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# SHAPED BY THE LOOM

*Weaving Worlds in the American Southwest*



Purchased by Ulrich S. Hollister, 1911. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History.

A positive outcome of the pandemic is that so much more is now available online. *Shaped by the Loom: Weaving Worlds in the American Southwest* will be the first hybrid exhibition to showcase the American Museum of Natural History's collection of Indigenous textiles from the Southwest. To know Navajo weaving, one must also understand the network of relationships that sustain a larger world, or ecosystem, of craft production in the Southwest. This world includes the sheep, the seasonal cycles that guide the harvesting of dye plants, the individual and communal rhythms of making, the cosmologies that inform a weaver's work, and the songs, stories and prayers that are woven into every rug. With a focus on Navajo textiles, the exhibition also offers a comparison with Pueblo and Hispanic weaving traditions to show regional variation in—and transmission of—motifs, materials, techniques, and technologies.

There is also interactive storytelling, dye and fibre analysis, and the showcasing of a variety of media. *Shaped by the Loom* will advance and enrich discourses relating to Native American textile art, craft history and theory, and issues of cultural preservation and heritage.

Navajo, blankets, and rugs are thought to be some of the most colourful and best-made textiles produced by indigenous North Americans. The Navajo, formerly a semi-nomadic tribe, settled in the southwestern United States in the 10th and 11th centuries and were well established by 1500. According to Navajo tradition, weaving is the most ancient and sacred practice of their people. Two spirits, the Spider People, brought hemp seeds to the Navajo. Spider-Man taught them to make the loom, while Spider-Woman taught them how to weave so that they could always provide for themselves.

Navajo textiles were originally utilitarian blankets for use as cloaks, dresses, saddle blankets, and similar purposes. Toward the end of the 19th century, weavers began to make rugs for tourism. **Bard Graduate Centre, New York. 17 February –9 July, 2023. [bgc.bard.edu](http://bgc.bard.edu)**

Image above: Unidentified Diné/Navajo artist, Germantown blanket, *Eye-Dazzler*, ca. 1895–1905. Wool and cotton, Germantown yarn, tapestry weave.