



KNOWLEDGE BEINGS

This gallery showcases exceptional works in clay made by thirteen Indigenous artists from diverse cultures and sovereign nations within the present-day United States. Each artwork is a being, made with the living earth by artists who observe and honor sacred presence in human and nonhuman alike. We can think of these beings as representatives of vital and varied Indigenous knowledge—about being original peoples to a place, the teachings of ancestors, and the artistic innovations that shape Indigenous futures.

In this transnational gathering place, shared Indigenous values are immersive. The carved walls evoke a geological space, inviting a sense of deep connection to Earth that is embodied by each clay vessel. A Sky Hole unites Mother Earth and Father Sky, the sources of life for many Indigenous nations. Thirteen artworks were selected to reflect the number of annual moons and the cyclical sense of time that brings into close relation Indigenous beings from the past, present, and future. The artists' words—written in each case and heard speaking—convey the diverse creative processes and values that help us understand each Knowledge Being.

"I hope that you'll take the design with you in your mind when you leave, thinking about these cultures, these people, these beings differently than you have before."

Chris Cornelius (Oneida Nation of Wisconsin), designer

This installation is organized by The Chipstone Foundation. We thank the Milwaukee Art Museum's Native Initiatives Advisory Group for their guidance throughout this project.

Nora Naranjo Morse

Kha'p'o Owingeh (Santa Clara Pueblo), b. 1953

Totems, 2005–18

Made on Kha'p'o Owingeh tribal land, New Mexico

Hand-coiled Kha'p'o and micaceous clay tempered with volcanic ash, with acrylic paint, natural clay slip, Bondo and other adhesives, and mesh tape

The Chipstone Foundation, 2021.24.a-c

"The figures on Totems represent the voice of where I come from. The central figure, she's lifting one leg up and getting ready to move forward in that ceremony of life; in the dance, she's moving forward."

Nora Naranjo Morse made *Totems* over thirteen years of personal and artistic searching. Honoring the teachings of her mother and aunts, Morse gathered and hand-coiled Kha'p'o Owingeh clay to make these standing forms. The warm-colored clay—still visible throughout the sculptures—became like a canvas to Morse, and she began painting her sculptures for the first time. Circles, spirals, and figures dance across Totems, inspired by the ancient rock art carved by Morse's ancestors. The central female figure is her own vision. An otherworldly being stepping into this space, she is grounded by the prayers, ceremonies, and the earth of where she comes from.





Anita Fields

ᎠᎵᎠᎵᎠ (Osage) and Muscogee Creek, b. 1951

Memory Bottle, 2020

Made in Tulsa, Oklahoma

Hand-coiled and slab-built porcelain with handmade stamped textures, gold glaze, and gold leaf

The Chipstone Foundation, 2021.30

"My time, my journey, is embedded in the clay stamps."

Handmade clay stamps pushed into fragments of moist clay create the heavily textured surface of Anita Field's *Memory Bottle*. The designs reference nature, Osage textiles, and symbols from Osage Orthography, an alphabet created in 2006 to support the revitalization of Fields's Native language. Fields thinks of the stamping process as a language, one that builds narratives, expressions, and a way to communicate. The stamps are a visual language akin to the eloquent Osage she remembers her grandmother and other elders speaking. The bottle's glowing gold interior—visible around the lip—symbolizes the life's work Fields holds most dearly: centering Osage culture and identity.

Chase Kawinhut Earles

Caddo Nation, b. 1976

Caddo Stirrup Bottle, 2021

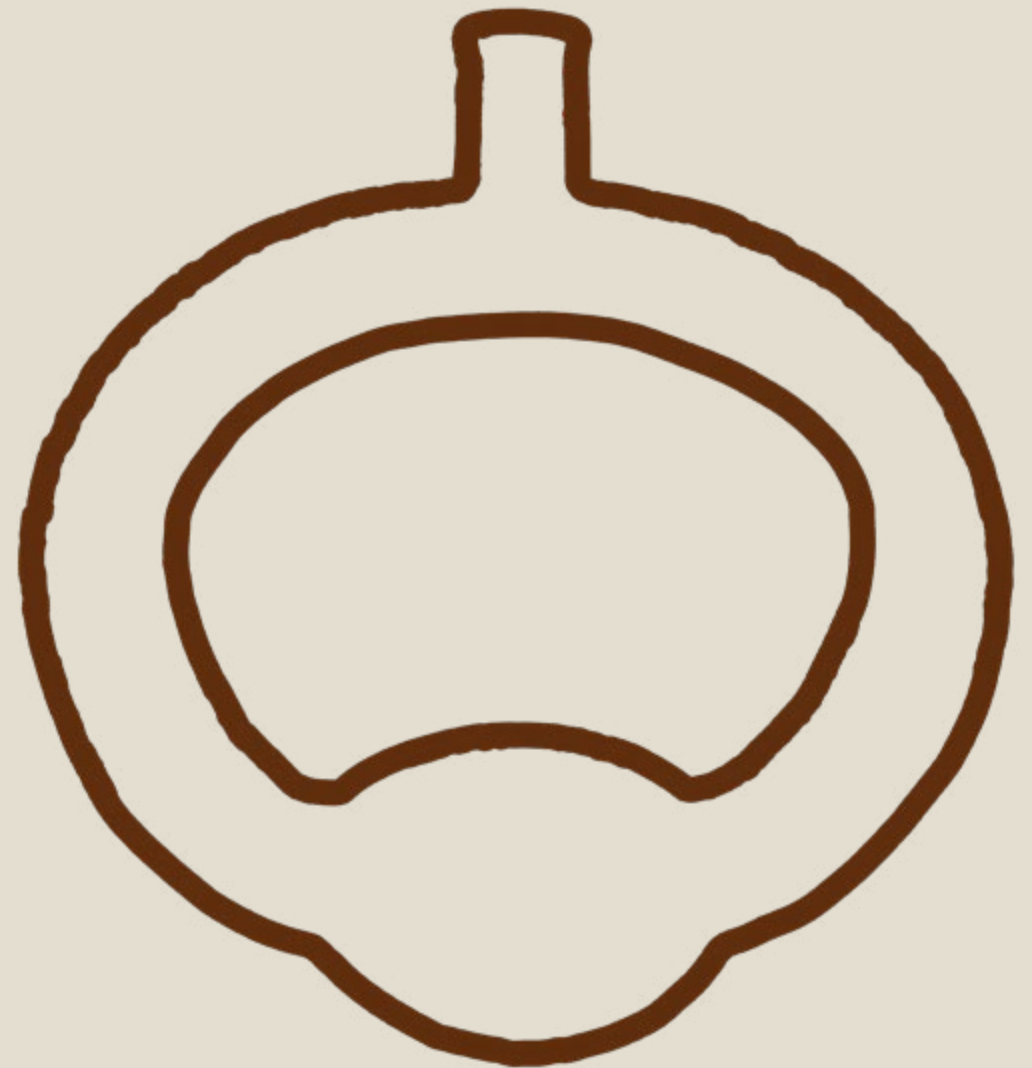
Made in Ada, Oklahoma

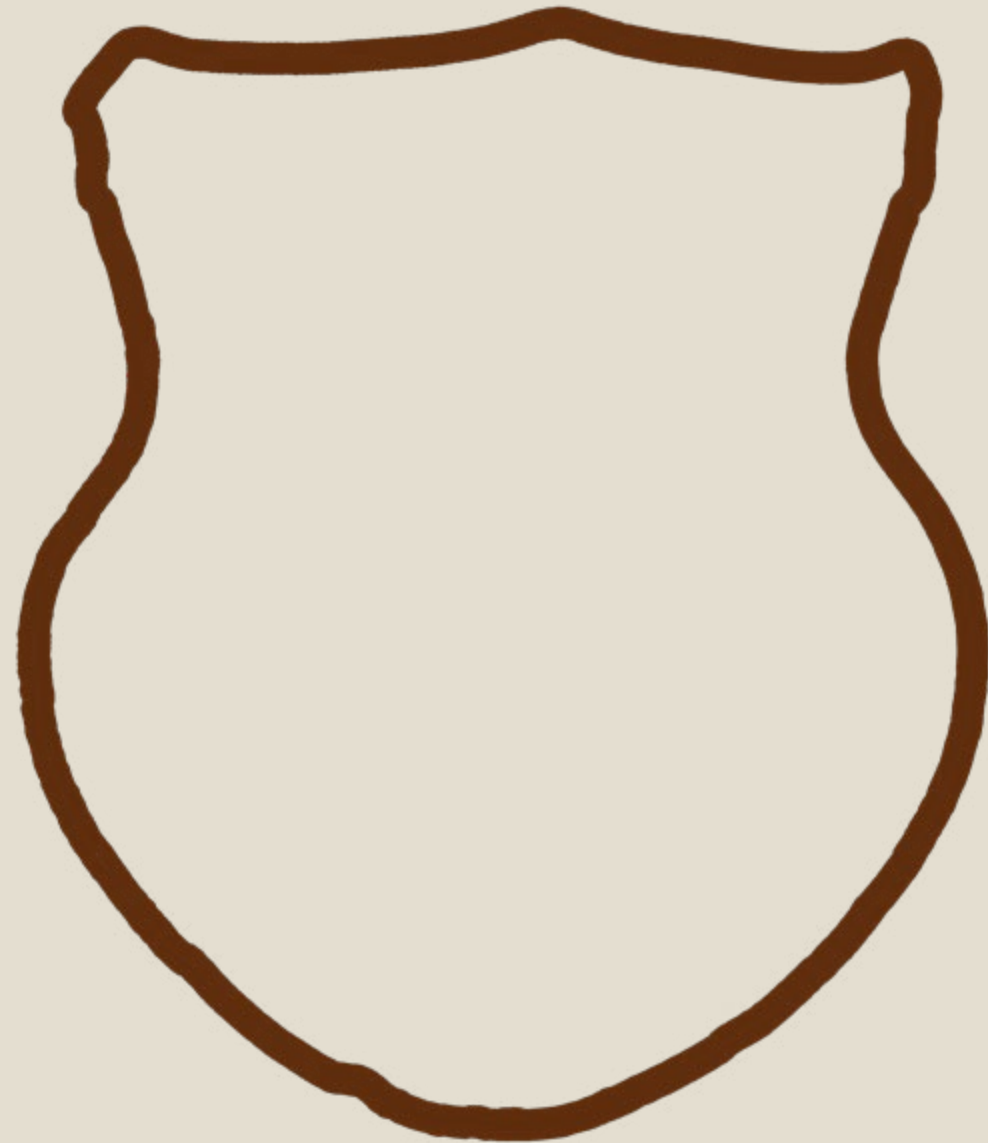
Hand-coiled Red River clay tempered with freshwater mussel shell, hand-burnished, wood-fired in traditional above-ground pit, and hand engraved after firing

The Chipstone Foundation, 2021.39

"The engraving on the arms of Stirrup Bottle is very Caddo, but there's not an example of that design anywhere because I made it. It's a story, a design type that I made, my own interpretation."

For Chase Kawinhut Earles, working in clay is a celebration of Caddo culture. Between 800 and 1800 CE, Caddo potters in what is now the southeastern United States produced some of the most sophisticated ceramics in the Americas, including tubular "stirrup" bottles adapted from Peruvian ceramics that the Caddo knew through trade and diplomacy. Earles continues his ancestors' tradition of innovation with Stirrup Bottle. Using time-honored materials and techniques, he works on a new, monumental scale that claims space for Caddo artistry. Creating original yet distinctly Caddo engraving patterns, Earles exemplifies his nation's value of balance, between rough and smooth, dark and light, past and future.





Richard Zane Smith

Wyandot Nation of Kansas, Sq̄hahiyq̄h, b. 1955

Untitled, 2007

Made in Wyandotte, Oklahoma

Hand-coiled Oklahoma upland clay with natural pigments

The Chipstone Foundation, 2021.12

"There's something similar to a genetic memory that is waking inside of you."

On Richard Zane Smith's delicate pot, the flowering vines, angular leaves, and five-point rim are inspired by traditional Wyandot beadwork, quillwork, and pottery. These deeply rooted designs are abundant with Wyandot values that Smith revitalizes for the next generation. Each vine curves back and forth in keeping with reciprocity, the belief that one must balance taking with giving in all relations. Even the parallel lines inscribed within each leaf and around the rim hold meaning. Because each line exists in its respective path, Smith sees them as representations of the peaceful nature needed to make art in the midst of colonialist violence.

Diego Romero

Kotyit (Cochiti Pueblo), b. 1964

Cochiti Chac Mool Bowl, 2022

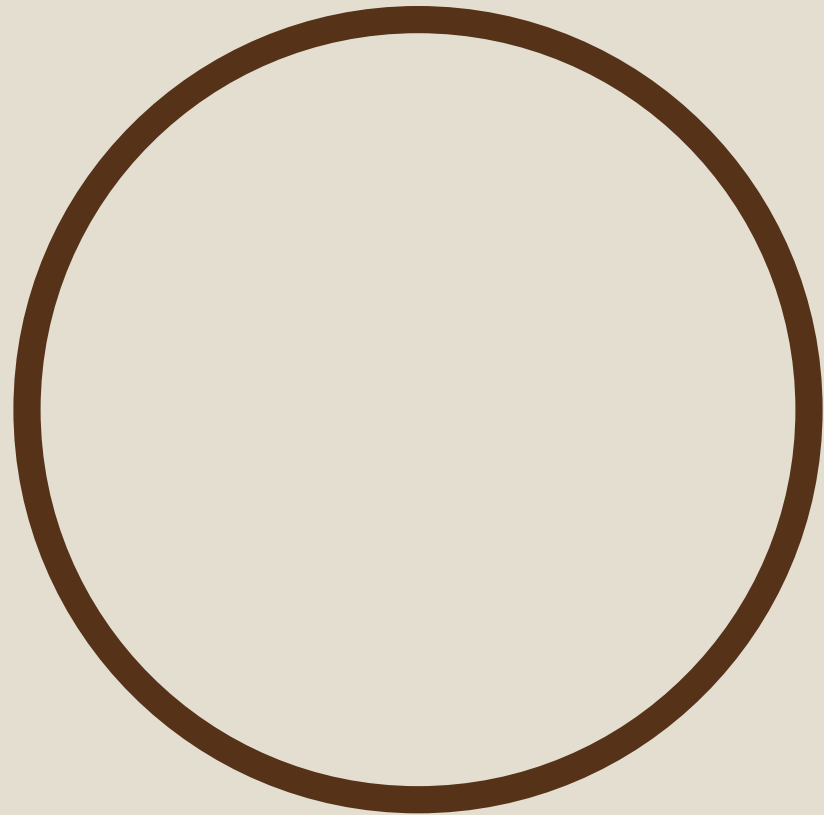
Made in O'gah'poh geh Owingeh (Sante Fe, New Mexico)

Hand-coiled earthenware with Kotyit white slip, brown slip, and gold luster

The Chipstone Foundation, 2022.10.1

"I looked through art history like a salad bar. I took pieces from Ancient Greek pottery and the Mimbres, Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, Marvel Comics; I put it all in the blender and came up with something unique that drew from all these things that have stood the test of time."

On this bowl, Diego Romero upends the racist lie that aliens were responsible for the Maya peoples' expertise in astronomy. Instead, he depicts the Maya as superheroes of the galaxy, floating in astronaut suits crisply emblazoned with Pueblo designs. A sculpture of Chac Mool, the mythical pre-Columbian warrior who acted as an intermediary between the Maya and their gods, rests on a brick wall representing the skillful masonry of Romero's Pueblo ancestors. Like Chac Mool, this bowl is also a superhuman emissary, communicating Romero's pride in Indigenous art and its limitless possibilities to generations to come.





Les Namingha

Tháánu Tééwa (Hopi-Tewa) and A:shiwi (Zuni Pueblo), b. 1967

Autumn Rain Shower, 2021

Made in O'gah'poh geh Owingeh (Santa Fe, New Mexico)

Hand-coiled clay with micaceous slip and acrylic paint

The Chipstone Foundation, 2022.15

"I have been taught that once you start working with clay, your thoughts will always be with clay."

Les Namingha's bold painting on this pot depicts the Pueblos' landscape in autumn, when rain is crucial for the harvest. Jagged lightning bolts in vivid colors crack across the neck, and black and tan lines symbolizing rain stream down the shoulder of the pot. A row of zigzagged blue mountains receive the autumn rain. Namingha's artistry reminds us that, like an autumn rain shower, pottery continues to bring spiritual and physical nourishment to Pueblo communities. By combining Tháánu tééwa and A:shiwi designs with postmodern coloration, Namingha walks his own path between pottery and painting.

Mary Thompson / ოიო WHbh / meli tamisini

ႠႠႠE DhGWY ႠႠ / dikalvgv anitsalagi Keli
(enrolled member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians), b. 1959

GWY DhrႠ ႠWႠY / *Tsalagi astilv tsulasgi* (*Cherokee Fire Pot*), 2020

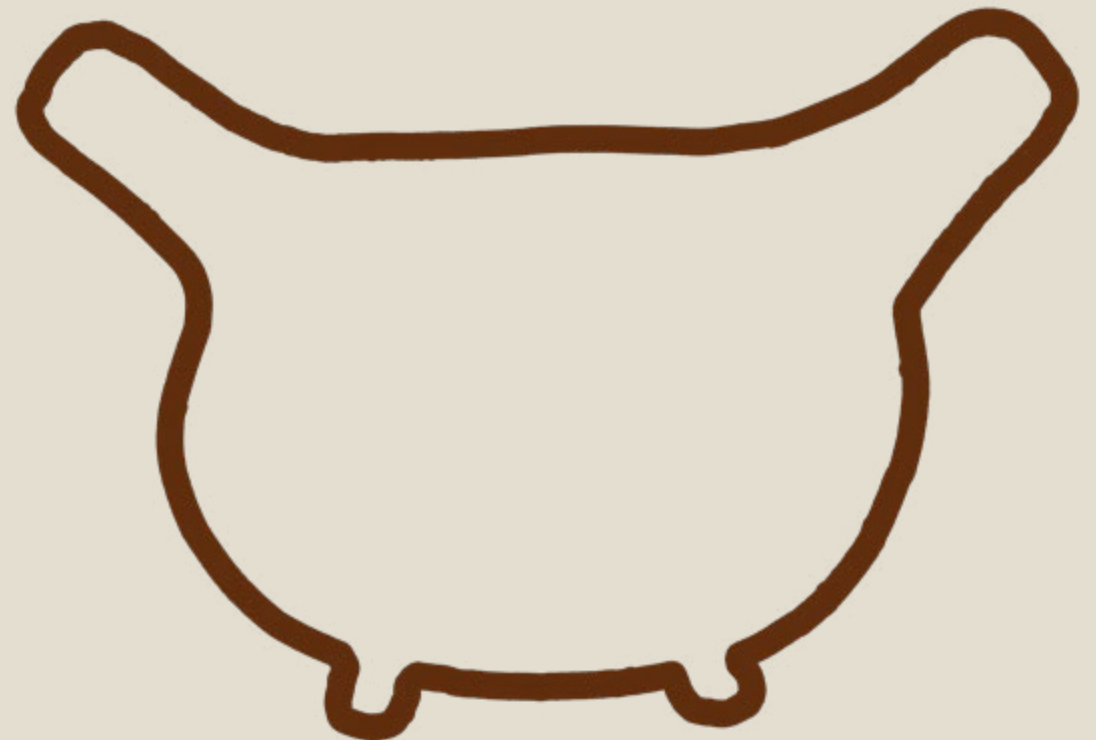
Made on the Qualla Boundary in Cherokee, NC

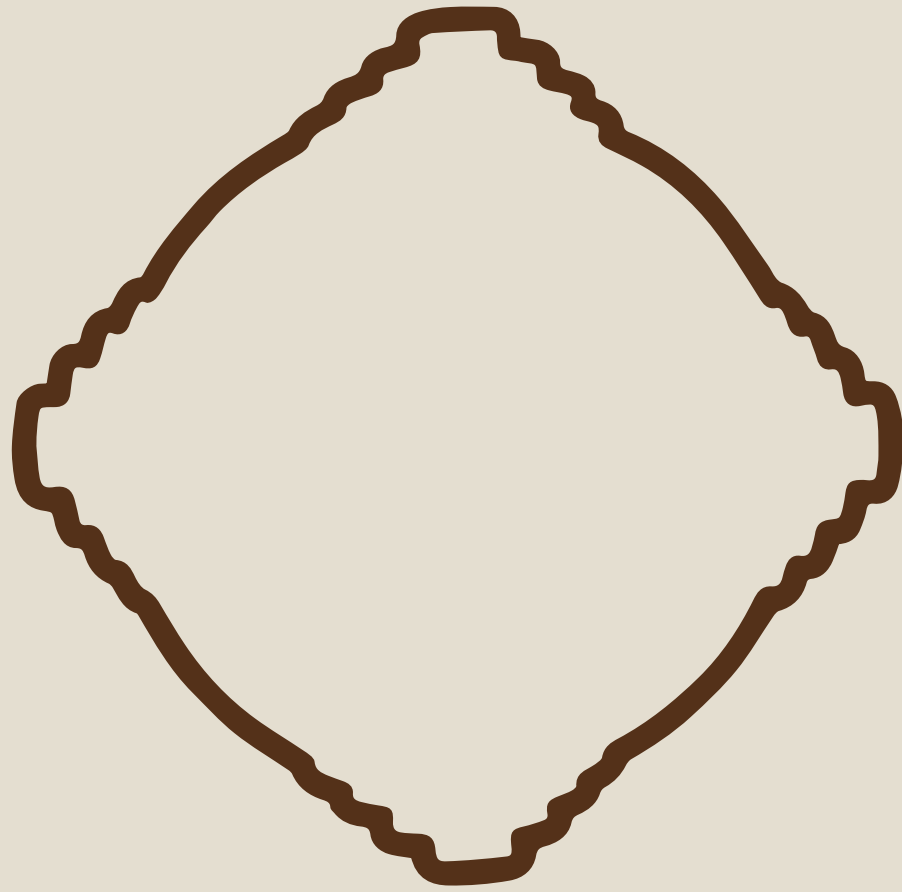
Hand-pinched and hand-coiled Lizella, Georgia, clay with traditional smudging

The Chipstone Foundation, 2021.17

"My family, we all are artistically inclined. We see it, we do it, we practice, we learn. We help each other, and that's how we're able to better hone our skills."

For Mary Thompson, revitalizing the GWY DhrႠ ႠWႠY (*Cherokee Fire Pot*) form is an expression of Cherokee family values. By studying historic GWY DhrႠ ႠWႠY, she honors her ancestors, who invented the ingenious spikes that allow embers to be carried in clay pots without burning one's hands. For millennia, the Cherokee used GWY DhrႠ ႠWႠY to unite their Appalachian communities with one fire. Pinching and coiling clay in her community, Thompson teaches young Cherokee people about their identity. Once out in the world, each finished pot carries her creative spark to untold generations.





Randy Nahohai

A:shiwi (Zuni Pueblo), 1958–2016

Cloud Bowl, 2014

Made on A:shiwi tribal land, New Mexico

Hand-coiled, wood-fired A:shiwi clay with white slip and natural pigments

The Chipstone Foundation, 2023.6

"It's like building a person, when you make a pot from the flesh of the earth."

Cloud Bowl maps the physical and spiritual landscape of Randy Nahohai's A:shiwi people. Four terraced walls represent the cloud-laced mesas of Zuni homelands. The deep bowl symbolizes the world of life-giving water below. Dragonflies, who arrive each spring with the rains, glide around the horned and feathered water serpent Kolowisi, who protects the sacred springs. A spiral of stars swirling behind Kolowisi complicates the binary of land above and water below. Nahohai chose not to explain the meaning of the stars here, a reminder that this bowl expresses a relationship between the artist and his homeland that is equally private and beautiful.

Russell Sanchez

P'ó Woe-geh Owingeh (San Ildefonso Pueblo), b. 1963

Rain Bird, 2006/09

Made on P'ó Woe-geh Owingeh tribal land, New Mexico

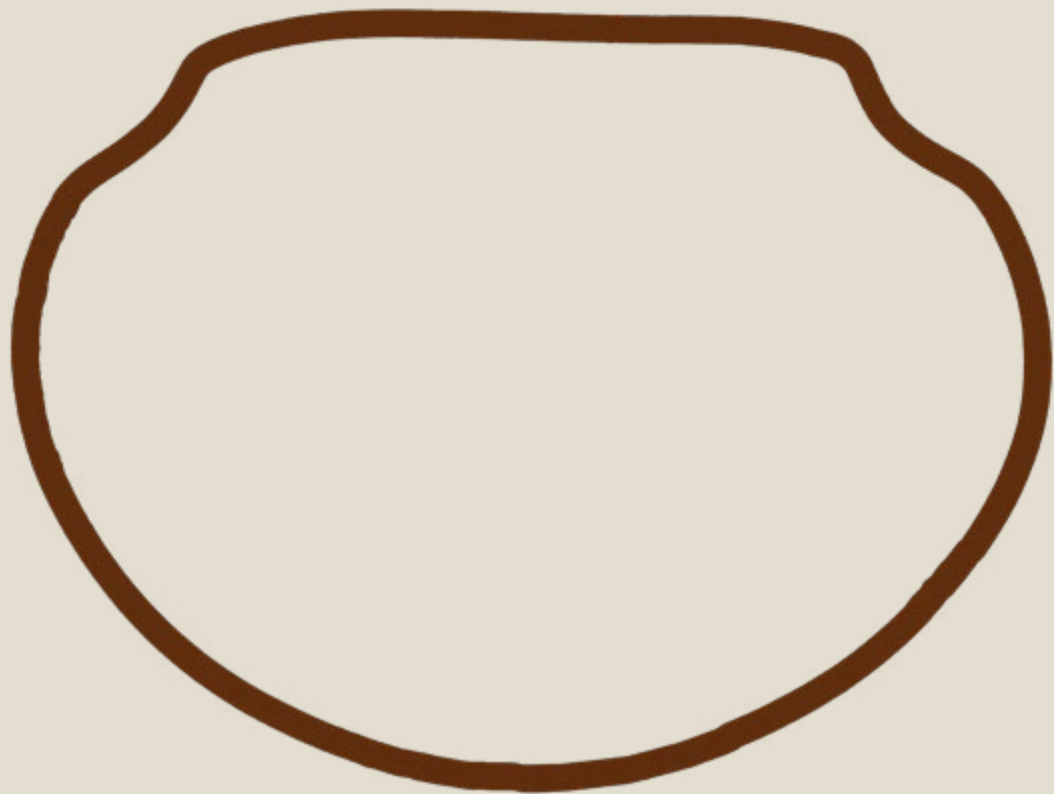
Hand-coiled and modeled P'ó Woe-geh Owingeh clays and slip with copper leaf wood-fired in traditional above-ground pit, with inlaid hand-made olive shell heishi beads

The Chipstone Foundation, 2021.11

"In order to stay alive and stay relevant and keep your culture alive and traditional, you have to keep moving forward and update things to the now, with what's going on today."

In Russell Sanchez's hands, a passing moment—a bird floating downriver during a spring rainstorm—becomes a meditation on the creative possibilities of P'ó Woe-geh Owingeh pottery. On the surface of the pot, circular raindrops made from iron-rich clays fall into an undulating river current represented with copper leaf. Each raindrop is encircled with subtly varied heishi beads, an innovation that is inspired by the necklaces that Pueblo communities often used to adorn the necks of pots. While its form is traditional, *Rain Bird* exemplifies Sanchez's distinctive artistic journey as a P'ó Woe-geh Owingeh potter in "the now."





Lonnie Vigil

Nanbé Owingeh (Nambé Pueblo), b. 1949

Golden Fire Cloud Jar, ca. 2005

Made on Nanbé Owingeh tribal land, New Mexico

Hand-coiled Nanbé clay with micaceous slip,
hand-burnished and wood-fired

The Chipstone Foundation, 2021.9

"The clay brings out her own desires and wishes, so the two of us together make whatever the shape eventually turns out to be."

For Lonnie Vigil, the act of creation is a collaboration with his ancestors and the living clay. He nourishes these relationships by using time-honored materials and methods, hand-coiling and enveloping each vessel in a slip of glittering Nanbé Owingeh clay abundant with mica. This jar's steeply indented neck and undulating upper edge echo the flat-topped mesas that have always sheltered and protected Pueblo peoples. Black clouds around the base of the jar are traces of the gusts of wind that created smoke during the outdoor firing process. Their swirling shapes make visible the ways Vigil brought this jar into being with the natural world of Nanbé Owingeh.

Virgil Ortiz

Kotyit (Cochiti Pueblo), b. 1969

Omtua, from the Revolt Chargers Series, 2020

Made at Reitz Ranch Center for Ceramic Arts, Saupkasuiva (Clarkdale), Arizona

Slab-built and hand-modeled clay wood-fired in an anagama kiln

The Chipstone Foundation, 2021.15

"I set it up against the wall of the kiln, so the fire was going sideways. You can control how some of the markings will come out, but then you can't control fire."

Omtua furthers a central mission in Virgil Ortiz's work: to educate audiences about the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, when the Pueblos courageously expelled Spanish colonizers from their homelands for twelve years. Ortiz's sculpture depicts *Omtua*, the runner who helped coordinate the attack before he was captured and executed by the Spanish. Deer hoof and bear claw marks pressed into the clay allude to the Pueblo landscape that connects Ortiz, *Omtua*, and all Pueblo peoples. Ortiz fired *Omtua* in a Japanese-style anagama kiln that deposited ash directly on the sculpture, creating a rough glaze that evokes *Omtua*'s determination and heroism.





Jacquie Stevens

Hōçak Nĩşoc Hacı (Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska), 1949–2021

Woodweave Bowl, 1996

Made in O'gah'poh geh Owingeh
(Santa Fe, New Mexico)

Hand-coiled and hand-burnished white
clay with wicker

The Chipstone Foundation, 2021.13

"Pottery is like people, every one is different and not perfect."

As a young artist, Jacquie Stevens attended the American Indian Art Institute in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where she learned to breathe life into clay from the revered Hopi potter Otellie Loloma. Inspired by watching her grandmother weave baskets, Stevens invented a method for incorporating Winnebago basketry techniques into many of her pots. This monumental vessel expands dramatically from base to shoulder, evoking lungs taking in air. Around the lip, delicate strands of wicker reach upwards like an unfinished basket, as if we are seeing a vessel suspended in the act of becoming.

Frederica Antonio

Acoma Pueblo, b. 1968

Optical Illusion Olla, 2021

Made on Haak'u tribal land, New Mexico

Hand-coiled Haak'u clay with white slip, hand-burnished, painted with natural pigments, and kiln-fired

The Chipstone Foundation, 2021.32

"When I'm ready to fill in the pattern I don't know what I'm going to put on it first, and then all of a sudden it just comes out how it wants to come out."

Frederica Antonio creates endless variation within a process she has perfected over decades. With clay and pigments prepared by her husband Randy, she coils each pot, then coats the surface with a white slip that she burnishes until the surface is smooth. Using her knuckle lengths and finger widths to measure, Antonio draws a stunningly precise grid of vertical and horizontal lines with a brush made from the fibers of the yucca plant, then paints the tiny squares in enthralling patterns. This pot's design creates a sense of one layer ripping open to reveal another, as if a rattlesnake is shedding its skin.



Audio Transcript

"I'm talking about memory, I'm talking about language, I'm talking about expression."
Anita Fields (᠘᠕ᠵ᠕ᠵ᠒ / Osage and Muscogee Creek)

"Revitalization requires everything, it's not just the arts, it's not just one thing. It's gotta be everything at once, it's gotta be the languages, the dances, our ceremonies, our speeches, our thanksgiving speeches. 'Yan᠒᠙᠒hkwany᠒hk' we say in Wyandot, which is the words before all else, that the Haudenosaunee people say. These are all things that have to come from the same garden; they all have to be planted and grown again."

Richard Zane Smith (Wyandot Nation of Kansas)

"That's one thing I'd like for Indigenous people to remember, even young people to remember, is that their creative integrity is very important. It's the thing that pushes me forward."

Nora Naranjo Morse (Kha'p'o Owingeh / Santa Clara Pueblo)

"The majority of Caddo pottery is not actually supposed to be seen because it's a burial item. This gives an avenue for our work to be seen. And also it gives a voice to our Caddo people that are marginalized. How many people know about Caddos? How many people know Caddos produced some of the most amazing pottery in the country?"

Chase Kawinhut Earles (Caddo Nation)

"You don't learn this stuff in school. You don't learn history, you don't learn culture, you don't learn our history and culture—our myths, our legends. So, the more I get involved in it and the more I share with other people, the more I learn, and the more intrigued I am with our history and culture."

Mary Thompson / ᠒᠙᠒ WHbh (᠕᠒᠗᠑᠑ Dh᠒WY ᠑᠙ / dikalvgv anitsalagi Keli / Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians)

"It's way bigger than I am. So I already knew that it wasn't about me. Everything I do and you see, it's for a purpose and there's a story behind it. It's all to educate our people about our people."

Virgil Ortiz (Kotyit / Cochiti Pueblo)

"Even though we had a huge language loss, there were a lot of words and phrases that were always repeated, and one of them is ᠘᠕ᠳ᠒᠕, it means do your best. This word is used if someone is going off to the military, if somebody got a football scholarship, if somebody is starting their PhD program, if you are tending to something within our culture that requires your physicality, if you are cooking for a feast, if you are serving people, you're told 'do your best.' And it also kind of refers to order. So, I think of that word a lot, and I think that is a guiding force for many Osage people."

Anita Fields (᠘᠕ᠵ᠕ᠵ᠒ / Osage and Muscogee Creek)

"The clay is a patient teacher. The clay will teach you, but she can only do so much for you; you can't push her beyond what she's meant to do, or what she can do, and she'll stop. You'll be pushed to a point, and that's it, you don't go any further. You

know, that's it. That's as far as it goes. But it's good to know where the edges are, it's good to know how far you can take something."

Richard Zane Smith (Wyandot Nation of Kansas)

"I think that the dreams and the emotions and the feelings that I had working endlessly in that studio on these pieces really helped me. It was like a vision quest or a curing or something that helps you to heal."

Nora Naranjo Morse (Kha'p'o Owingeh / Santa Clara Pueblo)

"The way my work is not looking like a polished machine made it, it looks very hand made but also very ancient, is also very specific to showing our Caddo people that we have an art form that is incredibly beautiful, that is ancient, that we can be proud of, and it doesn't have to be like what they see in other forms. It is unique to us, so I keep it unique. I'm not bending what our cultural identity and pottery and clay cultural tradition is to a different standard."

Chase Kawinhut Earles (Caddo Nation)

"Art is therapy to me. It saved my life."

Virgil Ortiz (Kotyit / Cochiti Pueblo)

"It helps us bond in our family relationships, in that my mom or my sister or my neighbor or my friends, whoever has an interest in clay, we can all sit down together and work together, and share our tips and share our technique."

Mary Thompson / ᠒᠙᠒ WHbh (᠕᠒᠗᠑᠑ Dh᠒WY ᠑᠙ / dikalvgv anitsalagi Keli / Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians)

"It all circles back to the clay, which is the heartbeat of everything that I do."

Virgil Ortiz (Kotyit / Cochiti Pueblo)

"I feel like just being an artist is a form of resistance in itself."

Anita Fields (᠘᠕ᠵ᠕ᠵ᠒ / Osage and Muscogee Creek)

"When I am gone and taken back into the earth, I feel good that those things are there to represent me, stand up for me, or speak for me while I am gone."

Richard Zane Smith (Wyandot Nation of Kansas)

"Being able to strip down all of these preconceived notions of what I needed to be as a contemporary person—Native person—in this world and really trying to find my own sense of self. And how was that going to proceed? This really represents that moment in my trajectory of stripping everything down. But the foundation of that were in these prayers, they were in these ceremonies, they were in the earth of where I come from."

Nora Naranjo Morse (Kha'p'o Owingeh / Santa Clara Pueblo)

"We definitely treat the Earth Mother as a living person. I mean obviously she's alive and she provides anything for us, we just have to do the work. We were taught to respect her and to really honor the ways, and that's what I wanted to do."

Virgil Ortiz (Kotyit / Cochiti Pueblo)

Audio Transcript

"I'm protecting the clay and I try to be as clean as possible and not waste anything. Taking elements from the earth is like taking her skin off and making sure that you take care of that and protect it."

Virgil Ortiz (Kotyit / Cochiti Pueblo)

"The Caddo tribe was really centered around pottery, from life to death."

Chase Kawinhut Earles (Caddo Nation)

"I want you to know that we're still here. That our culture and our history is still relevant. I can ramble on for a little while, but that's the bottom line."

Mary Thompson / ᎠᎹ ᎠᎵᎠᎵᎠ ᎠᎵᎠᎵᎠ ᎠᎵᎠᎵᎠ ᎠᎵᎠᎵᎠ / dikalvgv anitsalagi
Keli / Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians)

"We're here, and we represent our ancestors, and we're dang proud of our ancestors. I am so proud of my ancestors."

Richard Zane Smith (Wyandot Nation of Kansas)

"Everything that we were taught, you know everything that is inside of us that came with us through the ancestors is why we're survivors. You can't hold that kind of thing down no matter what you try to do to people. And I often think, I just don't think they understood who they were dealing with, or the kind of spirit that was there."

Anita Fields (ᎠᎵᎠᎵᎠᎵᎠ / Osage and Muscogee Creek)

In this gallery, English is a foreign language. Each work emerges from cultures shaped by diverse and ancient languages, which are being revitalized by numerous Indigenous communities despite cultural genocide inflicted by settler colonialism and government policy. To acknowledge the multilingual nature of this installation, we have consulted with the artists to include Indigenous place names and terms in labels.