degenerate into what anthropologists have called the "if I were a horse" mode of interpretation. As a result, less demanding and more comfortable methods often prevail—for example, looking at an individual artist's work and attempting to unravel his or her personal style and imagery. Alternatively, one can study the artistic products of other cultures for what they reveal about the art of one's own culture, looking for stylistic parallels, conscious borrowing of motifs, and the like. Or one may search for some mystic level at which cultural differences become irrelevant and "universal" themes, sentiments, or standards of beauty seem to emerge.

With specific reference to Navajo art, all of these approaches hold certain promise. Recently, scholars of Southwest art have begun to pay attention to personal styles, artistic schools, and the influences of one master upon another, and have recovered the names of previously anonymous artisans—all methods for treating the artist as an individual. The influence of indigenous southwestern artists upon certain trends and individuals in contemporary American and European art is widely acknowledged but rarely treated in

any depth, the influence of Navajo sand painting on the work of Jackson Pollock being the best-known example. Finally, the strong and immediate appeal of Navajo blankets, sand painting, and silver for even the viewer least familiar with other aspects of Navajo life and thought is evidence of their "universal" qualities. Such methods as these, however, tend to treat non-Western art in terms developed for and appropriate to European and American art. While useful in ways, they ignore completely the Navajo-ness of Navajo art and tell us nothing about the Navajo mind and hands that gave visual expression to Navajo values.

Such a problem does not arise when we look at a work of art that originates in our own culture, for then we share knowledge, attitudes, and assumptions with the artist. One of the functions of art within any society is to give visual expression to the values central to members of that society, producing an unconscious resonance in the "initiated" viewer. The artist thus speaks on behalf of the culture, informing or reminding others of beliefs held in common. Although modern industrialized, national societies have often cultivated other functions of art (art as a form of social criticism, for instance), in traditional societies such as the Navajo—more homogeneous, smaller, and more tightly integrated—it is the model of artist as portrayer of cultural values that prevails. Within a tightly integrated society, values and beliefs are broadly shared and permeate all spheres of activity—religion and law no more or less than cooking and dress. For art, a still

stronger point can be made: not only is it permeated by cultural values, it consciously and intentionally articulates them. Looking at objects of art without the presuppositions of our own culture, we can begin to appreciate the values of the culture in which they were made. Having begun to appreciate those values, we can then appreciate the works of art more fully. The process is a continuous one, in which we can move back and forth from art to culture, learning more at each step of the way.

In Navajo thought it is a given that fundamental societal values order and pervade all activities. To take but one example of how these values influence every aspect of life, we might consider agriculture. The Navajo learned to plant relatively late in their history, having been hunters and gatherers in Canada until the time of their migration to the Southwest with other Athapaskan groups. Once settled in their present locale, they rapidly acquired knowledge of crops and planting techniques from their Pueblo neighbors. However, while the crops and much of the technique remained constant, the intellectual dimension of agriculture—what is thought and said about what is done—was transformed by Navajo values and patterns of reflection, as evidenced by an agricultural terminology and ritual different from those of the Pueblo peoples.¹ In both language and action, traditional Navajo farmers made conscious and explicit daily reference to the supporting structures of their lives and to cosmology and mythology, which can be regarded as metaphors or elaborations of those structures.

Special preparation of seeds before planting, for example, was a common practice in traditional Navajo agriculture. Watermelon seeds were soaked in the juice of a sweet red berry so that upon fruition they would produce melons that were themselves red, juicy, and sweet.² While such treatment has occasionally been dismissed as nothing more than sympathetic magic, it is much more than that. The practice rests on a deep understanding that any process is continuous from beginning to end, all final results of the process being fully present at its inception. The berry syrup is thus a coded checklist of ideal watermelon-ness,

and its application ensures that this specific watermelon will attain that ideal of perfection. Were the seeds not soaked in this syrup, they would be deficient, imperfect; the process of growth would be flawed from the outset, and the resulting watermelon would be equally flawed. One could press the analysis still further, for the watermelon seed is placed in the syrup only by a farmer who is knowledgeable and caring, having become a proper farmer through a process of development from seed to maturity.

The same concern for process is evident in the rich set of Navajo terms to denote the various stages of growth through which plant species pass. Germination of seeds is traditionally welcomed by a song: "It grows in both directions" (i.e., up and down, having developed a shoot and a root). When sprouts begin to show leaves, these are always counted in pairs to designate stages of growth—thus, "beans with two ears," "beans with four ears," and so forth.³ This elaborate terminology holds great interest, for it marks symmetry and axially as the characteristics of proper development and order. From the possible ways of marking growth stages—simple measurement of the length of the vine, for instance—traditional Navajo farmers chose to count matched pairs of leaves and to note simultaneous growth in two opposite directions. The first stage of plant life is defined as the motion up and the motion down, which can be graphically expressed thus:



The second stage extends the motion to the right and left, balancing the earlier paired motion and producing a graphic form in which pairs of pairs are captured:



Similar concerns with form and symmetry occur elsewhere in agricultural practice, especially in the frequent appearance of cruciform or quadrantal arrangements. Thus, for example, harvested stalks of corn were

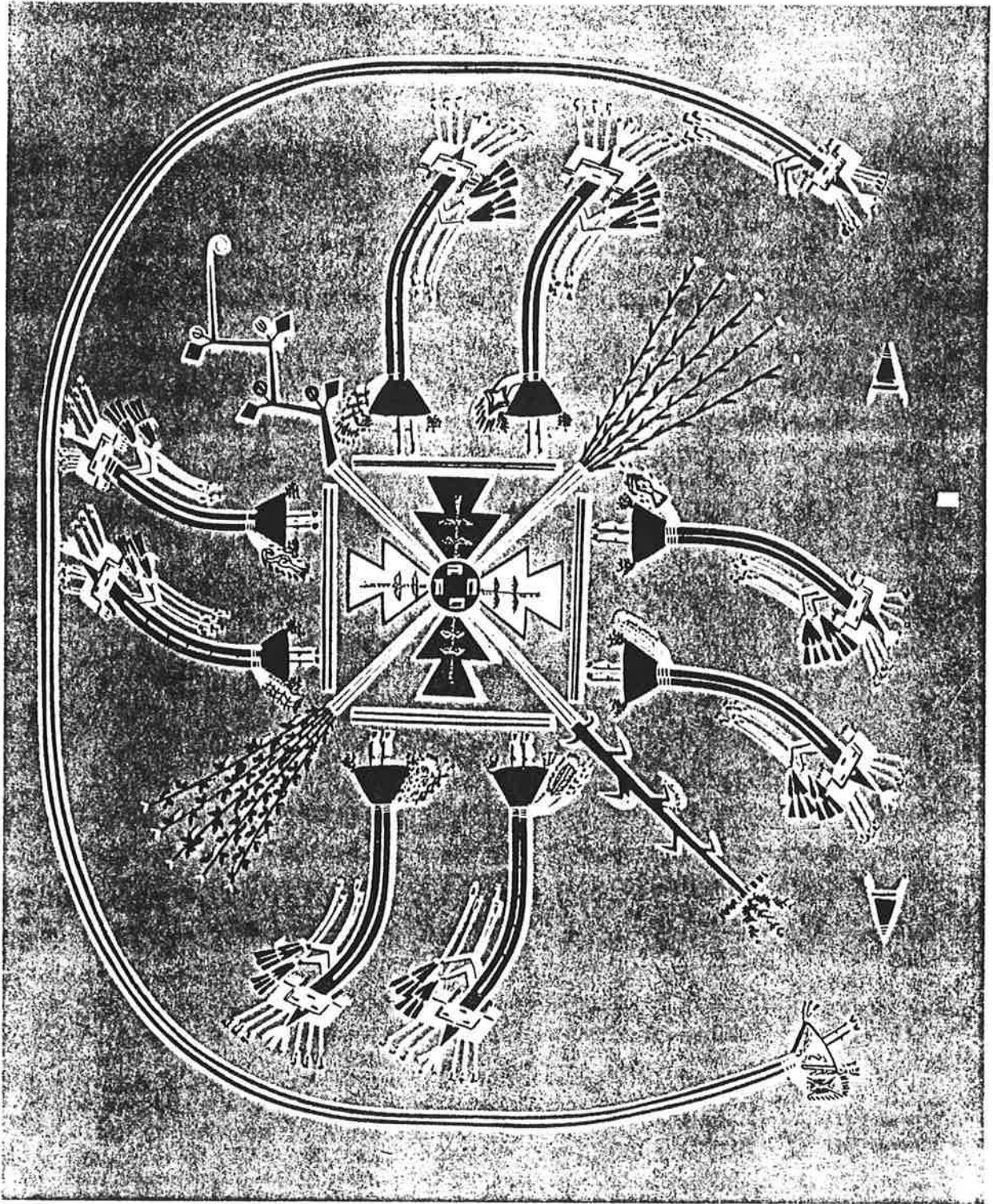


Figure 1. "Rainbow people," sand painting design from the Beautyway ceremony. (From Leland C. Wyman, ed., *Beautyway: A Navaho Ceremonial*, Bollingen Series 53, pl. 11. Copyright © 1957 by Princeton University Press. Reprinted by permission.)

always stacked in crosses, rather than being bundled or stacked at random. Similarly, the appropriate size of a field to be cultivated by one man was determined by his standing in the center and shooting arrows to the cardinal directions, thereby establishing the location of the sides.⁴

Examination of these and other details of Navajo agricultural practice suggests a certain set of values—values that transcend the specifics of agriculture and the practical desire for abundant and nourishing crops. Among these are an emphasis on process, rather than on end product alone, and on ordered, formal activity. Symmetry and cardinal orientation are also prominent, as expressions of a formally ordered, balanced state. The same values embodied in agricultural practice are to be found in all other aspects of Navajo culture, and ritual healing provides a convenient supporting example.

Traditional Navajo medicine is consciously based on the perception of what we would term “illness” as dis-order. Although illness may be caused by many factors, it is always an indication that the victim has in some way become removed from the normal course of life. For our purposes, however, perhaps the most interesting etiology of illness is that of excess. Too much of any activity—weaving, for example—or an obsession, such as avarice, produces a state of imbalance that manifests itself as physical or mental illness. These and other diseases, once identified and diagnosed, are cured by a ceremony conducted by a medical practitioner—a singer. Through song, through ritual activity, through administration of various plant-derived drugs, and through sand paintings, the patient is restored to normal, “normal” here suggesting health, happiness, and productiveness.⁵

Sand painting designs, although numerous, are to a large degree standardized and specific to the chant being performed; thus, a person suffering from a malady of one sort or another may be treated by exposure to a particular sand painting from the Beautyway chant series, for example (Figure 1). The sand painting serves to recall episodes of Navajo

mythology and to attract benevolent force to the patient. Most importantly, however, it restores balance, health, and happiness through ordered designs that depict the ideal state of things.

The concerns we have observed in agriculture and healing, taken together, suggest a coherent and elegant set of values: order, stability, harmony, and the interaction and interrelatedness of all things. These values are all contained in the concept of *hózhó*, which is perhaps the central principle of Navajo religion, philosophy, and aesthetics. The term is roughly and inadequately translated as “beauty,” but its broad meaning has no precise English equivalent. As the anthropologist Gary Witherspoon has noted, “*Hózhó* expresses the intellectual concept of order, the emotional state of happiness, the moral notion of good, the biological condition of health and well-being, and the aesthetic dimensions of balance, harmony, and beauty.”⁶ And it is through this complex and carefully articulated principle that every aspect of Navajo life, from the mundane to the sublime, is lent focus, purpose, and form.

The relationship of art to the concept of *hózhó* is particularly interesting. Not only must a finished work of art exhibit *hózhó*—that is, embody or be permeated by *hózhó*, be governed by principles of *hózhó* in its form, materials, etc.—it must also discuss *hózhó*, reflect on *hózhó*, communicate to the viewer just what it is to achieve the condition of *hózhó*. Moreover, it is not enough to speak only of the finished work of art; one must also take into account the process whereby the work was created, the artist who created it, the use to which it will be put upon completion, and the person who will use it. All of these are linked together by the finished piece—within European and American culture the only important concern, but for the Navajo something quite different. From the Navajo perspective, the piece is merely the vehicle whereby beauty, *hózhó*, is transmitted from an artist, who is himself or herself in a state of beauty, to a recipient or audience, who will in some measure be brought into a state of beauty through viewing, wearing, or appreciating what the

artist has done and made. For this process to succeed, the artist, whether weaver, silver-smith, potter, or singer, must be in a state of harmony, balance, health, beauty, or the process and the end product will fail. All who engage in creative action must thus be in a state of *hózhó*. A hogan, the traditional Navajo dwelling, must be properly built and properly blessed in order to be habitable, just as a watermelon seed cannot carry out the usual course of growth into a proper watermelon unless it is brought into a state of harmony with its own proper nature and made beautiful at the very start. The hogan, made in beauty, becomes beautiful to live in. The seed, made in beauty, becomes beautiful to eat. The sand painting, made in beauty, has the power to restore one who has fallen from a state of beauty to his or her proper, beautiful existence.

Silverwork, no less than other elements of Navajo culture, is permeated by this central value. And no less than other forms of Navajo art, it articulates the nature of that value. To be sure, silverwork is a relatively recently acquired art among the Navajo, and its general forms are largely derived from European sources. But just as Navajo thought and values restructured the agriculture learned from Pueblo neighbors, so too Navajo thought and values restructured the silverwork learned from Mexican smiths, making it into a distinctly Navajo product. And although the development of the art form has been greatly influenced by the surrounding culture, perhaps most notably by white traders attempting to obtain goods for the tourist trade, this only suggests that silver is an especially accurate mirror of Navajo culture as a whole.

Some have argued that because silver, unlike weaving, pottery, sand painting, or basketry, is a nonutilitarian art form among the Navajo, it may be dismissed as purely ornamental. To this there are two replies. First, this observation rests on a European notion of what utility is and ignores the patterns of jewelry use among contemporary Navajo. We may note that the Navajo continue to make and wear distinctive silver jewelry even though other traditional elements of dress and hairstyle have almost entirely disappeared. Further-

more, silver jewelry plays an important role in Navajo ceremonial life. This is evident, for example, in the girls' initiation ceremony, in which the initiate wears much jewelry, the chanter or singer is regularly paid in jewelry, and the participants in the ceremony often receive gifts of jewelry from the girl's family. In other ceremonies the patient for whom the ritual is performed may receive a bead or shell upon completion of the ceremony to symbolize its success, and this token is commonly worn thereafter on a necklace.⁷ The persistence of jewelry in everyday and ceremonial life suggests that it contributes in an external way to group identity and cultural cohesiveness and implies a degree of resistance to external influences. In other words, there is something essentially Navajo about Navajo jewelry in the minds of its wearers.

More importantly, there is no such thing as mere ornament; ornament always expresses numerous aspects of its mother culture. When beauty is a central cultural value, as it is for the Navajo, the attempt to capture beauty is nothing less than a conscious expression of crucial values. This implies that there must be a more or less clear set of standards for what beauty is and for which things are or are not beautiful, although the existence of such aesthetic canons has been questioned.⁸ An anecdote told by Virginia Doneghy, the collector of the objects exhibited here, provides support for the idea that such standards do in fact exist. On one of her many trips to the Southwest, she bought a silver necklace and immediately put it on. As she walked down the street in Albuquerque, proudly exhibiting her new acquisition, an elderly Navajo man approached her. Studying the necklace intently, he indicated his disapproval and remarked "Too long." "I realized at once," she later said, "that he was perfectly right—the necklace was awkward." More than awkward, it was un-balanced, and thus, un-beautiful. Like the sick individual, it was dis-ordered, out of conformity with *hózhó*, as the Navajo observer recognized.

Indeed, just by looking closely at individual pieces of jewelry and at jewelry in groups, we can discern a number of characteristics of style related to the concept of *hózhó*. In a cast

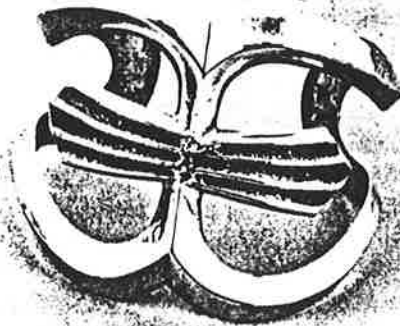


Figure 2. Cast Navajo bracelets from the Doneghy collection. *Left*, bracelet with cast leaf ornaments and

stamping, 1930s (no. 80). *Right*, a similar form with contrasting unpolished areas, 1970s (no. 334).

bracelet from the 1930s, for example, aesthetic and philosophic values are manifest on numerous levels (Figure 2, left). Perhaps the most striking feature of this piece is the contrast between the elegantly curved side elements and the blocky, rectangular center. Although such contrast can easily be read as a "balance" between two linear forms, the philosophic implications of that balance are rather more subtle. The idea of contrast as balance rests on the assumption that balance is completeness, is the presence of all components. The curve of a curved line is, in effect, meaningless without reference to a straight line. The Navajo see a similar "balance" between activity, which is explicitly associated with the curve, and stasis, which is associated with straight lines. In turn, activity is considered a trait of the female, both human and divine, while stasis is connected to gods and men.⁹ Thus, (curve = activity = female) + (straight = stasis = male) = whole. In the ideal sand

painting the curved and the straight complement each other, just as in ideal social relations the male and female complement one another. All are necessary parts of the whole.

There is balance of another kind between the more traditional external curved forms and the "leaves," the latter being a naturalistic, Anglo-inspired innovation which was a relative novelty in the 1930s. The combining of old and new in this way is entirely consistent with Navajo interest in the past and respect for tradition, on the one hand, and interest in creative innovation on the other. The Navajo recognize the value of both, but draw on neither too heavily. These balances imply an avoidance of excess; the weaver who weaves too much will become ill and must be cured through a restoration of balance, of *hózhó*.

Returning to the bracelet at hand, we should note also its careful quadrantal symmetry.

Obviously this is in some ways related to balance, but it is also connected to another, no less complex, set of ideas. Quadrantal symmetry is simply another way of describing cardinal orientation, which, as we saw above, is important in various traditional farming practices. And it is emphasized in traditional hogan architecture, too. The house frame consists of five long poles interlocked at the top, of which two, closer together and facing eastward, form the door frame (Figure 3). So insistent are the Navajo on the importance of the cardinal directions that they consider the two doorposts to be only one, so that it may be said that four poles support the hogan—an example, as we shall see, of mythic truth prevailing over reality.¹⁰

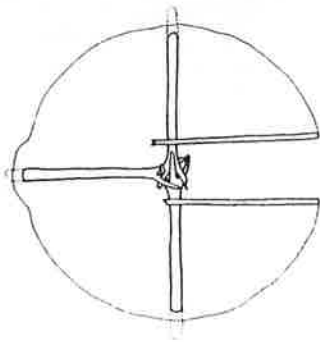


Figure 3. Supporting structure for a conical hogan, seen from above. The four (five) poles are interlocked at the top; the eastern pole(s) forming the doorway is visible at the right.

But why are the Navajo so insistent on the importance of the four directions? First, the cardinal directions are prominent features of Navajo myths about the creation of the world and the origin of the Navajo people. Division of the world into quadrants, each associated with a specific mountain on the periphery of Navajo territory, brought order out of chaos. With this in mind, we may look again at the hogan framework, in particular at the elaborate terminology and set of associations for each of the four (or five) poles. The eastern pole(s) is called *Nahasdzáán bijáadii*, “earth world’s leg”; the southern pole, “mountain world’s leg”; the western, “water world’s leg”; the northern, “corn world’s leg.” Earth and mountain world refer to the sources of the

wood and dirt used in the hogan’s construction, and hence to its origins; water and corn, the basic elements of human sustenance, may be seen as a coded reference to the hogan’s intended purpose as the center of family life.¹¹ Literally and figuratively, then, the hogan stands at the center of all things. It is the axis mundi: its poles mark off the four directions, the sacred mountains, and the origins and mythic structure of the people as well as their past and present (Figure 4).

Cardinal orientation, or division into quadrants, naturally implies a center point at which north-south and east-west axes intersect and which is a part of both axes and all four directions, or alternatively, a point which transcends all distinctions and dualities, partaking of perfect harmony and totality. Just so, the midpoint of the central bar in the bracelet under consideration is the point on which all lines and forms converge, or from which they all radiate, as in agriculture all labor—planting, weeding, harvesting, and even the singing of farming songs—begins at the center of the field.¹² Also reminiscent of agriculture are the two “leaves” that form one of the axes. When considered together with the straight central bar, they strongly suggest the “beans with two ears” stage of plant growth, when a plant first acquires all its distinguishing features. Far more important than this possible iconography, however, is the general pattern of focal center and axes leading to the cardinal points. This pattern permeates all of Navajo art and thought and is emphasized in creation mythology, wherein the first Navajo people are said to have come out of the earth’s depths at Emergence Rim, the spot where the axes described by the four sacred mountains intersect.

Even the treatment of the bracelet’s surface may be seen to result in large measure from the precept of *hózhó*. Like all cast ornaments of that period, this bracelet was made in a stone mold; when a silver piece is removed from the mold it is dull gray, and the surface is rough and pitted. The bright luster of this piece, and all cast pieces, is the result of days of sanding and polishing by the smith. The effect of this part of the manufacturing process is to eradicate all signs of the previous



Figure 4. Ceremonial hogan under construction, 1905. The doorway is at the right; a small boy sits atop the interlocked poles. (Photograph by Simon Schweinberger,

courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives)

step. By polishing away the marks of melting and casting, one returns the metal to its ideal, beautiful state; the process leads to a state of *hózhó*. But, perhaps because the uninterrupted shiny surface is too neutral, Navajo smiths commonly use a restrained, delicate stamping to enhance their work, thereby returning to it the mark of the maker's hand. The process is exactly analogous to the finishing of Southwest pottery, in which the pot is burnished at length to produce a smooth, lustrous surface. (The famous Hopi potter Fannie Nampeyo complained that nowadays girls are not patient enough to burnish their pots for the amount of time required to produce the proper sheen.) When the pot is smoothed and no longer bears the prints of its maker's hands, designs are painted on and the maker is again in evidence.

On this particular bracelet, a single V-shaped stamp has been used repeatedly along the ridge or apex, echoing the acute angle of the bracelet in section. The arrow is well known

in sand painting, where it has the same directional connotation that it has acquired in wider culture. Thus, it is easy to see the line of stamped Vs as implied motion, converging on the curved elements toward the center and radiating outward on the rectangular bar. The regular spacing of the stamps suggests rhythmic progression, the same steady beat that accentuates Navajo music. The silversmith Ambrose Roanhorse has recorded a smith's song about making beautiful silver, in which the rhythm is tapped out by a metallic hammering sound.¹³ Listening to the song, one can easily envision a piece like this one.

Necklaces require the smith to address the same question—How can the values implicit in *hózhó* be translated into silver?—but because of their different form they require a different set of solutions. Unlike the fixed, rigid form of bracelets, necklaces are mobile and fluid. They offer little flat surface for stamped decoration, nor do they permit the kind of exploration of cardinal orientation that

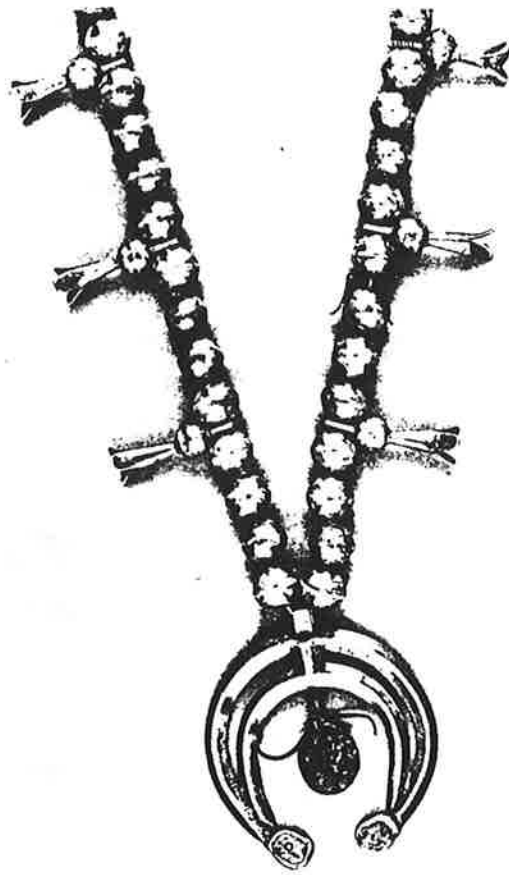
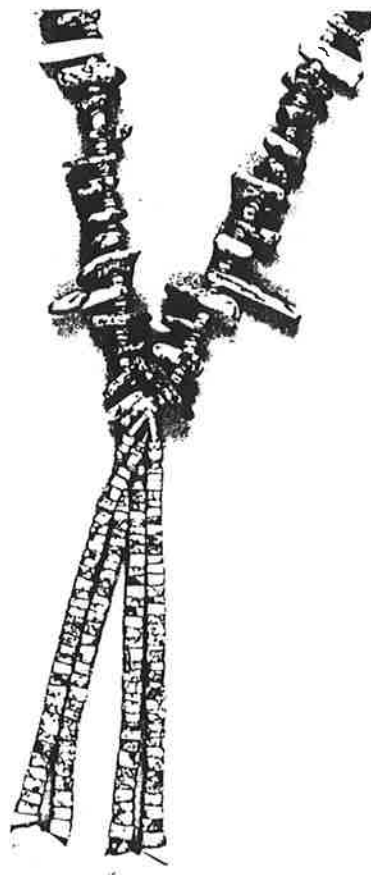


Figure 5. Necklaces from the Doneghy collection. *Left*, Navajo squash blossom necklace, double naja with turquoise sets and pendant, about 1910 (no. 371). *Right*,



Santo Domingo necklace of turquoise and shell nuggets interspersed with heishi, jaclas of discoidal turquoise and white shell beads, about 1920 (no. 884).

we saw so clearly in bracelets. The symmetry of their design revolves about one axis, not two. Necklaces are perhaps the most complex of Southwest jewelry forms and the most eclectic in their design sources. At the same time, they show relatively little variation from the typical forms, perhaps because the typical forms are highly satisfactory.

Looking at a necklace from the early period (Figure 5, left), in which the type is already well established, we may describe that typical form as being composed of graduated spherical beads flanking a crescent-shaped pendant and interspersed with so-called squash blossom beads on shanks. Although the outline of the form is different, the necklace is centered on

the naja, or pendant, as surely as the bracelet mentioned above was centered on the rectangular bar. The naja is not just a visual center, however, but a center of weight as well. Without the pendant, the necklace would lack a focus, lack a way of maintaining its alignment, lack a way of defining its axis. The naja serves to break the curve of the necklace, changing the curved line of a simple bead necklace into a more or less straight and orderly progression toward the center. The same broken curve is apparent in jaclas, early earrings consisting of a string of small tubular beads, usually of turquoise. At the center of each jacla strand were threaded several wedge-shaped beads, sometimes of coral or white shell, forcing the string to double back abruptly and the two

sides to hang closely parallel (Figure 5, right). Although there are doubtless functional considerations influencing this arrangement,¹⁴ there can be no doubt that there are aesthetic ones as well, for the use of beads of a contrasting color is obviously intended to give emphasis and weight to the center. We may note in passing that jaclas are now seldom worn as earrings; since the late nineteenth century or earlier it has been customary to tie them to turquoise or turquoise-and-shell bead necklaces as a center pendant, thus giving them the same role as najas on silver necklaces.

Beads on early necklaces like this one are often graduated, the largest being placed toward the middle of the strand; there are even examples of necklaces in which the squash blossom beads are graduated in size. Like the pendant, graduation serves to define the center, both visually and by the weight of the larger, heavier beads. A simple strand of beads, graduated or not, suggests a rhythmic progression, and until about 1880 silver necklaces made by the Navajo consisted of plain beads hung with a pendant in naja form. Photographic evidence indicates that in about that year smiths began to make what are commonly termed squash blossom beads (the Navajo word describing the type means "bead that spreads out")¹⁵ and to intersperse them after every third, or in this case fourth, plain bead. Because they were mounted by means of a shank rather than strung directly on the necklace cord,¹⁶ both the bead and the blossom extended beyond the body of the necklace, setting up a more complex visual rhythm. Similar rhythmic structures exist in music. Navajo song has been described as making creative use of repetition by introducing subtle patterns of alternation and progression.¹⁷ The evolved formal arrangement of necklace beads suggests a similar interest in repetition with variation.

We have already discussed the role of the naja in defining the axis and center of the necklace. But the form of the naja itself, as inherited from Spanish sources, seems to have presented an interesting set of problems to early smiths. Because it revolves on one axis, not two, the naja cannot be said to have a

center as such. Smiths apparently felt this as a lack of focus, for in naja designs from the early period to the present they have tried various ways of adding weight and emphasis to the basic form. Early najas usually thicken at the top into a true crescentic form or else echo the same shape in a double naja held together at the top by a vertical strip, as in this example. When stone settings came into use, the most common site for a setting on a naja was the apex of the curve, where the piece is joined to the necklace. Slightly later the more direct solution of extending the design into the void came into use. On the necklace we are considering, for example, a turquoise pendant has been tied to the small silver tab protruding into the open space. Turquoise or silver pendants and cast or soldered ornaments descending into the open space of the naja remain extremely common variants on the basic form.

Looking at Navajo art forms other than silver for parallel examples of this centering device within an open circle, we find them readily in sand paintings (Figure 1). Many sand painting designs are enclosed by a greatly elongated figure of the rainbow god bent into a C shape or sometimes into a three-sided square. This figure serves as the guardian of the painting and, by analogy, of the ceremony and the patient for whom the painting is made. Sand paintings, no less than bracelets, focus strongly on the center, where the patient will sit to be restored to health, and thus the form of a typical sand painting at its most basic level is an open circle with a dot in the middle.

Not surprisingly, we can argue for the same pattern in architecture, for the ground plan of a traditional hogan is a C-shaped outer wall. The hogan walls perform in concrete fashion the protective function of the rainbow god "frame" of sand paintings. The parallel is reinforced when we consider that sand paintings are traditionally made within hogans, the open side of the sand painting oriented toward the hogan door, which faces east—another example of form organized along an axis. The only fixed feature of interior hogan arrangement is the location of the hearth in the middle. The hearth is literally the center of family life and

activity; a hogan without a hearth is incomplete, uninhabitable. Given the apparent need to fill the void of the naja, it seems that without a focus this form is also in some measure unsatisfactory. It is clear, however, that the open circle—especially the open circle with a central device, be it pendant, fireplace, or pattern in colored sand—is a prominent feature of Navajo design. (Even bracelets may be regarded as C forms; the Navajo almost never make closed hoop bracelets.) The opening has been related to the supposed cultural trait of independence and fear of encirclement.¹⁸ If the form is put into the third dimension, however, a new set of associations and a more satisfactory interpretation may result. In terms of Navajo material culture, the spheroid with a single opening calls to mind gourd containers and storage pits hollowed out of the ground. If the open side of the hogan is the door, and the opening in a storage pit gives access and means of withdrawing, we can find a mythological parallel in the hole in Emergence Rim through which the First People in the Navajo creation myth came out of the earth into the world (the analogy to the womb is explicit in creation accounts). The first hogan was built at Emergence Rim at the time of the creation.

Much more remains to be said about the motif of the open circle and its various manifestations in Navajo art and thought. For present purposes it is sufficient to suggest that in nonsilver media the form has connotations of both protection and the creative process. We might speculate that, by extension, the naja also carries these associations; the occasional addition of hands as terminals, seeming to suggest encircling arms, has led some scholars to argue for the motif as a protective device, but there is no clear testimony to support the interpretation.

Necklaces, then, echo the same preoccupations we encountered in bracelets—the same interest in order, in stability, in harmony—but the approach and the form are more complex. The evolution of the basic form shows an interest in imparting stability to a mobile structure, in balance and rhythm, and in the problem of creating a center or focus. All of these aesthetic concerns are entirely consis-

tent with the ideal of *hózhó*. The Navajo are often cited for their ability to adopt aspects of other cultures and make these traits their own; they are said to be, in the anthropologist Evon Vogt's term, incorporative. There can be no better visual example of this ability than the squash blossom necklace, in which disparate elements have been brought together into a harmonious whole.

Having observed characteristics of Navajo style in silverwork that seem strongly related to Navajo ideology, we may now find it useful to examine silverwork from another Southwest group. The Zuni are perhaps the most instructive example in this regard, for they are as well known as the Navajo for their skill but are vastly different from their neighbors both in culture and in artistic style. They belong to a different language group, and their social, religious, and kinship systems, and the values derived from these, are quite different also. Whereas Navajo cultural expressions, as we have seen, emphasize harmony, simplicity, and focus, the Zuni stress complexity, multiplicity, fragmentation, and elaboration. The anthropologist Barbara Tedlock has elucidated the meaning of the Zuni term *coʔya*, a word corresponding in some ways to the Navajo *hózhó* but describing an aesthetic of multiplicity and dynamic asymmetry.¹⁹

The Zuni learned to work silver from the Navajo about 1872, and we know from period photographs that their early pieces resembled those of the Navajo. But using the same elements of turquoise and silver, they quickly developed a style based on a different aesthetic and an entirely different way of looking at their materials. Their jewelry gives primacy to turquoise, and the stones are often cut in small pieces of roughly equal size which are then set in radiating or grid designs. The silver so lovingly worked by the Navajo serves chiefly as a medium to set stones, although the ability to set dozens of "needlepoint" turquoises attests to the Zuni's skill in smithing. Diework is largely absent from Zuni silver, the rhythmic quality it imparts being supplied by multiple sets.

The essential stylistic differences between Zuni and Navajo silver may be most clearly

seen in the differing treatment of stones and squash blossoms. The Zuni, covering the surface of the squash blossom with turquoises, expand the form to occupy the entire necklace; the beads become an invisible supporting structure, and the necklace seems to consist of closely set, unvaried squash blossom units, far different from the alternation present in the classic Navajo arrangement. Similarly, Zuni rowwork bracelets display closely set small turquoises—dozens of tiny identical units, in contrast to the Navajo preference for a single large set. It is tempting to suggest here an architectural analogy, relating the Navajo interest in centrality and focus (and hence use of one large center stone) to their pattern of living in single hogans, isolated from other family groups. The Zuni, who rather display a preference for multiplicity, for dividing a visual field into numerous similar elements, have for centuries lived in large multiunit “apartment” complexes. Given the integrative nature of both cultures, it does not seem excessively daring to posit a relationship of this kind.

Despite the separation and distinctiveness of the two styles, and the identification with cultural values that we have suggested, there has always been some overlapping of the styles. Members of one group have always worn the other’s jewelry, whether through geographic proximity to silversmiths working in that style, patterns of intermarriage, or “aberrant” aesthetic preference. Some smiths have worked in the style of a neighboring group for commercial or personal reasons. Stylistic influence, or even a synthesis of styles, might be expected to result from such contact, but in fact the opposite is true. In many ways the styles seem to be becoming further differentiated: Zuni lapidary work is becoming ever tinier, and Navajo silverwork is becoming more and more sculptural. Among Navajo smiths a conscious revival of older traditions can be seen, for example, in the new use of graduated beads in squash blossom and other necklaces.

It is clear that Navajo smiths, recognizing the close relationship between their art and the concept of *hózhó*, are seeking and finding new ways to express that ideal, as a recently made cast bracelet in the Doneghy collection

demonstrates (Figure 2, right). The smith has deliberately left various planes of the center motif rough and unfiled after the casting process. Like stamping, it is a way of drawing notice to the smoothness of the other surfaces. The strong contrast between light and dark that the method produces is an explicit reminder of the importance of balance and of resolution into a harmonious state. By suggesting the process of its manufacture, the piece reflects and comments on its own origin in the same way that the names of hogan structural supports recall their sources.

In mainstream American and European culture it is considered appropriate and necessary to compartmentalize various fields of thought and activity. Medicine and religion are not allowed to permeate each other’s borders; the raising of crops and the education of children are considered separate endeavors. For this reason, trying to learn about silver jewelry by examining how houses are built, how the sick are healed, or how farming is made productive may at first seem an improbable technique. Fundamentally, however, we have attempted to come to an understanding of Navajo art and aesthetics through the concept of *hózhó*. Navajo life and thought are informed at every level by this central idea; in turn, all aspects of Navajo culture are interconnected through their association to *hózhó*. A study of any idea or object inevitably leads first to *hózhó*, then to all its other manifestations.

Thus far we have pursued meanings and implications of *hózhó* other than its usual English equivalent, “beauty.” That Navajo jewelry is beautiful, in the English sense, is surely beyond debate. I have attempted to demonstrate that it is also beautiful in the Navajo sense. That is to say, it is ordered, balanced, harmonious; it reflects and comments on the condition of its maker, on the process by which it was made, and on the past and present of the Navajo people; it suggests the ideal state of existence. All of these are preconditions necessary to the manifestation of *hózhó*. In fulfilling them, silverwork is in every sense *hózhó nahastlín*, “finished in beauty.”

NOTES

1. W. W. Hill, *The Agricultural and Hunting Methods of the Navaho Indians*, Yale University Publications in Anthropology, no. 18 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1938), pp. 182–190.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 57–58.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 35, 63.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 40.
5. See Gladys A. Reichard, *Navaho Religion: A Study of Symbolism*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 80–122.
6. Gary Witherspoon, *Language and Art in the Navajo Universe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977), p. 154.
7. Reichard, pp. 524–525.
8. For a summary of this position see Daniel J. Crowley, "An African Aesthetic," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 24 (summer 1966):523.
9. Witherspoon, p. 160.
10. Leland C. Wyman, *Blessingway* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1970), p. 13.
11. Stephen C. Jett and Virginia E. Spencer, *Navajo Architecture* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1981), p. 22.
12. Hill, pp. 29–30, 39–40, 68.
13. Ambrose Roanhorse, "Silversmith's Song," in *Folk Music of the United States—Navajo*, recorded and edited by Willard Rhodes, Library of Congress Division Recording Lab AFS L41, Washington, D.C.
14. The wedge-shaped beads prevent the earrings from forming a stiff curve, thus avoiding stress on the inner edges of the beads. If the beads were strung loosely enough to "break" on their own, the angled beads at the bottom would quickly wear through the string.
15. John Adair, *The Navajo and Pueblo Silversmiths* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1944), p. 44.
16. Attachment of the bead by means of a shank is explained by historical antecedents as well as functional and aesthetic considerations. The form is most likely derived from the ornate silver buttons in the shape of pomegranates used to decorate Hispano-Mexican men's trousers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This ornamental form, with shank attached, is essentially identical to the Navajo type. Although one might expect that in necklaces the bead would be strung directly on the cord, this adaptation would require soldering the blossom on at the seam, a weak point in the bead's structure. (A few necklaces are nevertheless made this way; of particular interest in the Doneghy collection is no. 482, made by the Euro-American smith Wolf Reed.) Furthermore, beads without shanks would not extend so far from the body of the necklace and thus would not produce the same uninterrupted external outline that incorporates the naja into a smooth exterior curve.
17. David McAllester, cited in Witherspoon, p. 156.
18. Reichard, p. 89.
19. Barbara Tedlock, personal communication, June 1981; see also her "Songs of the Zuni Kachina Society," in Charlotte J. Frisbie, ed., *Southwestern Indian Ritual Drama*, School of American Research Advanced Seminar Series (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1980), p. 18.

