

## STELLA CHAVARRIA | SANTA CLARA PUEBLO

When Stella Chavarria was born in 1939, not only was she born into Santa Clara Pueblo but also the Tafoya family. Anyone familiar with the Tafoya family knows that Stella is a descendant of a number of the Pueblo's celebrated potters - beginning with their matriarch - Sarafina Tafoya (1863–1949) and her daughters, Christina Naranjo (1891–1980) and Margaret Tafoya (1904–2001). Additionally, Stella's mother, Teresita Tafoya Naranjo (1919-1999) became an artist to be added to the history books. When Sarafina and Geronimo Tafoya (1863-1955) began raising their children in the late 1800's, one must wonder if they ever imagined their family would grow into a multi-generational dynasty of potters who's effect in Santa Clara pottery would be seen in generations to come.



The influence of her great-grandmother, grandmother, great-aunt and mother are ever present in Stella's contemporary pieces. Stella employs the method of adorning her pottery by carving deeply into her work. Carving designs into pottery is a technique that her great-grandmother, Sarafina, spearheaded in the 1920's at Santa Clara Pueblo. Comparably Stella is known for her simple yet classic pottery forms as well. A similarity shared between her and her grandmother, Christina. Additionally, her aunt, Margaret, who was widely celebrated for reviving the use of polychromes at Santa Clara, the making of which had been discontinued by the late 1800's, while Stella's work seems to focus solely on blackware.

Working in traditional methods since 1955 as she was taught by her mother, Stella sources clay only from within Santa Clara Pueblo's grounds. She hand-coils the prepared clay to create her vessels and refines their shapes with a polishing stone before and after etching the designs into her forms and finally pit firing them. During the outdoor firing process; using natural materials like dried manure, Stella turns her works from red to black. This is known as a fire reduction process where the atmosphere in the pit is removed of oxygen from the addition of the manure thus creating a chemical reaction on the pots, turning the surface from red to black. She then uses a stone to polish her works to a fine sheen.

Like her great-aunt, Margaret, she tends to focus on established design motifs like the Avanyu (Water Serpent), clouds, thunder and feathers to ornament her pots. Teresita was considered the first potter to carve outside the linear band designs for her motifs and Stella carries on her vision both in execution and composition. Conversely, Stella deviates from her elders' artistic influences in regards to the size of vessels she prefers to make. Unlike their very large pots which they were praised for, Stella enjoys working on smaller sized pieces. However, they are not quite as small as her great-uncle Camilio Tafoya's exquisite seed pots and plates.

In 1984, Stella won first place for a jar up to eight inches tall at Santa Fe's 63rd Indian Market. It would be the first of a good deal of awards she would earn over time. Stella has participated in numerous exhibitions, including the exceptional show "Seven Families in Pueblo Pottery" held at the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology in 1974. Stella's art is featured in many significant collections including the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona. Her work has been included in scores of important books published on Pueblo pottery; including *Fourteen Families in Pueblo Pottery* by Rick Dillingham and *Pueblo Pottery Families* by Lillian Peaster. She signs her work: "Stella Chavarria, Santa Clara".

The combined history of the potters within the Tafoya family truly reflects the transformation of Santa Clara Pueblo's pottery tradition (which began around 500 AD) from the utilitarian to the artistic forms we enjoy today. Thankfully, Stella has continued not only with the tradition of fabricating pottery at Santa Clara Pueblo but also

the custom of teaching the next generation these invaluable skillsets. All three of Stella and Loretto Chavarria's (1938 – 2020) children learned their culture's and family's traditions at early ages. Both of Stella's daughters', Denise Chavarria (b. 1959) and Loretta (Sunday) Chavarria (b. 1963), vessels can now be viewed in galleries, museums and collections alongside their mother's work. Stella also taught these ancient and familial techniques to her granddaughter, Mauricia (check book for birthdate), who's father was Stella's son, Joey Chavarria (1964–87). Loretto and Stella enjoyed sixty-one years of marriage together before Loretto passed away on Friday, April 3, 2020 with his loving family at his side while still residing in Santa Clara Pueblo.

Admirers and collectors alike would agree that Stella is best known for her exceptionally polished and deeply carved, forms that are quintessentially Santa Clara Pueblo blackware pottery. Whether you are viewing her contemporary work in a museum or thinking about purchasing a piece from one of the galleries that represent her, one can't help but see and feel the history in her vessels. Although her last name is Chavarria, the Tafoya family traditions run deep in Stella's pottery.

#### SOURCES CITED:

Adobe Gallery | Art of the Southwest Indian | Alexander E. Anthony Jr.

[https://www.adobegallery.com/artist/Stella\\_Chavarria89489710](https://www.adobegallery.com/artist/Stella_Chavarria89489710)

[https://www.adobegallery.com/artist/Teresita\\_Naranjo\\_1919\\_1999583845](https://www.adobegallery.com/artist/Teresita_Naranjo_1919_1999583845)

Andrea Fisher | Fine Pottery:

<http://www.andreafisherpottery.com/moreinfo.php?itemnumber=mksce5280&pueblo=Santa%20Clara&artist=Stella%20Chavarria&dimension=4%203/4%20in%20H%20by%205%201/2%20in%20Dia&price=425&dateborn=&condition=Very%20good&signature=Stella%20Chavarria%20Santa%20Clara&description=Black%20jar%20carved%20with%20avanyu%20design&saleprice=>

Armadillo Trading Company:

<http://www.armadillotradingcompany.com/stella-chavarria-santa-clara-pueblo-indian-pottery/>

Dillingham, Rick, *Fourteen Families in Pueblo Pottery*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1994, ISBN 0-97808263149-9-4 Softbound, Pgs.184, 227 - 228

In the Eyes of the Pot | A Journey into the World of Native American Pottery:

<https://www.eyesofthepot.com/santa-clara/stella-chavarria.php>

<https://www.eyesofthepot.com/santa-clara/christina-naranjo.php>

Indian Art Unlimited:

<http://indianartunlimited.com/product/stella-chavarria-pottery/>

King Galleries | Santa Fe | Scottsdale

<https://kinggalleries.com/brand/chavarria-stella-b-1939/>

<https://kinggalleries.com/brand/naranjo-christina/>

<https://kinggalleries.com/brand/naranjo-teresita-1919-1999/>

National Endowment for the Arts

<https://www.arts.gov/honors/heritage/fellows/margaret-tafoya>

Penfield Gallery of Indian Arts | A New Mexican Tradition Since 1898

<https://penfieldgallery.com/artistspotters/stella-chavarria-pueblo-pottery1-3.html>

Pueblo Direct | Native American Arts from the Pueblo Direct to You

<https://www.pueblodirect.com/pages/stella-chavarria>

Santa Fe New Mexican | Legacy

<https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/santafenewmexican/obituary.aspx?n=loretto-cruz-chavarria-cruzie&pid=195975989&fhid=10276>

Steve Elmore Indian Art

<https://elmoreindianart.com/Detailed/3840.html>