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Pueblo Water Jars

Harry C. Edwards, *Handsome Morning*

Dominic Carter: These three beautiful water jars were crafted by the Pueblo peoples of the American Southwest in the late nineteenth century. As you walk around this case, notice the subtle differences in their organic forms and geometric designs.

The clay for these jars would be gathered from sacred sources, shaped into layered coils, smoothed and polished with stones, then fired over open flames. The jars were used to carry and store water, and also to trade with other Pueblos in the region. In 1882 the railroad brought Anglo traders and tourists to New Mexico; a cash market opened up for native artifacts.

This enthusiasm for handcrafted goods from Indian country coincided with the Arts and Crafts Movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Middle-class Americans often set up in their homes what they called an Indian corner, with native artifacts on proud display.

The popular image of "Indians," however, had little to do with reality. Trapped and impoverished on reservations, tribes had to find their way in the cash economy of modern life.

Art made by Native Americans, and art made about them, were very different things. The studio portrait of the young Indian woman Handsome Morning was done in 1921. Was this an earnest attempt by a white artist to portray a Dakota woman or an effort to feed the market's hunger for all things Indian? Or perhaps both?