

IndianMARKET

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2015 Artist Directory
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Santa Fe Indian Market
SOUTHWESTERN ASSOCIATION FOR INDIAN ARTS

THE SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN



STORY BY DANIEL GIBSON | PHOTOS BY KITTY LEAKEN

Jenny and Rob Kimball are the noncollectors of Native art who have amassed a truly impressive collection of Native paintings, jewelry, sculpture and other artworks in both their Santa Fe and Paradise Valley, Arizona, homes.

"I don't think of it really as a collection; it was not something we set out to do," explains Jenny, sitting in the lovely living room of their home tucked into the Santa Fe River canyon. "Mostly it's developed through personal contacts and friendships I have with the artists. It's typically a case of I like the work and I like the artist."

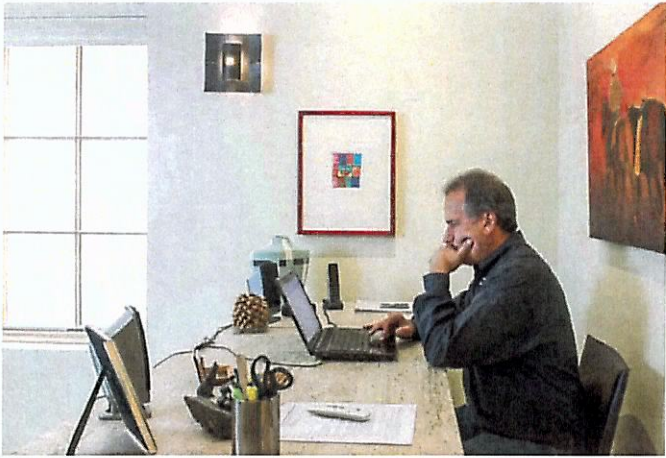
"I am also sort of a bleeding-heart liberal, and some of our purchases are not only because we love the work but sometimes because an artist is in a hard place personally and simply needs some support," she explains. This is certainly not the typical collector's strategy for acquisitions, but it has worked for them. "Every piece here has a story behind it. I don't really call it a collection, but over the years it has added up."

The commanding presence of Native art is evident immediately upon entering the contemporary home that steps down a steep hillside toward the rushing river that flows mere steps from their back portal. At the bottom of the stairs that descend to the living area is the home's largest single artwork, a Tony Abeyta (Navajo) oil and sand painting of yeibichai figures titled *Modernist Trio* that measures an impressive 7 by 4 feet. It incorporates willow stems the artist cut, applied to the canvas and then painted over.

It is the only piece the couple actually commissioned for the home. "The very first piece of Indian art I bought was a painting by Tony, in 1989," notes Jenny. This work, another grouping of yeis in soft blues, titled *Water Spirits*, hangs in a silver frame in a guest bedroom. "Tony is one of my better friends and kind of serves as my art mentor. I often go

Living room with three pots on coffee table by Maria Martinez (black), Dominique Toya (small brown) and Lonnie Vigil (largest), titled *Unconditional Giving*.

COLLECTORS



Rob's office with his favorite painting by Ophelia Ann Smith, a Navajo artist with Down's Syndrome. They bought it at a fundraiser for the Adaptive Ski Program at Ski Santa Fe.



Belts by Pat Pruitt and Marla Allison, cuff by Tony Abeyta.

JENNY & ROB KIMBALL BUILD ECLECTIC BODY OF NATIVE ART

to him to ask his opinion of up-and-coming artists."

Everywhere one turns in the house are examples of Native art, often resting next to non-Native made art, such as paintings by Carol Anthony or an architectural element from some exotic land the couple found at the International Folk Art Market Santa Fe. "It is all sort of blended together, mixed and matched, but works," says Jenny, and beautifully so within the home's simple contemporary lines and open spacing.

ALLISON & PRUITT PROMINENT

Perhaps most prominent in the home are various contemporary paintings by Marla Allison (Laguna Pueblo) in her trademark "mosaic" style. These range from fairly large landscapes of her Laguna homelands to small, exquisite works found scattered throughout the home.

Allison's husband, the cutting-edge jeweler and metal sculptor Pat Pruitt (Laguna Pueblo/Chiricahua Apache), is also well represented here. A stainless steel sculpture of abstracted deer dancers rests on a side table below the large Abeyta painting in the salon, and several collaborative concha belts he created with Allison are on display here and there. These include an impressive work for which Pruitt created large metal conchas faced with canvas that Allison then painted over with Laguna clan animals.

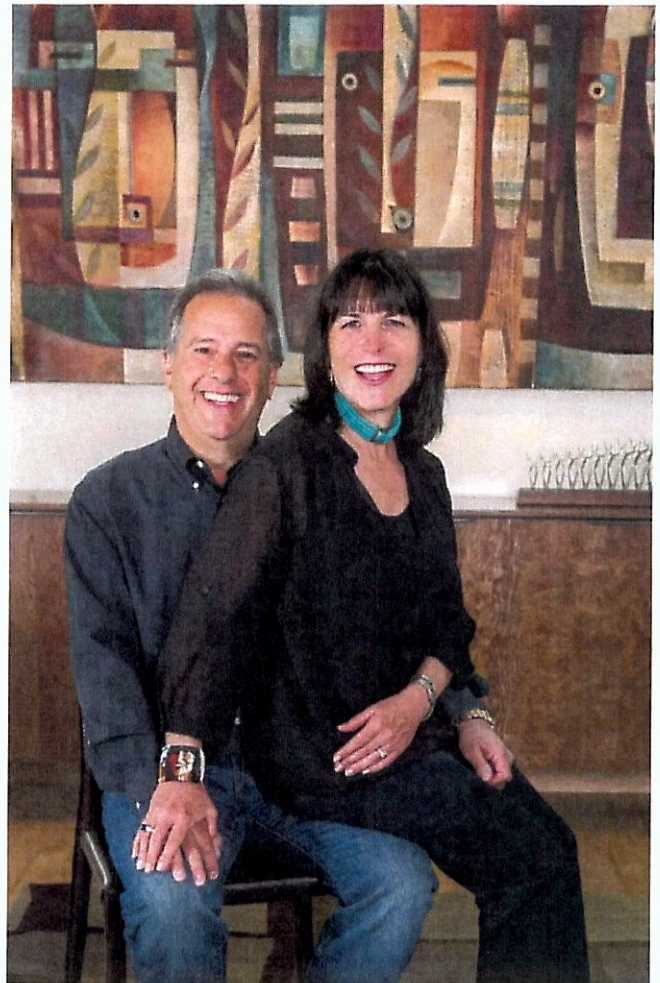
There are a few of the "classic" bronze wall plaques with subtle patinas created by Tammy Garcia (Santa Clara Pueblo), several sculptures by Alice Seeley (Abeyta's half-sister), a few of Mateo Romero's (Cochiti Pueblo) paintings made over black-and-white photos, a rare Sheldon Harvey (Diné) landscape and some arresting geometric, brightly colored paintings by emerging artist Phillip Vigil (Jemez Pueblo). In one of the two guest bedrooms sits some Gregory Lomayesva (Hopi) kachina-like figures, along with a Stan Natchez (Shoshone/Paiute) painting with embedded beads and gold leaf.

Three lovely works of pottery rest on the living room fireplace banco: a micaceous pot with "fire clouds" by Lonny Vigil (Nambe Pueblo), a golden-hued Dominique Toya (Jemez Pueblo) swirled melon pot and a black-on-black pot by the late, great Maria Martinez (San Ildefonso Pueblo) that Jenny acquired from Jed Foutz of Shiprock Trading Company.

With Jenny born and raised in Dallas and Rob in Massachusetts, the natural questions that come to mind regarding their obvious love of Native art is why and how?

LONG SANTA FE ROOTS

"My family often visited Santa Fe when I was growing up," explains Jenny. "After I had begun practicing law, I was looking to settle in a place where I could ski, bike, fish and otherwise enjoy a close relationship to the natural world. My parents had been close friends with the Ballens (Sam and Ethel, who owned and ran the La Fonda for decades), and in 1989 I moved here and began serving as



Jenny and Rob Kimball in their dining/jentry room front of Tony Abeyta painting, *Modernist Trio*.



Left, Sheldon Harvey painting, *The Idea of Taos*.

Facing page, Guest bedroom with Tony Abeyta painting, *Water Spirits*.
Tammy Garcia bronze wall plaque, *Duet*.

one of the attorneys for La Fonda."

When Sam Ballen died in 2007, Jenny assumed his position as chairman of the hotel board, a role she held until 2014, when she and Rob, also an attorney with a practice in Phoenix, along with her brother, put together an investment group and bought out the previous group of owners.

The couple moved into their current Santa Fe house eight years ago and began to actively find and buy art for it, as well as for a residence they maintain in Paradise Valley. They swap weekends in the homes. Some people call it "the perfect marriage," they joke.

"I don't call myself an art collector," notes Rob. "I have long been aware of some Phoenix-area Indian artists, like Fritz Scholder (Luiseno), but most everything I know about Indian art I've learned since I've met Jenny. I don't have as good an eye as she has." He occasionally initiates painting purchases, but Rob is more drawn to sculpture, particularly works in glass, than the wall art or jewelry that Jenny finds, buys and prominently wears. Some of the sculptural works reside in their Arizona home.

Jenny suggests Rob plays a larger role than he lets on. "He goes to every Santa Fe Indian Market with me, to the Heard Museum Market (in Phoenix) and to many charitable events where we buy art together. And he has ended up becoming as good a friend to these artists as I have."

There are not many blank spots left in their Santa Fe home; they are approaching saturation. "When that happens, we'll probably do some recycling of works," says Jenny. "We'll donate some to museums or other nonprofit institutions," which will allow them to continue their hunting.

One field that will definitely remain open for acquisitions is jewelry. Sid and Ruth Schultz, another venerable Indian Market couple, have also been friends of Jenny's over the years, and Ruth often provides advice on jewelry purchases. The day of my visit, Jenny is wearing a turquoise choker and earring set by Tony Aguilar (Santo Domingo Pueblo) and beaded wrist cuff by Marcus Amerman (Choctaw). "Sid took a photo of me standing in front of a mural by Tony Abeyta that hangs in La Fonda, and they gave a copy of the photo to Marcus," she explains. He then created the stunning cuff that unmistakably captures her likeness. "I would never pay someone to create an image of myself, but this came as a surprise gift, and I love it and wear it all the time."

The couple has also bought a lot of new art to hang in La Fonda, including many works by Native artists. This runs from large paintings to most of the bed headboards.

SUPPORTING THE ARTS

The Kimballs are very active supporters of Native arts, aside from their collecting. Jenny sat on the Southwestern Association for Indian Arts board for several years, and they donate financially to its ongoing operations. She always volunteers to assist with the judging during Santa Fe Indian Market and helps support the group in many other ways, not least of which is the La Fonda's hosting of SWAIA's most important annual fundraising event, the Gala Dinner and auction held on Saturday night of Indian Market weekend. They also host the annual Institute of American Indian Arts auction dinner, held every Wednesday night of Indian Market week.

"I try to cover our costs as best I can, but the events are not intended to be a moneymaker for us," she says. "We'll keep supporting them, because they are organizations we believe in. And with Indian Market taking place right on our doorstep, it just makes good sense. The Ballens got involved with both events many, many years ago, and when we came in, I wanted to continue our involvement with the things they loved and cared for."

Concludes Jenny, "We don't think of ourselves as collectors," but she admits the role may have sneaked up on them. "We pretty much just buy art we like, and fortunately the artists are friends. That's the best way to put it."

Daniel Gibson served as editor for Native Peoples magazine for 12 years and is the author of Pueblos of the Rio Grande: A Visitor's Guide and Kevin Red Star: Crow Indian Artist, among other books. He is the editor of this and other annual magazines for The Santa Fe New Mexican.

