



1

# Interconnected

A COMPREHENSIVE LOOK INTO HOW NAMPEYO'S SIKYATKI REVIVAL  
INSPIRED THE CAREERS OF MARIA AND JULIAN MARTINEZ.

By Steve Elmore

*Most contemporary Indian art collectors and curators are aware of the successful Pueblo pottery careers of Nampeyo, who created the Sikyatki Revival Art Movement at Hopi in the mid-1880s, and the later career of Maria Martinez and her husband Julian at San Ildefonso Pueblo. Yet most collectors view Nampeyo's and the Martinezes' careers as unrelated. After all, Nampeyo lived at remote Hopi in Arizona and Maria lived much later in New Mexico at San Ildefonso Pueblo, near Santa Fe.*

Yet despite the time and space between the artists, they share two important connections, one historic and the other aesthetic. In this new light, their careers reflect each other's in important ways for understanding the development of Pueblo art pottery.

As a collector and dealer of Pueblo pottery, I enjoy discovering new connections between the ceramics and the art potters. So, I was surprised to see one of Nampeyo's distinctive seed jar forms appear in a historic San Ildefonso polychrome, as the seed jar was not a traditional form at San Ildefonso.

Nampeyo revived the seed jar form from ancient Hopi ceramics, and she developed several varied seed jar forms in her decades of potting. The seed jar is considered one of her major achievements as an art potter. The object in Figure 1 is an example of one of Nampeyo's seed jars from around 1900 to 1910.

The similar seed jar form from San Ildefonso from around 1910 to 1920 can be seen in Figure 2.

The two forms are clearly similar. We know from the written record that the Martinezes were shown Nampeyo's work by local museum officials as well as nearby traders. I've seen two other seed jars from San

Ildefonso in my three decades of study. Although unsigned, this ceramic has many characteristics of the polychrome ceramics of the Martinezes, including Maria's precise molding and Julian's control in his drawing.

Then, I noticed a connection between Nampeyo's swirling Sikyatki Revival designs and Julian's similarly abstract curvilinear designs. For example, here's a low yellowware bowl by Nampeyo,

circa 1900 to 1910, with a design I call the rain sash design, as it resembles the round corn husk balls woven into a dance sash that dangle from a man's waist as he dances. Seen here is Nampeyo's version, with two corn

husk balls at the end of her red swirls, seen in Figure 3.

In Figure 4, you can see Julian's masterful reuse of the same design. Note how the four curved red feathers also swirl in a particularly Hopi way in the design.

Julian kept a notebook for sketching pottery design ideas. His interest in fine line curving and swooping feathers is often seen on the later blackware pieces that he painted for Maria. Significantly, Maria began creating wide open bowls with flat bottoms to better present Julian's extraordinary designs. This new flat bowl varies from the traditional round-bottomed chili bowl used at San Ildefonso, but closely resembles the open, flat bottomed bowls Nampeyo created to showcase her beautiful designs.



These two aesthetic elements of the ceramics, form and design, seemed to echo Nampeyo's artistic pottery career. I decided to research further by reading the two best-known Pueblo pottery scholars of the 1920s, Ruth Bunzel and Carl E. Guthe, to see if they could advance my insight into Nampeyo's influence on the San Ildefonso potters. I was not disappointed.

Bunzel's classic study *The Pueblo Potter* (Columbia University Press, 1929) provides two significant facts that strongly support my argument that Nampeyo's work influenced Julian Martinez: She writes in the 1920s, "Hopi Pottery is everywhere greatly admired, and Hopi designs are in common use at San Ildefonso, where their introduction is credited to Julian Martinez, the husband of the famous Maria."

Bunzel writes further of Julian: "...who decorated all of Maria's pottery. He is a skillful painter, and a

1. **Nampeyo (Hopi-Tewa, ca. 1856-1942)**, seed jar, ca. 1900-10.
2. **Attributed to Maria Martinez (San Ildefonso, 1887-1980) and Julian Martinez (San Ildefonso, ca. 1885-1943)**, seed jar, ca. 1910-20.



man of considerable originality and sensitiveness to problems of design...He favored especially Hopi (Sikyatki) designs. New forms were also introduced, including a shallow bowl." Certainly these statements support the hypothesis that Julian studied Nampeyo's drawing and that Nampeyo influenced Maria's shallow bowl and seed jar forms.

Writing of Maria and Julian's ceramics in his classic *Pueblo Pottery Making: A Study at the Village of San Ildefonso* (Yale University Press, 1925), Guthe states "The products of a man painter, Julian Martinez,

are easily recognized by the abundant use of very narrow lines. The figures, which are usually composed of many intricate elements, impress one with the amount of detailed and careful work lavished upon them. Julian has obviously been strongly influenced by the technique of modern Hopi potters, such as the famous Nampeyo, whose work he of course often sees in the curio-stores and in the State Museum at Santa Fe." Here, Julian's fine line is associated with Nampeyo's similar use of fine line work in her designs. The comment directly confirms Nampeyo's influence

on Julian's drawing in 1925.

So along with the actual ceramics showing Nampeyo's influence on the Martinezes, two prominent academic sources on Pueblo pottery, Ruth Bunzel and Carl Guthe both confirm Nampeyo's influence on Julian's drawing. I was delighted.

Of course, Julian was no mere copier, and his original designs are remarkable, but the inspiration for some of them seems to originate in the seminal work of Nampeyo. In a real sense, Julian's designs and Maria's new forms, influenced by Nampeyo, are continuations of Nampeyo's Sikyatki Revival. Even on the blackware, Julian used curvilinear and feather and bird designs pioneered by Nampeyo.

This first connection between Nampeyo and the younger Martinezes is primarily aesthetic, seen first by direct observation of the art ceramics, and then confirmed by scholars in the field at the time. Thus, Nampeyo's aesthetic had a profound impact upon the history of Pueblo pottery through Maria and Julian, who later dominated the world of Pueblo pottery.

As I continued to research the literature, I made a second important connection between Nampeyo and the Martinezes that other scholars have not mentioned. The Martinezes career as art potters, like Nampeyo's, was heavily affected by important intellectuals of the time who sponsored them in their growth and development by purchasing and marketing their pottery. As I studied the history of the art careers of Nampeyo and the Martinezes, I saw the connection between the archaeologist Jesse Fewkes' claim that he helped Nampeyo found the Sikyatki Revival art movement through his efforts and generosity—and Edgar Hewett's association with the Martinezes as he excavated at Bandelier in New Mexico a decade later.

The Sikyatki Revival was primarily based on Nampeyo's use of designs and forms from ancient Hopi ceramics in her own work. Examples of her beginning attempts to use the ancient designs and forms from excavated ceramics are clearly present in the Keam Collection. We can see her moving increasingly towards the use of ancient designs and forms before 1892 and prior to Fewkes' excavations of Sikyatki at Hopi in 1895 and 1896. More information

on this can be found in my book *In Search of Nampeyo: The Early Years, 1875-1892*.

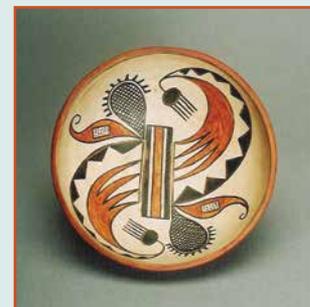
In the 1880s, visiting intellectuals, like Fewkes, criticized the poor quality of contemporary Hopi pottery, especially as compared to the ancient examples found in the nearby ruins of Awatovi on Antelope Mesa. Hearing this criticism and wanting to expand the market for her pottery, Nampeyo slowly began incorporating ancient designs and forms into her work in the mid-1880s. This process continued for years, and culminated in the summers of 1895 and 1896, when Fewkes excavated the ancient village of Sikyatki, on the back side of First Mesa, for the Smithsonian. During the 1896 excavation Fewkes unearthed 500 ceramics from the graves of Sikyatki. He wrote of Nampeyo's visiting the site and "begging" him to let her copy designs from the excavated pieces.

Fewkes, who was a frequent contributor to the new publication celebrating the new science of anthropology, wrote of Nampeyo in his articles for *American Anthropologist* in the 1890s. He writes of his influence on Nampeyo in his *Designs on Prehistoric Hopi Pottery*:

"Much of the pottery offered for sale by Harvey and other dealers in Indian objects along the Santa Fe Railroad in Arizona and New Mexico is imitation prehistoric Hopi ware made by Nampeyo. The origin of this transformation was partially due to the author who, in the year named was excavating the Sikyatki ruins and graves. Nampeyo and her husband Lesou, came to his camp, borrowed paper and pencil, and copied many of the ancient symbols found on the pottery vessels unearthed and these she reproduced on pottery of her own manufacture."

Several recent Hopi scholars have corrected Fewkes' claim that his efforts created the Sikyatki Revival by showing that Nampeyo had already begun making prehistoric copies and using ancient designs and forms in her own work by the mid-1880s.

Yet despite the recent debunking of Fewkes' claim, it is impossible to discount the impact of his excavations of Sikyatki on Nampeyo's growing career. She took full advantage of the situation. She made new examples of the new art movement by the hundreds, even the thousands, in the years after Fewkes' excavations.



4

3. **Nampeyo (Hopi-Tewa, ca. 1856-1942)**, yellowware bowl, ca. 1900-10.
4. **Maria Martinez (San Ildefonso, 1887-1980) and Julian Martinez (San Ildefonso, ca. 1885-1943)**, red feather bowl.

Thus the Sikyatki Revival, which continues to this day, blossomed.

Certainly, Fewkes writing about Nampeyo by name in the journal made her famous, and more people sought her out to acquire her pottery. Significantly, Fewkes' assistant, Walter Hough, who worked on the Sikyatki excavations, purchased some of Nampeyo's new creations and donated them, with Nampeyo's name attached, to the Smithsonian in 1896. Hough, in his 1896 travel brochure for the Santa Fe Railway, instructed his readers to go to Hopi, knock on Nampeyo's door and acquire her pottery. Thus, Nampeyo's career was boosted by her association with Fewkes and Hough.

As we turn to Maria and Julian's careers, we see that their career, like Nampeyo's, was greatly impacted by a similar archaeological episode in New Mexico. In 1907, Edgar Hewett, director of the Museum of New Mexico, was in charge of archaeological excavations on the Pajarito Plateau in New Mexico. Like Fewkes at Hopi, Hewett was using nearby Native workmen from San Ildefonso Pueblo, including Julian. When ancient ceramics were unearthed at Bandelier, Hewett soon asked his workmen who the best potter was at nearby San Ildefonso and was put in touch with Maria through Julian. Hewett contracted her to make pottery imitative of the ancient wares he was excavating at nearby Bandelier. Maria tells of Hewett bringing her ancient pottery to inspect, inviting her to the site, and asking her to make replicas. Julian worked three summers at Bandelier, while Maria experimented with the ancient pieces in her own work. Hewett visited her at San Ildefonso, bought her pieces and ordered more of them.

In most retellings of this part of Maria's early life, no connection is made between Hewett's asking Maria Martinez to make replicas of ceramics from Bandelier to the Fewkes/Nampeyo story from Hopi in 1896. After all, the Fewkes story had been well publicized

not only in the anthropological journals but in newspaper and magazine stories. By 1907, Fewkes had launched his own version of his founding of the Sikyatki Revival. In review, it's clear from the similarity of the events that Hewett's fated meeting with Maria was not coincidental but actually inspired by Fewkes' story of his interaction with Nampeyo. Hewett



5

consciously imitated the Fewkes' story of founding Nampeyo's career and hoped to repeat his success.

Soon after meeting Hewett, Maria and Julian Martinez became his adopted protégés and he moved them from their village into the Museum of New Mexico in Santa Fe, where Maria was relieved of housekeeping duties to concentrate on her pottery making and Julian was employed as a janitor for three years. Thus, their road to fame and success was paved by Fewkes' narrative of Nampeyo's creation of the Sikyatki Revival Art Movement through his efforts. Maria and Julian received special notice and compensation for their pottery early and were financially empowered by the museum and intellectuals around them to develop professional careers as art potters. In 1919, when Julian figured out how to fire the highly polished ceramics black, the new ceramics were an instant hit with the public through the presentation and sale of the pieces by the Museum of New Mexico.

If Hewett had not been influenced by Fewkes' work with Nampeyo by specifically choosing and encouraging Maria's career, would the Martinezes have been so successful so quickly? This question cannot be definitively answered, but we do know that until Hewett appeared on the scene pottery making was only a part time activity for the young Maria who was busy running a household with children. Whether she would have developed as a fulltime art potter on the scale of Nampeyo without Hewett's assistance is uncertain.

Hewett's re-enactment of Fewkes' legendary creation of Nampeyo and the Sikyatki Revival, true or not, had a great impact on the development of Pueblo pottery. It seems a clear case of life imitating art, of a story from the past inspiring similar actions in the

5. A colorized postcard of Nampeyo, ca. 1900, by Vroman.

6. T. Harmon Parkhurst (1883-1952), portrait of Julian Martinez, ca. 1940.



6

present. Ironically, the factual accuracy of the original event is not required to effectively transfer its energy into the future.

Through these two important connections, Hewett's re-enactment of the Nampeyo legend with the Martinezes and Julian's adoption of important aspects of Nampeyo's unique abstractions, the two great matriarchs of Pueblo pottery are forever connected. These connections reveal the development of the potters whose work made Pueblo pottery the success

that it has been in the art world.

The history of Native American art continues to surprise and develop. Much information is still not well documented and there is still work for young scholars with passion and insight to pursue. With more research and knowledge, and more exposure through the museums and art galleries, Native American art will continue to exert its own influence on the American art scene, as it has from the beginning of American culture. ❧