



Hopi Basket Weaving: Artistry in Natural Fibers

Helga Teiwes

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"With the inborn wisdom that has guided them for so long through so many obstacles, Hopi men and women perpetuate their proven rituals, strongly encouraging those who attempt to neglect or disrespect their obligations to uphold them. One of these obligations is to respect the flora and fauna of our planet. The Hopi closeness to the Earth is represented in all the arts of all three mesas, whether in clay or natural fibers. What clay is to a potter's hands, natural fibers are to a basket weaver."--from the Introduction Rising dramatically from the desert floor, Arizona's windswept mesas have been home to the Hopis for hundreds of years. A people known for protecting their privacy, these Native Americans also have a long and less known tradition of weaving baskets and plaques. Generations of Hopi weavers have passed down knowledge of techniques and materials from the plant world around them, from mother to daughter, granddaughter, or niece. This book is filled with photographs and detailed descriptions of their beautiful baskets--the one art, above all others, that creates the strongest social bonds in Hopi life. In these pages, weavers open their lives to the outside world as a means of sharing an art form especially demanding of time and talent. The reader learns how plant materials are gathered in canyons and creek bottoms, close to home and far away. The long, painstaking process of preparation and dying is followed step by step. Then, using techniques of coiled, plaited, or wicker basketry, the weaving begins. Underlying the stories of baskets and their weavers is a rare glimpse of what is called "the Hopi Way," a life philosophy that has strengthened and sustained the Hopi people through centuries of change. Many other glimpses of the Hopi world are also shared by author and photographer Helga Teiwes, who was warmly invited into the homes of her collaborators. Their permission and the permission of the Cultural Preservation Office of the Hopi Tribe gave her access to people and information seldom available to outsiders. Teiwes was also granted access to some of the ceremonial observances where baskets are preeminent. Woven in brilliant reds, greens, and yellows as well as black and white, Hopi weavings, then, not only are an arresting art form but also are highly symbolic of what is most important in Hopi life. In the women's basket dance, for example, woven plaques commemorate and honor the Earth and the perpetuation of life. Other plaques play a role in the complicated web of Hopi social obligation and reciprocity. Living in a landscape of almost surreal form and color, Hopi weavers are carrying on one of the oldest arts traditions in the world. Their stories in Hopi Basket Weaving will appeal to collectors, artists and craftspeople, and anyone with an interest in Native American studies, especially Native American arts. For the traveler or general reader, the book is an invitation to enter a little-known world and to learn more about an art form steeped in meaning and stunning in its beauty.

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