

Andrea Fisher

Fine Pottery

Thomas Tenorio

Santo Domingo



Born in 1963 at Santo Domingo Pueblo, Thomas Tenorio started making pots in the early 1990's. He grew up thinking he came from a family of heshi makers but found out his maternal great-grandmother had made traditional Santo Domingo pots and sold them by the side of the road in the 1940's. Realizing that these days only a few families continue to make Santo Domingo-style pottery he was inspired to learn so that he could help keep the tradition alive.

Thomas tells us he is a self-taught potter: "Nobody showed me how. I learned on my own through a lot of trial and error." He does credit Kenneth Chapman's book *The Pottery of Santo Domingo Pueblo* for providing him with examples of old Santo Domingo designs.

Thomas uses local Santo Domingo clay which he cleans, mixes, hand-coils, shapes, decorates and then fires outdoors in an open flame, just as his ancestors did for hundreds of years before him. He learned to protect his pots during the firing, surrounding them with a metal cage so no fuel touches them and burns the pot. It took him years to figure out the complicated chemistries of the buff slip and spinach paint (made from bee weed).

Thomas' greatest pleasure comes through recognition of his current work. While he enjoys the process, he "gets lost in the painting and could sit for hours and hours and paint." He especially loves painting the swirls of the water, the wind and the corn. He also loves painting his bowls, especially if they contain fish or traditional birds. He is exploring new shapes and designs on his more recent work but he isn't forgetting the traditional shapes and designs of Kewa on his huge pots.

Thomas read somewhere that he was a miniature potter. We laughed when he told us that because he is not a short person and some of his more recent pieces have been almost as big as he is. When we asked him where he gets his inspiration he replied, "My inspiration comes from my traditional faith at home and from nature".

Thomas often participates in the Heard Museum Guild Indian Art Fair (where he earned the 2012 1st Place ribbon for Traditional Painted Pottery). He earned the same 1st Place award at the Heard in 2007 and has earned 1st and 2nd Place ribbons at the SWAIA Santa Fe Indian Market in 2015, 2014, 2011 and 2010.

In 2013 Thomas had an extremely successful one-man show at Andrea Fisher Fine Pottery where he did an outdoor firing for some of our best customers.

Thomas signs his pottery "Thomas Tenorio, Kewa, NM" and sometimes adds the year.

His pottery can be found in the collections of:

- The White House, Washington, DC
- Rockefeller Museum, New York City
- Smithsonian Institute, Washington, DC
- Museum of Indian Arts & Culture, Santa Fe, NM
- Pueblo Grande Museum, Phoenix, AZ
- Crocker Museum, Sacramento, CA

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