

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATIONS  
TWO SUMMER EVENTS HONOR  
EXCELLENCE IN NATIVE ART

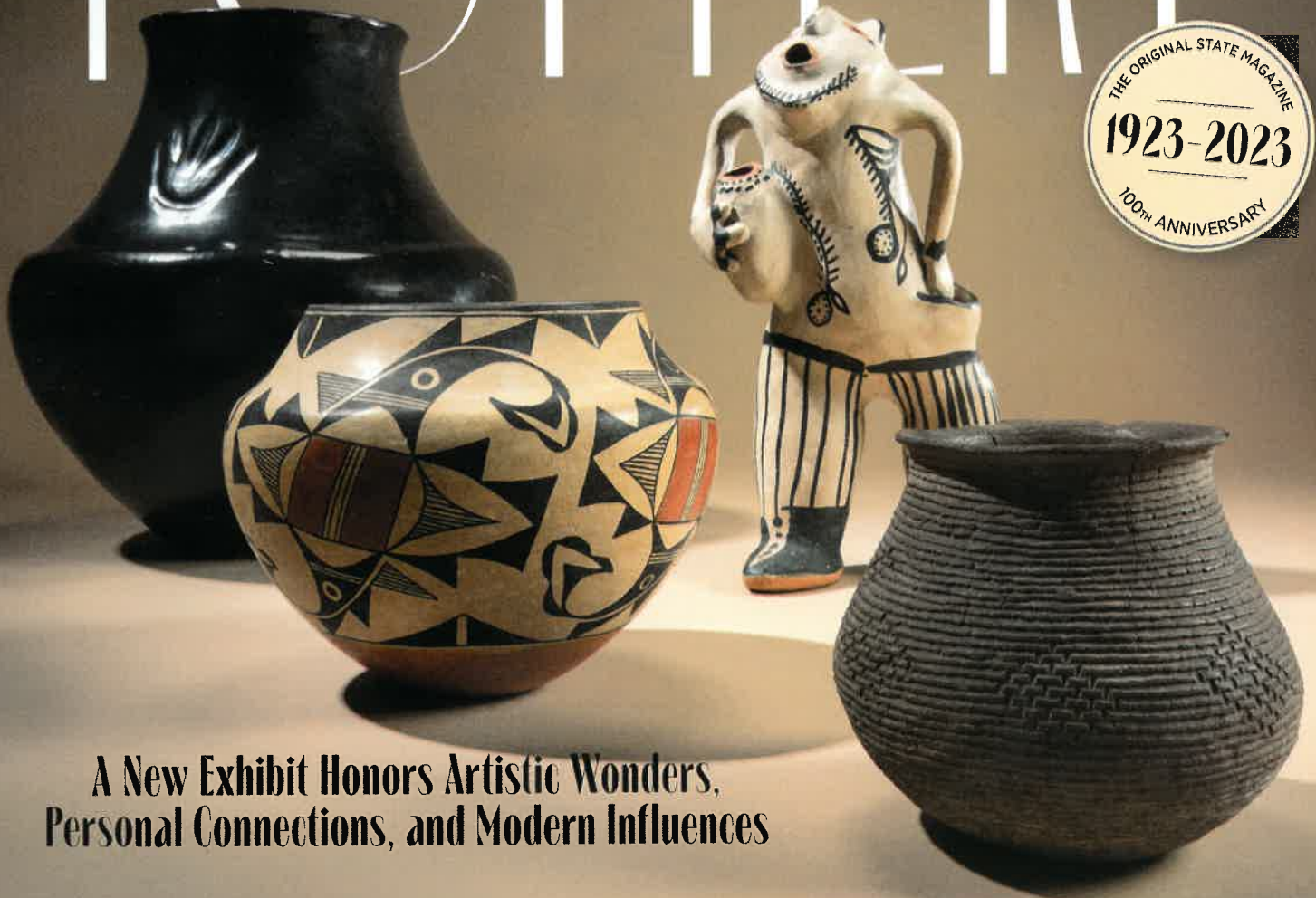
READ IT & REAP  
IT'S HARVEST TIME AT  
THE FARMERS' MARKET

PAST PRESENT  
LAS GOLONDRINAS BRINGS  
HISTORY & CULTURE TO LIFE

# New Mexico

AUGUST 2022

# PUEBLO POTTERY



**A New Exhibit Honors Artistic Wonders,  
Personal Connections, and Modern Influences**

DISPLAY UNTIL 8/23/22

AUGUST 2022 | \$5.95 USA

[NEWMEXICOMAGAZINE.ORG](http://NEWMEXICOMAGAZINE.ORG)



## TAKING WING

BEHIND THE SCENES  
AT SANTA FE OPERA'S  
M. BUTTERFLY

## FULL STEAM AHEAD

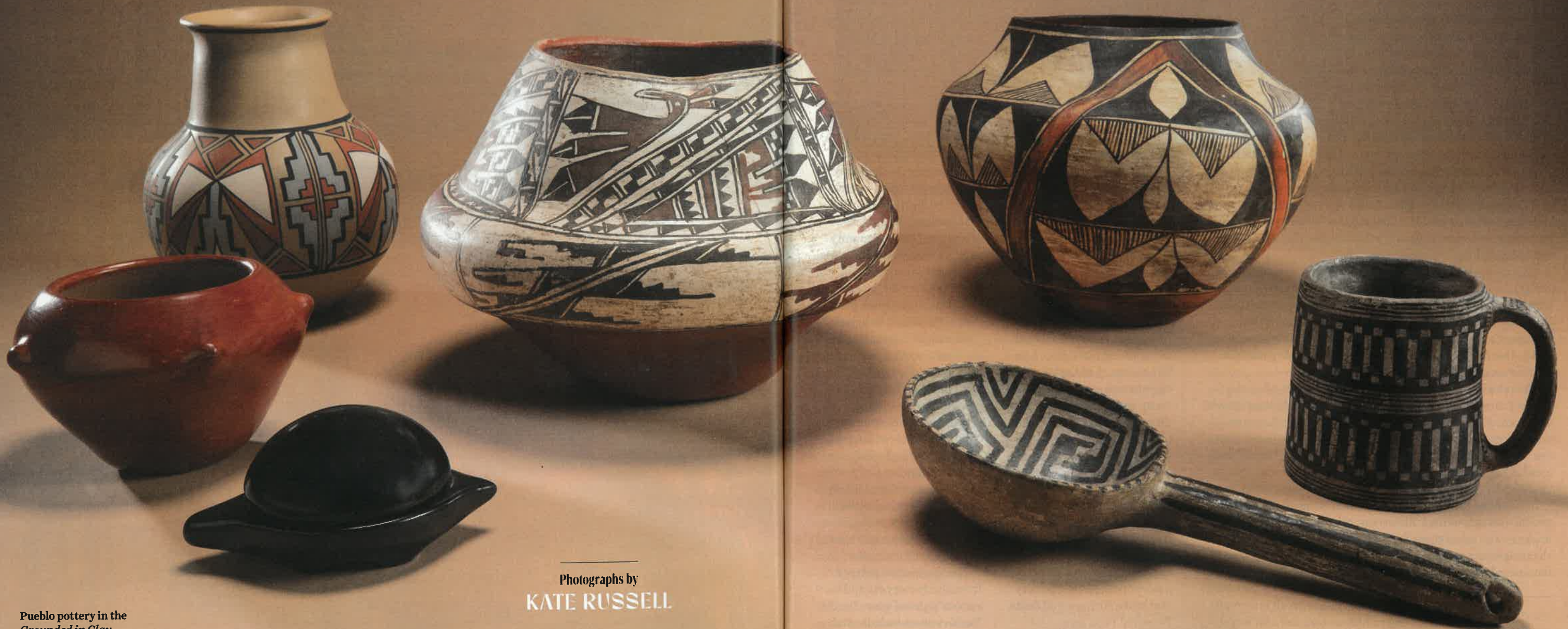
NEW EATERIES, SHOPS  
& LODGINGS ARE FUELING  
CHAMA'S GROWTH

# BREAKING

AN EXHIBITION OF PUEBLO POTTERY CELEBRATES  
CENTENNIAL—BY REVOLUTIONIZING THE WAY

# THE MOLD

A REMARKABLE COLLECTION'S  
MUSEUMS TELL STORIES. BY KATE NELSON



Photographs by  
KATE RUSSELL

Pueblo pottery in the  
*Grounded in Clay*  
exhibition features a  
range of styles from  
across the centuries.

# It's possible—likely, even—that when the workday ends and the lights flick off, whispers rise.

Here in the collections vault at the Indian Arts Research Center, in Santa Fe, a centuries-old water jar tells its many tales to a contemporary pot, which is still formulating one of its own. A storyteller figure holds its children close and murmurs a legend of how the stars were created to a clan of clay bears.

Arrayed on shelves that reach nearly to the ceiling of the IARC, the nearly 5,000 pieces have a lot to say—about their makers, their communities, their loves, and their sorrows. But over the last century, other people have done the talking for them.

That changes on July 31, when the IARC, part of the School for Advanced Research, joins the Museum of Indian Arts & Culture (MIAC) and the New York City-based Vilcek Foundation to present *Grounded in Clay: The Spirit of Pueblo Pottery*. The exhibition, which runs through May 29, 2023, before traveling to New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, represents a dramatic shift in acknowledging who holds the authority to tell someone else's story. It honors the 100th anniversary of the IARC's pottery collection, which is rooted in the gather-at-all-costs frenzy shared by institutions founded in an era that relished the myth of "the vanishing Indian."

"The reasons this collection was started were arguably paternalistic," says Elysia Poon, director of the center and co-curator—with her husband, MIAC curator Tony Chavarria (Santa Clara Pueblo)—of the exhibition. "When you're trying to help save a culture, it's not productive to take all the art out of that culture. Today, this is a working collection. One of our main goals is to provide access to the artists."

The exhibition found its wings several years ago, when the Vilcek Foundation was looking for a partner to help show its own collection of Pueblo pottery. The IARC's ongoing effort to re-engineer traditional museum processes caught the foundation's eye. "They were up for a revolutionary experiment," says Vilcek curator Emily Schuchardt Navratil. "Our question was, *How do we tell a story, and who tells it?* We knew it shouldn't be us."

Instead, the three institutions invited 70 mostly Pueblo people—artists, writers, historians, scientists, and political leaders—and asked them. Over the course of two years, amid the social-distance demands of the pandemic, the participants hammered out a plan where each of them would pick at least

one pot and write a 300-to-500-word essay about it. The result is a revealing exhibition text and a far larger illustrated catalog. Like raindrops that collect into a mesmerizing pool, each first-person story layers facts,

The collections vault at the Indian Arts Research Center holds treasures that inspire contemporary potters.

memories, and soul onto the larger narrative.

"*Grounded in Clay* focuses on personal relationships between Pueblo people, pottery, and clay," says Poon. "Academics' selections would have been very different—a tired 'best-of' exhibit."

The exhibition won't necessarily teach you how Jemez Pueblo's pottery differs from Acoma's, or how styles have morphed from early eras through colonial times to today. But if you listen, you'll hear the whispers. As journalist Tara Gatewood (Isleta, Diné) says in "From Me to You," her *Grounded in Clay* poem to an ancient Mogollon jar:

*I have learned that asking  
the right questions  
unlocks the full story ...  
To you reading this right  
now, the viewer,  
the visitor, the ancestor:  
Who were you when you  
stepped to this pot, and  
who are you now?*

The historic heart of the pottery held by the Indian Arts Research Center and the Museum of Indian Arts & Culture (via its Laboratory of Anthropology) thumps out a story fit for a soap opera, right down to the divorce. In 1907, what would become the School for Advanced Research was formed as the School of American Archaeology, dedicated to a field that was then mired in colonial mindsets, destructive field techniques, and occasional disregard for the "prizes" of the work. "There's a story of one piece of pottery that broke during a wild Santa Fe party," Poon says.

The school was given oversight of the state's Museum of New Mexico upon its 1909

creation. Set in the Palace of the Governors, the entities both began growing, albeit in different directions. The school established a privately owned pottery collection in 1922; the museum followed suit in the 1930s, when the Laboratory of Anthropology was built. The entities shared the collections there, but fissures appeared.

In 1972, the school moved onto the property of El Delirio, a gracious compound once owned by the philanthropic White sisters, whose flamboyant parties attracted Santa Fe's most colorful artists and writers. Two years later, the collections were divided.

In the new exhibition, portions will be reunited for the first time in decades, joined as well by Vilcek pots.

Witnessing the *Grounded in Clay* participants interact with the collections provided the organizers with a sense of healing. "The community curators brought perspectives to the works that could not have been provided by anyone else," says Rick Kinsel, president of the Vilcek Foundation. "One insight that stuck out to me was Erin Monique Grant's response to seeing a Tewa/Hopi Hano jar. Erin recalls being gifted a pot by her grandmother when she was a child [who had been adopted out from the Hopi tribe], as a blessing following a ceremony where she met several family members. Her recollections show how objects as simple as pottery hold important emotional and cultural value."

The essays cover pottery from nearly every era and in various states of wear. The 60 Pueblo writers include established stars like Nora Naranjo Morse and Rose B. Simpson (Santa Clara), Cliff Fragua



*"Grounded in Clay focuses on personal relationships between Pueblo people, pottery, and clay. Academics' selections would have been very different—a tired 'best-of' exhibit."* —ELYSIA POON



(Jemez), and Russell Sanchez (San Ildefonso).

Some write about past standouts such as Maria Martinez (San Ildefonso) and Lucy Lewis (Acoma). Many reflect on their relatives and cast nostalgic spells in stories about digging clay, forming pots, tending fires, and polishing surfaces with family members gathered around. Others lean toward pieces that are unrelated to their bloodlines but hold a place in their hearts.

"Josephine Kie, a Laguna Pueblo potter, chose a piece she had seen years ago," Poon says. "And then she re-created the pot. When she was finished, her granddaughter was born. She gave it to her and

calls it the Abigail Pot."

Acoma Pueblo Governor Brian Vallo, a former IARC director, discovered a storage jar in the Vilcek collection when he was visiting New York. Created by an unknown Acoma person around 1880, it bears chips and scratches and sits at

a tilt. Far from home, it struck a chord in Vallo, who wrote:

*Only the maker knows the prayers, songs, and intended use of this exquisite Acoma storage jar ... Signs of wear, the subtle patina, and the condition of the*

*interior indicate significant use ... This jar was probably a fixture in a food-preparation area or in a storage room with only minimal exposure to sunlight. I imagine that it contained dried meat of wild game, dried ears of Acoma white and blue corn, or maybe even loaves of wheat bread ... This jar sings loudly to me through its design and its lived experience at Acoma.*

The three institutions hope that *Grounded in Clay* sets a national standard by way of its format, one that Kinsel describes as "learning about art from a seminar of curators." The collaborators embrace that goal as well, one that could ensure the longevity of the art form, as explained by Zia potter Ulysses Reid:

*When I create pottery, it is common for me to invest two weeks or more in a piece. Pottery is an important way of life for Pueblo people, and I am proud to be a part of a resilient and strong community. Pottery's strength is evidenced by its permanent presence through time. This permanence means that our stories will live on in these and other vessels.*

**Kate Nelson** is the magazine's managing editor.

### The Details

*Grounded in Clay: The Spirit of Pueblo Pottery* opens July 31 and runs through May 29, 2023, at the Museum of Indian Arts & Culture, in Santa Fe. It will then move to New York in an exhibition shared between the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Vilcek Foundation. [nmmag.us/clayexhibit](http://nmmag.us/clayexhibit)

The exhibition's catalog, by Elysia Poon and Rick Kinsel, will be available in September. To be safe, preorder it. [nmmag.us/claybook](http://nmmag.us/claybook)

Make reservations to tour the Indian Arts Research Center's collections at the School for Advanced Research, in Santa Fe. [sarweb.org/iarc/iarc-tours](http://sarweb.org/iarc/iarc-tours)