



WEST COAST COLLECTION

Takes Flight

THE EAGLE FAMILY

BY JOHN VILLANI. PHOTOS BY JUSTIN GALLOWAY.



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"Rain Messenger," bronze sculpture by Tammy Garcia (Santa Clara Pueblo). Facing page: Mike and Juanita Eagle stand in front of their ten-foot-tall front doors, another creation by Garcia, embellished with a bas-relief pair of swirling, intertwined eagles.

From the warm hues of its hand-crafted doors to the Pacific Ocean sunsets framed in its west-facing windows, the San Diego residence of Mike and Juanita Eagle is a contemporary art showcase.

The couple's interest in Native American cultures was sparked in the mid-1980s by daughter Melodie's visit to tribal lands in northern Arizona. That modest beginning turned into a passion for art collecting after the family moved to Indianapolis, where they became supporters of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art. Today, the paintings, weavings, katsinas, ceramics and studio glass included in their collection reflect the Eagles' broad artistic horizons and stand as a testament to the creative mastery of their leading artists.

"Juanita and I have greatly enjoyed our 25-year art journey," Mike says. "At first we didn't really know much about the art, except that we knew we loved it. A 1989 visit to the Santa Fe Indian Market with some friends greatly expanded our knowledge. Early on, we decided to focus on quality workmanship and to only acquire art that we love."

THE HOUSE THAT ART BUILT

The collection is installed throughout the Eagles' Modernist residence. The house's dramatic sight lines, uncluttered walls, sophisticated lighting, solid craftsmanship, marble floors and recessed display settings were intended to function as environments for exhibiting art. Architect William Currier, who designed an earlier California home for the Eagles, infused the setting with high ceilings and abundant sources of natural light. This orchestration enhances the collection's interplay of shapes, references, pigments, themes and textures.



Nestled atop a hillside, the Eagle residence is distinguished from neighboring homes by the sentinel-like presence of “Rain Messenger,” a Tammy Garcia (Santa Clara Pueblo) bronze sculpture hinting at the stone pathway winding toward the home’s sheltered entrance. Ten-foot-tall front doors embellished with a bas-relief pair of swirling, intertwined eagles greet visitors. This bold Garcia creation is enhanced by two more of her creations: the doors’ cast-bronze handles and the nearby bronze sculpture “Abstract.”

The doors open onto a wide gallery whose walls are lined with recessed display settings, broad surfaces designated for paintings, and wide *bancos* suitable for larger sculptures. Three-dimensional works ranging from miniature koshare figurines and storytellers by Joyce Sisneros (Santa Clara Pueblo) and Randall Chito (Choctaw) to elegant ceramic vessels by Al Qoyawayma (Hopi) and Richard Zane Smith (Wyandotte) and a mixed-media creation by Felix Vigil (Jemez Pueblo) are among the many objects displayed in these spaces. Spotlights concealed inside ceiling niches project clear beams of light across the dimensional surfaces of works such as “Altar Guardian,” an assemblage by Tony Abeyta (Diné), and the iridescent depths of “Winter Rose,” a painting by Frank Howell (Lakota Sioux).

A KATSINA ROOM

The challenge of how to best display the collection’s extensive representation of katsina dolls was resolved by interior designer Regina Kurtz. Familiar with the art through her work on the Eagles’ Indianapolis residence, she proposed a separate “katsina room.” Its intimate dimensions and subdued environment project reverence for the katsinas and their stories. “Our early discussions with the architect and interior designer included a special place for the katsinas,” recalls Juanita. “Working with Regina on the design and with Todd Walling from Lightworks was a delightful experience. The space is now one of our favorites. It has a special feeling that enhances the display of any style of art.”

Among the artists displayed here are Arthur Holmes Sr. and his son, Arthur Jr., Wilmer Kaye, Loren Phillips, Dennis Tewa, Ros George (all Hopi) and Marlin Pinto (Zuni Pueblo/Tewa). Also featured in this area are “Yei Image” by Abeyta and a Garcia triptych titled “Deer Hunter.” Centered atop the room’s glass table is a geese-design pot by Garcia.

The concealed drawers of the media room’s coffee table were designed by Kurtz to hold a selection of art reference books. Centered atop its surface is “New Age,” a white pottery vessel with a gold-glazed buffalo lid by Pahponee (Kickapoo/Potawatomi). It’s one of many Pahponee pieces in the collection. Creations such as her lidded and cylindrical “Prayer Wheel” vessel displayed in the gallery, and “Pretty Pond,” a large vase displayed on the home’s wide stairway, exemplify the bonds that have developed between the Eagles and various artists.

“Over the years we have made wonderful friends with artists, collectors and gallery owners,” says Juanita. “It is such a joy to visit the markets and exhibitions and see so many people that we have now known for years. The decisions we’ve made about our art have been greatly influenced by these friendships.”

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Facing page (clockwise, from top left): “Moonlight on Winter’s Eve,” bronze sculpture by Bruce LaFountain. “Altar Guardian,” an assemblage by Tony Abeyta. “Pretty Pond,” one of many pottery pieces by Pahponee is nicely displayed in front of a Teec Nos Pos style Navajo weaving by Marian Nez. Studio glass vessel, a collaborative piece by artists Tammy Garcia and Preston Singletary.



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Sculptures by Clifford Fragua (Jemez Pueblo) and Larry Yazzie (Diné) are also on view in the media room. An ink-on-paper by Abeyta, “Plumed Yei,” oversees the exercise room’s daily activities, while an etched table in the kitchen’s adjacent dining area is the setting for a pedestal cradling “Soul Catcher,” a glass sculpture by Preston Singletary (Tlingit). A broad wall on the stairway leading to the home’s guest quarters is the perfect location for a Marian Nez (Diné) Teec Nos Pos weaving.

OUTDOORS AS WELL

From the western expanse of a patio and swimming pool, the Eagles enjoy views of rolling hillsides tapering off to a distant Pacific Ocean horizon. The apex of the semicircular pool’s bowed wall is marked by “Moonlight on Winter’s Eve,” a figurative bronze sculpture by Bruce LaFountain (Turtle Mountain Chippewa). Its segmented marble base mirrors the circular form of a hot tub notched into the patio’s quartzite surface.

That sweeping vista is also enjoyed from inside the home, where it serves as the backdrop for a collaborative, studio-glass vessel by Singletary and Garcia. Positioned at the center of the dining room’s oak table, the translucent dragonfly patterns of this 13-inch-diameter by 8.5-inch-high vessel capture the setting’s vibrancy. “Eagle Transformation Mask,” also by Singletary, is installed on the room’s north wall. When closed, the powerful, 17-inch head of this sculpture protrudes as if in flight. But with its hinged base fully opened, it transforms into a matched pair of concave eagle heads separated by a stylized human face.

“Works in studio glass are of great interest to us,” says Mike. “We love its fluidity of form and depth of color. Some of our favorite artists are doing wonderful work with glass, and we’ve enjoyed adding these beautiful pieces to our home.”

Four levels of display settings border the living room’s floor-to-ceiling fireplace. Larger ceramic pieces are featured here, such as “Sisters,” a sculptural work by Pablita Abeyta (Diné). This tribute to her sister Elizabeth Abeyta, an artist who passed away in 2007, depicts two women holding hands and supporting each other in their life’s journey.

Bancos topped with stone mark the living room’s boundary. “Long Hair Katsina,” a sculptural creation by Kaye, stands on one of these surfaces. The opposite banco is home to “Encounter,” a sculpture in etched and sand-blasted glass by Garcia.

As the boundaries of American Indian art move forward, so does the art collection of Mike and Juanita Eagle. Their enthusiastic support for the evolution of artists demonstrates their faith in the creative process and informs a perspective that’s guided their journey through the American Indian art world. 🍃

John Villani writes about cultures, communities, collections and creativity. His work has appeared in The Christian Science Monitor, Southern Living, The Dallas Morning News, Art in America and other national publications. He was visual arts critic at The Arizona Republic and is author of The 100 Best Art Towns in America.

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Facing page, Top: A mixed-media painting by Felix Vigil hangs above miniature koshare figurines and storytellers by artists Joyce Sisneros and Randall Chito. Bottom: “Soul Catcher,” a glass sculpture by Preston Singletary.