

AGUILAR

Felipita and Asunción
Santo Domingo Pueblo
circa 1905-1914



Special Exhibit
Opens Thursday, August 8th, 2019
Reception 5 to 7 pm



adobe gallery

art of the southwest indian
ALEXANDER E. ANTHONY JR.

Building Quality Collections for 42 Years

AGUILAR

Felipita Aguilar Garcia & Asunción Aguilar Caté Santo Domingo Pueblo

At the turn of the twentieth century, Felipita Aguilar Garcia and Asunción Aguilar Caté—sisters from Santo Domingo Pueblo—were creating pottery in the traditional fashion of their people. The Aguilar sisters were skilled potters who produced fine examples of traditional Santo Domingo Black-on-cream pottery. At the time, the Santa Fe train stopped at Santo Domingo Pueblo, allowing the sisters and other Native artists to sell their works to visitors.

By 1910, the Aguilar sisters' pottery sales had decreased significantly. They sought counsel from trader Julius Seligman, who was aware of their declining sales. Seligman suggested that they develop new designs. His specific suggestion was that they use more red than they had in the past. The Aguilar sisters accepted Seligman's advice, began experimenting, and ultimately created two distinct versions of a new style of pottery that was more bold and modern-looking than standard Santo Domingo pottery. In one version, the decorated area is black with narrow cream-colored lines forming strong geometric patterns. In the other, the designs are of the same type, but in red and black with cream-colored outlines.

Most of the Aguilar sisters' creations were water jars (or "tinajas") and storage jars. It is known that they also produced bowls—a photograph dated 1912 shows a large Aguilar sisters dough bowl or large storage jar on a library table in the lobby of Lamy, New Mexico's El Ortiz Hotel. (Taylor, 1987:220)

Seligman stocked his shelves with their new works, but there is no indication that sales increased. Their movement was strong but short-lived. It seems to have ended around 1915, most likely because of old age or illness. There is some disagreement as to the end of their careers, however. An unpublished text by Francis Harlow and Dwight Lanmon includes a handful of pieces by the Aguilar sisters, most of which are reported to date to 1910-1915. Chapman (p.152) states that two Black-on-red jars are known to have been made by one potter as late as 1920. He does not state the name of the potter, but it can be assumed that he was referring to one of the sisters. Douglas (1941) states that the two sisters passed away around 1915. Batkin (p.99) states that "evidence suggests that Felipita Garcia continued her style as late as 1920 to 1930; she also made traditional

polychrome and Black-on-red vessels, all of them beautifully executed.”

We are attributing our collection to both Felipita and Asunción, as they are generally regarded as the creators of this style. We are unable to confidently attribute a certain style to a certain sister, and so are crediting the pair for the creation of these jars. It should be noted there was likely a third potter in the family who produced similar works—many of our reference materials mention a sister-in-law. Her name is inconsistent between various texts, and so we are unable to identify her with confidence. As is often the case with pueblo history, conflicting reports exist, and precise details are unknown. It is our sincere hope that records someday will permit the attribution of specific vessels to the hands of each of the Aguilar sisters, and possibly their sister-in-law as well. For now, we cannot make attributions with any degree of confidence. What we do know is that the Aguilar sisters’ pottery, both the old and new styles, slid into obscurity, save for recognition from the scholars mentioned above. Collectors who purchased their pieces were aware of neither the names of the makers nor the story behind the creation of the style.

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When viewing these jars, one might assume that they were made much later than they were. That assumption would be reasonable, as they look very modern. The Aguilar sisters created a seamless blend of old and new that has aged very well in the century that has passed since its inception. Quite simply, they were ahead of their time. Like many truly innovative creators, their efforts were not recognized until much later. Despite being largely ignored during the era of their creation, the Aguilar sisters’ jars rank among the most important pueblo pottery pieces made during the early twentieth century.

In 2003, Adobe Gallery curated an exhibit of pottery made by the Aguilar sisters. The exhibit was the first to bring to the attention of the general public the names of these two exceptional potters and their creation of a new pottery typology. With our new exhibit, we wish to continue those efforts. The sixteen jars featured in this catalog represent the wide variety of design styles of the Aguilar sisters—from the traditional nineteenth century Santo Domingo style to the ultimate creation of a new style, as well as the steps between the two. We are pleased to again exhibit a large selection of their works and to continue our effort to keep their names prominent among collectors of the finest historic pueblo pottery.



Alexander E. Anthony, Jr.

August 2019



Item # C4213D 13-½" height x 11" diameter

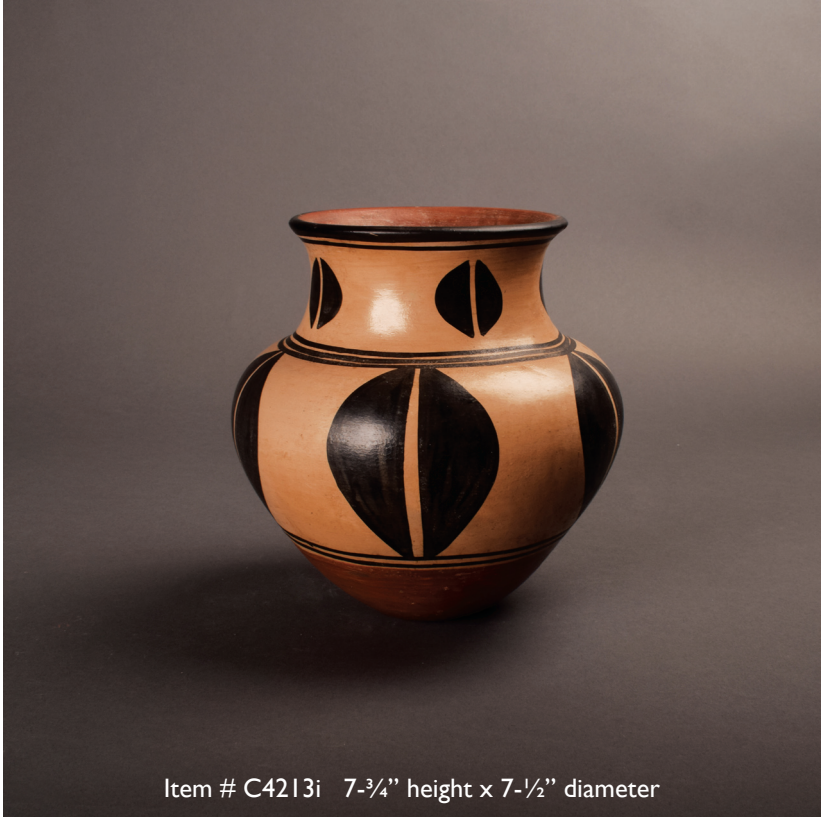
The Aguilar sisters created pottery masterpieces long before they created the bold black and Black-on-red designs for which they are remembered today. Their early style, which they continued making into the early 1900s, featured geometric black designs on a cream background slip. This jar is very typical of their fine early-career work; however, it is larger in size than most. At 13-½ inches tall, it stands a couple inches above their standard jar size.

Their designs, precision with pigment application, and the overall appeal of their work sets them apart from most potters of their day. The design on the body of this jar and around the neck is comprised solely of black triangles. The design may be viewed in one of two manners: black design on a cream background, or cream design outlined by black triangles. Around the upper neck, we see a similar situation in that the cream slip background emerges as a design element because of the black pigment that outlines it. The black guaco pigment was always applied in a strong and consistent fashion, with the thick application resulting in eye-catching designs like these.



This jar is something of a transitional piece from the Black-on-cream typology previously made by the two potters. Here, they applied their new design idea on the body but retained the old Black-on-cream style around the neck. The combination of the two styles is unusual and striking. The potters chose a dynamic yet simple design for the neck, with black lines expanding outward from two black parallel lines over a cream background. The design appears to be in motion. The static mid-body design features strong brick-red geometric elements outlined by a cream background and separated by black triangular elements. The lower body is traditional brick-red stone polished coloration, with a bottom that is slightly concave.

Framing lines at the rim, between the neck and body, and below the body design all are penetrated by a traditional ceremonial line break—a device that is used constantly in Santo Domingo pottery. “Every pot is the abiding place of a spirit which is manifested by the resonance of the vessel when tapped, and that to curb its freedom of exit and return by painting completely encircling lines is to endanger the vessel, which may be broken through the efforts of the spirit to pass these barriers.” (Chapman, 1936:33)



Item # C4213i 7-³/₄" height x 7-¹/₂" diameter

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Very few of the jars made by the Aguilar sisters were of the child-sized scale of this wonderful piece. Perhaps it was their attempt to produce something that could be purchased for less money and transported without hassle.

Impressively, the potters did not compromise their quality of work when creating smaller pieces such as this one. Except for size, this small jar has all the attributes of their larger works. The bold black split ovoid design on the body and the similar but smaller design on the neck were applied with the same skill and precision as those which are seen on larger vessels. The boldness and strength of the design adds a sense of stability and significance to this smaller vessel. The jar is proportional in shape and scale to larger ones made by the Aguilars; it is an excellent display of their technical abilities. This is the smallest jar in the exhibit.

There is no ceremonial line break on the black rim pigment, but there is a continuous line break through the entire design on the neck and body. There is a slight faint fire cloud in one area of the body. This is a standout piece despite—or perhaps because of—its smaller size.

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Item # C4213F 10-1/4" height x 9-3/8" diameter

With this elegant jar, Felipita Aguilar Garcia & Asunción Aguilar Caté reached their zenith. The vessel is tall, slim and graceful, with particularly strong design work. The outstanding black six-sided elements on the body are incredible; they appear to provide windows into the jar. These larger elements are softened and separated by smaller black designs, created in mirror-image pairs. The surrounding field is a beautiful dark red. The cream slip can show through, very carefully and deliberately, to create thin framing lines around each design.

The combination of red/black/cream is beautifully balanced; the artists did not use too much of one color or too little of another. They not only demonstrated their talent in forming a beautifully balanced vessel, they also expressed an amazing artistic ability in the design. The black, which is usually a notable highlight of an Aguilar vessel, is particularly intense and beautiful here. The talents of the two Aguilar sisters may not have been recognized during their careers, but collectors today are appropriately appreciative of their amazing work. They created some of the most beautiful pottery ever made at Santo Domingo Pueblo. This piece is as strong as anything we've seen from these artists.



Item # C4213ZG 11-1/4" height x 11-1/8" diameter

Santo Domingo Pueblo is one of the most conservative and secretive of the Rio Grande Pueblos. Potters apparently were not encouraged to create new designs; they were instead taught to follow tradition and use recognized designs of the past. This changed with the Aguilar sisters, who were frustrated by decreasing sales of traditional wares and decided to create new designs. This jar could possibly be one of their early attempts to innovate. The designs are not what was being used on other jars of the time; the use of four design bands rather than three is also unique.

The body of the jar is divided into two panels—a larger one atop a smaller one. The lower panel features the more traditional Santo Domingo bilateral symmetrical units in sequence. The main panel is sectioned off in rectangular boxes, each of which contains a black element expanding outward to the right. The element may be a cloud design of some sort. Sinusoidal lines resting on the shoulder add a dynamic dimension that seems to be in constant movement around the jar. The neck design elements are free-floating symmetrical pairs of black units, hovering like clouds within the space created by framing lines. This is an excellent example of early innovations by the Aguilar sisters.



Item # C4213G 10-7/8" height x 10-5/8" diameter

Felipita Aguilar Garcia & Asunción Aguilar Caté were responsible for a quiet revolution in pottery designs at Santo Domingo Pueblo between 1905 and 1915. They developed a new style of pottery design, using bold black pigment over a cream slip. One should understand the difficulty of creating and applying the black pigment, which was made from boiling the leaves of the Rocky Mountain bee plant. The pigment is clear when applied, making it difficult to see what has been painted and what has not. To obtain the consistency of the black on this jar, many layers of pigment were applied. It is only after firing that the definition is apparent.

This jar has a single design concept using circles and straight lines formed by the undercoat of cream slip. A cream framing line encircles the lower body and separates the design from the red underbody. The rim is black, and the interior of the rim is red. The base is concave. The bold black areas outlined by thin lines of cream color make a major statement using what is a rather simple design. It is the stark simplicity that is so impactful, and that impact is as strong as anything we've experienced from the works of these talented potters.



Item # C4213ZH 8-5/8" height x 8-5/8" diameter

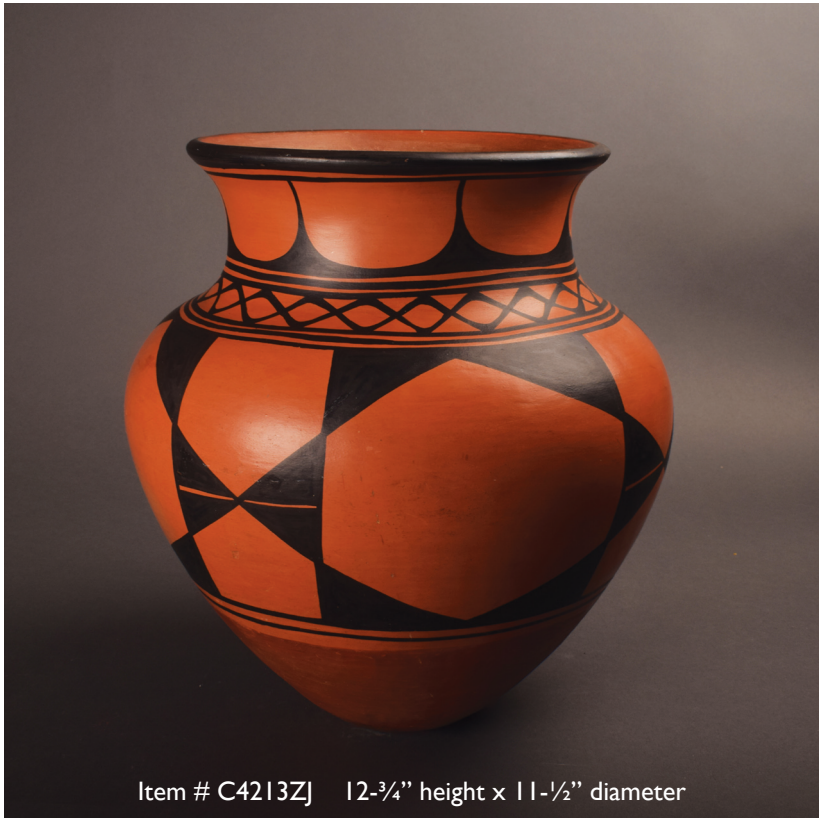
During the period of about 1890 to 1910, the Aguilar sisters produced some of the finest pottery ever seen from their pueblo. Their jars were tall and graceful, had high shoulders, and were expertly painted. During those years, they primarily painted their jars with traditional pueblo designs, which they modified with subtle personal touches. This jar features the traditional Santo Domingo cream ovals on the wide body style seen on pottery by other artists of the pueblo. The cream ovals are outlined in black; each one is positioned within its own rectangular box. Below these traditional designs, however, is one of the aforementioned innovative personal touches: a thin band of design near the base of the jar featuring cream triangles, alternating up and down, outlined in black lines with attached black dots. This was their slight variation to a traditional design, and it was placed near the underbody as if meant to be somewhat hidden. Both sisters were true artists and innovators, and it shows in the way they combined their own ideas with those of their ancestors. As is to be expected, there are framing lines just below the black rim, on the shoulder of the jar, below the oval design section and below the lowest designs. Each design band is penetrated by a ceremonial line break.



Item # C4213Zi 10- $\frac{3}{4}$ " height x 11- $\frac{1}{2}$ " diameter

The strong design concept on the body of this vessel is based on a traditional design of crossed diagonals, which was documented by Chapman (p.85). However, the artists embellished it by adding a four-leaf element at the intersection of the two black triangles. This might have been their way of elaborating on a traditional design which had been used many times before. The unusual treatment of the neck design adds to the overall brilliance of this jar. The lower part uses rain clouds, with increased intensity as a result of double-arched clouds and black dots for rain or hail. The upper design on the neck—just below the rim—is more relaxed, eliciting thoughts of gentle wind and pleasant motion.

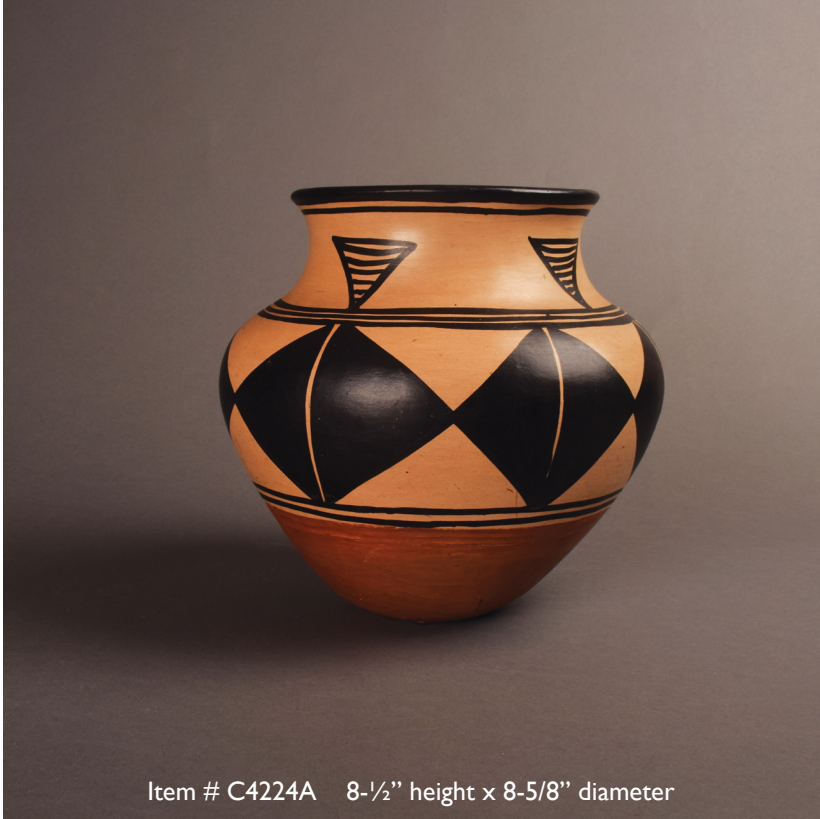
To emphasize the boldness, the artist added three framing lines just below the rim, three more on the shoulder, and a pair below the primary design panel. The very strong dark black pigment—one of the most recognizable traits of an Aguilar jar—stands out even more than usual on this amazing jar. Some of the Aguilar sisters' jars are delicate in appearance, but this one is bold, bright and powerful. Their ability to produce different styles so effectively is what sets them apart from other potters of their time.



Item # C4213ZJ 12-¾" height x 11-½" diameter

This jar is unusual in that the body was covered in red slip rather than the usual cream slip. According to Chapman: "From comparatively early times, a small quantity of red ware seems to have been made by a few of the Santo Domingo potters. Not more than ten specimens have been found during the course of this study (in the 1930s). Most of these give evidence of considerable age, though two in the collection of the Indian Arts Fund are known to have been made by one potter as late as 1920. . . . The forms of these few known specimens of bowls and jars are identical with those of Black-on-cream ware. The red clay slip is apparently mixed with a small proportion of cream slip, for in all specimens the tone of the decorated zone is lighter than that of the red underbody." (p.152)

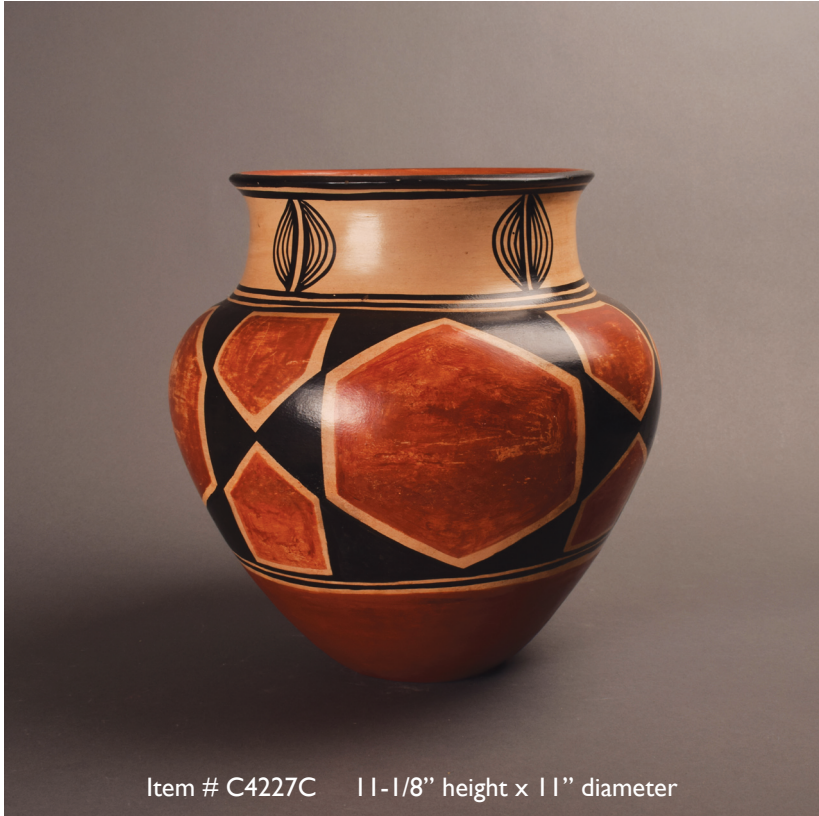
This Black-on-red jar is a highlight of this group, and not just because of its gorgeous, atypical color. Its shape, too, is amazing—a classic Aguilar shape with a few inches of height added. It's impressive—nearly symmetrical, with just enough slight variation to remind the viewer that despite its deceptively modern appearance, this is a handmade piece of pueblo pottery.



Item # C4224A 8- $\frac{1}{2}$ " height x 8- $\frac{5}{8}$ " diameter

Water jars almost always feature symbols associated with rain. They may not always be obvious to outsiders, but they usually exist. The neck design on this Aguilar jar—an inverse triangle with parallel black lines—may appear to just be a decorative design; however, it possibly represents a violent tornado-like storm with abundant rain. The black triangles on the body—meeting at their peaks, positioned back-to-back with neighboring black triangles—could possibly represent the darkness of a day of such torrential rain. All of this is speculative, however, because we do not know the intention of the artist.

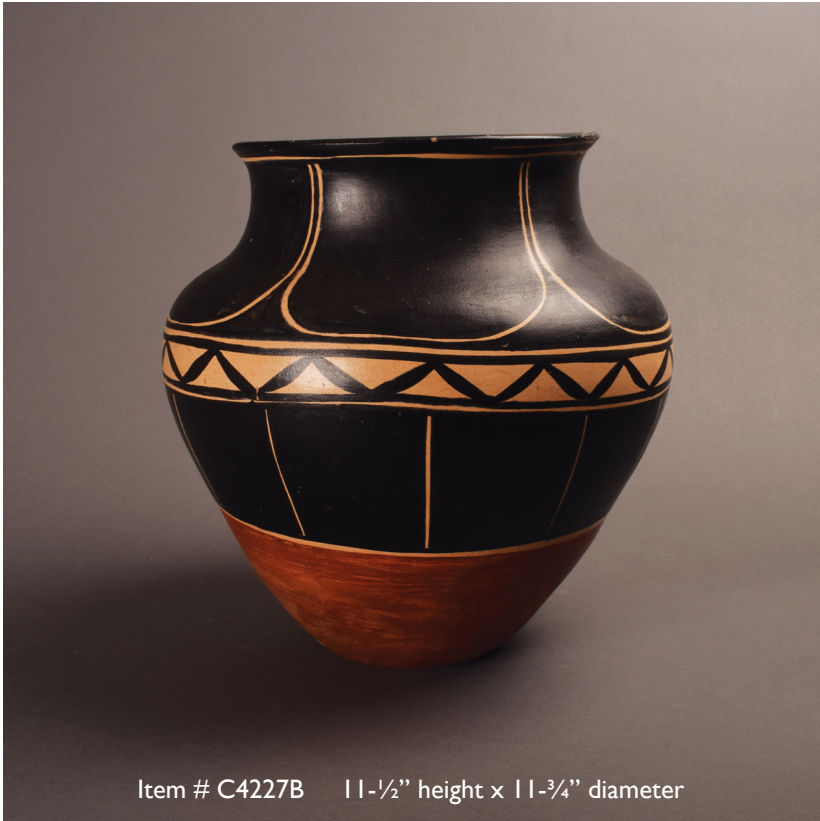
Following tradition, the potter painted the rim black, the interior neck red, and the underbody red. A single framing line lies below the rim, double framing lines lie below the design panel and triple framing lines define the shoulder. Triple framing lines are not often seen on Santo Domingo pottery—they provide a clue that a piece might have been created by the Aguilars. A ceremonial line break cuts through every set of lines, including the black rim.



Item # C4227C 11-1/8" height x 11" diameter

It is speculated that this style was originally developed by the Aguilars early in their career of innovative pottery design. The body design is a style they created beginning around 1910 and the Black-on-cream neck is the style they were producing prior to that. It is surmised that they were introducing a new style but also retaining aspects of the older one to clarify the origin as Santo Domingo. Perhaps they were unsure about abandoning pueblo tradition completely.

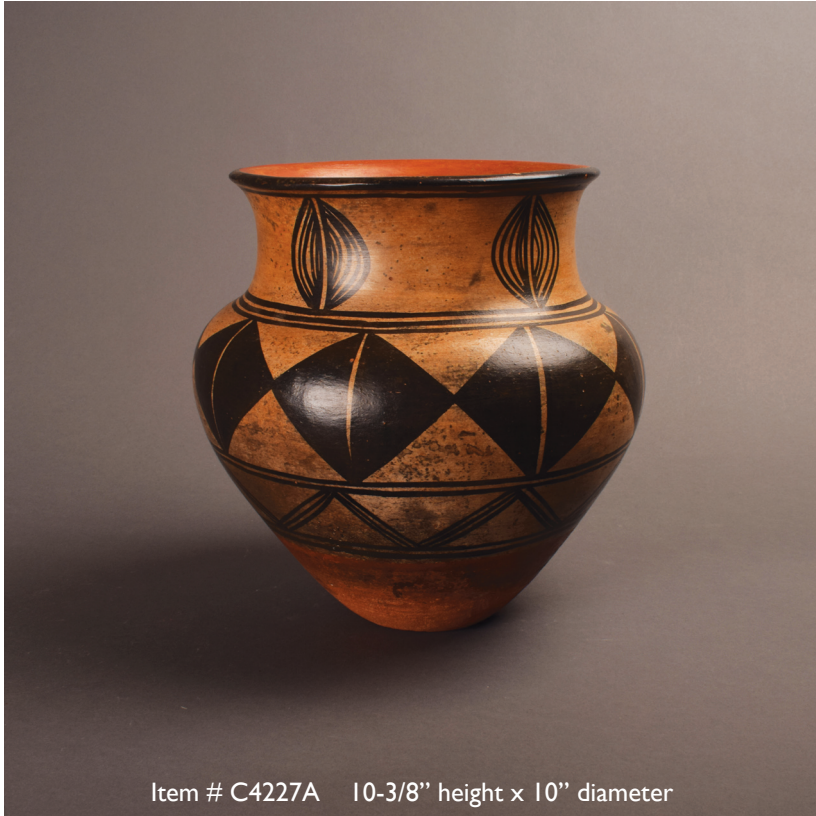
The neck design, consisting of expanding black lines anchored to rigid straight black designs, continues the traditional Black-on-cream styles. Below the Black-on-cream neck is a wide design band, which occupies the majority of the vessel's surface. Here, the designs are mostly atypical: large, red, five- and six-sided shapes, which are surrounded by the bold black that the Aguilars preferred. Between the black and red, the cream slip peeks through, creating thin lines around the red shapes. The Aguilars' design work on this jar is first-rate; their combination of traditional and innovative styles is seamless.



Item # C4227B 11-½" height x 11-¾" diameter

With this jar, the artist painted most of the surface with black pigment, allowing thin cream lines to form the design. The notable variation of this jar's design from that of the others of this general style is the division into three sections. The neck and lower body designs are almost entirely black. A cream band circles the jar just below the shoulder. It is an innovation from the all-black design seen on occasion from the artist.

The cream band circling the jar is decorated with an undulating line, in black, which matches that of the rest of the jar and links the upper and lower sections together. The lower black section is split into rectangles by cream lines. The upper black section features long, thin "U"-shaped lines moving down from and then turning back towards the rim. The black here is deep, strong, and reflective; it almost resembles tar. Below the lowest black section, the red underbody is stone-polished, as is the red interior of the neck. There are no ceremonial line breaks in this design. This is an exceptional Aguilar sisters jar.

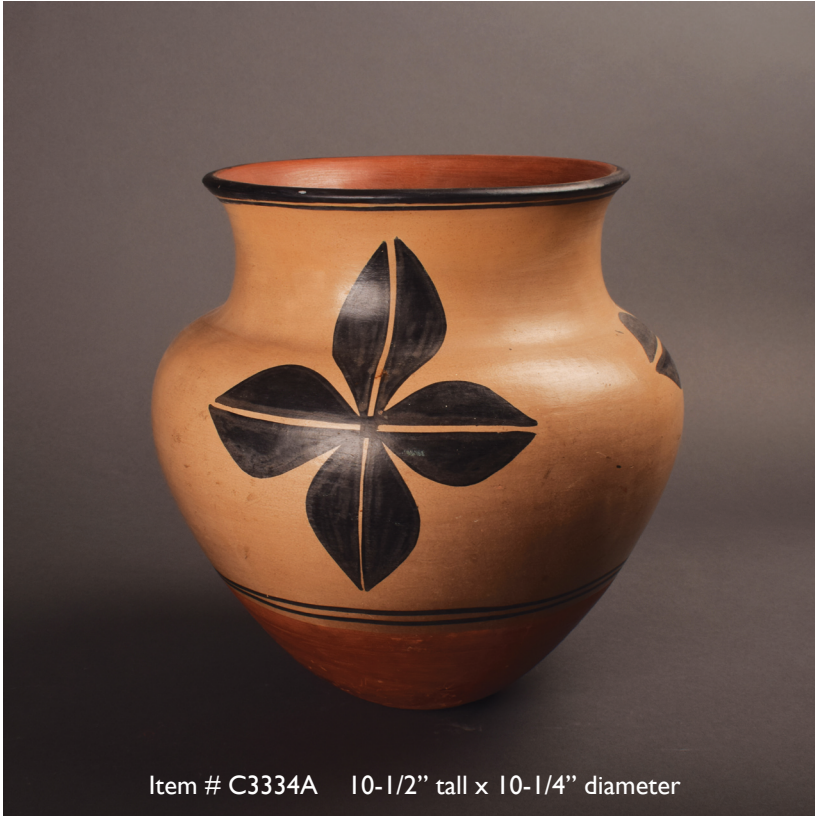


Item # C4227A 10-3/8" height x 10" diameter

This turn-of-the-last-century jar uses a traditional Santo Domingo water jar vessel shape with a bulging midsection, a slightly curved neck, and a graceful rolled out rim. The Black-on-cream typology fits the style of vessels being made at the pueblo at that time, but the design is clearly one created by the Aguilar sisters. The jar is divided into three distinct design sections. The mid body design features pairs of large black triangles arranged back-to-back, reaching out towards each other and meeting at their apexes. The black triangles create hourglass-shaped areas of visible cream slip. On the neck are black lines expanding outward, which have been described by some as "onions." The lower design band features triangles created by parallel black lines.

As is typical of works in this style, there are three black framing lines at the shoulder, a single one at the rim, and pairs above and below the lower design strip. The rim is black, and the interior is red stone-polished slip. The entire design is interrupted by a ceremonial line break that does not include the black rim, which is solid.

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Item # C3334A 10-1/2" tall x 10-1/4" diameter

This jar has three identical floral elements, each with intersecting split leaves and a single black dot in the center. The only other element that might be considered a design is the group of four solid black parallel lines contained by a pair of external dotted lines, all six of which run vertically from the rim to the base of the design panel. They continue vertically from the top and bottom framing and banding lines, creating a ceremonial line break. The thick black rim also has a ceremonial line break.

The jar's creator was extremely talented, and an excellent design artist. The jar is beautifully shaped, and the cream slip was expertly applied. There is one black line of paint that apparently ran while applying one of the lower framing lines, but that is part of the original preparation and does not affect the beauty of the vessel. It is a sparsely designed but very powerful jar.





Item # C4152A 14" height x 14-³/₄" diameter

The surface of this storage jar is quite substantial, providing a large area on which to paint the body design. The short neck enhances the considerable size of the body. The red band below the decorated panel—wiped on with a rag, usually—is indicative of a pre-1920 period. Storage jars rarely indicate wear from having been used because they generally were used for dry items, not water, so no stains resulted. It is difficult to determine if this one was used at the pueblo before it was sold.

The striking design on the upper half of the vessel certainly relates to rain, clouds—water sources. The most prominent features are pairs of black lines curving up and out, increasing in width. These have been referred to as “spread-arm” designs. The small element floating above and between these represents a cloud, from which a soft rain is falling. Rain symbols are often used on pottery; the artists are at once expressing gratitude and asking for more. Rain is very important to New Mexico and is always scarce, so a plea for help from the Great Spirit is understandable. This is a unique and wonderful storage jar that may have had special significance to its desert-dwelling creator.



Item # C3310Q 9-3/4" tall x 10-1/2" diameter

This is a polychrome jar with traditional rag-wiped bentonite slip and a black rim around the top. It features black double framing lines just under the rim, another pair just above the red underbody, and a third pair as part of the main body decoration. Triple framing lines separate the main body from the shoulder decoration. All the framing lines incorporate ceremonial breaks.

The main body is decorated in extremely bold design elements—strong black triangles back-to-back. The neck is decorated with cloud designs, which appear to float on the cream background. The interior neck has been rag-wiped with red slip, and the underbody below the design field also has been wiped with red slip. The underside is concave. All these features are consistent with the established works of the Aguilar sisters. This piece is simple, strong and understated; it is a testament to the Aguilar sisters' ability to do more with less.

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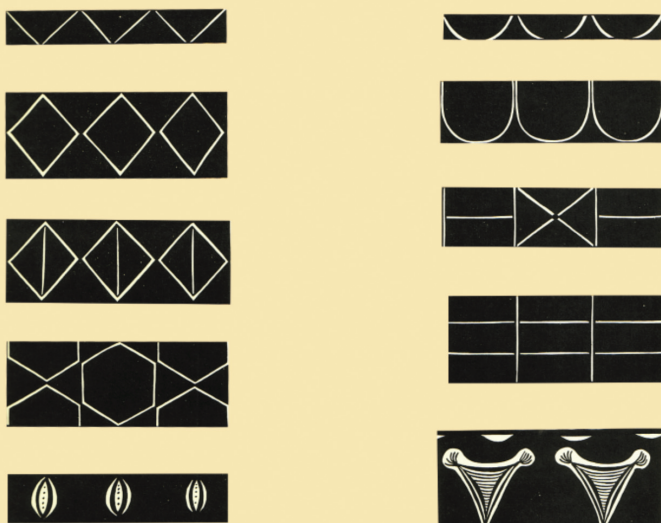
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Designs With Both Primary Motifs and Secondary Spaces Filled With Black



20

These are generally believed to be the product of one potter, now deceased, who made frequent use of the device during a period of perhaps ten years prior to 1920...commonly used motifs are first painted in solid black, following which the open spaces are also painted black, leaving a narrow open space to separate the resulting secondary black spaces from the primary motifs.

From *The Pottery of Santo Domingo Pueblo: A Detailed Study of Its Decoration*, by Kenneth M. Chapman, 1936.

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