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# Indian Art on the Common Market

By Lumarion Day

At his desert studio located near Benson, Arizona, in that crossroads of southwestern history, the San Pedro Valley, Mano Pardehntin made a last-minute, casual check of the pottery loaded onto his pickup, and then headed eastward toward Las Cruces and a new marketplace for his wares.

The pottery marked "Mana" or "Ashrama" is now becoming well-known in several distant parts of the country as well as in Arizona where it is handled in the Goldwater stores at Phoenix and Scottsdale, Marshall Fields in Chicago and Bon Marche in San Francisco are dealers for the pottery, as are numerous other stores in several states.

Once in Las Cruces, the pottery was put on display in the J. C. Penney Store at Loretta Shopping Center and for two days its creator demonstrated the workmanship that goes into hand-made ware of which no two pieces are exactly alike.

Soft spoken and slight of build is Mano Pardehntin, and there is an ageless quality about the man who is half-Apache. Facial features, air and mien are those of his white mother, and although Mana's long hair is held down smoothly with a forehead band, and knobbed and tied at the back in Indian fashion, it is in the man's art that his Indian heritage is more openly evidenced.

The traditional Indian designs of geometric pattern, stick figures and repeated lines are there, hand-incised or hand-painted onto jars, vases, pots, bowls, windells, trays, placques and pendants which otherwise are modern and often impressionistic in mood and shape.

While Indian markings are authentic and meaningful, missing are the bold strokes, sharp contrast of color, and full-surface design usually characterizing Indian pottery. Its further departure from what is considered usual in Indian pottery is that this ware has practically no utilitarian value. Each piece, hand made though it may be, is glazed twice and fired twice to insure against leakage, a bleeding and dimming of color should it be subjected to frequent washing, and so hard and durable is the composition that the ware is as safe in automatic dishwasher as are other dishes washed in that manner.

All of these features are re-creating of the man who makes the Mana pottery, and who oversees the making by others at his closed art shop in the Arizona desert.

Mana Pardehntin's Apache father died when he was three months old. Separated from his mother at this time and brought up in foster homes, Mana was exposed through boyhood to different people, different life patterns and different life situations. On reaching the age of 21, he was given a sum of money which purportedly belonged to him, and a slip of paper bearing the name of his mother.

With the money he purchased a motorcycle, and in a manner much like TV's "Brauman," went wherever he willed for a period. It was during this time he located his mother, and a good relationship is now established.

Mana began working seriously with pottery only about 15 years ago. With the Indian's hand for forming and shaping the clay, and his own light and sometimes whimsical touch, in



EACH PIECE DIFFERENT, the pottery turned out by Mana and the students and teachers in his closed art shop on the desert is hand-painted, and glazed and fired twice for durability. The greenware, such as the large jar seen in the picture, comes from molds of Mana's own original making. Sandra Reitmeyer is shown with the potter during his recent demonstrations in a local store.

Cover Photo  
by  
Nick Payton

duplicating the ancient and symbolic Indian designs, he worked and studied with the potter Valenta in Oak Creek Canyon, Arizona — that awe-inspiring and majestic "Little Grand Canyon" which attracts artists as well as tourists.

Mrs. Will Rogers Jr. became interested in his work and she and her husband arranged for him to work at their place near Tubaac, Ariz. The Barry Goldwaters also saw his work and recognized its value — its unique and harmonious blending of Indian culture and "modern" practicality, its continuance of Indian art but in smartly sophisticated shapes and forms, and in colors to accent those of today's home decorators.

"The hand production of whole-sale quantities of Mana's work explains he, "is the fault of every person I ever met."

In time an ashrama was established in the desert, a place where several others who, like Mana, were studying and practicing yoga. From inside Mana made, the greenware of his pottery was cast and the Indian art hand-incised or painted onto the wares by those in the commune.

The closed art shop now operated is an outgrowth of the ashrama period (hence the "Ashrama Pottery Co." designation on some ware), and pottery now is marked simply, "Mana".

Its advent into the Las Cruces store was arranged through

an interruption, but Mrs. Reitmeyer used her year in the nation's capital to advantage. While her husband was busy with his work at the Foundation, she haunted the Bureau of Indian Affairs and also learned everything she could about Indian art and those first Americans now living and producing art.

The Reitmeyers returned to Las Cruces this summer, and having again taken a business license, are activating the wholesale-retail service they planned earlier.

"I don't expect to make money out of it," Sandra Reitmeyer says honestly, "for paying a babysitter rats up any commission I might make in handling a deal between an artist and a retail outlet."

"Making money was not our primary purpose in starting the venture, however. My husband and I have been genuinely in-

terested in Indian art for some time. In our home we have what we consider to be a very good, if relatively small, collection. "We are of that growing number of appreciators, and we are concerned about the continuation, and the preservation of, this art form."

"Indian art actually is becoming a very good investment. As the Indian themselves slacken production of hand-ware — wares and fabrics, and hand-made pottery of authentic design and meaning, the pieces naturally become rarer."

Bringing the Mana ware to Las Cruces is Mrs. Reitmeyer's first block of business. Good Indian art sells itself, she believes, but it must be put before the public — shown to the average person and available in price to the average person.

The Mana Pardehntin pottery is a good beginner for her business-cultural venture.

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