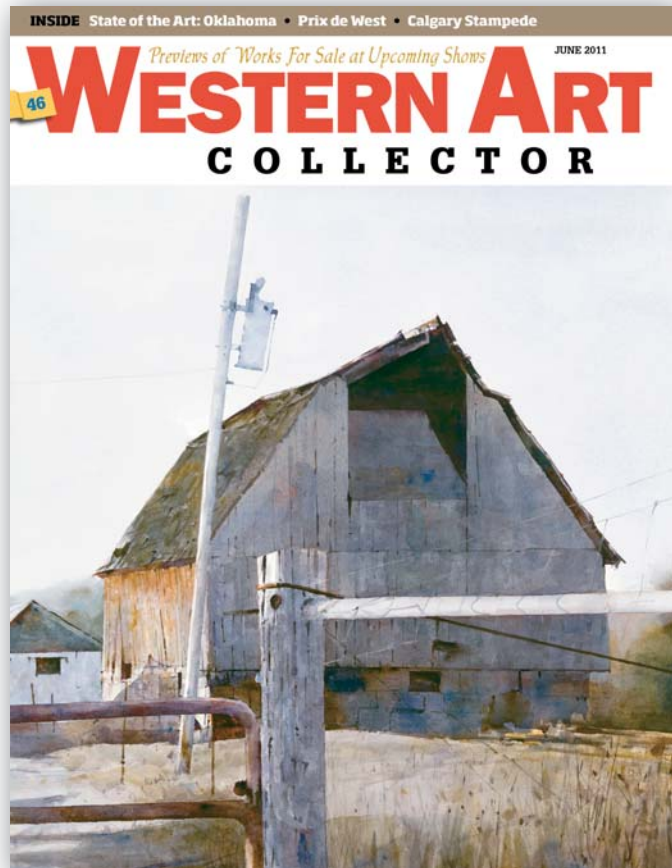


As seen in the
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A Tribute to Tradition

Wopila Artist Guild hosts its first exhibit honoring the Navajo weavers of historic Toadlena Trading Post.



Views from the austere but breathtaking region of the historic Toadlena Trading Post, home of Navajo weavers who create some of the most sought-after textiles on the market today.



Master weaver Evelyn George offers input on the sheep in Craig Bergsgaard's sculpture, *The Chaperone*. Evelyn had pointed to the shoulder of the sheep and said "It needs to be fatter." Craig then offered her a piece of clay and she applied it to fatten the sheep appropriately.

PHOTOS COURTESY JAY STEEBY

Noted painter James Ayers and sculptor Craig Bergsgaard pay tribute to the accomplished Navajo weavers of the historic Toadlena Trading Post in a new art exhibit debuting in June. Titled *Honoring Weavers with Canvas and Bronze*, each artist will unveil three new works in their chosen medium that honor the artisans who employ the 350-year-old weaving traditions to craft their sought-after textiles.

"It amazes me that the weavers of the historic Toadlena Trading Post are not celebrated in the art world centers of New York and Europe," says Ayers. "The best of these artists create pieces as sophisticated as any classic artwork."

Bergsgaard agrees. "The dedication these weavers show to their art form is inspiring," he adds. "A high quality piece can take as long as two years to make, but the results the weavers achieve are proof of the value of their devotion."

The exhibit opens June 18 at the historic Toadlena Trading Post and artwork will remain on view at the museum at Toadlena through August 21. Toadlena is located in the eastern part of the Navajo reservation near Newcomb, New Mexico. More than 1,300 people are expected to attend the exhibit opening, which includes the biannual trading post party and the wedding of trading post proprietors Mark Winter and Linda Larouche. The public is invited.

The historic Toadlena Trading Post weavers are known for their use of complex geometric visuals in subtle natural tones, with the best weavers making artworks to rival traditional masters in terms of balance, proportion, and contrast. The six new works by Ayers and Bergsgaard will depict weaving families in bygone days, complete with accurate period dress, accoutrements, locales, and weaving tools.

Both Colorado artists visited the trading post to meet the master weavers and glean insight and feedback for their then works-in-progress. Bergsgaard learned about Navajo carding and spinning techniques during his 2010 research trip to the trading post on their annual carding and spinning day. The exchange is depicted in his new piece titled *The Lesson*, which will be cast in bronze. The first of these editions will have features the rest do not such as a miniature Navajo rug with the title of the piece hand-woven into it and a special walnut jewelry box-style base with a drawer and the title laser cut into the box and embedded with turquoise.

"I was, and am, in total awe of the reverent dedication to the entire process," says Bergsgaard. "In this age of mass production it is easy to dismiss these works of art as merely functional, but a rug may be 'on the loom' for weeks, months, often years. With the added



James Ayers, *Patterns of Tradition*, oil on linen, 30 x 40"

Ayers got the inspiration for this piece after visiting with master weaver Pamela Brown at the historic Toadlena Trading Post. Brown told the artist that one of her earliest memories was the sound of the loom "clacking" as she was seated next to it as a baby.



Painter James Ayers gets input from master weaver Emily Watchman on early versions of his three works depicting traditional Navajo life.



Craig Bergsgaard, *The Lesson*, clay, 20 x 24 x 16"



Bergsgaard tries in vain to learn to spin with a traditional Navajo spindle. His patient teacher was master weaver Virginia Deal at the historic Toadlena Trading Post.

PHOTO COURTESY THE ARTIST



James Ayers, *Navajo Finery*, oil on board, 32 x 24"
In *Navajo Finery*, Ayers portrays a proud Navajo man from the 1870s wearing a classic third phase chief's blanket.



Craig Bergsgaard, *The Chaperone*, clay, 32 x 14 x 14"
The Chaperone features a Navajo woman tending to the young sheep of her flock. The shepherdess is wearing the traditional blanket dress and bun hairstyle of 150 years ago.

components of complexity, composition and beauty, the end product is truly a work of art."

Ayers says he was impressed with how the weavers get such accuracy and precision without using any kind of measuring tool or device. He also admired how each weaver can look at their textiles at different stages and have a personal or family anecdote that goes with it.

"The most significant aspect of this experience for me is seeing firsthand how the art and the culture and life are interconnected," continues Ayers. "Such a holistic approach to creating art is so difficult to attain in today's world, so getting to have a glimpse of this encompassing art lifestyle was

incredibly motivating for me as a painter."

Like the master weavers, both artists challenge themselves to make each piece better than the last. From this exhibit, Ayers hopes that viewers appreciate that knowledge of traditional art forms is important for an understanding of contemporary art because the fundamentals are ever-present.

"Contemporary art is connected aesthetically to traditional forms," says Ayers.

Honoring Weavers with Canvas and Bronze is hosted by the Wopila Artist Guild, an artist association formed in 2010 by Ayers and Bergsgaard with the goal of funding Native American youth art education. A portion of the proceeds from the sale of

artwork on exhibit will benefit the Toadlena Young Weaver's Project, a non-profit fund administered by the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian in Santa Fe. 🌿

Honoring Weavers with Canvas and Bronze

When: June 18-August 21, 2011

Where: Toadlena Trading Post, Newcomb, NM 87455. Toadlena is located in the eastern part of the Navajo reservation near Newcomb.

Information: (602) 510-3662, www.wopilaguild.org