

Bruce Museum Receives Promised Gift of Major Collection of Native American Art

A selection of Native American baskets from the donation by Mr. and Mrs. Jay W. Chai is currently on view in the Museum rotunda



Three of the Native American baskets now on view at the Bruce Museum and part of a promised gift of Native American baskets, textiles, and ceramics to the Museum from Mr. and Mrs. Jay W. Chai.

GREENWICH, CT, November 5, 2018 – The Bruce Museum is pleased to announce the promised gift of a highly significant collection of Native American baskets, textiles, and ceramics, to be donated to the Museum by Mr. and Mrs. Jay W. Chai of Riverside, CT. The Museum’s Executive Director, Peter C. Sutton, expressed his abiding gratitude. He characterized it as “a truly transformative gift.”

The donation will build on the foundation of ethnographic material given to the Museum in 1967 by Greenwich resident Margaret Cranford and will enhance the Bruce Museum’s standing as a regional resource for scholars and aficionados of Native American material culture.



The Museum's ethnology collection focuses on objects of peoples from the Americas and reflects the sophistication and diversity of the various cultures represented. The Native American collection is particularly strong in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Southwest material, including Navajo textiles and jewelry, Pueblo blackware, and Plains beadwork. Baskets, tools and clothing come from Plains, Southwest and Northwest Coast peoples. Prehistoric material from the Northeast rounds out the collection since the Bruce Museum is the repository for archaeological material excavated in Greenwich.

Mrs. Chai first took an interest in Native American art and culture while serving on the board of a company headquartered in Tulsa, OK, with a fellow director of Native American ancestry. A prominent local collector then introduced her to the collection at the Glicrease Museum in Tulsa, which amplified her interest. Regular travels to Scottsdale, where the couple had a vacation home, provided further opportunities to learn and collect.

Mrs. Chai enlisted the expertise of Terry DeWald, an appraiser and specialist in historic Southwest and California basketry, historic Navajo blankets and rugs, and frequent lecturer on Southwestern basketry. He identified the finest examples of Native American baskets, textiles and ceramics to create a collection with documented provenance, geographic breadth, and historic importance.

Many of baskets are certified as having been woven by the most famously talented Native basket makers, including Tootsie Dick Sam (1885-1929), Maria Chapula (1856-1960), and Elizabeth Hickox (1875-1947). Other baskets were formerly included in distinguished collections such as the Chapula-Richardson Collection of California and the Steiner Collection of Pittsburgh.

A selection of 13 Native American baskets from the promised gift is now on view in the Museum's rotunda, as a timely complement to the exhibition *A Continuous Thread: Navajo Weaving Traditions*. The exhibition showcases a dozen Navajo textiles from the Museum's Native American ethnographic collection, as well as biographical material about Miss Margaret Cranford. The exhibition will be on display in the Bantle Lecture Gallery through November 25.

"The documented and verifiable provenance of notable objects in this gift strengthens the Bruce's existing collection and provides innumerable avenues for interpretation and research," says Kirsten Reinhardt, Bruce Museum Registrar and Curator of the *Navajo Weaving Traditions* exhibition.

Among the baskets on display is a *Polychrome Bottleneck Treasure Basket*, c. 1900, from the Yokuts or Tubatulabal culture of Central California. Made of twined tule reeds, yucca, devil's claw, red wool and quail topknot feathers, the basket was used to store shell-bead money, other valued objects, and live rattlesnakes used in the springtime Rattlesnake Dance.



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Another exquisitely crafted item on view is a *Pictorial Shoulder Basket*, c. 1910, from the Panamint (Koso) people of the Southern California desert. Fashioned of sumac and willow, the basket depicts a hunting scene of antelope, bows and arrows, and desert plants that produce edible seeds. The weave is tight enough to hold water.

Looking toward the future, the Bruce Museum plans to offer an exhibition featuring significant pieces in the Chai collection to further its mission to promote the understanding and appreciation of art and science to enrich the lives of all people.

Since the Bruce Museum's founding more than a century ago, the community, through its generosity, has built the Museum collection to over 15,000 objects. The Museum building and its collections are resources owned by the Town of Greenwich and held in trust for the people of the Town by a separate, privately funded 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, Bruce Museum, Inc.

For more information about the Museum's collections and exhibitions or ways to contribute to the support of the Bruce, please visit brucemuseum.org or contact Kirsten Reinhardt, Registrar, kreinhardt@brucemuseum.org or 203-413-6770.

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About the Bruce Museum

The Bruce Museum is located in a park setting just off I-95, exit 3, at 1 Museum Drive in Greenwich, Connecticut. The Museum is also a 5-minute walk from the Metro-North Greenwich Station. The Museum is open Tuesday through Sunday from 10 am to 5 pm; closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors and students with ID, and free for members and children less than five years. Individual admission is free on Tuesday. Free on-site parking is available and the Museum is accessible to individuals with disabilities. For additional information, call the Bruce Museum at 203-869-0376 or visit brucemuseum.org.

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