



## NATIONAL MUSEUM of WOMEN *in the ARTS*

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## ***New Ground: The Southwest of Maria Martinez and Laura Gilpin*** **National Museum of Women in the Arts | Feb. 17–May 14, 2017**

### ***Martinez and Gilpin, shaping the image of a modern Southwest***

WASHINGTON—The National Museum of Women in the Arts ([NMWA](http://www.nmwa.org)) presents [\*New Ground: The Southwest of Maria Martinez and Laura Gilpin\*](#), on view from Feb. 17 through May 14, 2017. Contemporaries and friends, potter Maria Martinez (ca. 1887–1980) and photographer Laura Gilpin (1891–1979) shaped the image of the Southwest as a culturally rich region fostering artistic expression. Martinez’s bold adaptation of an ancient black-on-black pottery design technique reflected her Pueblo artistic traditions and appealed to a minimalist modern sensibility. Gilpin, hailed during her lifetime as the “grand dame of American photography,” was one of the first women to capture the landscape and peoples of the American West on black-and-white film.

*New Ground* features 26 works of pottery by Martinez and 48 platinum, gelatin silver and color print photographs by Gilpin, drawn primarily from the Eugene B. Adkins Collection at the Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, and the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma, Norman.



“*New Ground* counters dominant 19th- and 20th-century narratives that typically cast the American West as a masculine place of staged romance or rugged conquest,” said NMWA Director Susan Fisher Sterling. “The exhibition explores how Martinez and Gilpin refined the image of a modern Southwest during the mid-20th century as a space for communal creativity and connection.”

Martinez lived at San Ildefonso Pueblo, north of Santa Fe, N.M. Together with her husband, Julian, Martinez revived an ancient method of making black-on-black pottery. She traveled throughout the U.S. to demonstrate the technique for making her sleek, thin-walled ceramic vessels, creating a wide demand for her work, which is still sought after today. She was one of the first Pueblo artists to sign her works, examples of which are found in collections across the globe. Her work inspired generations of artists, including her own family, several of whom still produce pottery at the San Ildefonso Pueblo.

Gilpin was born in Colorado in 1891 and studied photography in New York at the Clarence H. White School from 1916 to 1917. She was drawn back west, by her own account, to be in the “mountain country” where she felt she belonged. She is best known for her documentary prints, which include aerial landscapes and intimate portraits, images that capture the geological marvels of the landscape, as well as the fine details on the faces of her sitters. Over six decades, Gilpin documented the Southwest and its people, experimenting with a variety of photographic techniques and styles to capture her own connection to the region.

“Works by Martinez and Gilpin illuminate continuing connections between the Southwest’s land, its inhabitants and their art-making traditions, while at the same time contributing to the creation of a modern aesthetic,” said NMWA Associate Curator Virginia Treanor.

### LANDSCAPE

Martinez’s pottery is formed from and decorated with clays dug from the earth near her home. Stylized depictions of local flora and fauna as well as mythical creatures like *Avanyu*, a feathered serpent and water guardian, are found on many of the works on view. Other motifs include birds, road runner tracks, rain, feathers, clouds and mountains.

In a field traditionally championed by men, Laura Gilpin was one of the first women to capture the landscape of the West on film and to comment—through her imagery and her writings—upon the interconnectedness between the environment and human activity. Hefting heavy camera equipment, Gilpin trekked great distances by foot, jeep or plane to reach remote locations in pursuit of views, often flying dangerously low in airplanes to achieve her aerial shots. Unbounded by physical risks and societal restrictions, Gilpin pursued photography in the Southwest well into her eighties.



### PEOPLE

Initially encouraged by Edgar L. Hewitt and Kenneth Chapman from the nascent New Mexico Museum, Martinez developed a distinctive style of pottery that continues to resonate among artists today. Her relationships with family, community members, friends and collectors profoundly shaped her creative life. She collaborated with her husband, sons (particularly Popovi Da), daughter-in-law and grandson. In keeping with the collective principles of the Pueblo, she also signed her name to works made by others so that all might share in the benefits of her popularity.

Educated at Eastern boarding schools, Gilpin was the daughter of a Western adventurer. Like her father and many others who relocated to the region in the early 20th century, she felt deeply connected to the landscape and described her compulsion to document its rugged terrain. Gilpin considered herself a landscape photographer, but her photographs chronicling people and their activities are perhaps her most distinctive work. Like other photographers documenting the American scene during the 1920s and '30s, Gilpin’s portraits capture the humanity and changing living conditions in rural America. She focused her lens on the American life she came to know among the Pueblo and Navajo peoples.

### PROCESS

Martinez learned the fundamentals of the laborious process of pottery making at a young age from her maternal aunt. She shaped the clay, dug from the surrounding earth, into long coils, following a centuries-old tradition.

She then stacked the coils one on top of another and smoothed them into a flat, thin wall as she worked. The earliest work made by Martinez and decorated by her husband was polychrome, the most common type of pottery at San Ildefonso Pueblo at the time. They based these pieces on the remains of ancient pottery excavated in 1907. By 1921, they perfected their process for making black-on-black pottery.

Gilpin frequently focused her lens on the art-making processes of her Pueblo and Navajo subjects. Some images highlight technique, while others emphasize artists' range of creativity. Gilpin photographed Martinez and her family at San Ildefonso Pueblo during the many stages of making pottery, from processing raw clay to shaping bowls and jars, painting decoration and firing the vessels. She never photographed anyone without their permission, and frequently formed relationships with her subjects, particularly Martinez and her late subjects from the Navajo Pueblo in Arizona.

Gilpin herself became famous for her role in reviving the platinum printing process—a complex method yielding a rich tonal range and crisp details—largely abandoned by the early 20th century. Much like Martinez, Gilpin built her reputation on the revival of a historical art form and a body of work inspired by the Southwestern earth. She continued working with this laborious process periodically throughout her career, while also exploring the expressive possibilities of color photography.

*New Ground is organized by the Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma. Initial support for the exhibition was provided by Philbrook Exhibition Series Sponsors (2011–2013), in particular the Raymond and Bessie Kravis Foundation.*

*The presentation of New Ground at the National Museum of Women in the Arts is made possible by the generous support of the Judith A. Finkelstein Exhibition Fund and the members of NMWA.*

## **Related Programs**

### **Free Community Day**

**Friday, February 17, 10 a.m.–8 p.m.**

In celebration of the opening day of our new spring exhibitions, visit us during a FREE, extended-hours Community Day. Take this opportunity to explore our two new exhibitions, [Border Crossing: Jami Porter Lara](#) and [New Ground: The Southwest of Maria Martinez and Laura Gilpin](#), along with our [newly reinstalled collection](#). Free. No reservations required.

## **Philbrook Museum of Art**

Rooted in the beauty and architecture of an historic home gifted by oil tycoons Waite and Genevieve Phillips in 1938, Philbrook Museum of Art has grown to become one of the preeminent art museums in the central United States. Highlights of the Museum's permanent collection include Renaissance and Baroque paintings from the Kress Foundation, notable examples of American art, one of the greatest surveys of Native American art anywhere, and growing modern and contemporary collections. The Philbrook main campus spans 25 acres of grounds and formal gardens and features an Italianate villa displaying the museum's permanent collection, as well as a modern museum complex. The satellite location in downtown Tulsa showcases modern and contemporary works, including an exhibition showcasing the impact of Native American artists beginning in the late 19th century into today. Named a national model for community engagement, Philbrook is frequently recognized as an innovative leader laying the foundation for the future of museums.

## **Eugene B. Adkins Collection**

Over a period of more than 40 years, Tulsa collector Eugene Brady Adkins (1920–2006) amassed a substantial collection of Native American and Southwestern art, which includes paintings, sculpture, jewelry, pottery and

weavings by 20th century Western and Native American artists living and working in the Southwest. Adkins' love of the West developed at an early age; as a child in the 1920s and '30s, his family often drove from eastern Oklahoma to the Pueblos of northern New Mexico and throughout the Southwest. During such trips, he acquired an appreciation for the natural and cultural landscape of the area, which led to Adkins' lifelong passion for art of the region. Philbrook Museum of Art stewards this 3,300-piece collection and archive in conjunction with the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma in Norman.

### **National Museum of Women in the Arts**

The National Museum of Women in the Arts (NMWA) is the world's only major museum solely dedicated to celebrating the creative contributions of women. The museum champions women through the arts by collecting, exhibiting, researching and creating programs that advocate for equity and shine a light on excellence. NMWA highlights remarkable women artists of the past while also promoting the best women artists working today. The museum's collection includes over 5,000 works by more than 1,000 women artists from the 16th century to the present, including Mary Cassatt, Frida Kahlo, Alma Thomas, Lee Krasner, Louise Bourgeois, Chakaia Booker and Nan Goldin.

NMWA is located at 1250 New York Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C., in a landmark building near the White House. It is open Monday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m. and Sunday, noon–5 p.m. For information, call 202-783-5000 or visit [nmwa.org](http://nmwa.org). Admission is \$10 for adults, \$8 for visitors 65 and over and students, and free for NMWA members and youths 18 and under. Free Community Days take place on the first Sunday of each month. For more information about NMWA, visit [nmwa.org](http://nmwa.org), [Broad Strokes Blog](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [Instagram](#).

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#### **Image credit lines:**

Maria Martinez and Popovi Da, *Black-on-black olla*, 1963; Polished blackware pottery with matte slip paint, 7 x 8 in. diameter; Eugene B. Adkins Collection at Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, and Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma, Norman, L2007.7063

Laura Gilpin, *A Navaho Costume of the 1880s at Window Rock Fair*, 1951; Gelatin silver print, 9 1/2 x 7 1/2 in.; Eugene B. Adkins Collection at Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, and Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma, Norman; © 1979 Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas, L2007.0761