

Teri Greeves



Teri Greeves (Kiowa, born 1970), photo from Craft in America, PBS

The daughter of an Italian-American sculptor and Kiowa mother, Teri Greeves was born on March 21, 1970, in Lander, Wyoming, and grew up on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming with the Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Native American tribes. Her mother, Jeri Ah-be-hill, owned a trading post and sold works by local women and Native beadwork artists. At age eight, inspired by the beautiful beadwork around her, Greeves learned her first stitch from her mother's adopted sister, Shoshone beadworker Zedora Enos. After that she began to bead constantly, while minding the trading

post for her mother, and soon sold her own work. Whenever beadworkers came in to sell their goods, they would share advice, give encouragement, and teach her new stitches. Through this, and listening to her mother sell beaded goods, Greeves gleaned a broad knowledge of different beadwork techniques and styles from tribes around the United States.

Greeves moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 1986 and took classes at St. John's College. Then she studied at Cabrillo Community College in Aptos, California, before transferring to the University of California at Santa Cruz, where she graduated with a bachelor's degree in Native American Studies in 1995. While in school, she continued beading and selling her work in order to buy books or pay rent. Although she intended to pursue a legal career focused on American Indian issues, in 1999 she entered her beaded *Indian Parade Umbrella* in the Santa Fe Indian Market, the largest and oldest Indian art show in the world. Her entry stumped the judges as they did not know whether to classify the work as "traditional" or "contemporary" due to the style of her artwork. Ultimately, her work won the highest honor, Best in Show – an award that did not require it to be categorized. At that point, Greeves decided she could use her art to bring awareness to the same issues, like respect for Native Americans and tribal sovereignty, which she would have advocated for as a lawyer. She says, "If I can make an object that is so beautiful, that someone comes over to see, and then walks away realizing

what it is to connect to a Kiowa person – I mean similar things flow through all of us – if I can do that, then I'm still fighting the good fight."

Although Greeves started working with moccasins and bags, she felt limited and soon pursued her own creative vision, prioritizing storytelling over using traditional objects. She has applied her beadwork to everything from prayer blankets to tipis to stethoscopes, and her most famous works include her high heel boots and tennis shoes. Fusing the geometric and abstract tradition of Kiowa beadwork with the pictorial style of the Shoshone, she creates her own visual language using her practice to stay connected to the Kiowa people and to address their experiences. Greeves is inspired by cultural, religious, and historical moments. With the birth of her children, she began to bead specific stories, which integrated Kiowa icons or treaty issues, to tell them about Kiowa history. However, she also strives to represent her current experience and that of other Kiowa and Native women. She states, "We are human beings living in this day in [sic] age, and I can't help but to be influenced by the world around me ... So in order for me to be personally authentic, I have to address the world that I come from. I do not live in the past, and I don't live in the future; I live right here and now."

For both her beadwork and her dedication to promoting Native American art, Greeves has won numerous awards at the Indian Market, Heard Museum, and elsewhere. Her artworks are featured in collections around the world, from the British Museum to Museum of Fine Arts in Santa Fe, where she currently resides. She directs seminars and workshops across the United States to educate people on American Indian beadwork and traditions, while frequently traveling to Oklahoma to maintain close connections with her Kiowa relatives and friends. She remains committed, through her art and educational work, to elevate the reputation of beadwork from its traditional definition as "craft" to a broadly recognized artistic medium and to advocate for the rights of American Indians.

Teri Greeves (Kiowa, born 1970), *Indian Parade Umbrella*, 1999, Brain-tanned deer hide, glass beads, abalone shell, Bisbee turquoise, cloth, brass and nickel studs, Indian bead nickels, and antique umbrella frame, Private Collection

Inspired by a beaded pair of shoes from her childhood, Teri Greeves' *High-top Tennis Shoes* reflect a general evolution in her creative interests, from traditional objects to contemporary fashion and utility. These vibrantly colored shoes are the seventh pair she beaded. They represent a specific breakthrough for the artist, where, for the first time, she viewed the shoe as a single design field rather than as a separate top and sides. Her choice to bead the high-tops reflects her interest in conveying Native Americans' present-day experience. She remarks, "We exist...not as we were at the time of contact [but] with rawhide parfleche briefcases, and [beaded] stethoscopes around our doctors' necks. [The] 'art' form my grandmothers and great grandmothers practiced [is changing] and alive."

Though the shoes are modern, the depiction of horses on the shoes evokes the pictorial art of her Plains ancestors. The outside of each sneaker portrays two horses; the smaller is beaded in a deep red and the larger in a bright yellow. Although interpretations of colors varied between time periods and ceremonial or non-ceremonial contexts, in Kiowa culture red represented the south and longevity, while yellow represented growth, the life force, and seasonal change. Among many Plains tribes, since their introduction in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, horses were a symbol of prestige and wealth. To many American Indians, the horse continues to symbolize their traditional ways of life and culture before the European American conquest and are still integral to Plains Indian life. Meanwhile, the geometric designs on the inside of each shoe recall the abstract design motifs of historical Kiowa beadwork. The orange center references the sun, while the turquoise, in addition to the blue background, represents power, medicine, and healing.

Greeves is emphatic that her work is meant to be used, noting, "Beadwork is about utility... There is something about the audience being the wearers and not just looking at the object on the wall. Art in everyday life—I like that idea." She describes the shoes' beadwork as "whimsical" and "modern," something an Indian might wear today, not the old styles and colors those outside the community generally favor. Non-Native preferences for "traditional" beadwork reflect how her culture in general is seen as stuck in the past. She continues to bead on non-traditional objects to remind viewers that American Indian culture is alive and changing.

Discussion Questions

Why does Teri Greeves bead modern forms like tennis shoes?

How does Greeves bring awareness to American Indian issues through her art?

In what roles are women depicted on Greeves artworks?

Teachers: go to www.joslyn.org/education for this poster's related academic standards and lesson plans.

a biography

The Voice of Native Women

Teri Greeves addresses Native American womanhood in her work. Striving to represent indigenous women not solely in terms of motherhood, she tells stories of women as protectors of their communities, educators, sisters, and individuals. Most important to her is demonstrating how Native women, specifically Kiowa, have adapted and survived despite difficulties. Their Kiowa cultural identity is alive and evolving, and Greeves addresses how Kiowa women retain this through the dichotomy of navigating a modern society while staying true to their more traditional communities.

Although Greeves' art represents multiple roles of Native women, her identity as a mother does impact her work. After her sons were born, she realized the importance of passing on Kiowa cultural heritage to them. So, for example, with *Khoiye-Goo Mah* (or Kiowa Women) (2004), she depicts four Kiowa women, of personal and historical significance, who made sacrifices for their communities and inspire her to continue her work. One of the women is her grandmother, a renowned beadworker who financially supported all her children and grandchildren despite her lack of education. Another female figure represents Greeves' aunt, one of the first female fancy war dancers in Oklahoma, who insisted on competing in a previously all-male dance twenty years before the passage of Title IX, which protects against gender-based discrimination in education.

During the late 2000s and early 2010s, Greeves transitioned from functional objects into more two-dimensional pictorial work in order to better represent the experiences of Native women. For example, her work *NDN Grrrl!* (2011) depicts an Indian princess beaded on a two-dimensional vinyl surface with a thought bubble that reads "NDN GRRRL!". "Ndn" is slang for "Indian" in contemporary American Indian pop culture, used mostly by young people – particularly on the Internet, to refer to themselves. She was prompted to create this work by non-Kiowa audiences' criticism of women's roles in Kiowa culture. For example, Kiowa men and women dance separately because they believe the power of women can overwhelm the men's ability to talk to god. Non-Kiowa audiences critique the practice as domination of men over women, but Greeves argues that women's rights look different across different cultures and that no one can impose their own ideas about gender onto cultures of which they are not a part.



Teri Greeves (Kiowa, born 1970), *Khoiye-Goo Mah*, 2004, size 13 cut beads, silver lined seed beads, and found tennis shoes, 6 x 4 x 12 in., Museum of Arts and Design, Museum purchase with funds provided by the Collections Committee, 2004.33a,b



IMAGES (LEFT TO RIGHT): Teri Greeves (Kiowa, born 1970), *She Loved Her People*, 2011, 80 x 36 in., raw silk, canvas, wood, glass beads, wood beads, and mother of pearl, Collection of Portland Art Museum, Museum Purchase: Funds provided by Barbara Christy Wagner, 2014.146.1; *War Mother*, 78 x 36 in., Hand-stitched beadwork on raw silk and canvas, Collection of Tweed Museum of Art, University of Minnesota Duluth, Marguerite L. Gilmore Charitable Foundation Fund, D2014.39

Around the turn of the century, people started to travel for leisure, and American Indians, including Teri Greeves' grandmother, began to sell their beadwork from roadside stands to tourists. After World War II, Native Americans organized numerous powwows to honor their returning soldiers. Although their regalia had been decorated with beads in the past, demand for beadwork surged as occasions to wear it, and pride in their heritage, increased dramatically.

In the 1960s and 70s, cartoons from pop culture, along with cartoon-style depictions of Native subjects, appeared in Plateau Indian beaded bags, a precursor to Greeves' pictorial work. Many Native and non-Native people began to study old tribal beadwork designs in the 1980s and early 1990s, which resulted in a renaissance of those styles, especially as films like *Dances with Wolves* and fashion trends piqued further non-Native interest. In 1998, Sotheby's in New York auctioned its first work by contemporary bead artist Joyce Growing Thunder Fogarty, which reflected the art form's increasing popularity and acceptance in the art world.

Today, native beadwork created by artists like Greeves, exists alongside yet juxtaposed with historic examples. Contemporary beadworkers are willing to step outside the conventional beadwork expectations, through their use of traditional techniques on modern objects, to push the art form forward while retaining their heritage.

Timeline

1970

1970 Teri Greeves is born on March 21 in Lander, Wyoming

1970s Cartoons first appear as subjects in Plateau Indian beaded bags

1978 Begins beading

1980

1980s Many non-Indians are deeply rooted in protecting the environment, spurring travel and interest in Native Americans

1986 Moves with her mother to Santa Fe, New Mexico

1990

1990s The film *Dances with Wolves*, along with Polo Ralph Lauren's Western line, incites interest in Native American culture including buying Native art

1990–1993 Beads her first tennis shoes while at Cabrillo Community College in California

1995 Graduates from the University of California, Santa Cruz, with a degree in Native American Studies

1998 The first work by a contemporary bead artist is auctioned by Sotheby's, New York

1999 Wins Best in Show at Santa Fe Indian Market for *Indian Parade Umbrella*

2003 Receives the Dobkin Fellowship at the School of American Research, Santa Fe

2007 Artist in Residence, University of Illinois, Urbana/Champaign

2009 Featured in *Craft in America*, PBS television series

2010

2015 Wins the Living Treasure Award from the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture in Santa Fe

2016 Named a Distinguished Fellow by the United States Artists

2020

BACKGROUND IMAGE: Teri Greeves (Kiowa, born 1970), Detail. *War Mother*, 78 x 36 in., Hand-stitched beadwork on raw silk and canvas, Collection of Tweed Museum of Art, University of Minnesota Duluth, Marguerite L. Gilmore Charitable Foundation Fund, D2014.39



Teri Greeves

Kiowa, born 1970

High-top Tennis Shoes

1995

beaded commercial canvas shoes, 6 1/2 x 4 x 12 3/8 in.

Museum purchase, 1996.24.A-B



Mrs. Joe Lefthand (Lakota Sioux, 20th century), *Moccasins*, ca. 1910, hide with beads and quillwork, 10 1/2 in., Collection of Joslyn Art Museum, Gift of Glenn T. Miller, 1946.155.a-b

The Kiowa, who originated in the Bitterroot Mountains of present-day Montana and migrated to the Black Hills by 1775 before settling in the Southwestern Plains in the nineteenth century, decorated their belongings with bones, teeth, shells, and paint in addition to large beads of their own making. They employed geometric patterns with box and triangular shapes, feathered circles, and symmetrical or striped designs in their decoration. Quillwork, the sewing of dyed porcupine quills and onto leather garments and objects, was also popular on the Plains, although the Kiowa practiced it less after their southern migration due to the difficulty of accessing quills.

With the arrival of Europeans in the fifteenth century came beads as gifts, or for trade. At first, the beads traded were the large ceramic variety known as "pony beads," named for their method of transportation, and because they were well-suited to

thong-strung decorations on horse gear. As the fur trade flourished in the late 1700s, pony beads increased in popularity with Native Americans who realized their decorative potential. Beads allowed them to achieve colors difficult to create from natural dyes. However, due to their value and short supply, they were often used only to enhance quillwork; a pound of these beads was worth a good horse or finished buffalo robe.

By the 1830s, European traders had brought smaller glass beads or "seed beads" to the Kiowa on the Western Plains. Native women realized the value of replacing the time-consuming and tedious quillwork with beading. The smaller beads allowed them to compose intricate designs, and, by 1840, quillwork had fallen out of favor. Beaded decoration began to appear on a wide variety of objects ranging from weapon paraphernalia to moccasins.

By the mid-1870s, most Indians were relegated to reservations, and beadwork reached an all-time high as the Native American economy shifted from fur trading and buffalo hunting to government payments. Beadwork was used to supplement annual incomes and hold onto cultural identity. Women also began beading for pleasure in their increased leisure time. When Indian children were sent to reservation schools, the missionaries taught European-style beadwork. So students adopted new techniques and adapted them to fit Native culture.



Artist Unknown (Crow, 19th–20th century), *Rifle Case*, beaded hide and wool, 38 in. long, Collection of Joslyn Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. A. H. Richardson, 1956.112



TERI GREEVES
Kiowa, born 1970

HIGH-TOP TENNIS SHOES
1995, beaded commercial canvas shoes, 6 1/2 x 4 x 12 3/8 in.

JOSLYN ART MUSEUM OMAHA, NEBRASKA
Museum purchase, 1996.24.A-B