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National Museum of the American Indian Archives Center

Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation - Grace Nicholson: Notes and Photos, 1903-1968

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the perfection of artistic basketry. Firm and water-tight, these baskets are a delightful combination of beauty and utility. As well as being perfectly adapted to their various purposes, they have also fascinating decorative qualities, and they are made to wear a hundred years or so.

Among the "root" designs which Mary inherited from her basket-making ancestors is a triangular pattern like a butterfly with folded wings. Another is known as the quail-tuft pattern and another resembles arrowpoints. A pretty design often seen in the coarser weaves is a motif called spotted snake or garter snake. The weaver uses these and other basic figures to form individual designs of her own, appropriate for the particular basket she happens to be making. Her only tools are a sharp knife, an awl, and a dish to hold water in which fiber is kept soaking so as to make it pliable. The weaver has no visible pattern before her but plans the design in her own mind and carries it out as she weaves.

In this day of the machine-made, standardized products so necessary to a smooth functioning of our civilization, it is no light thing that craftswomen like these Indians are doing for us. During the last decade, there had been a noticeable turning to the hand-made products of the American Indian. In many cases it has come just in time to save some hitherto unregarded craft from extinction. Now the blankets and pottery of the Southwestern Indians, the beadwork and leather of the Northern Indians, and the baskets of our Eastern and Western aborigines are really beginning to come into their own. In the development of a distinctive American art it may well be that historians of a future time will give a prominent place to the patient, sincere craftsmanship of such unassuming characters as Mary, the Pomo squaw.
- CRAIG HENDERSON

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