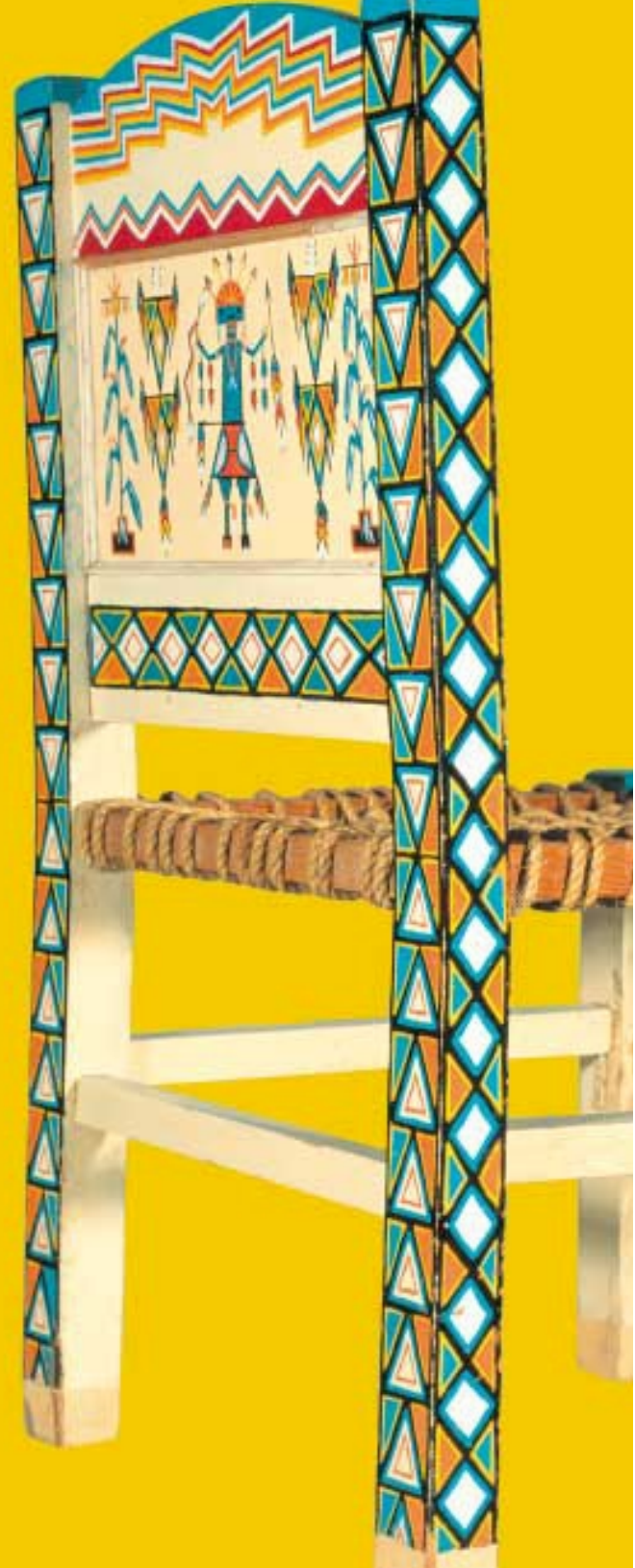


Painting with a Passion:

Will Evans and the Navajo





Decanter

—Robert E. Doyle Collection

Numerous others deserve many thanks for this project. In examining materials that replicate sand paintings, the museum has benefited greatly from insights and generous assistance from Herbert Benally of Dine College at Shiprock, and his numerous contacts on behalf of the museum, including his three brothers, Little John Benally, Sam Benally, and Tully Benally. Other contacts pertaining to the Navajo context of these materials have included Bill Hatch, Shirley Lowe, DeWayne Johnson, Esther Cambridge, Ambrose Teasyatwho, Avery Denny, and Timothy Benally. Thanks also go to Cheri Doyle of the Wheelwright Museum, Cynthia Graves of ArtServices, Inc., Mimi Roberts of TREX, Harvard Heath of Brigham Young University, Jack Loeffler, Stuart Hatch, Cassie Dallas, Jim White, Suzy Hastings, and Chester Myers.

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Finally, my appreciation to my husband Dave and daughter Marissa, who have had wonderful bonding time while Mommy obsessed. Many thanks.

Liesl Dees
Exhibit Curator

Introduction

Will Evans' painted materials often invoke a variety of reactions—curiosity, bewilderment, delight, and even disapproval—for Will has used images of Navajo sacred beings and painted a wide variety of surfaces—from trays and bottles to his garage door and the interior of a Farmington theater. A trader with the Navajo from the 1890s to the 1940s, Will spent years learning from the Navajo. Their language, customs, and ceremonies became the study of his life. This non-Navajo—this *bilagáana*—amassed a tremendous knowledge about the Navajo during his 77 years. His passion to paint Navajo images stemmed from his strong connections to Navajo life and deep interest in their culture.

In presenting the work of Will Evans, the Farmington Museum has chosen to focus on the man himself and his rich world of cultural interactions. Other publications focus on the stories behind the images and the sacred aspects of Navajo images; this is the story of how one particular trader became drawn into the world of those stories and created his own legacy of artistry. Will painted images from numerous ceremonies, including Blessing Way, Beauty Way, and Life Way. He included numerous figures from those ceremonies, including storm gods, wind gods, rainbow gods, and sun symbols, which he sketched and recorded at the invitation of Navajo friends who frequented the trading posts.

The extent of Will Evans' work may never be truly known, for it appears he painted everything he could get his hands on or was given permission to paint.

Grandchildren, for example, recall that even their purchased turtles from the Woolworth's store were touched up with a Navajo motif. As one of his grandchildren quipped, "The only thing he didn't paint was Grandma."¹ The story of Will's artistic passion and his great drive to paint hinges upon his 50-year relationship with the Navajo. He was not only a trader supplying food and dry goods; Will Evans was an interested, empathetic recorder.



Gourd and tin
—Robert E. Doyle Collection

“The only thing he didn't paint was Grandma.”