

Brian Bibby: "Why is it nice? What makes it nice?"

Lori Smith: "All the materials are precisely same size; the roots, the sticks. The shape—it's so straight, up and down. It's tightly woven. It's built heavy enough to be used, but somebody took the time to do it right. This is what I would call a perfect basket."



Lori Smith (Yurok/Wailaki) 1961–

SOUP BASKET

1995

split spruce root (buff), bear grass (white), willow shoots (foundation)

H. 3 1/8" Diam. 6 1/4"

Collection of the artist

The Yurok mush or soup basket is nearly identical to the cooking basket in materials (conifer root field with bear grass figure) and design (a horizontally arranged pattern on the upper third of the basket), except that the soup basket is smaller in size. A few documented examples suggest that cooking and soup bowls may have been made in sets carrying the same design patterns. Traditionally, this basket would have been used primarily as an individual food bowl, mainly for acorn soup.

Lori Smith, born in Fortuna and raised in the Ferndale area, felt an early interest in traditional Yurok basketry: "I was always curious about baskets because we had two baskets that my great-great grandmother wove. I realized at a very young age no one was doing this work. It was a part of my culture that was lost, really, because nobody in my family knew how to do it. There were no women left in that generation, in my immediate family, that were basketweavers. So it took until I was twenty-seven until I found somebody [Yurok elder Vera Ryerson] to teach me.



"I've always been kind of a perfectionist. Some of my first glimpses of baskets were from Lizzie Hickox [see page 95]. I would look at those types of baskets in the museum, and it's like . . . whoa! I've got a long ways to go. And I didn't realize that not everybody wove that fine. So I just worked and worked and worked. So now I think I'm finally getting to that stage. I cranked out a lot of little miniature baskets and didn't spend time doing a big basket until I perfected my weave. For one thing I didn't want to waste materials. They're too hard to get and too time-consuming.

"So the mush bowl is my first big piece. And it hasn't been shaped either. Some people, after they weave the basket they have to stuff it to make the bottom just so, but that is its original, natural shape. To me it's almost like being a potter, how you're

Lori Smith, 1995. Photograph by Dugan Aguilar.

shaping it with your hands. If I see it flaring out a little bit too much or I want to start going in a little bit more, I just slowly pull that stick in as I tighten it. Then you slowly do it on the next row and the next row and then you get the real gradual tightening."

Lori said she made this old-style basket because she felt too few of them were being made. And the soup basket materials appeal to her: "After weaving with all the materials that I can weave with, including porcupine quills, bear grass and spruce root are my favorites. The color combination and everything else about it, I'm just attracted to it. I've always woven with spruce root. That's what I learned with and that's what I like. It's what I have a feel for. I've tried pine [root] and I don't like it. Spruce really complements the bear grass and vice versa. They just kind of go together, like bread and butter."

The design or "mark" Lori used in this bowl is known as "sturgeon back" among the Yurok. In discussing her choice of this mark for her basket, Lori described the way she plans her weaving: "Sometimes I spend a week figuring out a design, and I have to have all that in my head before I start counting off my sticks.

Once I start a basket, I can hardly put it down. I've caught myself staying up until three-thirty in the morning, especially once that design starts going in. Once I get that design in, it's like I'm connected with it and I can't quit until it's done. It's just that fulfillment of seeing the finished product, I guess." (Lori Smith, 1996)



Artist Unknown (Konkow)
FEASTING BASKET
c. 1900

split shoots (buff), split winter redbud shoots (reddish), willow shoots (foundation)

H. 19½" Diam. 29½"

State of California, Department of Parks and Recreation, Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park

Baskets shaped like traditional cooking baskets but much larger were used at important gatherings and ceremonial occasions to serve acorn soup and possibly other foods. The soup would be cooked in the normal-sized baskets and then poured into these

magnificent feasting vessels. One historical photograph shows that four men and an encircling rope were needed to carry such a feasting basket full of acorn soup.

The Konkow living in the upper Sacramento Valley often had occasion for using these large baskets as their year was filled with a series of ceremonial dances. From early fall through late spring, ceremonial performances occurred about every three to four weeks. Certain women were responsible for preparing and cooking food at such ceremonial events. This involved a great deal of work, but it was also a prestigious position in the community. Generally the wealthier families in the village sponsored the dance and provided much of the food, the labor, and the fine large tureens that held the acorn soup and other foods.

Although many Konkow were forced onto the Round Valley Reservation in Mendocino County by federal troops in 1863 and several Konkow families have remained there, their original homeland of Butte County currently has four federally recognized Konkow communities.

Craig Bates: "This is the basket that Henry Azbill, who was from the village at Chico, thought was made by Polly Slack. He said its design and shape were just like the one she made for her husband's memorial burning. She labored for four years on that basket. When she completed it, they had to take the wall out of her house in order to get it out."

Denise Davis: "The edges on this basket are so amazing. Every once in a while you'll see an old basket like this and it has such a wonderful edge, absolutely perfect. It doesn't skip a beat. That rhythm . . . she's got it. These women had a way. It's almost perfection, with that rhythm they're creating in the form through the design. And so straight, so precise . . . it's exciting. I look at this basket and think, boy, this person had a wonderful life. They were such artists, such talented women.

"And I love to look at these baskets sideways. I always look at the rows and how smooth they are. Some baskets you can see each ridge and they actually bulge out. The ones that are as smooth as this and have that edge, you know, that's really hard. It takes flawless control."



CAPS AND CRADLES



Artist Unknown (Modoc/Klamath)

WOMAN'S CAP

c. 1895

split phragmites stems (buff), dyed tule (black), twisted tule stems (foundation), porcupine quills dyed with wolf moss (yellow), nettle fiber cordage (gray)

H. 4½" Diam. 8"

The Southwest Museum, Los Angeles

The Modoc formerly lived in an area of northeastern California and southern Oregon. After the war of 1872 which took place in the lava beds near Tule Lake, many Modoc were exiled to Indian Territory in Oklahoma. By 1900 some had returned to live in southern Oregon communities with those Modoc who had remained.

Modoc and Klamath caps are quite flexible because their foundations are made from twisted tule rather than the woody shoots used in most other twined ware in California. The dark design motif is carried out with tule that has been dyed in a dark iron-rich mud. Similar caps were made by the Achumawi to the south, the Umatilla and Cayuse of eastern Washington and Oregon, and the Nez Perce in Idaho.

Frank LaPena: "What's really nice here is the use of the quills as a running line. And the addition of color adds a richness to the design."



Artist Unknown (Owens Valley Paiute)

WOMAN'S CAP

c. 1900

split willow shoots (white and black), willow shoots (foundation)

H. 4 3/4" Diam. 8 7/8"

Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley

The Owens Valley is located at the base of the Eastern Sierra. It stretches some eighty miles and includes contemporary Paiute communities in Bishop, Lone Pine, Big Pine, and Independence. This area between Mono Lake and the formerly great inland body of water, Owens Lake, was once described as an "amply watered glen," fed by runoff from the Sierra. The Owens River traverses the length of the valley and functions much like an aorta, serving as the central waterway that pumps life into an otherwise arid environment. Traditionally, the Owens Valley Paiute practiced artificial irrigation by forcing water to flood specific areas in order to create a more advantageous environment for certain bulbs and tubers that were among their important food crops.

The Owens Valley Paiute utilized more than forty plants for food. Even with their abundant water resources, they had to be highly migratory in order to successfully exploit seasonal food and other resources that occurred in different micro-environments, often many miles apart. This kind of movement may have favored the development of basketry, since light and sturdy baskets have quite an advantage over other alternatives, such as pottery or metalware.

Among the most important food crops gathered in this migratory cycle were the nuts of the piñon pine. In the fall of the year the Paiute would set up camps in the hill regions bordering the Owens Valley. Groups might stay for several weeks to harvest the sticky pine cones, extract the nuts, and perhaps parch the meats for winter storage.

Craig Bates: "There were a great number of these caps collected around 1900, but they became much less common after that. One thing I've noticed about several of the ones I've looked at from Owens Valley is that the start, the first row of twining, will sometimes be done with twisted sinew cordage."

Judith Polanich: "This basket is made with 'winter-peeled' willow, that is, willow peeled in the winter when the dark underskin adheres and doesn't come off. The pattern is made by turning the material over, with the dark part out for the dark, and the light side of the strand out for the white. This has been overpainted, but just in the patterned band; they make the dark side darker by painting with black and the white whiter by painting with white, which is how they heighten the contrast."

Craig Bates: "There's an inherent problem with doing diagonal twining that way. The rounded side that has the thin bark stuck on it is covering the cambium layer, or the sapwood, so that doesn't pick up dirt. That's why when you trim the width of the sewing strands on a basket, you always trim from the back to make it smooth, because that's the rougher, split side. But when you turn that and have the flat, split face turning out, that's the side that picks up dirt."

Judith Polanich: "So if you really want to do it right and what you want to do is to heighten the contrast to make the pattern bolder, paint is a good solution. In Owens Valley they used white clay, and a black dye made from a couple of different recipes."

Craig Bates: "Boiled ephedra and yellow ochre are another recipe for staining the inner bark."

Judith Polanich: "If you're going to carry weight on your back with a tumpline, you don't want it chafing your forehead. Throughout California, caps are worn to prevent that. That's part of the purpose they serve in Owens Valley, but the Paiute caps are bigger than the ones in northern California. They fit over the head kind of like a rain hat. In some field notes, I've found discussions of women wrapping their hair up and putting it on top of their heads underneath these hats. Apparently the women wore these caps for gathering piñon nuts and that hairdo prevented the piñon pitch from getting in their hair. So that might explain the broader hat: protection from the sun and piñon pitch as well as from chafing."

Craig Bates: "This style of cap represents the finest example of Paiute twining ever produced. It's so thin-walled."



Amy Smoker (Yurok) 1897–1989
WOMAN'S CEREMONIAL CAP
 c. 1948

willow root (buff), bear grass (white), woodwardia fern stem dyed with alder bark (rust), maidenhair fern stem (black),
 porcupine quill dyed with staghorn lichen (yellow), willow shoots (foundation),
 pileated woodpecker scalps, dentalia shell, abalone shell

H. 3 ½" Diam. 7 ¾"

Collection of Vivien Hailstone

Amy Smoker was born in Kepel, an ancient Yurok village that was site of a famous Yurok fish dam and the “first salmon” rites. As a weaver she was respected throughout the Klamath River region. Her repertoire included highly ornamental tobacco baskets, miniatures, gift baskets, baby cradles, fruit baskets, and caps. Mrs. Smoker said that she preferred “to do the fine work rather than the open-work baskets,” (Kelsey, 1975) and her caps reveal her skill in this style. Their shape, the layout of the motifs, and her excellent technique distinguish her caps as among the finest of her day.

Ceremonial caps such as this one are usually used by young women who have yet to bear children. The caps—often lavishly ornamented with the rarest and most valuable gifts of nature such as woodpecker scalps and dentalia shells—enhance the stunning display of the ceremonial dances, during which some two dozen girls might parade into the rectangular, semisubterranean dance pit, interlock arms with male dancers, and gracefully bob up and down on the balls of their feet in rhythm with the singing.

Judith Polanich: “With the woodpecker scalps and the dentalia shells, this looks very special.”

Vivien Hailstone: “I decorated it myself. This is how you decorate the hats for the ceremony (Brush Dance). When you go to the dances, you see that they decorate the hats used in ceremonies now.”

Brian Tripp: "This is one of those baskets where the design is perfect. It just sparkles. The black just kind of bounces around with that black ring. Of course, with all the design this cap's got on it, all the embellishment, you can't imagine this cap without all that now."

Vivien Hailstone: "It's made correctly. This is the correct way to make a hat."

Kathy Wallace: "There are three distinct areas in making a cap: there's the top, there's the part that comes down the side, and there's the rim. It's made to fit the measurements of the person who is going to wear the cap. It's measured from the tip of her finger to the first knuckle, that's the first circle. Then from the tip of the finger to the bottom knuckle, that's where the rim starts; and then the thumbnail width (for the rim design area). To find out if it's the right size you have the person who's going to wear the cap open her hand inside it: if she can touch [the edges], it's the right size. I'm told you make caps a little bit bigger now because of curly hair. The cap isn't tried on until it's all finished, so that's how the weaver measures it."

"So there are three distinct bands that you won't find on any other baskets, you only find them on caps. Caps have the design on the top, not like a bowl, which would be plain on the bottom with the design starting on the side after the bowl turns upward. And these caps are for dances, so you've got to realize that our dance pits are subterranean, and the people watching the dance look down. That's why you want that top decorated, because you look down on the girls dancing. You can look down and see the tops of their caps."



Amy Smoker, c. 1980. Courtesy of Clarke Memorial Museum.



Ada Charles (Yurok) 1909–
WOMAN'S CAP
 c. 1965

willow root (interior weft), bear grass (white), maidenhair fern stem (black), willow shoots (foundation)

H. 3 ½" Diam. 7"

Collection of Herb and Peggy Puffer

Ada Charles, who now lives in Klamath, California, was born in the historic Yurok town of Wokel on the lower Klamath River. She began making baskets at age five under the tutelage of her mother. She is adept at making numerous types of traditional Yurok baskets, including cooking, wood-gathering, and storage baskets, as well as innovative pieces, such as woven hair-ties, table mats, earrings, and medallion necklaces. When asked about her basketmaking, Mrs. Charles once said, "I make baskets for pleasure and also I make baskets to use around the house. I make a baby basket each time a grandchild is born. I like to make baskets. Sometimes when I go someplace, I can hardly wait to get home so I can get started making baskets again." (Kelsey, 1975) Among the many baskets Mrs. Charles has made are scores of caps, primarily woven for native people.

Caps have a special character in Yurok society, as was noted by ethnographer Lila M. O'Neale: "A cap represents even today a choice possession, and a weaver's ability to make a good one will give her a widespread reputation as an expert. . . . Caps have always had a sale value among the Indians themselves, above that of any other type of basket. Into them, as everybody knew, went the most carefully selected materials and the best workmanship." (O'Neale, 1932:43)

Even a relatively small basket such as this cap requires the selection and preparation of an astonishing amount of material. The finished materials used in this one piece include:

- split willow root, 225 linear feet
- bear grass, 118 linear feet
- maidenhair fern, 82 linear feet
- willow sticks, 81 linear feet.

Laid end to end, this material would cover one and two-thirds football fields, or be about the height of a forty-story building. It is not simply the materials, but the weaving skills that are admired in a fine cap, as O'Neale notes: "Younger women bought [caps]

from older weavers with reputations for fine work. . . ." Indeed, this cap had been bought around 1965 by Karuk basketmaker Florence Harry for her own use.

Kathy Wallace: "[I used to hear that] if you make a cap that has lots of holes and is too loose, your children will be stupid, because all their brains will fall through the holes.

"Caps like this one would really show up. The ceremonial dances are often viewed at night, from a distance; the bold black-and-white design on this cap would make it stand out, even at a distance, even in the dark."



Artist Unknown (Kawaiisu)

WOMAN'S CAP

c. 1900

split willow shoots (white), Joshua tree root (red), split devil's claw (black), deer grass (foundation)

H. 4 1/2" Diam. 7 1/2"

The Field Museum of Natural History

In addition to the wide distribution of twined basketry caps in northern California, Oregon, and the Great Basin, traditions of coiled caps existed in much of the south-central portion of the state, for example, among the Kawaiisu. The Kawaiisu homeland is located at the southern end of the Sierra Nevada range, below the Kern River drainage; it borders the Tehachapi mountains on the west and the Mojave Desert to the south and east. The environment is semi-arid, and vegetation can be sparse. Acorns from seven varieties of oaks were their major food resource. The Kawaiisu made the same array of baskets for collecting and processing foods as most other native peoples in California. That baskets were an important and valuable aspect of Kawaiisu culture is indicated by the first recorded meeting between the group and Europeans, in May of 1776, when Francisco Garces came upon a village and noted in his diary, "There were none but women and children who made us presents of meat, seeds and even of two baskets to take along with us." (Coues, 1900, 1:304-305)

Kawaiisu caps were worn only by women and sometimes doubled as personal food bowls. (Zigmond, 1978:205) Design layout and placement ideas for Kawaiisu caps appear to include two definite borders, often articulated by a single row of black at the crest where the basket begins to turn downward, and again a few rows from the selvage. The last two or three rows of the rim often include groups of black "ticking" as a finish design. The motif found in the main body of the present example is known to the Kawaiisu as, *ayataniit 'kad'*, referring to "butterfly." (Zigmond, 1978:207) This example was collected by Mrs. William Tevis from a weaver living near Caliente Creek in Kern County near the turn of the century.

Judith Polanich: "Hats are so interesting. I mean, the idea of hats. Look at this one, perfect, fine, colorful, beautifully thought out and executed. And all the literature says that women wore hats for protection from the sun, so you think, Aha, this is a practical art. But in other areas, like parts of southern California, their hats were not even decorated, just twined open-work juncus bowls. They must have worked as practical hats, but they're not like these. And whole vast regions of California with wonderful basketmakers, like the Pomo, didn't even bother with hats. Just think what a Pomo dress hat would have been like!

"If you go back to the idea of hat-making as a 'practical art', you have to remember that it's usually the fancy version that got saved. When women weave a dress hat, it's usually the finest weaving of all: tiny stitches, perfect materials, meticulous preparation, elegant layout, complex design, and virtuoso work. It goes far beyond what is required to be practical, far more 'art' than 'practical art'. So for every work hat, there's probably a hundred dress caps, because everybody saved the fancy ones, not the work ones. And those fancy ones aren't anything but art."

Frank LaPena: "The idea of having the running squares is really neat. The idea of the variation of the square design element, moving those shapes through that piece. I think it's interesting that there are four square elements and four diagonal patterns. I like that kind of abstract form: squares and rectangles. A square, that's not organic, but then the color and tone of the materials, the tan, red, and black: . . . that makes it organic."



Ulysses Goode (Northfork Mono) 1927–

CRADLE BASKET

1984

sourberry shoots (cradle foundation), split winter redbud shoots (reddish), split sedge root (buff), deer brush shoots (hood), cowry shells, glass beads, yarn

H. 11 ½" L. 30 ¾" W. 14 ½" to 8"

Collection of Ron W. Goode and Myra Kirk-Goode

When he was a child, Uly saw his elder relatives making baskets every day. He showed an interest in their basketry at an early age and was initially given small basket "starts" to work on. Uly later learned that there were several men who had made basketry in the old days. Uly continues to collect and weave, living on his family property outside of Northfork in Madera County.



Ulysses Goode, undated. Courtesy of Ron Goode.

Uly is adept at making Western Mono style winnowing, burden, and coiled baskets, as well as cradles. When asked what he liked best about basketmaking Uly said: "Putting the basket together. It's the culmination of all your work. You see these sticks and stuff out there in the hills and then you've put this basket together." His reputation as a fine weaver may be attributable to the way he approaches the art. "With a basket I don't say, 'That's good enough'. The basket comes out right because I make it that way. I take pride in what I do."

Uly has made over four hundred cradles in the past twenty years. Uly and his late wife often worked on cradles together, with her making the back board and him making the hood. Uly draws from one of the four traditional Western Mono cradle patterns that he knows. The Western Mono weavers use different designs for girls and boys. The designs are executed in the dark winter redbud, on the back board and on the hood. For boys there is the diagonal line and the "arrow" design; for girls, a vertical zigzag and a crossing pattern. In addition to full-sized cradles like this one, Western Mono weavers sometimes make "receiving" cradles; intended for a newborn baby, the receiving cradle is somewhat smaller and usually does not contain sex-specific designs. The majority of Mr. Goode's cradles are still used within the native community.

Judith Polanich: "This basket is really quite complicated. It's actually three baskets in one: the back, the arch, and the hood

are all made separately. It needs two different warp materials, two weft materials, and three different weaves. Uly is a great weaver and really articulate about weaving and what makes a good basket. He can explain what is critical to achieving the proper shape and how it's necessary for the function of the basket. I must have made my baby cradle three times; when the work wasn't just right, Uly would just wait until I realized that I had to undo it, and then show me again. He's very skilled at weaving all the Western Mono baskets.

Craig Bates: "This cradle couldn't have been made before 1978 or so. Initially it looks like it's completely an old-style cradle, but there are several important differences. The hood is covered with design, compared to older cradles. Those additional bands of redbud chevrons are a new idea for cradle hoods that I didn't see happening until at least the end of the 1970s. I don't remember them before then.

"Also, most of the time those bead and shell pendants are hung from the center of the bow, the center of the main chevron design on the hood. Until recently I'd never seen them hung from the bottom like that. And the use of cowry shells is a totally new, innovative thing. The older cradles tend to have fewer pendants and they're in groups of four, five, or six pendants together. So it's a good example of how this weaver has kept a traditional form for a cradle, but has modified it to make it distinctly his own."



**CEREMONIAL
AND GIFT BASKETS**



Artist Unknown (Yurok)
JUMP DANCE BASKET
 c. 1920

split conifer root (interior weft), bear grass (white), maidenhair fern stem (black), willow shoots (foundation), buckskin, paint, eagle plume
 L. 23 1/2" W. 5" x 7 1/2"
 The Southwest Museum, Los Angeles

Every autumn the Yurok and their Karuk and Hupa neighbors hold a Jump Dance—a ten-day ceremony with a focus on “fixing” the world. This grand ceremony provides a stunning display of regalia, an integral part of which is this cylindrically shaped basket. Each male dancer holds such a basket in one hand and at certain moments of the dance, with a sweeping motion across the body, raises the basket skyward.

The Jump Dance basket is one of the more unusual examples of basketry in California; unlike nearly all other examples of twining, it is not made in a radial progression. Instead it is a rectangular woven mat that is rolled into a cylindrical shape when done. The ends are covered over with buckskin, and an open slit is formed where the mat meets, held in form by two wooden rods that are attached to each edge of the rolled mat by buckskin that has been sewn to incorporate basket and rod. The basket is made by women, but the geometric painting adorning the buckskin and the attachment of feathers is done by men.

Some say the basket’s shape is significant, resembling as it does the elkhorn “purses” that have traditionally been used to hold items of wealth, such as dentalia shells, which are evidence of good luck and good standing with Spirit Beings known in Yurok as *woge*.



Brian Tripp: “A lot of times there are some bands that split the center of the design. I’ve heard this design called “crab claw.” This is one of the few baskets that’s totally ceremonial. The women made them, but the men used them. This painting on the end would have been done by a man.

Denise Davis: “The painting really complements the basket’s form as a sculpture.”

Yurok Jump Dance, c. 1900. Photograph by W. Ericson. Courtesy State of California, Department of Parks and Recreation.



Artist Unknown (Pomo)

GIFT BASKET

c. 1880

split sedge root (buff), split and dyed bulrush root (black), willow shoots (foundation), acorn woodpecker crest feathers, valley quail topknots, clamshell disc beads, glass beads, cotton thread

H. 5 1/4" Diam. 7 3/4" x 9"

The Haggin Museum

Coiled, oval-shaped “canoe” baskets have sometimes been described as being made for “doctors,” the shape of the basket being appropriate for storing or carrying their various rattles, medicines, and other paraphernalia. Examples range in size from baskets more than four feet long to miniatures of less than two inches.

The decorations on this basket are extraordinary. The brilliant scarlet crest feathers of the acorn woodpecker were nearly always reserved for a highly valued ceremonial or gift basket such as this. The small white glass trade beads must also have been valuable. These beads became available to the Pomo and other native peoples of northern California in the early nineteenth century. Basket-weavers soon began to use them as delicate highlights within dark design areas, sewing them onto the basket with cotton thread rather than weaving them into the foundation.

Disc beads were made from shells of the Washington clam, which was obtained on the coast. Typically, the men made these beads, breaking the shells into pieces, roughing them into a rounded form, and then drilling them, using a hand drill spun between the palms (later the pump drill). A group of these drilled discs was strung on wire grass or on slender shoot material and then rolled on a smooth, flat stone until all the beads were evenly rounded and of the same diameter. This was Pomo money, here attached to the rim of the basket and further ornamented with quail topknot feathers.

Craig Bates: “Sherrie, what do you think about the size of these boat-shaped baskets. Do they get bigger as time goes on?”

Sherrie Smith-Ferri: “There seem to be some really huge ones, like four or five feet long. One is pictured with a child sitting inside it, looking just like a real canoe. There seems, for some reason, to have been a big production of them around 1905. You don’t see the huge boat baskets much after that, maybe because they were too much work. I’ve heard people say that the larger ones are more traditional because you could fit the doctoring stuff in them. Another thing I’ve heard is that when you add the quail plumes at the rim of the basket, where they’re sewn under the clamshell disc beads, you always have four—four groupings around the rim. That’s the right number to use.”



Artist Unknown (Pomo)

GIFT BASKET

c. 1910

split sedge root (buff), dyed bulrush root (black), willow shoots (foundation), acorn woodpecker crest feathers (red), valley quail topknots, clamshell disc beads

H. 6" Diam. 10 7/8"

State of California, Department of Parks and Recreation

Among the Pomo, baskets of exceptionally fine weave that incorporated materials of great value (woodpecker crest feathers, clamshell money) became, themselves, symbols of wealth. They had roles in the exchanges of property that marked certain important personal and community events, such as young women's coming of age ceremonies, weddings, or any situation for which a valuable gift might be appropriate or a payment required. By the turn of the century, these Pomo "jewel baskets" were in great demand among non-Indian collectors who had no real use for traditional utilitarian baskets and acquired these ornamental baskets as objects of art. Considering the relatively short time span most of these baskets were collected (c. 1890–1915), they were produced in remarkable numbers. This example was collected from the Eastern Pomo at Kelseyville (Lake County) by C.P. Wilcomb.

Frank Tuttle: "What strikes me about this basket is its wideness."

Sherrie Smith-Ferri: "It doesn't really come in very much at the top."

Frank Tuttle: "Right. It just tips up very subtly. And for me, that wideness is based on the fact that the dark pattern is so even from top to bottom. It makes it flat, like wallpaper. The design element is not manipulated with a lot of contrast, like from small to medium to large, and so it adds to its boldness. From top to bottom there seems to be an almost straight-sided effect. And all those little woodpecker tufts in there [are] only on the light sides."

Sherrie Smith-Ferri: "It's a very definite way of making what you think of as the relief part of the pattern really come alive with color. [There is a] sculptural quality to the feathers projecting out of the face of the basket."

Frank Tuttle: "Yeah, because that's what it would be. It would be a slight velvet, a velour feeling. Because there's the solid surface of the basket, and then there's an airy, light-catching device, with all the little feathers sticking out. So you get hints of red triangles and black triangles, with that little step pattern going up and down, that crisscrossing."

Sherrie Smith-Ferri: "And then that really bright light rim of the clamshell beads, which really helps finish it. With the black and the white and the red all playing off each other."

Frank Tuttle: "And those little diagonal tufts going into the surface, they're somewhat perpendicular to the surface. The black sits on the surface and then the clamshells sit at the top and are so regular. It does just hold it right off."

Sherrie Smith-Ferri: "It really is nice to know what these baskets were supposed to look like. I see a lot of the old baskets that have the spot feathering, and the red feathers have been eaten away. You only see tiny holes where they used to be. It removes a whole dimension from the basket. It makes a difference when they're gone. The weaver was really working with them as a design element. They're not just an addition that was thrown on at the end, they were part of the whole conception and execution from beginning to end."

Frank Tuttle: "Yeah, she was very conscious of the material and how she manipulated it. And not only are the materials manipulated in such a way as to create such a unique and special object, but then the object demands something of its handlers, to hold it—because it would be fuzzy, there'd be a fuzziness to it. Knowing how careful one has to be with them, that adds another dimension to these baskets. A specialness, a uniqueness just goes along with them. It's important to know that the basic idea of baskets can go all the way from everyday, work-a-day knockabout, to something that sits and asks to be viewed."

Sherrie Smith-Ferri: "It's really sort of an heirloom piece."



Artist Unknown (Pomo)

GIFT BASKET

c. 1900

split sedge root (buff), willow shoots (foundation), acorn woodpecker crest feathers (red), western bluebird crest feathers (blue), mallard crest and neck feathers (green), valley quail topknots, clamshell disc beads, abalone shell

H. 1 1/8" Diam. 9"

The Field Museum of Natural History

Fully feathered baskets were made in at least two general forms: closed forms, which are globular bowl-shaped baskets, often using mallard neck feathers for the color field; and open forms, which are generally larger, flaring bowl or tray-shaped baskets, often using valuable woodpecker crest feathers as the main color field. There are special techniques for working with feathers, especially the crest feathers of the acorn woodpecker, which are very small, only about three-eighths of an inch in length. The weaver spins two or three of these tiny tufts between her thumb and forefinger to compact the quill ends together. She then places the tufts

under the newest sewing stand of the basket, just before it is cinched tight. The weaver has to be careful of the angle of the tuft so that when it is cinched, its direction doesn't change. Often the weaver must do a significant amount of adjusting to make sure that all the tufts are lying at the correct angle and that the camber of the feathers is aligned. There is some evidence to suggest that in earlier times these display baskets were suspended from the ceiling area of Pomoan houses by the clamshell-laden string attached to the rim.

This basket was collected by Carl Purdy at Upper Lake. It was eventually purchased by Marshall Field Company department store in Chicago in 1904.

Craig Bates: "This is remarkable. We're talking about massive numbers of little heads on this basket. We're probably seeing two hundred bird heads. And not just acorn woodpecker heads, but bluebird heads, because with the western bluebird you have to use the head feathers to get the blue color. I think that's an important thing for us to comment on, how native arts have had to change because of the changing ecosystem in California. Largely it is the degradation of habitat for these birds that has caused their decrease in numbers."

Frank Tuttle: "It's just gorgeous. I'd like to be able to see it move, with all those pendants moving. The black would start moving when it swirls, and the pattern. Rather than being static, everything would move. Then it's doing what it's supposed to do, which is to remind us that we're in constant motion. It's not static and we're not outside of it. We're a part of it, and that's what it's doing . . . it's reminding us that we're part of a larger context."

Sherrie Smith-Ferri: "These really highly decorated, ornamented feather baskets are traditionally made by women, among the Pomo, and so they're seen as women's creations. But truthfully, all those feathers are usually gotten by the men, and the clamshell disc beads are usually made by the men. And that's a lot of work. So the basket is really a collaboration."



Mabel McKay (Pomo/Patwin) 1907–1993

GIFT BASKET

c. 1965

split sedge root (buff), willow shoots (foundation), acorn woodpecker crest (red) and chin (yellow) feathers, mallard crest and neck feathers (green), valley quail topknot, clamshell disc beads, abalone shell

H. 1 1/2" Diam. 3 7/8"

Collection of Marshall McKay

Mabel Boone McKay was a sickly child who spent most of her childhood in the company of her maternal Patwin grandmother, Sarah Taylor. She recalled watching her grandmother weave, but not necessarily being taught to weave herself. By the age of twelve, Mabel had already experienced a number of powerful dreams that eventually would direct her to a life of traditional healing



Mabel McKay, 1973. Photograph by Spence Billington. Courtesy of Pacific Western Traders.

or “doctoring.” She attributed her knowledge of weaving to her dreams. The spirit had provided the direction in Mabel’s life and the inspiration for her basketmaking career.

Mabel was well known throughout California for her doctoring, knowledge of Pomo and Patwin traditions, fluency in the Hill Patwin language, and for her impeccable basketry. She held classes for aspiring weavers over several years. Hundreds of native and non-native people received their introduction into traditional native weaving from Mabel. For young people searching for knowledge and skills associated with the old culture, Mabel was an ever-so-important bridge. She was often requested to speak about native tradition and about her weaving at universities throughout the state.

Mabel once spoke about her feather-basketweaving tradition: “I get most of my enjoyment working with the feathers. The bird is very sacred to us. Also, the traditional weavers, when they weave their baskets, when they kill their own birds, they eat the birds. They do not let it spoil. Feather-basketweaving, we do not eat. We work couple of hours first thing in the morning. And as you get hungry, you push it to side. And when you eat, you don’t touch it no more till next day.” (Mabel McKay, 1974, videotaped by Dorothy Hill)

Frank LaPena: “I am always impressed by the restrictions Mabel McKay worked under. That is why I value her work: her patience and knowing there is a story to each basket.”

Judith Polanich: “Mabel’s feather baskets were very special to her. They’re the one thing she refused to teach her students.”

Craig Bates: “I remember that Mabel took this basket around with her to various demonstrations. The feather baskets that Mabel made were really in her own style. Particularly, her use of a single clamshell disc bead and abalone shell pendant in combination. That is something you don’t see in older examples, which generally had a collar of clamshell disc beads at the rim just above a ruff of quail topknots. When these earlier baskets have abalone shell pendants, they are suspended by an inch or more of small glass beads, or by three or more clamshell disc beads laid side-to-side. From a survey of extant baskets in museum and private collections, it appears that the smaller-size baskets more commonly lacked the pendants. Mabel’s basket differs from the earlier feathered baskets in several ways. Her abalone pendants are suspended by only one clamshell disc bead, her baskets lack the requisite collar of clamshell disc beads, and they have two rows of offset, widely spaced quail topknots, again something I’ve never seen in earlier baskets.

“These unique attributes of Mabel’s baskets can probably be explained in several ways. Mabel always said that ‘the Spirit’ told her how to make baskets, so this basket may well be representative of specific instructions Mabel received. In another way, the basket can be viewed as uniquely Mabel, with her own aesthetic sense guiding its creation. The lack of a full collar of clamshell beads, three beads on the abalone pendants, and a full ruff of quail topknots may also be evidence of how clamshell disc beads were no longer readily available. I think it’s important to remember that, even though Mabel was very much steeped in tradition, she was also quite an individual. And there really wasn’t a circle of women around her to criticize a divergence from traditional norms in the basketry of her community like there might have been a generation or two earlier.

“And another interesting thing: if Mabel made this basket in the late 1960s, then this basket used a heck of a lot of acorn woodpecker scalps in its creation. As we all know, habitat degradation—primarily the loss of oak woodlands to development

throughout central California—has resulted in a marked decrease in acorn woodpecker populations. In earlier larger feathered baskets, four or five hundred scalps would be necessary. By the 1960s it was difficult to get even forty or fifty such scalps. By then, acquisition of woodpecker feathers was illegal. Protection of the birds by federal and state laws, and the ever-present vigilance of game wardens, agents, and bird-watchers, made acquiring the feathers difficult at best. I recall that many of Mabel's friends brought her birds they found run over by automobiles. But I do wonder just how long it took Mabel to save up the forty or fifty scalps needed for this basket."



Mabel McKay (Pomo/Patwin) 1907–1993

BEADED BASKET

c. 1960

split sedge root (buff), split and dyed bulrush root (black), willow shoots (foundation), glass beads

H. 4 3/8" Diam. 9 3/8"

State of California, Department of Parks and Recreation

Mabel McKay's basketry was among the most sought-after Native American art in the country. When she died, there was a long list of names in the little book containing her basket waiting list. Fortunately she passed on some of her knowledge.

Here she speaks about dying the bulrush roots used in this basket: "Our black roots is the bulrush. This is a dull brown before it's dyed. Many years ago, when they dyed this bulrush, they bury it in the black mud around the creek where the black mud was. But since we don't own the land or have rights of [access], we cannot do it that way no more. So we have to do it the modern way now. So I use just a plain old pan. And I use a little acorn in it, I put some tea leaves, and I put a little dirt, and a little nail so it will rust in the water. It will take about five days. And if you overdo it, it will chip too. You got to test it just right for it to stay on." (Mabel McKay, 1974, videotaped by Dorothy Hill)

Craig Bates: "I think this is just remarkably Mabel. Nobody else in the world made baskets like this but Mabel. It's really interesting I think. Here's this woman who became a really important traditional figure later, as she got older, but in making this

basket, she's made a total change, a break with tradition. Whether it was something that she dreamed or whether it was something she just decided to do, we don't know. She felt comfortable enough to do this, with these big loops of beads. It's a pretty big break for a Pomo or Patwin person before the war or even during the war. And to keep the two designs going on at the same time, one in the sedge and bulrush and another in beads, is a new idea too. Doing this kind of thing is not too common."

Judith Polanich: "But for Mabel, this makes sense. This sort of departure is very much the way she was. I was a student of hers for eight years, and I'll never forget the night she gave us a speech about 'tradition.' Mabel's view of tradition was that you dreamed the pattern. For her, tradition didn't mean that you were doing it the same way as the older generation or that you had been 'taught' by a traditional weaver."



Artist Unknown (Tubatulabal)

GIFT BASKET

c. 1905

split sedge root (buff), split devil's claw (black), dyed bracken root, (black), split and dyed bulrush root (black),
split sumac shoots (white), deer grass stalks (foundation), valley quail topknots

H. 9 1/4" Diam. 13 1/2"

Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University

Very little is known about Tubatulabal weaving traditions. Among their coiled forms is the "bottleneck," a shape of basket also made by the Western Mono, Yokuts, Kawaiisu, and Panamint Shoshone. There is some question as to its aboriginal use, but it may have been a special basket made for gift or payment or to hold valuable articles. The design motif in this basket has a fairly wide distribution in the southern Sierra and into the Death Valley region. The Western Mono sometimes refer to this pattern as a "butterfly"

motif; however, their version of the design includes only two of the small triangular projections rather than four. The vertical marks, or "ticking," on the rim are a common treatment for the rim of a Tubatulabal bottleneck basket.

Craig Bates: "On Tubatulabal baskets the butterfly designs are set off with two stitches of split shoots [white] on either side of the dark triangular motifs, instead of with sedge."

Bruce Bernstein: "This piece is so marvelous because she's chosen to highlight the design with sumac (white) which makes the bracken (black) jump out. This is such a unique use of split shoot material in California. We tend to call this design "flight of the butterfly," which may or may not be accurate, but when you are thinking about that name for this design and you look at the way she's given it dimension—that flight line—it could very well be that. It's a pretty incredible piece. You also see that she was so careful to choose her materials to get the even color. I think good weavers make it look easy."

Brian Bibby: "Are you talking about the sedge root?"

Bruce Bernstein: "All of it. All of it is so even toned. It's the grading of material, it's the tending of the places where she went to harvest those roots and sticks. The close attention she paid to those places. It's a well-tended garden. It's clear that the result of her work in harvesting and preparing her materials is that the basket has such an evenness of the hue and tone. The weaver has created a technical masterpiece, a thing of beauty."



Artist Unknown (Shoshone)
TREASURE BASKET
c. 1900

split willow shoots (buff), split devil's claw (black), porcupine quills (white)

H. 5" Diam. 6 3/4"

State of California, Department of Parks and Recreation

Among the Shoshone inhabiting the Panamint Range and Death Valley region of California, this form of basket may once have been used in association with cremations and/or funerals. By 1900, however, treasure baskets were largely made for sale to collectors. In this example, the weaver has incorporated the flexible white quill from the porcupine to create a brilliant contrast with the dark devil's claw sewing elements.

The design follows the form of this bottleneck basket. Each of the five evenly spaced vertical designs gradually grows in width as the diameter of the basket reaches its widest point at the shoulder; each design then narrows as the shape quickly recedes to its small opening at the neck. The border or selvage receives a different design treatment. This subtle treatment of the vertical design bands complements and emphasizes the elegant shape of the piece.

Shoshone weavers used several weaving tools. Before metal awls were available, the Panamint Shoshone used the spikes of cottontop cactus (Fowler and Dawson, 1986:720). Later Shoshone weavers punched small holes in a tin can lid and drew strands of willow or devil's claw through them to assure even-sized and especially fine sewing elements in their basketry.

Bruce Bernstein: "The first thing that draws me to this piece is its beauty, and just how carefully and meticulously it is constructed. The technical expertise needed to make this piece is a high level. The choice of materials, the choice of how well they fit together, the preparation of those materials are all flawless. The stitching is also flawless. The weaver makes a very unusual use of the quill. You sometimes find quills in baskets but they're generally little spots of color. For this weaver to choose to use quill exclusively as she would use any other sewing strand is a pretty remarkable thing—the basket stands out because of that. This is quite likely porcupine quill, however, it could also be domestic leghorn chicken quill. And this is one of those things that make baskets wonderful, that the materials are transformed by the weavers in such a way that they become difficult to identify.

"This bottleneck form, I believe, is indigenous. The evidence suggests it was used as a gift or treasure basket. A gift or treasure basket could be used at a [funeral] burning, as an offering. You also give that same kind of gift basket for payment to a doctor, or as a gift at a wedding, or to mark a person's birth. It's a payment. What we don't know is whether the shape and size of a bottleneck signifies something as well.

"The designs on much of Panamint Shoshone coiled works are often set vertically. That's because people at that particular time didn't live with furniture, but lived looking down into the containers on the ground. That's the way they saw the containers, so they wove them in such a manner to provide the best visual impact from that particular vantage point."



CONTINUITY AND CHANGE



Mrs. Graham (Chukchansi) c. 1870–c. 1930

BASKET

c. 1905

split sedge root (buff), dyed bracken root (black),
common flicker quills (pink), deer grass stalks (foundation)
H. 6 ½" Diam. 12"

Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution

The identity of “Mrs. Graham,” to whom this basket is attributed, is unclear. However, it is interesting to note that the 1910 U.S. census report included a Mary Graham and listed her occupation as “basketmaker.” She was Chukchansi, a group of foothill people who are linguistically, culturally, and historically related to the many distinct communities that are often grouped under the generalized term “Yokuts.” Historically, Yokuts people occupied most of the southern San Joaquin Valley and many of the adjacent eastern foothills.

In addition to making coiled works such as this, the Chukchansi made a number of twined wares used primarily for gathering and processing foods. An unusual feature of this basket is the use of red-shafted flicker quills as weft elements.

Craig Bates: “This has to be one of the most beautiful Chukchansi Yokuts baskets in existence. The striking contrast of the black bracken root with the salmon-orange of the flicker quills is unique in collections of Yokuts or any other basketry.

“While Chukchansi women have told me about people doing this sort of thing long ago, it was always, apparently, somewhat of an unusual practice. The feather quills are somewhat slick and are not an easy material to weave in a coiled basket. The basket is just marvelous.”



Fannie Brown (Wintu) c. 1867–c. 1940

STORAGE BASKET

c. 1905

split conifer root (buff), bear grass (white), woodwardia fern stem dyed with alder bark (rust), maidenhair fern stem (black), willow shoots? (foundation)
H. 5 1/2" Diam. 7"

The Oakland Museum of California



Fannie Brown lived in the upper Sacramento River drainage area of Shasta County. She was a noted shaman among her people and had a considerable reputation. Many considered her a dangerous person, with the ability to “poison.” A contemporary, Sadie Marsh, once said, “Fannie is strong in poisoning, that is why people won’t call her when they get sick.” (Du Bois, 1935:111) Fannie Brown explained that her first experience in becoming a shaman occurred when her nephew died in her arms. Crying, she fell unconscious, and in a dream, she saw a spirit woman with tattoo marks on her face come to take the dead boy away. Among her personal shamanic paraphernalia, she wore a necklace made of rattles obtained from rattlesnakes she had killed.

Frank Tuttle: “There’s an interesting visual impact, an interplay, in the separation of the light upper and lower portions of the pattern [as if they had once fit together and been pulled apart]. This break, this ‘opening up,’ reveals an underlying pattern contrary to the outside, overlaid pattern of color. It’s visually engaging and highly effective.”

Jean LaMarr: “It’s very artistic.”

Fannie Brown, undated. From Cora Du Bois, “Wintu Ethnography,” University of California Publications in *American Archaeology and Ethnology* 36, no. 1 (1935).

Denise Davis: "It's like you're peeking into something. The artist has prepared a surprise for you with her choice of color placement in the design. She's directed your focus to one place."

Frank LaPena: "The alternating of the red and black, as a pattern within the design, is common in a lot of Wintu baskets. Also characteristic is the horizontal relationship of patterns, sometimes inside designs, as in this case."



Mary Kintano (Cahuilla) 1877–1934

CUP

1908

split dyed and undyed juncus stalks (black and field), juncus stalks (foundation)

H. 2 3/4" Diam. 4"

Pomona College, Claremont, California. Gift of Emil P. Steffa, 1933

Mary Kintano (often spelled Quintano) was a resident of the Torres-Martinez Reservation in Riverside County. It is probable that she was in her early thirties at the time this basket was made.

Frank LaPena: "I react to the shape and the form as a cup. But the way the design works, it really moves me into it, so that I have to react aesthetically. Because I need to see how even it is, how and what it feels like. That black design setting on there just pulls me right in. I want to feel that thing. I just feel like I've got to hold that. It's like when you see a sculpture and you want to lift it up to see if it's right."

Donna Largo: "She was a Desert Cahuilla from Torres-Martinez [Reservation]. And I've seen some other baskets of hers. This one's really nice. It's the lightning pattern."



Guadalupe Arenas (Cahuilla) c. 1880–1958

BASKET

c. 1910

split dyed and undyed juncus stalks (field and black), split sumac shoots (white), deer grass (foundation)

H. 4 ¾" Diam. 10 ¼"

The Palm Springs Desert Museum, gift of James Smeaton Chase

Guadalupe Arenas was raised near Indio and later worked in the Palm Springs area. Her basket incorporates a rattlesnake design, a motif that was quite popular among the Cahuilla and other native peoples of southern California after the turn of the century.

Donna Largo: "She was from Santa Rosa Reservation. I knew her when I was a little girl. I remember that she was quiet and that she spoke Indian, the Cahuilla language. The rattlesnake and the eagle in the basket, that is like her signature. Her baskets, basically, all had those figures in them. My grandmother told me a story about the rattlesnake and how it got into the basket. She said that the women would all sit around on the ground making baskets and a rattlesnake kept coming toward one lady. And she'd chase him away and chase him away. And he kept coming back. And finally she told the rattlesnake, 'If you don't go away, I'm going to put you in my basket.' Well, he wouldn't go away, so that's how we got rattlesnakes in our baskets."



Jean LaMarr: "Two strong life forms."

Frank LaPena: "Not only are the forms dominant because of their size, but the 'signature' symbol line [the isolated bar above the snake] fits."

L. Frank Manriquez: "People know that the snake is a strong person. [At one time it was said,] no weaver made a rattlesnake design in a basket for fear of going blind. At some point a weaver risked her sight to honor the snake. After that, others wove snake designs and no one has ever heard of a blinding."

Guadalupe Arenas (left) and Marguerita Pablo (right). Courtesy of The Southwest Museum.



Magdalena Augustine (Chemehuevi) 1877–c. 1945

BASKET

c. 1914

natural and dyed (black) juncus stalks, split sumac shoots (white)

H. 10 3/8" Diam. 15 1/8"

Pomona College, Claremont, California. Gift of Emil P. Steffa, 1933

The basketry of Magdalena (or Madelena) Augustine shows some differences from that of her Chemehuevi relatives living farther to the east near the Colorado River. One major difference is the use of native Cahuilla materials, such as juncus, for weft strands. Her husband was a Cahuilla, and the two lived on the Augustine Reservation near the Salton Sea in Riverside County.

L. Frank Manriquez: "I'm looking at the bottom part of the juncus plant, the red, the use of that for the interior, and the dyed juncus for the black outline. The negative space between the stitches is just as pretty to me as the design stitches."

Donna Largo: "I know that when I make baskets and use the red, I match all the darker reds and lighter reds and then start putting them in there. Juncus stalks have different colors in them. They can start off really dark red at the bottom and then get lighter toward the top, or they can be real dark all the way up. If you pick juncus too early, it's real pink. The mountain juncus is really dark red, and then toward San Diego it's more orange. I think that's because of the different elevations. Where I pick my juncus, in Cahuilla, is over a sulfur spring. So the color is completely different than in other areas. I also pick on another side of the mountain, where it's not quite as dark. I really think the sulfur water it gets has a lot to do with the color. We pull the juncus out of the ground instead of cutting it."



William Benson (Eastern Pomo) 1862–1937
STICK PIN WITH MINIATURE BASKET
 c. 1915

split sedge root (buff), split and dyed bulrush root (black), garnet gemstone, gold
 Overall length (pin and basket) 2 1/8" H. (basket) 1/8" Diam. (basket) 3/8"
 The Grace Hudson Museum, City of Ukiah

William Benson was the son of a non-Indian father, Addison Benson, and an Eastern Pomo mother named Sally from Big Valley. William was one of the most extraordinary artisans of his day, creating a variety of artifacts for collectors John Hudson, Grace Nicholson, and Stewart Culin. In addition to his remarkable coiled basketry, he created an array of dazzling ceremonial pieces, including finely feathered hairpins, a woven feather belt, and a finely incised elkhorn dagger. While many of these items are part of Pomoan tradition, Benson's creations were often quite innovative and individualistic. His second wife (Mary Knight Benson) and mother-in-law (Sarah Knight) were also exceptional weavers. Mary and William worked together and were quite famous in their day, traveling widely and demonstrating their skills at various exhibitions across the country.

Miniature baskets have been popular among Pomoan weavers for many years. The setting of the garnet stone in this particular piece is quite unusual, in the way that it appears to be set snugly within the basket and attached to the stick pin.

Sherrie Smith-Ferri: "A true artist and a very fine craftsman."

Frank Tuttle: "And the notion that it was somehow built around that stone in there is just amazing, almost unbelievable. Baskets have this sort of historical sense about them. When we look at baskets, we think of them as being in the past. We think of the making of baskets as being sort of limited—technique-wise, material-wise—in order to fit into certain criteria. And then here's this beautiful pin, this obvious example of manipulation of materials and technical wizardry, and we want to attribute it to a more recent time, because we're more familiar with micro-chips and others types of small things. Given all those decades ago, it's quite a creation."

Sherrie Smith-Ferri: "It's very innovative. You get the sense that Benson probably just wanted to see if he could do it. He probably had an idea and wanted to see if it would work. A really dazzling piece."



William Benson, 1931. Photograph by Jaime de Angulo. Courtesy of Phoebe Apperson Hearst Museum of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley.

Frank Tuttle: "Yeah, sort of a showmanship type of thing—along with the other things he did, the feather belts, that one dagger, the ear sticks. Those are very elegant, very fine. Here, the weavers [weft elements] almost take on a linear quality, almost like an etching. It's so tiny. Just a tiny manipulation of line, a physical line. That's how I see baskets anyway. But here, right off, what one sees is just the pattern. One doesn't visually take in the texture of the weave."

Sherrie Smith-Ferri: "And this is something that would be very stylish today. I would love to wear it."

Frank Tuttle: "It's timeless. It really shows how well he knows his materials and what can be done. He's extending the possibilities of the materials and the techniques. And now, in our own communities, we don't have enough of the activity occurring to determine what the possibilities are, what the limitations are. So we may be afraid to suggest what the possibilities could be, because we just haven't seen it. But here, in this little pin, we have a very elegant example of what the possibilities could be."



Elizabeth Hickox (Wiyot) 1873–1947
LIDDED TRINKET BASKET
c. 1916

Oregon grape root (interior weft), maidenhair fern stem (black), porcupine quill dyed with wolf moss (yellow), myrtle shoots (foundation)
H. 5¼" Diam. 7"
Private Collection

Elizabeth Conrad Hickox (known as Lizzie) was the daughter of a Wiyot woman and a German father. Her mother was witness to one of the worst massacres of native people in the state, in February of 1860, when approximately fifty Wiyot were killed by vigilantes on Gunther Island in Humboldt Bay. Elizabeth's parents settled at Somes Bar on the Klamath River in the heart of Karuk country, and there she was raised. Her mother, Polly Conrad Steve, was a weaver and was probably Elizabeth's primary teacher.

Elizabeth's weaving may represent some of the finest twining ever done. Her baskets—with their dramatic use of maidenhair fern (black) as a background field rather than a conservative design element, and their elegant shape, which often exhibits a concave camber to the outer wall as it restricts toward the rim—represent a mastery of technique, design, and vision that is truly virtuoso, even in a community where so many women created such outstanding work. Beginning in 1908 and extending into the 1930s

Mrs. Hickox's baskets were marketed by the premier merchant in Native American art at the time, Grace Nicholson of Pasadena. Elizabeth's baskets were collected by museums and well-to-do collectors throughout the United States.

Elizabeth developed a remarkably distinctive style of lidded baskets. In this basket, her dramatic use of two colors follows a pattern a Yurok weaver described to ethnologist Lila O'Neale in 1936. O'Neale later wrote, "A downriver cap-maker frequently visualized the [black-and-white] pictures of baskets as they might be developed in certain colors. In all her descriptions, yellow was used in smallest amount. She explained that the larger areas in a motif should be of black fern because the strong color area of quills needs the balance of dark. What she actually said was that no one would ever make a big mark of yellow quills and a little mark of black fern."

Vivien Hailstone: "Where she lived, there were lots of ferns all along the side of the hill. She had ferns galore. So, that's why she used a lot of black [maidenhair] fern."

Kathy Wallace: "Well, the challenge is getting the materials. Was she able to use them fresh, then? When they're fresh, it's easier to weave them."

Vivien Hailstone: "Yes, but they need to be dried [slightly] first."

Kathy Wallace: "Her starts were decorative. She started weaving the basket in the traditional technique, and then turned the bottom outside to the inside. Then she continued weaving: what had started as the inside undecorated part of the basket, she made into the outside overlaid part of the basket. Her designs always continued on the lid."

Brian Tripp: "I remember seeing her show on the coast, with a whole group of these baskets, some of the most perfect baskets. The technique and everything. They're just like little jewels. Exactly like jewels."

Craig Bates: "The interesting thing is how many there are of these [kinds of baskets]. I don't know exactly how many, but there are definitely more than twenty, maybe more than fifty. And they range in size from three inches to a foot."

Judith Polanich: "If we're focusing on baskets as art, this basket makes a nice statement. I mean, this form is modeled on a storage basket: it has a lid and you put things in it to keep them safe. Yet, if you open this basket, you find that the storage idea is completely negated by the design. There is a design on the inside, but it only shows on the inside, so it can only be seen when the basket is empty. So that aspect of the basket works artistically only when it's empty. If you put something into the basket, activating the storage function, you are taking something away from it artistically."



L. Frank Manriquez: "As an artist, I don't see where her problems were. There were no problems to overcome, no solutions. There was just making things. I don't know that these baskets challenged her. They look so perfect."

Craig Bates: "I think her success is making them look that way."

Brian Tripp: "If you were to look at all of her stuff, you'd see where she'd take the designs and do just one more step that made them incredible."

Elizabeth Hickox, undated. Courtesy of The Huntington Library.



Carrie Bethel (Paiute) 1898–1974

BASKET

1929

split sedge root (buff), dyed bracken root (black), split winter redbud shoots (reddish), willow shoots (foundation)

H. 3 1/8" Diam. 6 1/8"

The Yosemite Museum, National Park Service

Born Carrie McGowan near Mono Lake at the edge of the eastern Sierra, she finished her first basket when she was ten. By the 1920s she was an accomplished weaver and a prominent competitor in the Yosemite and June Lake Indian Field Days. During this period many of her finest works were purchased by wealthy San Francisco collector James Schwabacher. In 1939 Carrie gave demonstrations of weaving at the Indian Exhibition of the Golden Gate International Exposition held on Treasure Island. She was

adept at a number of basketmaking techniques. In addition to the traditional twining methods used by Paiute weavers to produce most of their utilitarian pieces, she produced over a hundred single-rod beaded baskets. (Bates, 1995) But it is her three-rod coiled baskets with their striking polychromatic design motifs that made her famous. They represent her most demanding and finest works.

Craig Bates: "Carrie Bethel was probably one of the most innovative weavers in the Yosemite-Mono Lake region. She was about thirty when she wove this basket. When she started weaving, she began making all these new patterns that nobody had made before. Baskets made this way, with these materials, weren't made before 1900. They start to be made around 1908 and are well developed by 1912. At the end of the 1920s Carrie Bethel is making numbers of baskets in this style. She just kept evolving and changing patterns. Her technology and the quality of her weaving is always extremely consistent."

Carrie Bethel, c. 1929. Courtesy of Yosemite National Park.





Carrie Bethel (Paiute) 1898–1974

BASKET

1933

split sedge root (buff), dyed bracken root (black), split winter redbud shoots (reddish), willow shoots (foundation)

H. 14" Diam. 27"

Private Collection

Carrie Bethel's weaving evolved, but the level of her skill remained constant, with the high quality of the weaving visible in pieces she made in the 1920s matched by those she produced in the 1960s.

This piece is among Carrie's largest works (the largest being more than thirty inches in diameter). The treatment of the three rows of triangles on this basket attests to Carrie's dedication to her artistry. Each of the more than one thousand slender, elongated triangles has a single weft outline. Triangles in the top and bottom rows are executed in split winter redbud shoots and outlined in black-dyed bracken root. Middle-row triangles reverse that color scheme. Switching materials for a single width stitch—a laborious task that had to be repeated many times for a basket this size—shows a remarkable dedication. And to good effect: the outlining adds a significant dimension to the overall design.

Craig Bates: "She was weaving this basket while working in the laundry at Tioga Lodge at Mono Lake in 1933. She finished it in 1933 in the summer. She's just so good. In the same decade, the 1930s, she made at least two others that are almost the same size. It would take her about three years to complete one, besides working in the laundry and weaving lots of small baskets."

L. Frank Manriquez: "Artistically, it's maniacal."

Craig Bates: "The pattern is so complex and made up of so many small elements that in some places you'd have to change materials every stitch or two. That's more splicing than I'd ever want to do."



Lena Dick (Washoe) c. 1889–1965

BASKET

c. 1934

split willow shoots (white), split winter redbud shoots (reddish), dyed bracken root (black), willow shoots (foundation)

H. 9¼" Diam. 13"

Private Collection

Lena Frank Dick was one of the premier Washoe weavers of her generation. Her fancy three-rod coiled gift baskets were reminiscent of the works of Datsolalee, who had developed and popularized this style of basket, termed *degikup* by the Washoe, a generation earlier. Indeed, several of Lena's earlier baskets were sold through Abe Cohen's Emporium at Lake Tahoe, also outlet for Datsolalee's work. And like Datsolalee, Lena Dick had a patron in Carson Valley rancher Fred Stettlemeyer, who commissioned baskets from her for Roscoe A. Day, a San Francisco orthodontist.

Lena Dick made this basket in what her biographer Dr. Marvin Cohodas describes as her most outstanding phase of work

(c. 1926–1934), when her technique and artistry were at their peak. During this period her baskets were generally larger and the weaving finer, reaching thirty-three weft strands per linear inch.

Craig Bates: "The willow sewing strands are very white for a Washoe basket this old. Usually the willow will have aged to a light brown."

Judith Polanich: "I'm always interested in patterns like this, with designs that seem like beadwork, with stretched-out lines linking them. They remind me of the African Makonde sculpture, which is very attenuated and has a really strange feeling to it. The Makonde is also art created for a market, so there's another connection."

Brian Tripp: "I like it because it's not overcrowded. So you get such a beautiful background. I see the white as the background, and the black and the other stuff is just sort of laying on top. Just sort of floating."

Lena Dick, c. 1930. Courtesy of Marvin Cohodas from the collection of M. Flores.



"There's been a whole long line of people making baskets. And for an artist to step out, away from that pack, and be recognized, he or she is going to have to come up with something a little bit different—we're different people, we grow up with different sensibilities, in different times—and this basket probably filled the bill."

Craig Bates: "This basket, like the Mono Lake Paiute baskets woven by Carrie Bethel, isn't from an old tradition. This type of basket is a new invention. People didn't make baskets in this form before, so the weavers didn't have to follow any tradition. So they were free to experiment, like you say, free to break out and try new things."

Kathy Wallace: "I like it because it leaves a lot of exposed coils, so you're looking at the fine work that was put into the basket, not just the design."



Mary Wrinkle (Shoshone) 1876–1940

BASKET

c. 1939

split willow shoots (white), split juncus stalks (yellow-orange), split and dyed bulrush root (black),
Joshua tree root (reddish), willow shoots (foundation)

H. 3 1/2" Diam. 6 3/4"

Collection of Eva Slater

Mary Wrinkle is still remembered throughout the Owens Valley, not just for her basketry, but for her outgoing personality and good humor. Originally from the arid Saline Valley, north of Death Valley, Mary later married and moved to Keeler on the shores of Owens Lake (now dry), where she and her husband worked for the Soda Works plant. It was from the plant manager that her husband Charlie took the surname Wrinkle. In about 1910 the Wrinkles moved to the mining town of Darwin.

Around this time, and in a new setting, Mary apparently set aside old basketmaking traditions and created new forms and images. At first she continued to use the two-color scheme in the old Shoshone style and with great precision, often achieving over fifty stitches per linear inch. Over the years Mary included additional colors and materials in her work, among them the yellow from juncus rush, red from the yucca tree root, a bright white from porcupine quills, and, by 1930, the orange-pink of the common flicker quill.

Many of her new materials are from the sandy hills around Darwin, for example, the root of the yucca tree, which grows there at higher elevations. These trees not only provide weavers with a red basket material, but also offer nesting places and perches for the black-and-yellow Scott oriole, the subject of Mary Wrinkle's bird baskets of the 1930s. These baskets became very popular with collectors. (Slater, n.d.)

Craig Bates: "You often see birds represented in baskets, but you seldom see birds that are so real-looking. This is remarkable."

Brian Bibby: "Her exceptionally fine weaving and technique allowed her to represent these birds and plants so well that their species can be easily identified."

L. Frank Manriquez: "This is beautiful. It's so alive."



Nettie McKinnon (Karuk/Yurok) 1898–1987

PLAQUE

c. 1955

willow root (buff), bear grass (white), woodwardia fern stem dyed with alder bark (rust), maidenhair fern stem (black), willow shoots (foundation)

H. 2 1/2" Diam. 11 1/2"

Collection of Vivien Hailstone

Nettie Cooper McKinnon was born and raised near Bluff Creek on the Klamath River. She was a versatile weaver capable of making several different types of traditional baskets, as well such new forms as the wall plaque. Wall plaques appear to have been an invention of Klamath River weavers, who started producing them sometime after World War II. It is evidence of the ingenuity and adaptability of weavers that they were able to develop new basket forms that would appeal primarily to non-Indian customers

and that could be made fairly quickly with a smaller investment of time than is often required for larger or more demanding traditional forms.

Judith Polanich: "A basket like this really shows how important innovation can be in keeping the tradition going. To take the best part of the tradition—the fine weave and the brilliant colors—and to generate new forms that younger weavers can master, and can finish in a reasonable time, helps to keep the tradition alive. This kind of innovation is such an important development.



Vivien [Hailstone] has been able to do it at Hoopa, too. Encouraging the younger women keeps basketry going in the various communities across California; and what does it is finding ways they can get to the heart of the tradition, have a finished product, and experience the excitement of that accomplishment."

Brian Tripp: "It doesn't only inspire the women; it inspires the guys too."

Kathy Wallace: "This is one of the most striking plaques I have ever seen. It's so eye-catching, even from across the room, even when it's displayed among other baskets. Nettie's starts are very distinctive, and this basket shows off the start, which is usually relegated to the bottom of the basket, and seldom seen. Her use of color or contrast in the design is what makes it stand out."

Nettie McKinnon, c. 1980s. Photograph by Larry Dalrymple.



Boquita Wilson (Atsugewi) 1888-1968

BASKET

c. 1958

split conifer root (interior weft), bear grass (white), maidenhair fern stem (black), split winter redbud shoots (reddish), willow shoots (foundation)

H. 5" Diam. 8 1/4"

The Redding Museum of Art and History

The Atsugewi homeland encompasses most of the Hat Creek drainage north of Mount Lassen. Atsugewi weavers call the central design element running through this piece the "lizard's foot." It is interesting to note the similarity of this piece to the next basket, which was made by Selena LaMarr, Boquita's sister.

Jean LaMarr: "What I like about this basket is that it takes the white part and makes it very important. There's a strong element of the white, which emphasizes the dark. Sometimes the white becomes the negative, or nothing, and that's very beautiful."

Kathy Wallace: "The work in this basket is extremely even and smooth for a full twist overlay twined basket."



Selena LaMarr (Atsugewi) 1892–1968

BASKET

1960

split conifer root (interior weft), maidenhair fern stem (black), bear grass (white),
split winter redbud shoots (reddish), willow shoots (foundation)
H. 6" Diam. 9"

Lassen Volcanic National Park, National Park Service

As a youth Selena Taylor LaMarr often made a summer trip with her family, from their homes on Hat Creek to the high mountains and meadows that became Lassen National Park. Here her father and uncles hunted deer, and Selena and the other women fished for trout, dug for various bulbs, and gathered manzanita berries. In 1951 Selena began performing interpretive demonstrations of various traditional Atsugewi arts for the National Park Service at Lassen, a role she fulfilled until her death.

In an interview (c. 1960) Selena recalled her first experience at gathering bear grass, the principle overlay material in Atsugewi basketry:

"We call it *mahow*. You got to gather that just about week after Fourth of July. If you gather it before, when you twist it, it's brittle, it will break. And when you gather it late, they get old just like hay. They get stiff, you can't use it.

"I went with two ladies. They had a car. We went over here to Greenville. We drove right up to it. She said, 'Well, here's the grass.' The lady said, 'Start in and pick. They grow in big bunches here among the timber and bushes.' I picked out the biggest bunch and I sit down and pull. It's kinda hard pullin', you got to watch out, you'll cut your finger. They're sharp. I sat there and pick, and I look back at these two ladies, just walkin' around. Look like they weren't pickin' any. Well, they just lookin' for the best, I thought. I sat there and pull. Pretty soon one lady come back and she says, 'That grass you're pickin's no good.' I said, '(Isn't) that grass?' She said, 'Yes, but you can't use it.' And she said, 'You ever pick before?' I said, 'No, this is my first time.' She told me, 'Come here, let me show you how to pick.' So I got up and went with her."

Frank LaPena: "These little elements at the top of the design are really interesting."

Jean LaMarr: "I think that was her trademark. It is a good example of an Atsugewi design."

Frank LaPena: "What I like about this piece is the evenness of the design within the space. The proportion. What helps balance the overall design is the three little elements at the top of the pattern. If you were to eliminate those little elements, the whole pattern would drop. . . it would sink. It's almost like the whole design is suspended. The dark, solid triangular area of black in this pattern stabilizes the whole design. It's a real nice combination, the design elements and filling a space."



Selena LaMarr, 1960. Courtesy of National Park Service, Lassen National Park. [Note that the unfinished basket at the far right is the one featured in this publication.]



Laura Somersal (Wappo/Pomo) 1892–1990

BASKET (above right)

c. 1975

split sedge root (buff), dyed bulrush root (black), willow shoots (foundation)

H. 2 ¾" Diam. 4 ½"

Collection of The Smith Family

Laura Fish Somersal was born on the Stone Ranch near Geyserville where her father was employed. As a child, her first home was a brush-covered dwelling. She was fourteen years old before her family moved into a cabin with a floor. She spoke the Dry Creek dialect of Pomo, and was perhaps the last fluent speaker of the Wappo language. In addition to Dry Creek Pomo and Wappo, Laura knew several other native dialects and was fluent in English and proficient in Spanish. She attended neither public nor government boarding schools. As a youth she worked in the fields, picking hops and various fruit crops, and later worked as a domestic at various ranch houses.

Laura began weaving at about age nine, when a cousin, Jack Woho, handed her a coiled basket start, or "button," and encouraged her to finish it. Later, her sister-in-law Rosie taught her to gather and process materials. Laura became a master at nearly all Wappo and Pomo weaving techniques, including single- and three-rod coiling, plain, three-strand, wrapped and lattice twining, and wickerwork. As a teacher, Laura was an important link to a whole generation of weavers, native and non-native, who became interested in native basketmaking during the 1970s and 1980s. As a tribal scholar, she was a major consultant for several publications regarding Wappo and Pomoan culture and language. In 1978 Laura was honored with the first Women of Achievement Award presented by the Sonoma County Commission on the Status of Women, and a photograph of her hands at work on a basket appeared on the 1983 National Women's History Week poster. (Ortiz, 1990/91:4-5 and 1994)

In a 1991 interview with Beverly R. Ortiz, Kathleen Smith, a Dry Creek Pomo, said about her: "I remember being out in the sedge beds with Laura before the Warm Springs Dam was built. We went way up on the Dry Creek side and when we sat there at lunchtime she would say a little prayer. She didn't make a big deal out of it, she just said 'Thank you.' She said, '*yah we.*' And she pulled a little piece of her bread off of her sandwich and threw it in the plants. She said, 'Oh, I would just love to sing.'" (Ortiz,

1991/92:19) In another interview the same year with David Ludwig, Kathleen said: "She was just the consummate teacher. She was just a master artist. And . . . she just had this wonderful wry sense of humor. She was just a great person. Never stuck in an old lady role. She was very contemporary." (Ortiz, 1994)

"[W]hat put her in front of other women was the fact that she was so good at doing the baskets," remarked Bette Holmes, another Dry Creek Pomo, during an interview with Beverly R. Ortiz. "And it's something that she did when it wasn't popular. Way back when I was a little girl she was making these baskets, and she always made them for every new baby in the family . . . it was just in her; that she could no more stop making the baskets than she could stop eating, because it was just part of [her] life. . . I think what made her seem so modern and up-to-date was that she never traded anything for her Indianness. She was a Pomo, and basketry was just a part of what she always did and would always do and share with others."

Frank Tuttle: "There are a lot of things going on. It's one of those baskets that just feels very nice. That zigzag design, there are four elements, the same motif that's repeated four times, very evenly spaced around the basket. I like that because it causes this flipping, there's a visual tension. You flip from a positive design to a negative design, with those parallelograms in the inner spaces there. And there seems to be a real even tension between those parallelograms and the positive design. And there seems to be just the right amount of weight, visual weight, in there. Something I really enjoy about this basket is the strong horizontal bars on the zigzag. They add a lot of validation to the parallelograms as inner spaces, and they fit just right in the back and forth, shooting your eye back and sending it forward again, back and forth in this nice zigzag."

Sherrie Smith-Ferri: "I've always liked it. I think it's a much more successful basket because of the black finishing row. I think it would look incomplete if she hadn't done that. Somehow the black row contains it."

Frank Tuttle: "Yeah, the dark finishing row actually confines the upward movement of the zigzag pattern. It doesn't matter on the bottom because the seat of the basket is smaller than the opening at the top. So the way it sets . . . it sets just right. It's deceptive in its simplicity, its comfortableness. It doesn't have a lot of fancy things going on, but what makes it work is the fine degree of balance between black and white, and the strong horizontal lines and the broken diagonals and the restful parallelograms, which are so nice and blank."



Laura Somersal, c. 1982. Photograph by Scott Patterson. Courtesy of Victoria Patterson.

Laura Somersal (Wappo/Pomo) 1894–1992

MINIATURE BASKET (page 105)

c. 1977

split sedge root (buff), split and dyed bulrush root (black)

H. $\frac{3}{4}$ " Diam. $1\frac{1}{2}$ "

Collection of The Smith Family

Judith Polanich: "Laura could do everything. She made meticulous miniature baskets like this, hundreds of them, each just perfectly made. She made feather baskets, too. I was with her one Sunday afternoon when a family of Mexican farm workers brought her two dried pheasant pelts. They had heard that she could make feather baskets. Once she made a feather basket from a parakeet that had died. The children wanted her to "save" their pet for them. And Laura could do fine Pomo close twining. I never thought I'd have a chance to learn, but she got me started on a mush boiler. But when I think about Laura, it's not her weaving that I remember, it's her self. She was such a lovely person. So gracious. When that family brought her the pheasant, they were dressed for a state occasion, the kids all freshly combed and in their best. She thanked them in Spanish and spent time talking to them about her baskets. I'm sure they'll never forget that afternoon. She was like that with everyone."

Sherrie Smith-Ferri: "This little one-stick basket, it's a very different basket if you look at the pattern on the bottom, a sort of flower design, or star design, than if you look at it from the side. That pattern almost disappears unless you flip it upside down. You wouldn't know it was there."

Frank Tuttle: "Yes, that's true. There's another basket I'm thinking about that has this same sort of large, wide diamond. The wide part of the diamond occurs on the bulge of the basket, and then with this small one here, see how it thins again? So you get this kind of billowing. Your eye spreads out with the wide diamond, and then it moves back in with these small black vertical diamonds. And it just moves in and out like that."

Sherrie Smith-Ferri: "And actually, if you look at the top row, it ends up being a very neat checkerboard. This little one was given to us at our wedding by my grandma. My grandfather bought a lot of Laura's little miniature baskets. He really liked her work and she liked to weave for him. I think it's kind of illustrative of the use of baskets by native families today still to mark important events in different ways. And, in fact, a lot of the weaving that's going on today is being done for native people by native people."

Frank Tuttle: "For native reasons. Which is real important for me as a native person. And also for me as an artist, because oftentimes as I think of my pieces, my making of things has to do with who it's for. When we look at baskets and look at ourselves, review ourselves as Indian people and see ourselves strung out with the history, we have to remember that a lot of things have happened to us without our consent, and with our consent. And a large part of why we have survived is because of our consent. We've said to ourselves, we want to do that, and baskets have been a real visible part of saying this part of us is very important. And it may have diminished in its activity in our communities, but its intent hasn't. Because it's still very important."



Myrtle McKay Chavez (Pomo/Wintu) 1939–

BASKET

c. 1979

split sedge root (buff), split and dyed bulrush root (black), willow shoots (foundation)

H. 27½" Diam. 8"

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Sacramento District

Myrtle McKay Chavez was born on the Big Valley Rancheria in Lake County, but has lived in the Santa Rosa area most of her life. It was not until 1971, when she was in her mid-thirties, that she began to weave, with instruction from her mother's aunt, master weaver Laura Somersal. As Myrtle recalled in a 1993 interview with Dot Brovarney, "There was a neighbor of mine who wanted to go to basket classes, which I didn't want to go to. I knew that Auntie started teaching, but I didn't want to go. I didn't think I wanted to learn baskets. Then my neighbor convinced me that it was relaxation, so I went with her. I learned to weave the baskets and she didn't." Myrtle's memories of that period reveal that her teacher had a traditional insistence on quality, thoroughness, and discipline: "I don't know how many times she made me rip the basket out and go around again. She made sure I learned right. She showed me what my mistake was and told me what I had to do. Sometimes I'd be in a hurry and I'd put two stitches in one, and she'd tell me to take it out. Or I didn't connect the rod right or something and have to take it out. She was a good teacher."

Myrtle makes both three-rod and single-rod coiled baskets. As design material, she prefers the black-dyed bulrush root, which

she gathers in November and December. Myrtle also weaves feather baskets, having learned the difficult technique from the late Pomo weaver, Elsie Allen.

Judith Polanich: "Part of what you're seeing in this basket is the technique. Single-rod will always give you this comb-edge patterning. That's part of what it is. The two colors interlock with each other, and so you don't get a hard edge."

Sherrie Smith-Ferri: "Another part of the technique you see in this basket is the smooth surface of the basket walls. Single-rod baskets are always smooth, not like the corrugated walls of three-rod baskets."



Myrtle McKay Chavez (right) with her aunt, Laura Somersal, c. 1980. Photograph by Scott Patterson. Courtesy of Victoria Patterson.



Leroy Fisher (Chemehuevi) c. 1954–

TRAY

1990

split willow shoots (white), split devil's claw (black), split juncus stalks (orange), whole willow shoots (foundation)

H. 2 ¼" Diam. 8 ¾"

Collection of Larry Dalrymple

Leroy Fisher is a very active weaver living along the Colorado River on the California-Arizona border. He began weaving in the mid-1970s under the instruction of Chemehuevi master weaver Mary Lou Brown. The snake figure depicted on the basket is



a Mohave rattlesnake. Leroy stated that his grandmother, Kate Fisher, had used the design in her baskets. On occasion he has seen these snakes coiled under an old mesquite tree near the spot where he weaves. (Dalrymple, 1995)

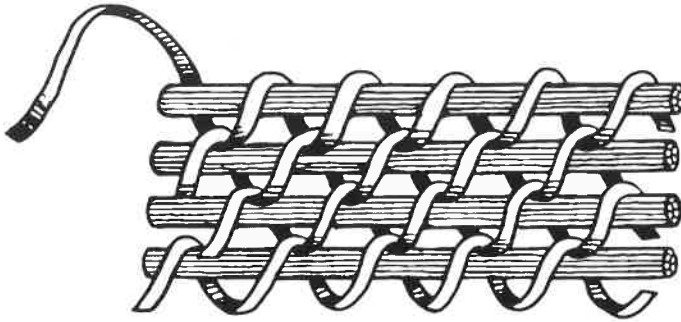
L. Frank Manriquez: "Leroy's workmanship is tight and strong. This design is immediate and lasting."

Frank LaPena: "This is a solid, regimented design. Everything seems to be even. It's bold."

Leroy Fisher, c. 1988. Photograph by Larry Dalrymple.

WEAVING TECHNIQUES

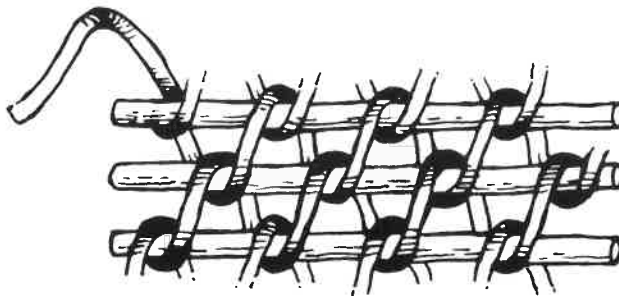
COILING



Grass bundle (interlocking stitch)



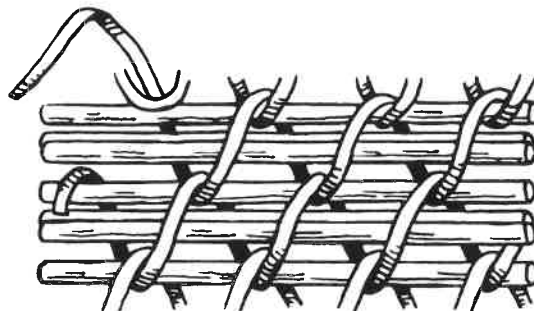
side view



Single-rod (interlocking stitch)



side view

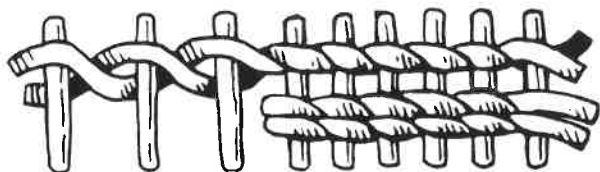


Three-rod (interlocking stitch)

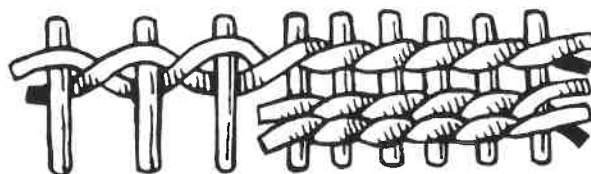


side view

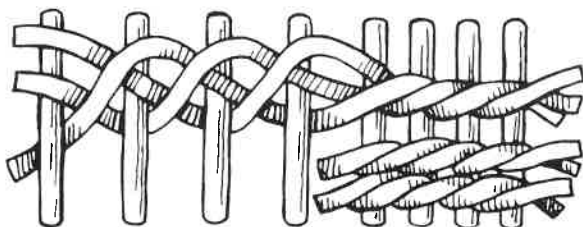
TWINING



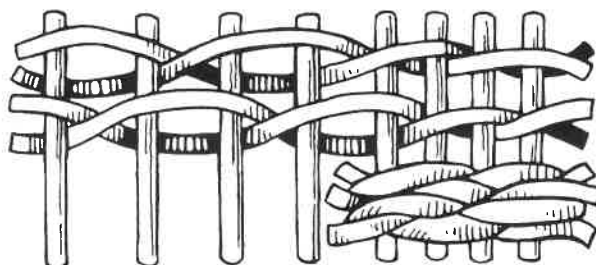
Plain twining pitch down to right



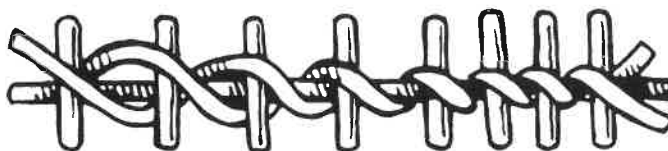
Plain twining pitch up to right



Three-strand twining



Diagonal twining



Lattice twining

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bates, Craig D. Personal Communication. 1995.
- Bates, Craig D. and Brian Bibby. "Amanda Wilson: Maidu Weaver." In *American Indian Art Magazine*, Volume 9, Number 3, 1984, pp. 38-43.
- Bates, Craig D. and Martha J. Lee, *Tradition and Innovation: A Basket History of the Indians of the Yosemite-Mono Lake Area*. Yosemite National Park: The Yosemite Association, 1990.
- Bernstein, Bruce. *Native American Basketry: The Hartman Collection*. Saint Joseph, MO.: The Albrecht Kemper Museum of Art, 1996.
- Blackburn, Thomas C. and Kat Anderson (editors). *Before the Wilderness: Environmental Management by Native Californians*. Menlo Park: Ballena Press, 1993.
- Brovarney, Dot. Interview with Myrtle McKay Chavez, February 26, 1993. Unpublished.
- Busch, Briton Cooper. *Alta California, 1840-1842: The Journal and Observations of William Dane Phelps, Master of the Ship Alert*. Glendale: The Arthur H. Clarke Company, 1983.
- Coues, Elliott. *On the Trail of a Spanish Pioneer: The Diary and Itinerary of Francisco Garcés in His Travels through Sonora, Arizona, and California, 1775-1776*. New York: Francis P. Harper, 1900.
- Culin, Stewart. Report on the Collecting Expedition among the Indians of New Mexico and California, May 4-September 29, 1907. Unpublished manuscript. The Brooklyn Museum.
- Dalrymple, Larry. 1995. Personal Communication.
- Du Bois, Cora. "Wintu Ethnography." In *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology*, Volume 36, Number 1, 1935.
- Fowler, Catherine S. and Lawrence E. Dawson. "Ethnographic Basketry." In *Handbook of North American Indians*, Volume 11: Great Basin. Warren L. D'Azevedo, volume editor. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1986.
- Hill, Dorothy. Videotape footage of weavers Mabel McKay and Bertha (Wright) Mitchell at Chico State College, 1974.
- Kelsey, Andrea. "Interview with Ada Charles." In *I Am These People*. Exhibition catalogue. Governor's Office, State Capitol, Sacramento. 1975.
- Liljeblad, Sven and Catherine S. Fowler. "The Owens Valley Paiute." In *Handbook of North American Indians*, Volume 1, Great Basin. Warren L. D'Azevedo, volume editor. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1986.
- McLendon, Sally and Brenda Holland. "The Basketmaker: The Pomoans of California." In *The Ancestors: Native Americans of the Americas*. Anna C. Roosevelt and James G.E. Smith, editors. New York: Museum of the American Indian, 1979.
- Mendelsohn, Pam. "Northwest California Basketry." In *Southwest Art*, June 1983, pp. 59-60.
- O'Neale, Lila M. "Yurok-Karok Basketweavers." In *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology* Volume 32, Number 1, 1932.
- Ortiz, Beverly R. "California Indian Basketweavers Gathering: A Special Report." In *News from Native California*, Volume 6, Number 1, 1991/92, pp. 13-36.
- . "With Respect: Laura Fish Somersal, 1892-1990." *News from Native California*, Volume 5, Number 1, 1990/91, pp. 4-5.
- . *Pomo Basketweavers: A Tribute to Three Elders*. Video. Cotati: Creative Light Productions, 1994.
- Slater, Eva. Unpublished manuscript on Panamint Shoshone basketry.
- Smith, Lori. Personal Communication. 1995.
- Zigmond, Maurice. "Kawaiisu Basketry." In *The Journal of California Anthropology*, Volume 5, Number 2, 1978, pp. 199-215.

**CROCKER ART MUSEUM
CO-TRUSTEES/CAMA BOARD MEMBERS**

1996/97

City of Sacramento

The Honorable Joe Serna, Jr., Mayor

Crocker Art Museum Association Board of Directors

Timothy S. Taron, *President* • Stephen F. Boutin, *Vice-President*
Marcy Friedman, *Treasurer* • Harriet Derwingson, *Secretary* • Timothy S. Lien, *Past President*

Sharon Anapolsky • Roger Berry • Nancy Brodovsky • Paul Dauer • Gloria Evosevich
Zarou Haesslein • John Hamlyn • Kyle Hoffman • Frank LaPena • Marc Levinson • Archie Milligan
Susan B. Moore • Carol Otto • Susan Parker • Ronald G. Pomares • Patty Prado • Gary Pruitt
Randall M. Schaber • Bob Slobe • Walter M. Thompson • Mavis Williams

Crocker Art Museum Staff

Stephen C. McGough, *Director* • Darren Ali, *Security Supervisor*
Leslie Barton, *Museum Store Manager* • Bruce Beck, *Custodian*
Jane Bertke, *Resident Artist* • Rana Blair, *Accounting Assistant*
Theresa Boldt, *Receptionist* • Terri Contenti, *Special Events Coordinator*
Lynn Daly, *Resident Artist* • Janice T. Driesbach, *Curator*
Jason Drury, *Membership Operations Assistant* • Jay Drury, *Assistant Director for Administration*
Joseph Fairgood, *Senior Custodian* • Peter J. Flagg, *Associate Curator*
Sheryl Gonzalez, *Public Relations Coordinator* • Jennifer Grimes, *Assistant to the Director*
Paulette Hennum, *Registrar* • Erika Jackson, *Family/Youth Programs Coordinator*
Early Kanavy, *Cashier* • KD Kurutz, *Curator of Education*
Karen Martin, *Curatorial Assistant* • Jody McKay, *Accounting Manager*
Lisa Minahan, *Development Assistant* • Patrick Minor, *Exhibition Coordinator*
Stacey O'Dell, *Custodian* • Kevin Ohama, *School Services Coordinator*
Johanna O'Kelley, *Membership Promotions* • Norris Porter, *Burns Security Lieutenant*
Alice Schilla, *Communications Director* • Jutta Solano, *Special Events Assistant*
Mei Tan, *Education Assistant* • Steve Wilson, *Exhibition Coordinator*
Cindy Yee, *Museum Store Clerk*



For thousands of years California Indians have been making baskets, often for the most practical of reasons—for use as cradles, cooking and serving vessels, winnowing trays, and dozens of other necessary functions. Over the centuries these baskets have evolved artistically as well, becoming what many consider to be among the world's most beautiful, sophisticated, and cherished art objects.

Searching private collections and public museums throughout the country, over sixty stunning examples of California Indian basketry have been assembled, some over a hundred and fifty years old, some made within the last few years. Commenting upon each basket are native basketweavers, California Indian artists in other media, and scholars. Together they provide exciting and intimate insights into this world of intense beauty.

ISBN 0-930588-87-8



SMITHSONIAN
MUSEUM SHOPS
2539443
FINE ART CALIF
BASKETRY
\$20.00