

Diné Textiles: Nizhónígo Hadadít'eh, September 2, 2023 - September 29, 2024

Diné (Navajo) apparel design is constantly evolving, often in response to historical events. After Spanish colonists introduced Churro sheep to what is now the Southwest United States in the late 1500s, Diné developed a Navajo-Churro breed that produced wool ideal for weaving. By the 1800s, Diné women were creating wool blankets, mantas, and other forms of apparel. After the 1868 Treaty of Bosque Redondo subjected Diné to US federal government rule, forced assimilation, and American capitalism, Diné apparel transitioned from woven wool textiles to sewn commercial fabrics. As non-Natives began collecting Diné textiles, Diné weavers also created designs for hanging on walls.

The patterns woven by Diné women in the 1800s reflect Diné aesthetics and beliefs. While we can appreciate these works through the lens of art and design, it is a disservice to overlook their cultural meanings. *Diné bizaad* (Navajo language; pronounced *de-NEH biz-AHD*) has no word for “art,” but Diné style is distinct and married to *hózhó* (balance, beauty, and harmony; *HOZH-oh*). This idea is demonstrated through symmetrical geometric design, light and dark color, and the continuance of the practice by way of matriarchal teaching.

Diné textiles were and continue to be sources of design inspiration, as well as objects of cultural appropriation. Despite hardship, Diné resilience drives creativity forward. We honor and appreciate the generations of Diné weavers who, through *hózhó*, have designed beautiful garments for beautiful people.

—Sháándíín Brown (Diné), Henry Luce Curatorial Fellow for Native American Art

T'áá íiyisíí ahéhee' (thank you very much) to Diné weaver Chris Brown, Diné scholar Ty Metteba, and Thierry Gentis, curator of the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, for their contributions to this exhibition. Special thanks also to Diné artist Darby Raymond-Overstreet for designing the exhibition title and thumbnail.

Diné Textiles: Nizhónígo Hadadít'eh (pronounced *nizh-OH-NEE-go hah-dah-DEET-eh*) is the work of the Henry Luce Curatorial Fellow for Native American Art, which is funded by a generous grant from the Henry Luce Foundation. RISD Museum is supported by a grant from the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, through an appropriation by the Rhode Island General Assembly and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and with the generous partnership of the Rhode Island School of Design, its Board of Trustees, and Museum Governors.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Diné weaver once known
Beeldléí | *Wearing Blanket*, ca. 1870 - ca. 1880
Wool; tapestry weave
Gift of Mrs. Frances Carpenter 08.126

This blanket was well loved and worn frequently. We know this because of the staining at the hem and the back of the neck. It is soft to the touch yet durable, suitable for outerwear or utilitarian use. In addition to being used as garments, wearing blankets can be utilized as mats, rugs, tarps, or bedding.

Weaving a wearing blanket requires a tremendous amount of skill, time, and resources. Highly valued and sought-after, blankets were mended when tattered and used until they fell apart completely. This philosophy is akin to today's slow-fashion movement.



Diné weaver once known
Beeldléí | *Wearing Blanket*, ca. 1870s
Wool; tapestry weave
Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 31.182

The background of this wearing blanket was woven with Moqui stripe patterns of indigo-dyed blue and natural brown-black. The design originated with Rio Grande Spanish weavers in the early 1600s. *Moqui* (*moh-kee*) is the old Spanish name for the Hopi, yet Hopi weavers did not generally use this design. Later, as seen here, Diné weavers added red geometric designs to the striped background.

Diné, Pueblo, Hopi, and Spanish weaving practices and aesthetics are distinct, yet they share similarities. Cultural and artistic exchange occurred in the 1800s by way of trade networks, intermarriage, and enslavement. Spanish and Mexican settlers forced enslaved Diné women to weave textiles sold for profit.



Diné weaver once known

Diyogí n'teel | *Chief-Style Blanket (Third Phase)*, ca. 1865-ca. 1880

Wool; tapestry weave

Gift of Mrs. John Sloan 42.088

Note how the nine-spot pattern—a diamond in the center, quarter-diamonds in each corner, and half-diamonds in the center of each side—envelops the wearer in perfect symmetry. This pattern emerged in the 1860s, a tumultuous period for Diné.

In 1864, after burning homes and crops and killing livestock, the US government forced 8,000 Diné on the Long Walk to eastern New Mexico. During their imprisonment there, Diné women continued to weave, despite the scarcity of resources. In signing the Treaty of Bosque Redondo in 1868, Diné agreed to cease war against the US, allow government officials to live within their lands, and permit the construction of railroads through their territory—changes that soon allowed capitalism, Christianity, and the English language to influence Diné life.



Diné weaver once known
Asdzáán bi beeldléí | *Woman's Manta*, ca. 1880
Wool; twill weave with interlocking tapestry weave
Gift of Mrs. John Sloan 42.093



Diné silversmith once known
'It dah nát'áhi k'aalógii | *Butterfly Pin*, before 1967
Silver, turquoise
Bequest of Martha B. Lisle 67.173



In the mid-1800s, Diné weavers began making garments like this one, modeled after earlier Pueblo mantas. This style was worn by all genders around the shoulders, as a cape or shawl. As shown here, a silver pin could fasten the manta at the wearer's chest. Women also wore this form wrapped around the body under one arm, fastened over the opposite shoulder, and belted around the waist.

The textiles in this exhibition were made using tapestry weave—all except this one. This example features a twill weave with interlocking tapestry weave. This technique is every bit as complex as those used at the time to create Euro-American couture fashions.

Diné weaver once known
Diyogí n'teel | *Chief-Style Blanket (Transitional Third Phase)*, 1855-1863
 Wool and cotton; tapestry weave
 Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth 45.083



Before Diné gained access to wool in the 1500s, clothing was made from woven plant materials and animal hides. The *Diné Bahane'* (Navajo creation story; *de-NEH ba-HA-neh*) describes how Na'ashjéii Asdzáá (Spider Woman; *nah-AHSH-jay-EE ahs-DZAH*) brought the gift of wool and weaving to the Diné.

The design repeated six times on this textile is Spider Woman's cross. This motif came into fashion around 1864, perhaps in reference to the six sacred mountains of the Diné homelands. The thick stripes of white and black suggest this was created for a male wearer. Women's wearing blankets typically feature thin stripes.

Andy Warhol, American, 1928-1987
Untitled (Native American blanket wrap in chest), 1969
 Dye diffusion print (Polaroid Polacolor)
 Gift of J. Malcolm and Clarice S. Gear 2002.120.12



In 1970 Andy Warhol curated *Raid the Icebox 1* at the RISD Museum. That installation included several works on view here. Because Warhol did not display these textiles as garments on mannequins, it separated them from their intended use. In this Polaroid, Warhol recorded Diné textiles in museum storage. The manta at right in this photo is on view behind you.

Diné weaving aesthetics share similarities with American midcentury modern art. Both practices emphasize geometric designs, color, emotional introspection, and complex relationships of positive and negative spaces. Artists including Agnes Martin, Donald Judd, and Andy Warhol collected 19th-century Diné textiles. Warhol once said Diné weaving is "yet another proof that women are the world's major artists."

Pendleton Woolen Mills, manufacturer, Pendleton, Oregon; 1909-present

Woman's Shirt, ca. 1950

Wool; plain weave

Gift of the Estate of Peggy Cone 2011.21.1



Beginning in the late 1800s, colonization policies forced Native Americans to rely on white traders for goods, including blankets. Established in 1909 by a white settler family, Pendleton Woolen Mills originally produced machine-woven blankets with Native designs for sale to the Native American market. Pendleton's non-Native designer, Joe Rawnsley, visited tribes to copy their designs. Many of Pendleton's blankets still use Diné designs, without accreditation or compensation.

While they continued to make Native American trade blankets, Pendleton also began producing apparel for broader American markets. A glance at this simple plaid shirt doesn't reveal its manufacturer's history of Native American design exploitation. Many textile and fashion brands have histories of stealing designs from Native American communities.

Melissa Cody, Diné (Navajo), b. 1983
Only Love Can Break Your Heart (Dust), 2013
Wool and aniline dyes; tapestry weave
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2022.43

Note this textile's bright hues of pink, red, and purple. Like some other contemporary Diné weavers, Melissa Cody works in the Germantown Revival style, which is characterized by vibrant aniline dyes. In the late 1800s, Diné began working with synthetic-dyed yarn made in Germantown, Pennsylvania. When the market soon dismissed the use of bright Germantown yarns, the style went dormant until the 1980s.

While Diné weaving has its roots in apparel, the practice evolved to include fine art hung on walls, as exemplified by this tapestry. Its text refers to Neil Young's 1970 song of the same title. Materials, references, and colors may change within Diné weaving, but its values remain the same.



Cara Romero, Chemehuevi, b. 1977
NIKKI, 2014
Pigment printed on Epson Legacy Platine paper
Walter H. Kimball Fund 2022.91

The figure in this photograph crouches in a position that can be interpreted as powerful, protective, and life-giving. *Nikki* serves as a visual metaphor for the multilayered and complex experiences of Diné women past, present, and future.

Diné society is matriarchal, and weaving is a source of great pride for Diné women. The prominence of the textile in this photo signals a deep connection to the cultural knowledge and practices embedded within the weaving itself. The figure's pose reinforces this connection by mimicking the bold red diamond pattern. Her braids also resemble the zigzagging black lines in the eye-dazzler design.



Emme Studio, Brooklyn, New York; 2015–present
 Korina Emmerich, Puyallup descent, b. 1985
Ari Jacket, from the Collection *Misshapen Chaos of Well Seeming Forms*,
 Fall 2022
 Pendleton® fabric (wool and cotton), button closure; hand-tailored
 Museum purchase: gift of Frances Middendorf 2023.3.1



Korina Emmerich founded her slow-fashion brand, Emme Studio, to “expose and dismantle systems of oppression in the fashion industry and challenge colonial ways of thinking.” She grew up in Oregon, where Pendleton Woolen Mills is based. As an Indigenous designer of Puyallup heritage (Washington State), Emmerich uses Pendleton fabric to reclaim Native American patterns.

Pendleton frequently stole designs from Diné weavers; this example includes the Spider Woman cross, seen in the chief-style blanket also in this case. Pendleton named this textile “Kiva Steps” in reference to the terraced steps of Hopi and Pueblo underground ceremonial rooms.

Emme Studio, Brooklyn, New York; 2015–present
 Korina Emmerich, Puyallup descent, b. 1985
Ari Mini, from the Collection *Misshapen Chaos of Well Seeming Forms*,
 Fall 2022
 Pendleton® fabric (wool and cotton), metal hardware; hand-tailored
 Museum purchase: gift of Frances Middendorf 2023.3.2



Emme Studio, Brooklyn, New York; 2015–present
 Korina Emmerich, Puyallup descent, b. 1985
Brooklyn Beret, from the Collection *Misshapen Chaos of Well Seeming Forms*, Fall 2022
 Pendleton® fabric (wool and cotton), leather trim; handmade
 Museum purchase: gift of Frances Middendorf 2023.3.3



Emme Studio, Brooklyn, New York; 2015–present
 Korina Emmerich, Puyallup descent, b. 1985
Bklyn 90s Choker, from the Collection *Misshapen Chaos of Well Seeming Forms*, Fall 2022
 Pendleton® fabric (wool and cotton), chain, clasp; handmade
 Museum purchase: gift of Frances Middendorf 2023.3.4



Emme Studio, Brooklyn, New York; 2015–present
 Korina Emmerich, Puyallup descent, b. 1985
Carry a Little Handbag, from the Collection *Misshapen Chaos of Well Seeming Forms*, Fall 2022
 Pendleton® fabric (wool and cotton), leather straps, metal hardware; handmade
 Museum purchase: gift of Frances Middendorf 2023.3.5



Darby Raymond-Overstreet, Diné (Navajo), b. 1994
Inherited Legacies, 2019
 Canvas print, yarn, pine lumber, red coral, pyrite inlay
 Courtesy of the artist
 Mary B. Jackson Fund 2023.68



I use woven patterns in my portraits as a way of both reclaiming and celebrating our visual cultural aesthetic. Prompted by rampant cultural appropriation by corporate industries, I find it an apt response to show who these designs come from and for whom they were made. The works also serve as an homage to weavers and the practice of weaving.

—Darby Raymond-Overstreet

Displayed on a warped vertical loom typically used by Diné weavers, this portrait of Diné scientist Sherralyn Sneezer is layered with textile patterns. A testament to generations of Diné strength in the face of adversity, Darby Raymond-Overstreet's work is inspired by Diné patterns from the late 1800s to the mid-1900s.

TahNibaa Naataanii, Diné (Navajo), b. 1967

TahNibaa Feather Wrap, 2023

Commercial wool with aniline dyes and Navajo-Churro wool; tapestry weave and fringe was handspun using the Navajo three-ply method

Museum purchase: gift of Frances Middendorf and Mary B. Jackson
Fund 2023.70.1



When I was young, I came home from school and my mom had a loom set up for me and she told me, "Today, you're going to learn to weave."

—TahNibaa Naataanii

Each of these pieces has elements made with Navajo-Churro wool from the artist's sheep. Naataanii is a fifth-generation Diné weaver, rancher, and veteran. Her full name, TahNibaa Atlohiigiih Naataanii, translates to Came into Battle with Her Weaving. *Lightning Way Head Wrap* and *Felt Cuff Bracelet* are hand felted and embellished with various adornments. Their non-traditional designs demonstrate Naataanii's innovative artistic practice. Exemplifying the versatility of Diné apparel designs, *TahNibaa Feather Wrap* can be worn as a wrap, shawl, miniskirt, or across the shoulder.

TahNibaa Naataanii, Diné (Navajo), b. 1967

Lightning Way Head Wrap, 2020

Navajo-Churro wool, Merino wool, seed beads, turquoise chips, metal buttons; felting and beadwork

Museum purchase: gift of Frances Middendorf and Mary B. Jackson
Fund 2023.70.2



TahNibaa Naataanii, Diné (Navajo), b. 1967

Felt Cuff Bracelet, 2020

Navajo-Churro wool, beads, semi-precious stones, cotton fabric, metal buttons; felting and beadwork

Museum purchase: gift of Frances Middendorf and Mary B. Jackson
Fund 2023.70.1



Diné weaver once known

Átchíní bi beeldléí | *Child's Wearing Blanket*, ca. 1880

Wool; tapestry weave

Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, Gift of Alfred J. Walker, 76-21

Note the terraced line and diamond pattern on this blanket, made to be worn by a child. A core concept of Diné culture, *hózhó* (pronounced *HOZH-oh*) encompasses balance, beauty, and harmony; it is expressed through the symmetry of designs like this one. In the late 1800s, wearing blankets made for children were sought after by collectors.

The name of the weaver who created this textile is not recorded in the museum's records. Although her identity—like the identities of many of the makers in this exhibition—is lost to us today, she was known in her community. We can only wonder about her relationship with the child who wore this blanket. Her weaving and design skills are readily apparent.



NO IMAGE
AVAILABLE

Diné weaver once known

Diyogí n'teel | *Chief-Style Blanket (Third Phase)* ca. 1860 - ca. 1880

Wool; tapestry weave

Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, Brown University

The Conser Family Collection, donated by Walter H. Conser, Jr., Brown
Ph.D.'81



NO IMAGE
AVAILABLE

When worn, this style of blanket is a formal garment, akin to a man's suit or tuxedo.

—TahNibaa Naataanii, Diné weaver

Blankets like this one—wider than they are long—were wrapped around the wearer's body. Known as chief blankets, they were typically worn by individuals of high status, although not necessarily chiefs.

Diné weavers designed apparel for their own communities and for trade. Chief-style blankets were traded in tribal communities across the West, and were especially valued in the Great Plains. These textiles were prized not only for their distinct style, but also because the tightly woven Navajo-Churro wool kept the wearer warm and dry.

Gilmore Scott, Diné (Navajo), b. 1974
Pendleton Woolen Mills, manufacturer, Pendleton, Oregon; 1909-present
Female Storm 2013
Pendleton® fabric (wool and cotton)
Collection of Sháńdíín Brown



NO IMAGE
AVAILABLE

Designed by Diné artist Gilmore Scott, this blanket is a part of a recent collaboration between Pendleton Woolen Mills and contemporary Native American designers. In Diné weaving, vertical loom warps represent rain, and here Scott portrays the calm *níłtsq' bi'áád* (female rain; *nih-lth-tsa' bih-AHD*) within the Diné landscape. The terraced patterns at the bottom of the blanket refer to Diné weaving designs.

Despite Pendleton's long history of cultural appropriation, Pendleton blankets with Indigenous designs are cherished within Native American communities. Like Diné wearing blankets, Pendleton blankets are worn around the shoulders or used as bedding. Diné often give them as gifts during *kinaaldá* (female coming-of-age ceremony; *kih-naahl-dah*) or for school graduations.