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pieces of the past

by Ben Ikenson

Adobe Gallery's
Al Anthony and his passion for Pueblo pottery

WHEN AL ANTHONY TALKS ABOUT historic Pueblo pottery, the glow in his eyes suggests the same contained fire that baked so many of his showpieces in the indigenous kilns of the past. He's an ardent fan, and Adobe Gallery—the Canyon Road establishment he opened in 2001, after 23 years of operation in Albuquerque—is something of his shrine.

Considered one of Santa Fe's leading Native American art galleries, Adobe is filled with contemporary Pueblo pottery, katsina dolls, baskets, paintings, and many other native objets d'art. But it's the historic Pueblo pottery Anthony loves so much that lends a distinctive archaeological air to the place. Lining shelves and perched on glass cases are weather-worn pots of various shapes and sizes, adorned with patterns and images and the traditional black, white, and burnt umber color scheme.

"This pottery is phenomenally beautiful and ethnographically important," Anthony says. "Unlike pottery made to sell, these items were made to be used, and their evidence of use is especially appealing to collectors."

Although Anthony's been a fixture on the Native American art scene for 34 years, he had little exposure to art, let alone Southwestern Indian art, for most of his life. Growing up in a small North Carolina town, he joined the U.S. Air Force to become a nuclear engineer. It wasn't until 1957, when he was stationed at Kirtland Air Force Base, that he first set eyes on a Pueblo pot.



Al Anthony, owner of Adobe Gallery on Canyon Road, says Pueblo pottery is "phenomenally beautiful and ethnographically important."

"I was wandering around downtown Albuquerque, and in a shop window I saw a black pot that just captivated me," Anthony recalls. Since he couldn't afford the \$100 cost outright, the shopkeeper let him make 10 monthly payments of \$10 each.

Anthony collected for the next 19 years and, in 1978, two years after retiring from the Air Force, he opened Adobe Gallery in Albuquerque's Old Town, selling mostly contemporary pieces. In the mid-1980s, he was offered 13 historic Native pieces and, though he knew little about historic pottery at the time, his interest—and subsequent passion—was ignited. In 2001, Anthony moved shop north to Santa Fe, where he is now a very well-

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This Powhoge storage jar from San Ildefonso (18" high x 18" diameter), sold for \$43,750 at a recent Bonhams auction of Native American art.

Collecting

respected, self-taught expert in historic Pueblo pottery.

While Anthony dealt directly with Pueblo potters when he began his business, often driving out to the Pueblos to buy art, these days he is approached by art sellers on an almost daily basis. Many of his pieces come from the estates of longtime collectors across the country and from those looking to downsize, both of which provide a steady source for historic items.

One of his recent acquisitions, a San Ildefonso Pueblo vessel made in 1889, came to Anthony through a phone call from a woman who runs estate sales. About the size of a large beach ball but with the considerably larger price tag of \$85,000, the pot's belly features a series of images that tell the story, presumably, of a horse theft gone awry. One image depicts a man walking, horse at his side; another shows a second man riding into scene on horseback; lastly, the two men are shown fighting. The names "Juan" and "Jose" are scrawled on the vessel's body, but only "Juan" is on the lid above the date. "We assume the pot was made in Juan's honor," says Anthony. "We just don't know whether he won or lost the fight"

That's a mystery that Anthony—and a future buyer—can live with. In fact, it's part of the vessel's allure. "The exciting thing for me is always when new stuff comes in," he says. "But I certainly enjoy what I have on display here." ■



the auction block

While Al Anthony's longstanding reputation has made him a go-to guy for collectors, many gallery owners and high-end collectors obtain Native American pieces on the auction circuit, where stakes are high and bidding is often fiercely competitive.

Altermann Galleries and Auctioneers

Santa Fe-based Altermann Galleries and Auctioneers, which maintains galleries in Santa Fe and Scottsdale, Arizona, specializes in American Western art from 1840 to present day, including Pueblo pottery and textiles. With a strong collector base that the company has been nurturing since its 1978 establishment, it now conducts four annual auctions: two in Santa Fe (August 11, 2012, and November 18, 2012), one in Dallas (October 2012), and one in Scottsdale (April 2013). altermann.com

Bonhams

At a recent Bonhams auction, an Acoma Pueblo pottery storage jar fetched \$337,000—more than the price of many homes. An international auction house based in London, Bonhams was established in 1793, before much of the historic Pueblo pottery that's now on the market was even produced. Today, Bonhams hosts auction rooms as well as online and phone bidding, and it conducts fine sales on the first Monday of June and December and an intermediate "Arts & Artifacts of the Americas" auction in mid-September. The company announced that its recent three Native American auctions in San Francisco sold approximately 500 pieces of rare art and artifacts for a total of more than \$1.4 million. Among the Southwestern pottery, a historic San Ildefonso storage jar and a 1970s turtle effigy each were sold for \$43,750. bonhams.com

Heritage Auctions

Established in 1976, Dallas-based Heritage Auctions has become the largest auction house in the United States and the third largest in the world. With its nearly 750,000 registered online bidders, the company has made serious inroads in the world of Internet-based auctions as a kind of smaller-scale eBay for collectors of everything from comic books and movie posters to, yes, historical American Indian arts and crafts. Heritage Auctions has two biannual American Indian art auctions—one in the spring and one in the fall—where collectors can shop for a range of rare and valuable pieces. Indeed, Heritage Auctions has some fine goods. ha.com



Heritage Auctions hosts two American Indian art auctions each year. This Northern Cheyenne beaded hide baby carrier (above), ca. 1880, sold for \$65,725.

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