

Hopi Katsina Dolls

Pronunciation: The Hopi do not have a formal written language and therefore all Hopi words are spelled phonetically. Katsina, more so than Kachina, correctly approximates the term used by Hopi to describe these spiritual beings. Katsinam is the plural form of Katsina.

What is a Katsina? Katsinam are spirit beings that bring balance and harmony to the physical world, and manifest many of the oral histories of the Hopi. They can represent things seen in the physical world, such as plants, animals, and weather phenomenon, as well as concepts and figures from Hopi history and culture. By portraying particular Katsinam during ceremonies the Hopi believe that the blessings of that particular Katsina will become manifest. These usually are prayers for rain, food crops, and a peaceful life. Katsinam also teach children rules, norms and roles of the Hopi.

What is a Katsina Doll? Katsina dolls represent the ceremonial dancers that appear in the various villages of the Hopi. Traditionally made relatively simple, to be given by Katsinam to female Hopi, they have now emerged as one of the most distinctive art forms in the southwest. Carved out of cottonwood root, they are made in many different styles: flat cradle dolls given to infant girls, old style carvings that use pre-1900's materials to carve and paint, sculptural figures that often incorporate multiple figures, and the very detailed fine art dolls that often win top prizes at juried competitions and can cost tens of thousands of dollars.

Types of Katsina Dolls There are hundreds of different Katsinam that are depicted in doll form, and it can be overwhelming at first to differentiate among them. Many can be grouped into a type of "family" that makes them easier to identify. Here are a few:

- **Animals:** Some of the easiest to identify because of the obvious resemblance to the animal they represent. Animal Katsinam are related to health and vitality (especially the bear and badger) and are good suggestions for customers who are looking for a doll to give to a sick friend or family member.
- **Ogres:** Ogres, or Soyoko as the Hopi know them, are fierce beings who threaten to punish those who misbehave. They are usually carrying knives or swords and have very sharp teeth.
- **Manas:** There are many different types of Manas (Maidens) and can usually be identified by the two maiden whorls on the sides of their heads. They will usually take their name based upon the male Katsina they accompany (i.e. Cactus Maiden, Bear Maiden).
- **Whippers/Guards:** The Whippers carry green yucca whips in their hands. They are often confused with Ogres because many are fierce looking, but Ogres would be carrying more deadly weapons. Whippers usually function as guards during ceremonies.
- **Non-Katsina:** While technically not Katsinam, no Katsina Doll collection would be complete without a Clown, a Warrior Mouse, or a Social Dancer. These figures of non-Katsinam are either carved after the dancers that appear in the villages that have their faces uncovered, or of legends, as is the case with the Warrior Mouse.

Misconceptions The most common misconception is that authentic, Hopi dolls won't have real fur and feathers. The Hopi have always used feathers as ornamentation on the dolls, and believe that flying creatures have power to help carry prayers to the Creator. In 1975 The Migratory Bird Act made it illegal to sell many of the feathers that the Hopi were using in their dolls. In response carvers began carving feathers out of wood. While it is true that most of the high dollar dolls currently being made are entirely of wood, many carvers still use real bird feathers.

Another misconception is that authentic Katsina Dolls are carved entirely out of one single piece of wood. Many carvers will call a doll "One Piece" if the head, torso, arms and legs are carved out of a single piece. Cecil Calnimpewa is famous for his "One Piece" dolls, but I have rarely seen one of his without added accoutrements. There are a few carvers who specialize in dolls that *are* entirely carved out of a single piece, but this is the exception, not the rule.

Important! The Katsina belief system is a very sacred part of the Hopi religion that most Hopi currently subscribe to, and there are many things that should not be discussed where it might be overheard by a young, uninitiated Hopi. Never refer to a Katsina mask, or to the dancers taking part in a Katsina ceremony. The Hopi believe that the dancers are real Katsinam until they are told otherwise when they are initiated into the clan at puberty.