"Indian Girls"
—a simple pair of Chucks
Certain pieces in the Coe collection are guaranteed to garner excitement from anyone who comes into our space. This pair of beaded Converse is absolutely one of those pieces. Many of our guests do not know about the artist Teri Greeves or her work, but they are immediately struck by the medium—a simple pair of Chucks. A shoe that everyone knows and has different associations with, whether basketball or punk rock, Chuck Taylors get around.

This piece, titled “Indian Girls,” captures the movement of individual dancer’s styles on the two-dimensional plane. Each side of each shoe shows a different dancer; these are not only a pair of matching shoes, but, additionally, each shoe is a work of art, a sculpture, and a story in its own right, telling a scene from contemporary powwows. On one side is a woman in a Southern Plains cloth dress and another wearing a Southern Plains buckskin. On the other shoe is a fancy dancer and a jingle dress dancer. These are individuals, but they are also Dancers, with their backs to us focusing our attention on their incredible strength and power of movement and rhythm that is a sustaining force.

Learn more about Teri Greeves and this piece here.

Converse, #13 cut beads, blue shoelaces, 6 x 12 in. NA0604

A wondrously beautiful form...
What a wondrously beautiful form, so perfectly woven and lovely to hold. It is hard to believe that this container was made for hard use; for storing foods, like shellfish, seaweed, and acorns.

Gorgeous and functional, it is engineered to allow for air circulation so foods would not spoil unnecessarily and allow newly harvested sea plants and food to drain. The basket’s utility was further enhanced as a result of it being made of plant materials; wood that is made to expand and contract with the introduction and drying of water. As a storage container, it would be kept at home for smaller and more easily carried bags and baskets to be emptied into. This is a large container, and its round form makes it awkward to carry, especially if it was filled, making it heavy. Bay leaves were used to keep mice and insects from the stored acorns.

Coe curator Bruce Bernstein had the very wonderful fortune of learning about baskets from Pomo basket weaver Mabel McKay (1907-1993). (Here is a nice tribute to her life by the Autry Museum). In numerous car rides and sitting with her while she demonstrated, she generously shared
her life stories with him. Knowing about bay leaves were things from her life, what she lived and learned from her family growing up at a quite different time.

Learn more about this piece and Bruce Bernstein’s experiences with artist Mabel McKay here.

Witness to history...

Unknown (Pomo, Mendocino County, California), Storage Basket, c. 1890. Sedge roots, Hazel Sticks, and clamshell disk beads, 11.5 x 18 diam. in. NA0540

This bowl lacks any information on its origins or maker. When Ted Coe acquired it, he noted: It turned up at the Elkhart Collection, Santa Fe, run by Bob Ashton, who had no idea of its tribal origin. But fortunately, objects are the key place where social actions and information is encoded. We only need to find the right tools to read, understand and
contextualize the basket to learn more about it. Using documented baskets can help identify and date this basket. For example, baskets found in European, Russian, and American collections allow us to date this piece and give a location.

The basket was made during a period of genocidal misery for California’s Indigenous peoples. Another important aspect as to why this bowl is hard to identify. By the 1860s, when this basket was made, the remnants of once great populations banded together. Surviving often meant finding other survivors, sometimes people who were your tribe’s traditional enemies and other times foreigners.

Consider what this weaver might have endured while making this basket. She was heroic in continuing to make baskets in the face of colonialist aggression. Nonetheless, she asserted her Indigenous agency over her circumstances by creating a wholly Indigenous item. Her incorporation of the beads makes them hers, an Indigenous testimony of strength, emphatically telling the world a story of survival and persistence. This basket is a marvel isn’t it?

Learn more [here](https://www.coeartscenter.org).

Unknown (Southern Pomo, Lake Miwok, or Coast Miwok, Sonoma County, California) **Bowl (Basket)**, c. 1860. Redbud, willow, and porcelain beads, 3.25 x 6.5 diam. in. NA0541

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