

Tonalist Landscapes
by Shanna Kunz

High Season in
Santa Fe

Poetic Still Lives
by Jean Chambers

Southwest Art

Fine Art of Today's West

SPECIAL FOCUS:
**NEW MEXICO
ARTISTS**





OFF THE HANDLE BY
TAMMY GARCIA



STATE OF THE ARTS

Welcome to *Southwest Art's* special focus on New Mexico and its vast array of talented artists. Residents of the Land of Enchantment like to boast that they have more artists and galleries per capita than any other state in the union. Combine that with the vibrant Native American and Hispanic cultures that weave through the state like threads on a loom, and visitors here experience a rich artistic tapestry unlike any other in the country. Some observers like to call New Mexico the "State of the Arts."

Ever since painters Ernest Blumenschein and Bert Phillips arrived in the late 19th century and founded the Taos Society of Artists, painters have flocked to New Mexico, drawn by the stunning colors of its skies, mountains, and cliffs. "I never knew what 'purple mountain majesty' meant until I moved here," says **Cheri Christensen**, one of the artists featured in the following pages.

In addition to Christensen, we feature the versatile **Tammy Garcia** and oil painter **William Berra** along with six portfolio artists—**Bill Gallen**, **Joseph Breza**, **Maggie Muchmore**, **Stephen Day**, **Jeff Otis**, and **Irby Brown**—who paint the New Mexico landscape. We hope you enjoy the two- and three-dimensional works being created by some of the state's finest artists.

ABOVE, FROM LEFT: NEW MEXICO MESAS BY JEFF OTIS.
RANCHO VIEJO ARROYO BY IRBY BROWN.
TAOS MOUNTAIN III (DETAIL) BY MAGGIE MUCHMORE.

Defying Labels

Working in clay, bronze, and glass, Tammy Garcia boldly resists categorization **BY NORMAN KOLPAS**

YOUR FIRST fleeting glimpse of an artwork by Tammy Garcia may well register an impression that she works firmly in the tradition of the Santa Clara Pueblo, where she was born 40 years ago. The zig-zag, step, and swirl motifs she uses—on their own or to embellish renderings of birds, fish, and Native dancers—are similar to the deeply incised patterns on the surfaces of traditional coil pots made by her mother, Linda Cain, and her grandmother, Mary Cain, as well as Garcia's aunts and uncles, all of whom are accomplished potters.



But dwell even a moment longer on any work by the prolific Garcia, and you soon realize that while she remains deeply connected to her roots, the artist has moved far beyond the pueblo and its traditions to stake out new creative territory that is entirely her own. In her hands, traditional motifs sometimes become minimized in an almost Southwest-meets-Bauhaus style. Artistic mediums are shaken up in a delightfully disorienting way: Carefully designed patinas give bronze sculptures the look of Navajo jewelry. What appears to be black-glazed pottery is, in fact, blown and sandblasted glass.

“You can definitely see the cultural influences in what I do,” says Garcia. “But early on I realized that, to hold my interest, I needed to keep finding new imagery and to continually do something different.”

Just how different Garcia's work has become, and the mastery with which she accomplishes it, can be seen in the respect she has already won just 23 years into a career that promises to continue for decades more. Her works are found across the country in the prestigious collections of the Heard Museum, the Eiteljorg Museum, the Autry National Center, the Rockwell Museum, the National Museum of Women in the Arts, and the National Museum of the American Indian. In her home state of New Mexico, you'll see pieces by Garcia on display in the Albuquerque airport and in the Capitol Art Collection in Santa Fe. In 2008, she won the Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts.

So it's surprising to learn that her first

◀ **THUNDERBIRD 1, BRONZE, 6 X 6 X 4.**



HUNTER'S BOUNTY, BRONZE, 26 X 15 EACH PANEL.

career path, after she left high school in Española, NM, after 10th grade (she eventually earned her G.E.D.), was to become a cosmetologist, or maybe a hairdresser. Collectors and curators alike can thank an unnamed woman who, three months into young Tammy's education in the art of applying makeup and cutting hair, complained to the instructor about what she saw in the mirror. “She gave me a description of what she wanted,” Garcia recalls with a laugh, “and I cut her hair in my interpretation of it. There was this debate between me and the instructor. And that was the turning point. I realized I didn't like the idea of being told what to do.”

So Garcia moved to Taos and took up a craft that was second nature to her: pottery making. While paying her bills by working in a local art gallery, she perfected her craft, selling those pots that turned out well. “With pottery,” she says, “you could spend a good amount of time making a piece, and if it happened to break, money you were maybe counting on



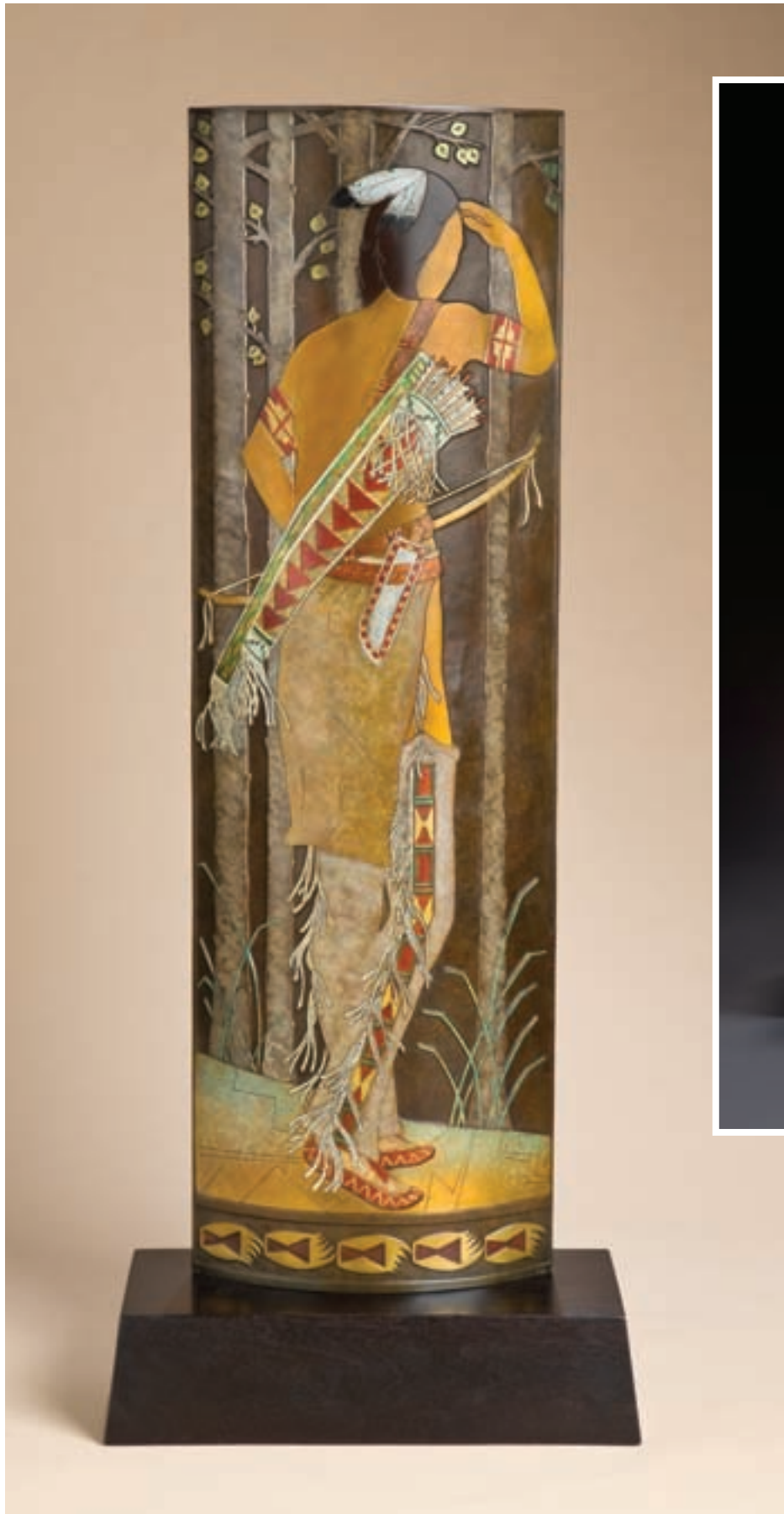
DOSSIER

REPRESENTATION

Blue Rain Gallery, Santa Fe, NM.

UPCOMING SHOW

Indian Market show, Blue Rain Gallery, August 19-20.



▲ **OUT OF SIGHT,**
GLASS, 92 X 36 X 18.
◀ **OUT OF SIGHT,**
BRONZE, 47 X 15.



UNTITLED, GLASS, 26 X 99.

suddenly wasn't there. So working in the gallery provided a steady income." More and more pots were successful for her, and within a year she scaled back to part-time gallery work. By her 18th birthday she was pursuing art full time and showing her work at the Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial in Gallup, NM. By age 21 she had gallery representation in Scottsdale, AZ.

The same year she began exhibiting in Scottsdale, she married her boyfriend, Leroy Garcia. A business major in college, he grew increasingly intrigued by the art world at a time when works by tribal artists, especially those of the Southwest, were booming in popularity. Two years after they wed, Leroy and Tammy opened Blue Rain Gallery in Taos. The gallery, which has represented Tammy exclusively since 1998, moved to Santa Fe in 2006.

FOR THE FIRST several years showing at Blue Rain, Garcia continued to create the sort of pottery on which she'd first built her reputation. More and more, however, she began to push the limits of what was possible in the Pueblo tradition, exploring new sizes and shapes for her work. Her longstanding passion for something new and different eventually led her to another medium: bronze. "For years, in pottery, my main obsession had been symmetry," she says. "But by going into bronze sculpture, I began to experiment with asymmetry." Instead of the traditional earthen clay gathered on the pueblo, she started working with the more malleable kind of oil-based clay from which molds are made to cast molten bronze. "Now I was able to build different

"Early on I realized that, to hold my interest, I needed to keep finding new imagery and to continually do something different."

forms and monumental pieces," she says. "The first sculpture I ever made this way was 12 inches tall. The third was 6 feet."

The move to bronze seemed to unleash Garcia's already formidable creativity. "A different way of thinking came into play for me," she says. "Working in this new medium brought with it a flood of inspiration."

And she didn't stop there. Over the past decade, Garcia, who now lives in Albuquerque with her husband and their three daughters, also went on to design and create silver jewelry and began to work in glass.

Her forays into glass came about through her and her husband's friendship with the highly respected Native American artist Preston Singletary, whose stunning glass works are carried by Blue Rain Gallery. "The Northwest Coast imagery he sandblasts onto his glass pieces has a carved style similar to my pottery, so I said to him, 'Let's work together,'" she recounts. "We've collaborated on three series now, for which he blew the glass, I designed the imagery, and he sandblasted it. They've been very successful. It's been an honor to work with Preston."

Garcia's latest bronze sculptures are, in a more subtle way, equally collaborative, and also represent a unique hybrid



UNTITLED, CLAY/TURQUOISE, 7 X 6.

of media. Drawing on her experience creating jewelry, she designs and sculpts in clay intricate three-dimensional objects that combine tribal imagery with the less-is-more aesthetic of the Bauhaus movement, which has increasingly fascinated her over the past three years. “My new forms are very angular,” she observes.

The most collaborative part of the process for these most recent works, however, happens at Bronzsmith Foundry in Prescott, AZ, where her sculptures are cast. There Garcia works closely with Bronzsmith’s patina artist Carl Wolf, himself an accomplished sculptor, to create color finishes so amazing that her pieces almost appear *trompe l’oeil*.

Just how dramatic these effects can be is evident in bronzes like THUNDERBIRD I. For the piece, Garcia sculpted her own interpretation of a traditional Navajo jewelry motif, cast entirely in bronze to form a solid block 6 by 6 inches square. Then, she and Wolf worked together to achieve detailed patinas that trick the eye into thinking that the bronze surface is tarnished silver inlaid with turquoise.

A different but equally dramatic effect can be seen in LUNKER, a similarly sized bronze depicting a trout swimming through a mesmerizing pattern of seaweed and abstracted zigzags. Here the patina gives the fish’s skin an amazingly lifelike iridescent shimmer, while the underwater vegetation seems sculpted from blue-green turquoise and burnt-orange coral stone.

Garcia herself continues to marvel at what is possible. “In my early years of bronze making, I didn’t look forward to choosing the patina colors. With my lack of experience, the color of some pieces would just fight with me. Now, it’s defi-



DA TRIBUTE, GLASS/HEISHI/TURQUOISE, 10 X 14 X 9.

nitely at a point where doing the patinas is something I look forward to,” she says. “Almost every color choice is available. You can mix and overlap and combine them.”

The collaborative process clearly suits and excites her. So does the variety of mediums now at her disposal. “Each medium has its challenges, but I think a great way to quickly learn the possibilities and limits of each is just to do it, have that hands-on experience,” she says, echoing the same approach she first took to mastering the potter’s art.

It’s tempting to imagine where Garcia’s love of variety, innovation, and collaboration might lead her in the future. But Garcia, with becoming modesty that belies her impressive achievements, won’t play that game. “I really don’t think about my goals,” she says. “I’m more about working in the moment. What I achieve at this time in my life will lead me wherever I end up.” ❖

Norman Kolpas is a Los Angeles-based freelancer who writes for *Mountain Living* and *Colorado Homes & Lifestyles* as well as *Southwest Art*.



◀ ELEMENT VIII, BRONZE, 15 X 10 X 3.



TAMMY GARCIA

Friday, August 20th

Isn't it worth the wait?

BLUE RAIN
GALLERY

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