The Virtual Coe  

Being together while being apart....

June 25, 2021

Do you know her?
The Coe holds over a dozen different crooked knives in its collection dating from the late 1700s to the late 1980s. Each knife has its own personality, reflecting, quite literally, the hand of their maker. The fact that you can hold one of these knives in your hand, resting your thumb and fingers just so, and suddenly touch the past is incredibly powerful. And to see the aesthetic choices made by a particular carver in constructing their own tool, what they wanted to look at and feel as they carefully worked away on their projects only brings more meaning to that interaction. You can even tell whether the carver was right or left-handed, depending on the direction of the blade.

This particular knife is by far the most charming in the collection—not only is the handle carved with a delicate scroll, embedded on the front of the handle is an image framed under an aged piece of glass. Presented there, for the eyes of the maker to contemplate during work, is a newspaper cutout of the actress Joan Blondell. Blondell, who starred alongside James Cagney in numerous films and Broadway shows, was a classic “blonde bombshell” of the 1930s and ‘40s. In the photo, Blondell is captured glancing coyly backward over her shoulder, beaming a smile out for her beholder. It is definitely an inviting image, and its presence here on this crooked knife calls to mind the intimacy of work, with a touch of lightheartedness and humor alongside. The repurposed copper wire contrasts the aged hue of the wood and steel, all of which shows not just age but hours and hours of use.

Read more here.

Artist Unknown (Penobscot or Passamaquoddy attrib.), Crooked Knife with Joan Blondell Photo, c. 1930s. Wood, metal, glass, newspaper, copper wire, 4 x 1.75 x 9 in. (10.6 x 4.445 x 22.86 cm). NA0330f

The way of the ralámuli...
This belt or *pukera* is made out of handspun wool yarn, as are many traditional Tarahumara textiles. The Tarahumara women wear *wide skirts and loose blouses*, almost always covering their heads with a scarf if married, and wearing such *pukeras* around the waist. The geometric design motifs of black spirals and triangular patterns may represent mountains or hills (kawi), roads, a center, or an “eye”.

According to testimonies analyzed by anthropologists, the stair-like images mean “the road” or “the way” of the *ralámuli* that is fundamental in Tarahumara thought. Each path is distinct and unique, to which we must strive to work and do things well to go in that path. One typically sees the designs to reveal a division of the cosmos into three planes (supra-world, center, and underworld). These designs are a structured reflection of the relationship with these worlds; their path, and their connection to their environment, their lands, and the cosmos. Everything has its way, not only each individual *ralámuli*, but also the waters, the sun, the clouds, the flowers, and other entities that are considered beings that coexist with the Tarahumara. Living in harmony means following this path marked by the Creator. (Aguilera, 2007)

**In case you missed it...**

Experience artist John Hagen as he hosts COLLECTIONS SPOTLIGHT on June 15, 2021. Learn as Hagen talks about artworks relating to fishing in the Coe collection. John Hagen is an Unanga(ax), Inupiaq, Irish and Danish curator, and an artist. He is currently working as the Curator of Indigenous Arts and Initiatives at the Anchorage Museum in Anchorage, Alaska. He is also a photographer originally from Haines, Alaska. The inspirations for his work are people and place, and interactions between the two.

COLLECTIONS SPOTLIGHT is a program developed in partnership with First American Art Magazine is an interactive, online monthly experience that brings together diverse scholars and Native artists who select artworks from the Coe’s collection to interpret and discuss. The virtual Zoom format also brings together attendees from diverse regions. Attendee questions are accepted throughout the experience via chat, and at the end opened to audio. These events are free and open to the general public.
To view past The Virtual Coe issues, please click here.

Donate today

The Ralph T. Coe Center for the Arts is a private operating 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent of the Internal Revenue Code. Please donate online or mail checks to the Ralph T. Coe Center for the Arts, 1590 B Pacheco Street, Santa Fe, NM 87505. Your support creates connection. Thank you.

Ralph T. Coe Center for the Arts | 1590 B Pacheco Street, Santa Fe, NM 87505
(505) 983-6372 | info@coeartscenter.org | coeartscenter.org

Unsubscribe | View our Privacy Policy

Connect with us

Facebook | Instagram