

Barbara Teller Ornelas

MASTER NAVAJO WEAVER



Specializing in

Two Grey Hills, Period Pieces, Miniatures,
Demonstrations and Beadwork

Large Tapestries 3' X 5' or larger
(By request)

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<http://www.nativeart.net/artist>

BIOGRAPHY

Barbara Teller Ornelas was born, as her birth certificate states, “in the vicinity of” Montrose, Colorado on November 26, 1954. Her entry into the world took place in the shadow of a pinion tree as her family was in the process of gathering pinions nuts at the time of her premature arrival.

She was raised behind the Two Grey Hills Trading Post in New Mexico with two sisters and two brothers. Her father Sam Teller worked there as a Navajo Trader for 32 years. From grades Kindergarten to 6th she attended Toadlena Boarding School in Toadlena, NM at the foot of the Chuska Mountains. During her secondary education, Barbara moved away as so many Navajo children of past generations, and attended Aztec High School. After graduation she moved to Phoenix, AZ and attended Business College.

In Phoenix she met and married her husband, David Ornelas. In their 25 years of marriage, their family has grown to include two children, daughter Sierra and son Micheal. Barbara used her weaving talents to put her husband through the College of Pharmacy Program at the University of Arizona (1991).

Barbara and her family reside in Tucson, AZ.

FAMILY WEAVING HISTORY

Weaving has been in my family for as long as I can remember. Up to 6 weaving generations have been recorded. The 1st and 2nd generations are represented by my great great grandmother Asdzaa Tabaaha and my great grandmother Denetsouie Bitsi. The 3rd generation is represented by my maternal grandmother; Susie Tom (1903-1985) wove Two Grey Hills rugs and my paternal grandmother Nellie Peshlakai Teller who was famous for her Two-Faced Rugs. Grandmother Nellie wove Twill weaves, Saddle blankets and did our first Teller’s Rug Catalog by weaving a sampler with all her designs and color combination for my father who took orders from tourists visiting the Trading Post. My mother, Ruth B. Teller (1928-) and my maternal aunt Margaret Yazzie (1930-) represent the 4th generation. Both are accomplished, highly noted Two Grey Hills Tapestry weavers whose works appear in countless periodicals and sought after by collectors in the United States and from other countries.

The 5th generation of weavers includes me and my sisters, Rosann Teller Lee (1945-1996) and Lynda Teller Pete (1958-). Rosann was considered one of the best Two Grey Hills Tapestry weaver in the weaving world. She was innovative in her weaving process but never compromised the weaving standards set by her elders. In 1987 we collaborated on a one-of-a-kind Two Grey Hills tapestry that measured 5’ x 8’ 10”, the largest Navajo Tapestry ever made of its time and perhaps, today. It has been noted as the most expensive contemporary Navajo weaving ever sold. It garnered **BEST OF SHOW** at the 1987 Santa Fe (SWAIA) Indian Market, an honor never before achieved by a textile or rug in the sixty-six year history of Indian Market. This tapestry generated a lot of interest among collectors and inspired other weavers in my family. I have since won the “Best of Show” at the Santa Fe Indian Market a second time with a solo two year effort.

The 6th generation are my children, Sierra Nizhoni Teller Ornelas (1981-) and Michael Paul Teller Ornelas (1985-) who are award winning and accomplished weavers in their own right. Both children have pieces bought by the Arizona State Museum and the Heard Museum for their permanent collections. There is a 7th generation prospect in our family. Roxanne Rose Lee was born in 2000 and has recognized the weaving process as an inherited legacy. It is my hope that weaving continues in our family, it promotes harmony and frees the creative spirit in each family member.

PERSONAL WEAVING HISTORY

“I am a fifth generation rug weaver in my family”. My mother taught me how to weave when I was 8 years old. At the time I hated it. They were like taking piano lessons. I sold my first rug to the Two Grey Hills Trading Post when I was 10. I got \$10 for it. The rug was shaped like an hourglass, but I was proud of my efforts. After that I only did one rug in the summer time, when I was out of school. When I moved to Phoenix, I would have a rug on the loom because it reminded me of my mother and home.

When I met my husband David, he encouraged me to weave more frequently. He also suggested that I do a rug on my own. Before I would have my mother set up my loom and prepared my wool. Little by little I started doing everything myself. Now I help my mother out with her yarns. My husband deserves much credit for getting me starting in my weaving career and later it became our main source of income during my husband’s schooling at the University of Arizona’s School of Pharmacy.

My work means a lot to me. There’s a great amount of emotions involved in the finished pieces. My rugs are like my children. I like to keep track of them. It’s a special joy for me to meet the people who will buy my work. My working at home is convenient in that I am able to simultaneously care and provide for my family here in Tucson and my mother who lives in New Mexico.

My family is generally well known for weaving Two Grey Hills tapestries with high weft counts. This style was heavily influenced by the traders at the Two Grey Hills Trading Post where my father worked. In the past, the weavers in this regional area used mostly hand carded, hand spun natural colored wool in a double diamond pattern using geometric designs. Due to economic pressures, some weavers have resorted to using commercial processed wool. Our family’s pieces are easily identifiable by a rich red/brown wool used for the inside field color. This wool is from my Aunt Margaret’s flock. Her sheep is a blended animal of Merino and Rambouillet. Our family’s commitment to preparing our own wool, including selvage cords and wool warp used in our Two Grey Hills tapestries is a standard that was set by our elders. Each generation has achieved and contributed to this standard.

I generally work at least 8-12 hours a day, six days a week. Just prior to the Santa Fe Indian Market, I am up and working as long as possible in preparation for this market as it is my greatest source of income. I try to prepare all my wool in a month’s time and will last me about a year. If I am doing Two Grey Hills tapestry work, I prepare everything from the sheared wool. I dye my black wool in aniline dye. All the other colors are natural hues in tans and browns. During the carding process, different colors are blended to get various shades. Blending black and white to get gray and adding a bit more white or black to achieve several shades of gray offers more color combination in my rugs. Some of the browns, I will leave in the sun to get the lighter color that I need.

Upon some commissions, I started to weave other regional styles and love to weave Classic period pieces. For the latter styles, I use commercial aniline dyed wool; however, I re-spindled the wool to get the fine tapestry weft that I use in my Two Grey Hills tapestries. Some of the regional styles that I have woven include Ganado and Burnt Water. The Classic period pieces include Moki, Child’s Blankets, and Women’s Mantas. I am now creating 9.5” x 10” period pieces that represent the old Navajo period pieces now referred to as “Chief Blankets”. These come in sets of 3 and each set has a Phase One, Phase Two and Phase Three. These are limited edition sets and will only make 25 of them. A large part of my artwork now is specializing in tapestries larger than 3’ x 5’.

My work, my ideas, my processes and weaving materials are ever evolving but staying true to the standards set by my elders. I take the responsibility of carrying on our family’s tradition by teaching my family and mentoring others to help preserve this cultural legacy.

AWARDS

2005

Heard's Indian Fair & Market

Conrad House Award, Judge's Choice Award

2003

Heard's Indian Fair & Market

Best of Division - Textiles

1st Place

2002

University of San Diego Indian Art Fair

"BEST OF SHOW"

1st and 2nd Place Ribbons for Textiles

1999

Heard's Indian Fair & Market

1st place in Traditional Weaving

Best of Division, Best in Classification

1998

Heard's Indian Fair & Market

1st Place in Traditional Weaving

Best of Division, Best in Classification

1997

Heard's Indian Fair & Market

1st Place in Traditional Weaving

Best of Division

1996

Heard Museum's Indian Fair and Market

BEST OF SHOW

1st Place in Traditional Weaving

Best of Division, Best in Classification

1991

SWAIA 69th Annual Indian Market

Weaving Award for Excellence in Navajo Weaving

1st Award

Best of Division

Best in Classification

"BEST OF SHOW"

1989

SWAIA 67th Annual Indian Market

Weaving Award for Excellence in Navajo Weaving

1st Award

Best of Division, Best in Classification

2004

Heard's Indian Fair & Market

2 Judges Choice Awards

2003

SWAIA 81st Annual Indian Market

Best of Division – Textiles

1st Place

2001

SWAIA 79th Annual Indian Market

1st Place in Textiles

1999

SWAIA 77th Annual Indian Market

Best of Division in Textiles

Best in Classification

1998

SWAIA 76th Annual Indian Market

Best in Traditional Weaving

1st Award

1997

SWAIA 75th Annual Indian Market

1st Place in Traditional Weaving

1995

Gallup InterTribal Ceremonial

1st Place in Traditional Weaving

Gallup, New Mexico

1988

Navajo Nation Fair

Window Rock, AZ

1st Place in Navajo Rug Weaving

1987

SWAIA 66th Annual Indian Market

The Sallie Wagner Award for Excellence in Traditional Weaving

1st Award

Best of Division

Best in Classification

“BEST OF SHOW”

1986

SWAIA 65th Annual Indian Market

1st Award in Traditional Weaving

1984

The Heard’s Indian Fair & Market

1st Place

2 Honorable Mentions

1982

Tanner’s 11th Annual All-Indian Invitational Show

Best of Rug Weaving

1st Place

1980

Tanner’s 9th Annual All-Indian Invitational Show

Best of Class – Rug Weaving

1st Place

1985

SWAIA 64th Annual Indian Market

Sallie Wagner Award for Excellence

1983

The Heard’s Indian Fair & Market

2 Honorable Mentions

1982

O’Odham Tash, Casa Grande, AZ

2nd Place in Textiles

1980

Gallup InterTribal Indian Ceremonial

1st Award – Navajo Textiles

DEMONSTRATIONS, LECTURES, WORKSHOPS

Tucson Weaving Guild

Weaving Workshop

Tucson, AZ, 2004, 2005

Arizona State Museum

19th Century Blankets, 20th Century Rugs,
21st Century Views, Navajo Weaving Now!

Curator, Tapestry in Exhibition

October 2004 – May 2005

The Smithsonian Institute’s National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, DC

Two Grey Hills Tapestry Traditions

Tours, Talks & Lecture Series – Rasmuson Theater, Weaving Demonstration in Potomac Lobby

Live Webcast, <http://smithsonian.tv/nmai>

March 2005

Heard Museum – Celebration of 75th Anniversary

Honored Speaker to represent Native Artists that helped build the Heard’s reputation as a world class museum. Appeared with Supreme Court Judge, Sandra Day O’Connor and Gov. Janet Napolitano
Phoenix, AZ 2004

Arizona State Museum Fair

3 Generations of Navajo Weaving Exhibition

Tucson, AZ, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005

Gloria Ross Weaving Symposium

Speaker, Conferee, Panelist

Tucson, AZ 1994, 2005

Idyllwild School of Arts – Summer Program

Navajo Weaving, 101 & 102, Speaker's Panel
Idyllwild, CA 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005

Elder Hostel

University of Arizona, Extension Program
Tucson, AZ 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999

Indian Summer Festival

Navajo Weaving Demonstration
Milwaukee, WI, September 1989, 1990

St. Francis Hotel, San Francisco, CA

Navajo Scholarship Fund - Weaving
November 1985

Santa Fe Indian Market, Santa Fe, NM

Navajo Weaving Demonstration
August 1984

School of American Research

Artist Gathering for Navajo Textile Studies
Santa Fe, NM 2001

FiberFest

Lecture on Navajo Weaving
Santa Fe, NM 1998

The Heard Museum-DeGrazia Foundation

Artist in Residence – Navajo Weaving
Phoenix, AZ 1986, 1987, 1988

British Museum of Mankind, London

The American Festival – Weaving
Prince Phillip – Official Patron, May 1985

Denver Indian Market, Denver, CO

Navajo Weaving Demonstration
June 1981

JUDGESHIPS

Gallup InterTribal Indian Ceremonial

Textile Division
1999, 2003, 2004
Gallup, NM

Museum of Northern Arizona

Navajo Market Place
Textiles
Flagstaff, AZ

Heard Museum's Indian Fair & Market

Rugs and Textile Categories
1992

SWAIA Indian Market, Santa Fe, NM

Rugs, Baskets and Clothing Categories
1992, 1995

O'Odham Tash, Casa Grande, AZ

Rugs and Textiles Categories
1991, 1992, 1993

OPENINGS

1997

Grey Dog Trading Company, Tucson, AZ
Gallery Opening – Navajo Textiles

1995

Cristof's Gallery, Santa Fe, NM
One Woman Show, exhibiting finest work

1993**Traveling Exhibition for the Gloria F. Ross Collection of Contemporary Navajo Weavings**

Commissioned piece of Two Grey Hills Tapestry to be permanently housed at the Denver Art Museum

- Denver Art Museum
- The Heard Museum
- The Smithsonian Institute
- The National Museum of the American Indian

PUBLICATIONS

2005

Navajo Weaving in the late Twentieth Century

Kin, Community, Collectors

Ann Lane Hedlund

2004

Loom with a View

Gloria F. Ross Tapestry Center, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ

Produced & Edited by Sierra Ornelas, Justin Thomas, Ann Hedlund

2003

The Weavers Way – Navajo Profiles

Photographs by Carter Allen, Text by Dodie Allen

City Press, Tucson, AZ

2001

American Indian Textiles – Artist Biographies, Value and Price Guide

By Gregory Schaaf, Ph.D

CIAC Press, Santa Fe, NM

1998

Arizona Illustrated (TV)

KUAT (PBS), Tucson, AZ

July 1998

1997

Phoenix Home and Garden Magazine, Vol. 17 No.5

“Masters of the Southwest”, People who shape homes, gardens, art and lifestyles.

March 1997

1997

Navajo Weaving from The Santa Fe Collection 1971-1996

By Ann Lane Hedlund

National Cowboy Hall of Fame, Oklahoma City, OK

Terrell Publishing Co. 1997

1997

A Guide to Navajo Weavings

By Kent McManis & Robert Jeffries

Treasure Chest Books

Tucson, AZ, 1997

1997

Persimmon Hill, National Cowboy Hall of Fame

By Creating Rugs with Spirit by Karen Klinka

Persimmon Hill, Vol. 25, Num.3

Oklahoma City, OK, 1997

1996

Beyond Tradition: Contemporary Indian Art and Its Evolution

Photographs by Jerry Jacka, Text by Lois Jacka

Northland Publishing Company, Flagstaff, AZ

1996

Reflections of the Weaver's World

The Gloria Ross Collection of Contemporary Navajo Weaving
By Ann Hedlund, Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO

1996

Focus Santa Fe Magazine

Jan/Feb/March 1996

1991

Navajo: Tradition and Changes in the Southwest

Front Cover Photograph of Tapestry
By Wolfgang Lindig and Helga Teiwes
Facts on File, New York, NY
Amtrak Express, Summer 1991

1988

***CNN National News* (TV)**

"Looking Up" February 1988

1988

Native Peoples Magazine

Journal of the Heard Museum, Phoenix, AZ
Spring, 1988

1988

National Geographics Illustrated

Vol. 173: No. 55
May 1988

1987

BUSINESS WEEK Magazine

"What's In"
September 7, 1987

1995

Pacific Discovery

Academy of Sciences, San Francisco, CA
Winter 1995

1990

***Arizona ArtForms* (TV)**

KAET-TV, Tempe, AZ
Arizona State University
October 1990

1988

Southwest Weaving: A Continuum, Historical Video

San Diego Museum of Man

1988

AMERICANA Magazine

May/June 1988

1988

New Mexico Magazine

Vol. 66, No. 8
August 1988

1997

The Arizona Daily Star

Accent Section, Tucson, AZ
November 1, 1987