



Navajo pictorial rug, circa 1875.
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Museum of Natural History



Press Release

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What: *Navajo Weaving: Diamonds, Dreams, Landscapes* showcases the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History's Extraordinary Collection of Textiles

When: May 29, 2009 - May 30, 2010

Where: University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, Changing Gallery

Cost: Admission is free but donations are welcomed

Contact information for publication: University of Colorado Museum of Natural History at 303- 492-6892 or visit <http://cumuseum.colorado.edu/>

Navajo Weaving: Diamonds, Dreams, Landscapes showcases the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History's Extraordinary Collection of Textiles

On May 29, 2009 the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History is opening a new exhibition entitled *Navajo Weaving: Diamonds, Dreams, Landscapes*. The textiles included in this exhibition are part of the Museum's Joe Ben Wheat Southwestern Textile Collection, considered to be one of the world's best collections of Navajo textiles. This is the first major exhibition that this Museum has organized using pieces of this collection. Most of these textiles have never before been on exhibit. This is an exceptional opportunity for the public to learn more about this collection, and the Museum's efforts to preserve these textiles for future generations.

Navajo Weaving is also unique because every four months the public will have the opportunity to see a completely different group of these beautiful textiles. It will be presented in three installations each showcasing 20-30 Navajo textiles. The three installations' themes are:

"Diamonds And Beyond" (May 29 - October 1st., 2009)

The first installation will include vibrant textiles in both color and design and will focus on the diamond motif commonly woven into Navajo weavings. Emphasis will be on the contemporary weaver's approach to design and the design elements and their arrangement within each textile. Conversations with contemporary Navajo weavers and artists will add a personal note. Beyond the diamonds a few surprises await.

"Dreams, Schemes and Stories" (October 2nd., 2009 - February 4, 2010)

Textiles on display during the second installation, Dreams, will include narrative and image-based weavings and will focus on stories. These will include cultural stories of the Navajo people (the Dine), as well as individual stories of weavers who are members of the Navajo community. A wide variety of pictorial rugs will be featured.

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“Landscapes” (February 4 - May 30, 2010)

Wide Ruins and crystal style rugs will anchor the third installation, which will focus on the Southwestern landscape that has influenced Navajo cultural and artistic traditions. Many of the textiles are dyed with plants from the Navajo reservation and special emphasis will be given to the art of natural dyeing and the aesthetic impact of color. Motifs such as lightning lines and spider woman crosses are embedded in designs related to cultural stories about the making of the first loom and the beginning of weaving. The relationship to the landscape still influences many of the designs created by contemporary Navajo weavers.

Judy M. Newland, Faculty Exhibit Developer at the Arizona State University Museum of Anthropology is the Guest Curator for the exhibition *Navajo Weaving*. She states:

Navajo Weaving: Diamonds, Dreams, Landscapes will bring to light the depth and diversity of the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History's collection of Navajo textiles. The makers of these textiles created complex and exacting designs, sometimes with a whimsical twist. They were woven for sale and trade, and the threads contain personal and cultural stories expressing the lives and landscape of the Navajo people. This exhibit will take a new look at this extraordinary collection and explore the designs and dreams of weavers who lived primarily in the expansive landscape of the desert southwest.

A full slate of public and school programming will accompany the exhibit, including a grand opening event on May 29, 2009 which includes a public lecture by Dr. Ann Hedlund, director of the Gloria F. Ross Center for Tapestry Studies, Arizona State Museum, University of Arizona; and a reception. This event will be open to the public. In addition, hands-on workshops for adults, parents and children, guided tours, movie nights at the Museum (featuring movies directed and/or produced and/or acted by Navajos), and a lecture series by Navajo weavers and specialists on Navajo textiles will be offered throughout the year the exhibition will be open.

The exhibition will be on display May 29, 2009 - May 30, 2010 in the Changing Exhibits Gallery of the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, in the Henderson Building on the University of Colorado—Boulder campus between 15th-16th Streets, just east of Broadway. Mon-Fri 9-5, Sat 9-4, Sun 10-4. Free admission, donations welcomed. Contact: 303-492-689.

About the Collection:

The Joe Ben Wheat Textile Collection at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History is rated one of the top five in the world. The collection encompasses more than 800 fine textiles from three traditions—Pueblo, Navajo and Spanish American (Hispanic).

Dr. Joe Ben Wheat, one of the great scholars of the Southwestern textiles, assembled the collection and initiated his research at CU in 1972. His book, *Blanket Weaving in the Southwest*, edited by Dr. Ann Hedlund, is a result of decades of reviewing, tabulating and charting extensive data on these textiles, and hundreds of others at other museums. In his research, Dr. Wheat not only identified and documented many rare pieces, but he studied the stories, people and culture behind the textiles.

Dr. Wheat took decades to build the collection. He felt strongly about building a collection for the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History that would be used by students, researchers and weavers. His initial goal was to establish a key for the cultural identification of 19-century weaving, comparing the physical traits of textiles with descriptions in historic written records. His study went far beyond this goal. It resulted in the first new historical classification scheme for southwestern textiles in 40 years and in the deep understanding of culture change. Wheat's meticulous study reveals the contexts within which technological traditions in the Southwest developed and were recognized or overlooked; it included the people behind the artifacts and the cultural nexus within which the people work.

Even after Dr. Wheat's death in 1997, the collection continues to grow through donations and purchases. Recent additions include a large piece by famed weaver Sadie Curtis, and sashes by Morris Musket.