

COILING KIN

The Life of Pueblo Pottery



**Maxwell Museum
of Anthropology**

Education Guide

The Maxwell Museum of Anthropology invites faculty and staff to visit our newest exhibition, *Coiling Kin: The Life of Pueblo Pottery*. This exhibit presents a comprehensive exploration of the Maxwell Museum's permanent collection through the perspective of 25 Pueblo artists and co-curators.

Through their voices, *Coiling Kin* explores Pueblo pottery as a living cultural practice as well an enduring art form. Over the course of 3 years, curators visited the Maxwell Museum to review the permanent collection and select objects to be displayed in the exhibit, refining and discussing their choices in video recordings. *Coiling Kin* features 70 works from the Museum's collection and enhanced by photographs, loan items, and the extensive use of audio-visual materials.



Jars with bird designs (left to right): Polychrome Jar, P'o:whoge Owingeh (San Ildefonso Pueblo) (72.10.51); Polychrome Jar with "Zia bird" design and double rainbow, Tsiya (Zia Pueblo) (79.82.1); Polychrome Seed Jar with bird design, Hopi'sinom (Hopi Tribe) (78.59.15); Polychrome Jar with turkey design, Tsiya (Zia Pueblo) (73.4.1). Photograph by Karen Price.



Elaborate panel designs on nineteenth century polychrome jars feature a white slip and deer or antelope iconography from Haak'u (Acoma Pueblo) (36.20.3, left), and A:shiwi (Zuni Pueblo) with the Pueblo's distinctive white kechiba (kaolin clay) slip and floral designs (61.3.317, right). Photograph by Karen Price.

For more information, or to schedule a tour for the upcoming semester, please email our Education Division at maxeducation@unm.edu

Educational Tools

Exhibit Themes

***Coiling Kin* introduces the curators and explores four primary themes:**

- Clay and its broader purpose in Pueblo Life;
- Pottery's kin connections through time and across generations in the Southwest;
- Pottery making knowledge and processes;
- The contemporary context and future possibilities for pottery.

Suggested Topics for Consideration

The content of this exhibition raises a wealth of issues you can explore with your students to enhance their learning through a unique out-of-the-classroom-experience. Extending beyond the exhibition itself, *Coiling Kin* invites consideration of such topics as:

- Cultural ecology/human-environmental relations: land, environment, materials in New Mexico/Southwest (for example: plant ecology, sustainability)
- The history of museum collecting: art/craft; anthropology/art history
- Community collaboration and Tribal consultations
- Material culture, technology, and social identity
- Teaching and learning (including inter-generational learning, and land based pedagogy)
- Ways of knowing
- Design (from decorative motif to exhibit design)

Including the Maxwell Museum in your teaching practice

Whether you are interested in scheduling an exhibit tour, bringing your class for a self-guided visit, or assigning students to visit the exhibit on their own time, the best place to start is by considering what you would like your students to take away from their visit.

Museum staff is available to discuss your ideas, questions, and requests, and to work with you to facilitate the best experience with this exhibit for you and your students. Please email maxeducation@unm.edu to start a conversation.

Resources

Coiling Kin includes several videos that both highlight the working methods of the exhibition curators and share insights into their selections for the exhibit. In addition to being on display in the exhibit, these videos can be accessed through the links below, or by visiting <https://www.youtube.com/@maxwellmuseum>

[Coiling Kin: The Life of Pueblo Pottery](#)

(30 minute video on the process of pottery making told in the artists words)

[Coiling Kin Playlist: Storytelling](#)

[Coiling Kin Playlist: Ways of Learning](#)

[Coiling Kin Playlist: Changing Traditions](#)

Exhibit Background

Seven Families in Pueblo Pottery and Fourteen Families in Pueblo Pottery

In 1974, the Maxwell Museum mounted this exhibition and catalogue, featuring contemporary potters from four Pueblos. The exhibit was unique in its acknowledgement of Pueblo potters as named individuals and was among the first to look at the work of Pueblo potters in the contemporary artistic context in which it circulates. Twenty years after the original Seven Families exhibit, Fourteen Families in Pueblo Pottery was published. This updated and expanded catalogue highlighted the growth and diversity of Pueblo pottery. It featured more extensive family genealogies as well as photos of the individual potters and their work.

While these publications were a celebration of pottery styles and family legacies, they also contributed to the commodification of Pueblo pottery and distanced the practice from local meanings and values. The original exhibit and both catalogues attempted in their times to communicate some element of the breadth and depth of Pueblo pottery, but these efforts were all constrained by Western institutional representations. Many families with generational practice went unrecognized, and the representation of the social and kinship networks amongst Pueblo potters and the ways in which these connections ground the practice within their communities was inevitably distorted.

Coiling Kin: The Life of Pueblo Pottery

The seed of the exhibition was planted with a spontaneous comment from Rachel Sahmie, a fifth generation Hopi'sinom (Hopi-Tewa) Nampeyo potter, on a visit to the Maxwell Museum in 2019.

She brought some of her work to sell in our store, remarking that the Museum had been so important to her generation of potters. The 1974 Seven Families in Pueblo Pottery exhibit and catalogue brought attention to members of her family, from which she had benefited and for which she was grateful. Couldn't something be done in the museum now, she wondered, to reflect on the intervening years of Pueblo pottery's recognition as an art form?

[From Creating Coiling Kin: The Life of Pueblo Pottery, by Lea McChesney \(The Maxwell, Volume 56 No. 1 Spring 2026\)](#)

Sadly, Rachel Sahmie passed away in 2022. As the 50th anniversary of Seven Families approached, the question of how best to honor Rachel's sentiment became even more important. Lea McChesney, Curator of Ethnology at the Maxwell, reached out to a wide range of potters, some members of the original "seven families", some part of the subsequent larger group of "fourteen families", and many other accomplished contemporary Pueblo potters not recognized in those projects. Over the course of ongoing visits and conversations with these potters, the guiding idea for Coiling Kin emerged: the exhibit would be a story that the 25 curators would narrate. Over three years, curators visited the Maxwell to make selections, refine those selections, and discuss them in video recordings. The curators interacted with each other and museum staff in small groups and whole team meetings, working collectively to develop themes and content. A final team meeting completed the exhibit's organization and content in preparation for its design by Curator of Exhibits Toni Gentili. Curators wanted the exhibit not just to display works of pottery, but to explain how the exhibit came to be, and to explain why pottery and clay are so central to their lives.

About the Maxwell Museum

Location

The Maxwell Museum is located east of University Blvd. between Las Lomas Rd. and Dr. M. L. King Jr. Ave. See <https://maxwellmuseum.unm.edu/about/visit-us> for directions

Hours (Museum & Store):

Tuesday - Saturday: 10am - 4pm
Closed Sundays, Mondays and all major holidays
Free and open to all

Parking

10 free parking spaces are available just west of the museum, parallel to University Blvd. Parking permits are available inside at reception. Paid parking areas are west of the Museum adjacent to permitted spaces and north of Las Lomas Rd.

Contact

To schedule a tour, contact the Education Division at maxeducation@unm.edu
<https://maxwellmuseum.unm.edu>

If you would like to bring your class for a self-guided visit, please let us know so that we can try to ensure that there are no other groups visiting during that time.

Maxwell Museum of Anthropology

Working toward greater understandings of the fullness of human experiences in the Southwest and the world.

Vision

The Maxwell Museum of Anthropology at UNM contributes to
Reconciling injustices
Restoring voices
Realizing community

Values

The Staff at the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology at UNM embrace these values in all they do:
Uphold integrity through honesty and transparency
Act with courage and take informed risks
Lead with humility and own our mistakes
Embrace inclusivity with openness and sincerity
Embody dynamism and manifest meaningful change
Excite curiosity and the passion for learning