

Bard Graduate Center to Present First Exhibition of Rare Navajo Textiles from the American Museum of Natural History in Groundbreaking Physical and Virtual Exhibitions

Shaped by the Loom: Weaving Worlds in the American Southwest Features Rarely Exhibited Historic Navajo Textiles and Works by Contemporary Diné (Navajo) Artists to Explore the Traditions and Cosmologies Behind the Finished Work

The first exhibition to showcase the American Museum of Natural History's (AMNH) historic collection of Navajo textiles, *Shaped by the Loom: Weaving Worlds in the American Southwest* is being curated and presented at **Bard Graduate Center** (BGC) in two forms—a physical exhibition opening **February 17, 2023** and an online exhibition opening that month. *Shaped by the Loom* pairs these rare historic weavings from the AMNH—most acquired a century ago and many never before exhibited—with contemporary Navajo textiles and materials to explore the processes, traditions, and cosmologies that underpin Navajo weaving. Focusing on Indigenous aesthetics and ways of knowing, *Shaped by the Loom* will examine the ecosystem of craft production in the American Southwest—from working with sheep, harvesting dye plants, and producing fibers, to the individual and communal rhythms of making, as well as the songs, stories, and prayers that inform the practice of creating textiles.

Curated by **Hadley Jensen**, BGC/AMNH Postdoctoral Fellow in Museum Anthropology, in consultation with Diné (Navajo) master weavers **Lynda Teller Pete** and **Barbara Teller Ornelas**, *Shaped by the Loom* emphasizes Native agency and experience, with both the innovative physical and digital exhibitions encompassing a diversity of narratives to explore cultural preservation and heritage. The physical gallery exhibition will feature 25 Navajo textiles dating from the 1800s to the present day, and the digital project will feature the first catalogue of the AMNH's nearly 250 Navaho textiles in a rich immersive and interactive experience.

Shaped by the Loom explores six themes: Homeland and Cosmology; Ecology; Dyeing and Coloring; Techniques and Technologies; Design Elements; and Value and Exchange. The exhibition foregrounds the active and historical practices that shape the art of weaving through a new interpretation of the AMNH's collection, expressing both the cultural legacy and continued vibrancy of weaving traditions in the American Southwest.

Gallery Exhibition — Opening February 17, 2023

The gallery exhibition will feature 25 historic and contemporary Navajo textiles, as well as objects including images by Diné (Navajo) photographers, and historic and contemporary weaving materials. The exhibition will also present comparisons with Pueblo and Hispanic weaving traditions to show regional variation in—and transmission of—motifs, materials, designs, and techniques.

Online Exhibition — Launching February 2023

Developed as a resource for scholars and educators as well as contemporary makers and those curious about the craft, the interactive online exhibition will offer a distinct and immersive experience complementing—but functioning independently of—the gallery exhibition.

An interactive catalogue will feature approximately 250 items from the AMNH collection of Navajo textiles, including images and metadata, alongside an illustrated essay by the late Dr. Ira Jacknis of the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology, as well as essays by curator Hadley Jensen and Diné master weaver Lynda Teller Pete.

A deep exploration of these materials and narratives will be facilitated by digital tools, including: an interactive feature that enables viewers to explore 360-degree panoramic imaging—created by BGC for the project—of sites that are integral to the weaving process; and a magnification tool that allows users to look closely at weave structures, dyes, and photo micrographs of fibers and raw materials.

About Focus Projects

Shaped by the Loom is part of Bard Graduate Center's Focus Projects series, exhibitions that are curated by faculty, postdoctoral fellows, and graduate students and emerge from their research and teaching. These exhibitions form part of an innovative program that promotes experimentation in display and interpretation, provides graduate students the opportunity to be involved in every aspect of exhibition development, and engages the public with new ways of understanding the material world. Past Focus Projects include [*The Story Box: Franz Boas, George Hunt and the Making of Anthropology*](#); [*Richard Tuttle: What Is the Object?*](#); [*Conserving Active Matter*](#); [*Jan Tschichold and the New Typography: Graphic Design Between the World Wars*](#); and [*The Codex and Crafts in Late Antiquity*](#).

About Bard Graduate Center

As the leading research institute in the United States dedicated to the study of decorative arts, design history, and material culture, Bard Graduate Center has pioneered the study of objects to better understand the cultural history of the material world. Offering experiences for scholars, students, and the general public alike, Bard Graduate Center is built on multidisciplinary study and the integration of research, graduate teaching, and public exhibitions. Since its founding in 1993, Bard Graduate Center has established a network of more than 400 alumni who work in leading museums, universities, and institutions worldwide to advance new ways of thinking about material culture. For more information, visit bgc.bard.edu.