



Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NC American Indian Pottery on Exhibit

On exhibit through August 23, 2008 at the North Carolina Pottery Center in Seagrove, is pottery by members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee, the Haliwa-Saponi Tribe, and Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina. Pottery by members of the South Carolina's Catawba Tribe is also on exhibit.

North Carolina has an American Indian population of over 100,000, the largest of any state east of the Mississippi River. There are eight state recognized tribes: the Coharie, the Sappony, the Meherrin, the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation, the Eastern Band of Cherokee, the Haliwa-Saponi, the Lumbee, and the Waccamaw-Siouan. The Eastern Band of Cherokee is also federally recognized.

The Carolina coast was the site of the earliest evidence of pottery making in North America, the pieces dated at 4,500 B.C. and tempered with Spanish moss. In 1540, when Hernando De Soto traveled through the Carolinas, the Catawba Indian Nation controlled 55,000 square miles of land including portions of North Carolina and Virginia and most of South Carolina. The Cherokee dominated an area including present day East Tennessee and Western North Carolina. Within the next two centuries, European settlement left the American Indian population decimated by disease, enslavement, and war, with treaties made and broken, hunting grounds and land for traditional farming methods taken from them. By 1840, the Catawba Nation was confined to 641 acres in Rock Hill, SC.

In 1838, with the discovery of gold on Cherokee lands, the federal government forced the migration of the Cherokee and other tribes to a reservation in Oklahoma. Of the 16,000 Cherokee who began the march which was to become infamously known as the "Trail of Tears", 4,000 died of cold, hunger, and disease. Today, the Western Band of Cherokee is located in Tahlequah, OK. The Eastern Band of Cherokee, formed from the few who escaped the forced removal, live today on the Qualla Indian Reservation, held in trust by the federal government.

Yet through this great destruction, pottery making has survived, preserving and conveying cultural identity with forms and processes that reference a proud and resurging culture. While individual artist's work on exhibit may differ stylistically and reflect the contemporary tastes of the makers, the work shares much in common. The pottery is coil built and may be burnished with a polishing stone to achieve its characteristic satin patina. Some pieces are deeply carved.

The work is unglazed, and is pit fired resulting in subtle tones of red, cream, and soft grey to deep black.

The Catawba Nation has maintained the longest pottery making tradition in North America and was instrumental in keeping the Cherokee pottery making tradition viable. The vast tourist market in the North Carolina mountains from the 1920s through the 1970s provided an important source of income for both the Catawba and Cherokee potters. Traditional wares were being produced in very small quantities, but pottery making was maintained through small decorative ware. The stunning revival of Cherokee stamped and carved pottery, as witnessed in this exhibit, began in 2002 with a series of workshops at the Museum of the Cherokee Indian. In 2003, the Cherokee Potters Guild was formed. Many of its founding members have work in this exhibition.

Historically, all cultures developed pottery making for three uses: utilitarian or functional such as cooking pots and storage jars, ceremonial vessels, and pieces for trade. The potter's wheel was developed in Mesopotamia (present day Iraq) around 3500 B.C., the technology then carried by traders to Europe. Many cultures world-wide maintained a coil building tradition which more easily accommodated the production of large storage pieces. Within the European culture, men were the potters. Within the American Indian culture, women were the potters. The gender barrier was broken in both cultures during the 20th century. The diversity of cultural expression continues to flourish within the pottery communities of North Carolina.

Exhibitions are made possible through the generosity of our membership, the Randolph County Board of Commissioners, the North Carolina Arts Council, the National Endowment for the Arts Institute of Museum and Library Services, the Covington Foundation, and the Cooke Foundation. Thank you!

The mission of the North Carolina Pottery Center is to promote public awareness of and appreciation for the history, heritage, and ongoing tradition of pottery making in North Carolina. The Center is located at 233 East Avenue in Seagrove, NC. For more information, please call 336.873.8430 or go to www.ncpotterycenter.com.