



Navajo Textiles: The William Randolph Hearst Collection

Nancy J. Blomberg

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William Randolph Hearst's collection of Navajo textiles is one of the most complete gatherings of nineteenth-century Navajo weaving in the world. Comprising dozens of Classic Period serapes, chief blankets, Germantown eyedazzlers, and turn-of-the-century rugs, the 185-piece collection was donated to the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History in 1942 but for the next forty years was known only to a handful of scholars. Hearst began acquiring textiles from the Fred Harvey Company after viewing an exhibit of Indian artifacts. Over four decades he amassed a collection spanning more than a century of Navajo weaving and including nearly every major type produced from 1800 to 1920. Hearst's passion for American Indian artifacts was so strong that he had originally visualized his now-famous castle in San Simeon as a showplace for his Navajo textile collection. At a time when the Harvey Company was itself influencing the development of Indian handcrafts by opening up the tourist market, Hearst contributed to this influence by expressing his own artistic preference for rare and unusual pieces. This catalogue raisonné, featuring nearly 200 illustrations, provides the general public with the first look at this important collection. Nancy Blomberg's narrative introduces the reader to the history of Navajo weaving and documents Hearst's role in its development. The heart of the book provides a detailed analysis of each textile: fibers, yarn types, dyes, and designs. Navajo Textiles thus constitutes an invaluable reference for scholars and collectors and will be enjoyed by anyone who appreciates these beautiful creations from the Navajo loom.

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