

Substance of Stars

DINE (Navajo) labels & extended texts

***Dilyéhé* (Seed-like Sparkles)**

The seed pots within this display are arranged in the formation of *Dilyéhé* (known by the Western name Pleiades). *Dilyéhé* is the most highly ordered of all the Navajo constellations and epitomizes the Navajo emphasis on order and balance. It is the only one of the eight Diné (Navajo) constellations whose name lacks an agreed-upon translation. Because of its easily recognizable form and its balanced composition, *Dilyéhé* is the representation for all Diné constellations and it is depicted on the ceremonial mask for Black God, also known as Fire God, who was given the responsibility by the Holy People to create the constellations with which to adorn the “upper dark.”

In one story, six little warrior boys are practicing their skills and accompanied by a woman with buckskin slung over her back. They wander off and disappear over a hill. When *Dilyéhé* is no longer visible in the sky, it is time to plant, and when they reappear in the summer, it is time to stop planting. There is a saying, “Never let *Dilyéhé* see you plant.”



Seed Pot, 2006

Aaron Peshlakai (Diné), b. 1983

Silver, coral

Heard Museum Collection, Gift of Norman L. Sandfield, 4511-23



***Shooting Star*, 2007**

Fidel Estudillo (Diné)

Silver

Heard Museum Collection, Gift of Norman L. Sandfield, 4593-23



***Four Directions*, 2007**

Jerry Gaussoin (Diné/Picuris), b. 1971

Silver

Heard Museum Collection, Gift of Norman L. Sandfield, 4593-10



Seed pot, 1990s

Jerome Begay (Diné)

Silver

Heard Museum Collection, Gift of Norman L. Sandfield, 4426-63



Seed pot, 1990s

Jerome Begay (Diné)

Silver

Heard Museum Collection, Gift of Norman L. Sandfield, 4450-58



Seed Pot, 2005

Kee Yazzie (Diné), b. 1969

Silver, gold, coral

Heard Museum Collection, Gift of Norman L. Sandfield, 4511-23



***Many Stars*, 1992**

Norbert Peshlakai (Diné), b. 1953

Silver, coral

Heard Museum Collection, Gift of Norman L. Sandfield, 4426-20



***How Coyote Put the Stars in the Sky*, ca. 2015**

Sally Black (Diné), b. 1959

Sumac, dye

Heard Museum Collection, 5012-1

Ma'ii (Coyote), is often considered a trickster being and associated with creating chaos, a necessary yet frustrating force in the creation of the universe. In one story, the Holy Beings carefully placed crystals in precise arrangements in the sky, creating the first constellations. They kept the crystals in a buckskin bag and placed them one by one with great care. *Ma'ii* came along and asked the Holy Beings what they were doing, and enthusiastically wanted to help. He placed one star in the south, and declared it his own, *Ma'ii Bizò* (Canopus), the “Coyote Star.” He then turned to the north and placed the North Star, *Náhookqs Bikq'*, and other stars in the east and west. But, as usual, Coyote grew impatient, and grabbed the buckskin bag and tossed it high into the sky, flinging the remaining crystals in every direction, filling in all the blank spaces. Diné associate this story with the belief that there are many unnamed stars and constellations, and that chaos is intimately related to order, as evidenced in the night sky.



Gazer, 2014

Steven Yazzie (Diné), b. 1970

Oil on canvas

Heard Museum Collection, Gift of the Heard Museum Council, 4799-1

Coyote is a complex character, enduring a rich history with the human world. For the Navajo/Diné, Coyote is a character of transgressive power, a revered cultural being whose actions are often seen as a reflection of our own human morality. Even in a contemporary sense, they are mischievous instigators, often believed to be an invasive species, challenging the livelihood of rural ranchers and farmers and city dwellers. But they have always been symbiotic creatures on the periphery of human civilizations.

It's through this lens that one might consider the coyotes I paint in man-made worlds as a reflection of our own transgressive relationship to the natural world we share with Coyote. In my paintings, they can be seen perched on chairs or perhaps a canoe, wandering throughout vacant interiors of contemporary environments. Void of humans in these spaces, each room contains artifacts of our lives, offering clues and questions. Objects, forms and associations of the Western imaginations become the resting place for nature's determined creature on four skinny legs, taking back the places we all too often see only as our own.

—STEVEN YAZZIE



Ni' Hodilhit (The First World), 2004–5

Peggy Black (Diné)

Sumac, dye

Heard Museum Collection, Gift of Dr. Anthony Terrana, 4865-122



Ni' Hodoot'izh (The Second World), 2004–5

Peggy Black (Diné)

Sumac, dye

Heard Museum Collection, Gift of Dr. Anthony Terrana, 4865-123



Ni' Hattsooi (The Third World), 2004–5

Peggy Black (Diné)

Sumac, dye

Heard Museum Collection, Gift of Dr. Anthony Terrana, 4865-124



Ni' Halgai (The Fourth World), 2004–5

Peggy Black (Diné)

Sumac, dye

Heard Museum Collection, Gift of Dr. Anthony Terrana, 4865-125

A fundamental principle of the Creation stories of the Diné (Navajo), is the concept of emergence. Emergence is the process of transformation and migration; First Beings of Creation follow sacred pathways from one world into another, each time entering a reality where new qualities of the universe and new beings are created.

There is a great richness of variety in versions of the Diné Creation narrative, called *Diné Bahane'* (“story of the people”). The number of worlds created and transformed can range from four to as many as sixteen. It is commonly accepted today by the Diné that there exist Four Worlds, as the weaver Peggy Black has illustrated in these four baskets, and that the Diné ultimately emerged into *Dinétah*, the current Navajo homeland.

Each of the Four Worlds are generally described as:

Ni' Hodilhil (The First World) is translated literally to mean the “dark or black world.” The First World was small. In the middle of the four seas, there was an island floating in the mist. Insects and insect-like beings, called *Nilch'i Dine'é* (Air-spirit people), dwelled in the First World. Four clouds emerged from the four cardinal directions. These clouds paired off in the East and the West and from the breath of the wind, *Altsé Hastiin* (First Man) and *Altsé Asdzqá* (First Woman), arrived at these merging positions. The *Nilch'i Dine'é* became jealous of one another and began to fight, leading the beings of this world to decide to leave. Either by climbing or flying, each one traveled toward an opening in the sky and crawled through it into the Second World.

Ni' Hodootl'izh (The Second World) or the “blue world” was inhabited with the Swallow People. These included bluebirds, blue jays, blue swallows, and certain furred animals. For a short time, everyone lived together harmoniously. The *Nilch'i Dine'é* were asked to leave by *Táshchozhii* (the Swallow Chief) after he found out that one in the group had asked to sleep with his wife. They were guided by *Nilch'i* (the Wind) to a hole in the sky, and this took them and bluebird, who decided to join, to the Third World.

Ni' Haltsooi (The Third World) or “yellow world” contains two rivers and sacred mountains inhabited by the Holy People. The Holy People, along with *Nilch'i Ligai* (the White Wind), transformed First Man and First Woman from *Nilch'i Dine'é* into human beings and instructed them to live as husband and wife. The couple bore children, several sets of twins, who were

taught ceremonies by the Holy People and to pray. They lived here for many years before Coyote caused a great flood and the inhabitants of the Third World had to migrate once again.

Ni' Halgai (*The Fourth World*) or “white world” is the present world. It is the place where the sun, moon, stars and seasons were created. The first human born in the Fourth World was *Asdzáá Nádleehé* (Changing Woman).

The four sacred colors, mountains and cardinal directions contain metaphoric values, which connect the landscape of *Dinétaah* to the minds and definitions of Diné qualities of life. They are:

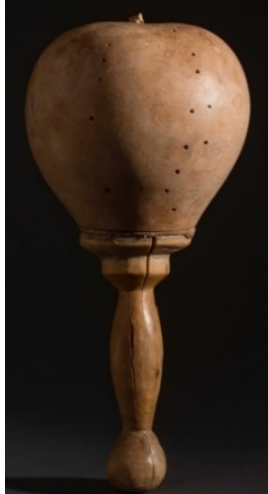
Ha'a'aah (East) and white are associated with *nitsáhákees* (thinking) and the early dawn. The Eastern boundary of *Dinétaah* is the sacred mountain *Sisnaajini* (White Shell Mountain, known in English as Blanca Peak, near Chama, Colorado). East is the direction of blessings and holiness, therefore the *hogan* (house) and ceremonial baskets are always pointed toward the East.

Shádi'aah (South) and the color blue are associated with *nahat'á* (planning) and blue daylight. The Southern boundary of *Dinétaah* is the sacred mountain *Tsoodzil* (Turquoise Mountain, known in English as Mount Taylor, near Grants, New Mexico).

Ee'ee'aah (West) and yellow are associated with *'iiná* (living according to a pattern) and the evening sunset, as well as dreaming and the subconscious. The Western boundary of *Dinétaah* is the sacred mountain *Dook'o'oosliid* (Abalone shell mountain, known in English as San Francisco Peak, near Flagstaff, Arizona).

Náhookos (North) being associated with darkness and the color black, is also associated with *sihasin* (prayer), reflection and rejuvenation. The Northern boundary of *Dinétaah* is the sacred mountain *Dibé Nitsaa* (Big sheep, known in English as Hesperus Mountain, near Durango, Colorado).

Together, the four sacred mountains are called *Dzil Diyinii Díj'go Sinil*.



Gourd rattle with constellations, 19th century

Diné

Gourd, wood, leather

Heard Museum Collection, Na-Sw-Na-I-17

In their language, the Navajo people identify as *Nihokáá dine 'é bila'ashdla'ii* (five-fingered people of the land). In their star knowledge, the constellation named the *Náhookos* (North) group is intimately connected to the landscape of *Dinétaah* (Navajo homeland) and is essential to ceremonial life, Diné identity and traditional teachings. The constellation represents three entities: *Náhookos Bikq'* (the Central Fire), known in Western astronomy as Polaris or the North Star; *Náhookos Bi'kq'* (the Male Revolving One), or the Big Dipper or Ursa Major—the big bear; and *Náhookos Bi'áád*, (the Female Revolving One); also known as Cassiopeia. While these three star-groups are considered separate constellations in Greek astronomy, Diné consider them one single entity. Together, the parts of the *Náhookos* constellation represent all those elements in a Diné household necessary to provide a nurturing foundation for its members. *Náhookos Bikq'* provides warmth, a place of focus, and is a means for ceremonial healing. *Náhookos Bi'kq'* provides for and protects the family. *Náhookos Bi'áád* is also a provider and reflects the ideal characteristics of stability and peace within the home.

This rattle is perforated with the pattern of the stars of the *Náhookos* group constellation, and also includes a representation of the star group *Dilyéhé* (Seed-like Sparkles) in Diné star science. *Dilyéhé* is important in relation to the corn planting season, as these stars disappear from the visible sky in May, signaling the proper time for planting. The rattle demonstrates the intimate relationship Diné ancestors have always had with observance of the night sky, and the harmonious importance the stars have in determining Diné seasonal activities and many other related ceremonial events. In this rattle, we have evidence that the Diné have spent many generations observing and learning from the night sky, which has always watched over all of *Dinétaah*, and has inspired its people since time immemorial.



Seed Pot, 2007

Arland Ben (Diné), b. 1962

Silver, gold

Heard Museum Collection, Gift of Norman L. Sandfield, 4593-18



Seed pot, 2005

Ric Charlie (Diné), b. 1959

Silver

Heard Museum Collection, Gift of Norman L. Sandfield, 4450-88a



Hoghan, 1993

Eric Saganey (Diné)

Linocut print

Heard Museum Collection, Purchased with funds provided by Albion Fenderson, 3444-1



Naayéé' Neizghání (Monster Slayer) pictorial textile, 1920s

Diné artist, not recorded

Handspun wool, natural wool color, aniline dyes

The Valette Collection at the Heard Museum, Gift of Jean-Paul and Rebecca Valette, 4930-55

Naayéé' Neizghání and his twin, *Tóbájishchíní* (Born for Water), are together known as the Warrior Twins. They are the children of *Jóhonaa'éei* (Father Sun) and *Asdzáa Nádleehé* (Changing Woman). Here, *Naayéé' Neizghání* is depicted wearing flint armor and holding weapons of lightning. Both elements of protection were given to the brothers by *Jóhonaa'éei* and were used by the twins to kill off monsters who were ravaging the earth. All were slain except Poverty, Old Age, Ugliness and Disease.

This depiction of *Naayéé' Neizghání* differs from those in sand paintings in that, instead of the usual zigzags or lightning running down the length of his torso, the lightning emanates outward from his shoulders and waist. The triangular symbols on his torso are likely rain clouds and, as one weaver surmised, the orange and white elements could be water vessels—possible ties to his twin brother, *Tóbájishchíní*.



Cradleboard, c. 1960

Diné

Wood, leather, shell

Heard Museum Collection, Na-Sw-Na-Q-40

Asdzáá Nádleehé (Changing Woman) is considered the most highly revered by the Diné of all the Holy People. Before she created the *Nihokáá dine 'é bila 'ashdla 'ii* (five-fingered people of the land), *Asdzáá Nádleehé* was cared for and raised by her parents, *Altsé Hastiin* (First Man) and *Altsé Asdzqá* (First Woman). *Asdzáá Nádleehé* was lovingly swaddled and strapped into a cradleboard made of rainbows, lightning, and sunbeams.

The longitudinal backboard represents Mother Earth and Father Sky on the left-hand and right-hand sides respectively. The steamed wooden canopy arched over where the child's head will rest represents a protective rainbow. Buckskin loops, which are used to lace the child securely in place, run up both sides of the backboards. These represent male zigzag lightning, while the thong that is laced through the buckskin loops from top to bottom represents either sunrays or female straight lightning. The footrest and board attached behind the longitudinal backboards under the arched canopy represent short rainbows.

Here on this cradleboard, a white shell is attached to the protective arch where the baby's head will rest. This white shell is affiliated with *Asdzáá Nádleehé*, who is sometimes also referred to as White Shell Woman. Altogether, when a child is laced into a cradle, she or he is symbolically nestled in the protection of the Diné cosmos.

Diné Wedding Baskets

There are many interpretations of the symbolism represented in Diné ceremonial baskets and trays. Each basket includes references to both earthly and celestial beings, as well as elements of Diné Creation stories. The central point of the basket, and the break line which points from the center to the edge, is a reference to the *sipapu*, the point of emergence from one world into the next. In a ceremony, this direction should point toward the east, and should never face downwards. The light color of the basket is symbolic of the Earth and of the East (following the logic of Diné philosophy), and the black zigzag designs refer to the sacred mountains, to clouds and to lightning and stars. The red color is associated with human life, with blood and the blending of families between the two spouses. (These particular baskets are also referred to as Wedding Trays). Combined, the various elements and colors are metaphoric of light, darkness and the pathways to enlightenment through life's struggles.



Wedding basket, ca. 1900

Diné

Sumac, willow, dyes from mountain mahogany, charcoal and juniper sap
Fred Harvey Fine Arts Collection at the Heard Museum, 247BA



Wedding basket, ca. 1900

Diné

Willow, sumac, dyes from mountain mahogany, charcoal and juniper sap
Fred Harvey Fine Arts Collection at the Heard Museum, 238BA



Wedding basket, ca. 1900

Diné

Willow, dyes from mountain mahogany, charcoal, and juniper sap
Fred Harvey Fine Arts Collection at the Heard Museum, 217BA



Wedding basket, ca. 1900

Diné

Willow, sumac, dyes from mountain mahogany, charcoal, and juniper sap
Fred Harvey Fine Arts Collection at the Heard Museum, 261BA



Wedding basket, ca. 1900

Diné

Sumac, dyes from mountain mahogany, charcoal, and juniper sap
Fred Harvey Fine Arts Collection at the Heard Museum, 231BA



Wedding basket, ca. 1900

Diné

Sumac, dyes from mountain mahogany, charcoal, and juniper sap
Fred Harvey Fine Arts Collection at the Heard Museum, 236BA



Wedding basket, ca. 1900

Diné

Sumac, dyes from mountain mahogany, charcoal and juniper sap
Fred Harvey Fine Arts Collection at the Heard Museum, 252BA



Wedding basket, ca. 1900

Diné

Sumac, dyes from mountain mahogany, charcoal and juniper sap
Fred Harvey Fine Arts Collection at the Heard Museum, 272BA



Késhjée (Navajo Shoe Game), 2008

Jane Hyden (Diné)

Commercial wool, aniline dyes

Heard Museum Collection, 4544-1

Késhjée' (the Shoe Game), in the Creation story, was enacted to determine whether the Earth would have continual day or continual night, and for the animals to compete among each other to see which would be nocturnal (awake at night) and which would be diurnal (awake during the daytime). There are many humorous details in the game, and these also play a role in the Creation story. For example, the crow was one of the last creatures to arrive, being perpetually late. As the original game involved each of the animals decorating themselves, by the time crow arrived there was only one color left to use: black. This is why crow is always black to this day. Another such example is the bear, who arrived sleepy, and put his shoes on the wrong feet. This explains why bears' tracks appear to point outwards, and they walk with an awkward gait.



***Floating Weft*, 2007**

D.Y. Begay (Diné), b. 1953

Churro wool, vegetal dyes

Heard Museum Collection, 4471-1

The tradition of weaving perpetuates components of Diné culture and spirituality. The process of weaving is embedded with universal cultural meanings stemming from the Diné origin stories.

In many Diné families in which weaving is a central focus, the process begins with raising the sheep and harvesting the wool and vegetation required to color the wool. Weaving the design on the warp attached to the loom is only the final and least intensive step in a process steeped with cultural teachings.

“In my culture, the earth, the land, the animals, the sky and the plants are very important elements in our lives. They are always part of our ceremonial process, too. When I go to collect plants, we make special offerings to the plant that we’re going to take. I was taught by my father that the deities will hear you. They are waiting for your voice to ask permission to use a particular plant.”

—D.Y. BEGAY, in *Hear My Voice*, published by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2017



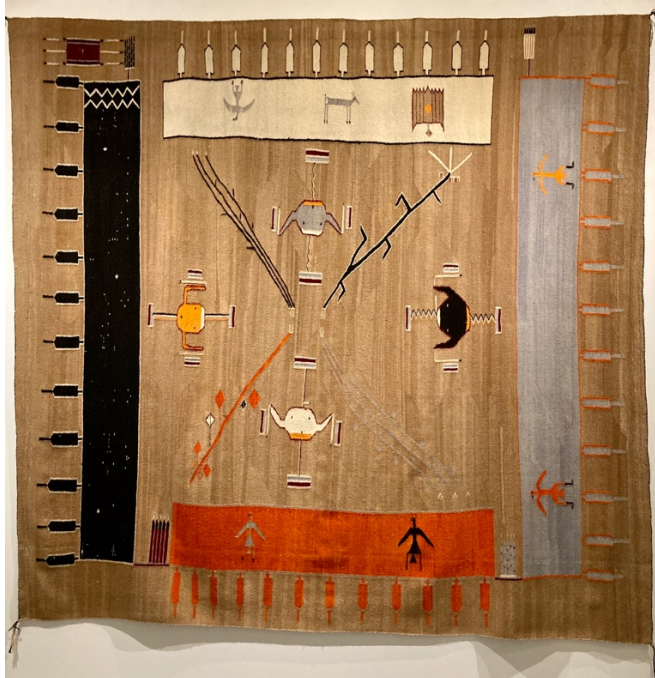
***Horned Toad and Lightning*, 2021**

Kevin Aspaas (Diné), b. 1995

Wool, indigo, rabbitbrush dye

Heard Museum Collection, 5019-1

Horned Toad and Lightning by Kevin Aspaas possibly represents the first time a Diné weaver has woven a textile utilizing the combined techniques of wedge weave and twill. The textile is dyed with rabbitbrush and various shades of indigo. It has a fringed bottom edge, which was created using the wool tufting technique. The grey and blue zigzag stripes symbolize Lightning, and the broken-diamond twill design represents the natural armor worn by Horned Toad. In his artist statement, Aspaas noted, “Navajo stories talk about the fight between Lightning and Horned Toad. Lightning challenged every living being and won each time. Everyone was scared, but Horned Toad was not. Horned Toad challenged Lightning. He was struck four times but was not affected. His flint armor protected him.”



Sandpainting textile, c. 1925

Hastíin Tłah (Diné), 1867–1938

Wool, vegetal and aniline dyes

Heard Museum Collection, Gift of Mr. Read Mullan, Na-Sw-Na-R-328

Hastíin Tłah (Hosteen Klah) was a respected *Hatalii* (medicine man) who wove the first textiles based on sandpainting designs, in order to preserve their important ceremonial knowledge. This textile follows the design of a sandpainting from a portion of the Shooting Way ceremony. The center design features the four sacred plants of the Diné: corn, beans, squash and tobacco. The horned figures watch over the skies of the dawn, mid-day, evening twilight and night.

Ceremonial sandpaintings (or drypaintings, since the colors are carefully produced from various natural pigments, not simply from sand) are traditionally created by a *Hatalii* as part of healing ceremonies. The knowledge of sacred sandpaintings was first taught to medicine men directly by the *Ye'ii Bicheii* (Holy People) in the origin stories of the Diné. The paintings are considered spiritual, living beings to be treated with great respect. The images in the paintings often contain representations of various *Ye'ii Bicheii* who are invoked by the medicine man through the songs in the ceremony, which encourage the *Ye'ii Bicheii* to inhabit the painting as part of the healing process. Once the healing ceremony has taken place, the sandpainting with harmful elements of the illness drawn out of the patient over the course of the ceremony are gathered up and returned to the earth.

The act of creating textiles following the designs of sacred sandpaintings continues to be controversial. To avoid potential spiritual harm in creating profane, permanent images of sandpaintings in textiles, weavers often employ deliberate errors or imperfections in the designs, to respect the sacred nature of the sandpaintings themselves. Often, colors are inverted from their proscribed order, or details of the *Ye'ii* figures are altered or missing.



Tsé Bit'a'í (Shiprock) pictorial textile, 1920s
Artist not recorded (Diné)
Handspun wool, natural wool colors, aniline dyes
Collection of Carol Ann Mackay

The mountain *Tsé Bit'a'í* ("Winged Rock," known in English as "Shiprock") figures prominently in Diné Creation stories, and remains a sacred site to the Diné. In one telling of the story, the Diné were being plagued by a host of monster beings. The sons of *Asdzáq Nádleehé* (Changing Woman), the twin warrior brothers *Tóbájíshchíni* (Born of Water) and *Naayéé' Neizghání* (Monster Slayer), engaged in a series of battles with the various monsters, and destroyed them one by one.

Tsé Nináhálééh (Monster Eagle, literally "it puts people down on a rock," as an eagle does with its prey) were two of those menacing beings that lived on top of *Tsé Bit'a'í*. They would steal men (never women) every day from *Dzil Dah Neezlínii* ("Rock that lay down," known in English as Roof Butte) and take them to the top of *Tsé Bit'a'í*. Monster Slayer managed to trick the two adult birds, destroy them and transform their two young into the first eagle and the first owl.

In still another story, the rock of *Tsé Bit'a'í* is formed when the Diné are far in the north, being threatened by hostile enemies. Their medicine men prayed for deliverance, and in response, the earth rose up like a wave, and carried the Diné to the current location of *Tsé Bit'a'í*, leaving the "winged rock" we see today. In this story, the Diné are delivered to safety in their current lands of the Southwest. These fundamental stories of Creation are among the evidence that the Diné have existed in their homeland, *Diné'tah*, since time immemorial.



Sand painting textile, 1920

Diné

Handspun wool, aniline dyes

Collection of Carol Ann Mackay

This textile with a sandpainting design depicts the hunting animals with their corn packs. The same animals are depicted on both sides of the design, in mirror formation. Reading from the outside toward the center, there are representations of badger, lynx, bobcat, spotted lion and wolf.