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Rings by Shawn Bluejacket. From clockwise: Rubellite, hollow formed sterling silver/18k gold; Constantine coin 18k gold; Moonstone, ss/18k; Peach moonstone hollow formed ss/18k ring; (centre) Tourmaline 18k granulated ring.

RING CYCLE

BY DEXTER CIRILLO, Ph.D.

Native Americans have treasured rings for at least two millennia. The prehistoric Hohokam of south-central Arizona fashioned rings from shells, using sandstone files for decoration and carving. At Chaco Canyon in New Mexico, the Ancestral Pueblo people crafted polished rings of jet with turquoise mosaic accents. Rings of bone, shale and argillite also have been discovered in prehistoric ruins.

Traders first introduced metals to Native tribes. Fur traders distributed metal ornaments to tribes in exchange for pelts, introducing new materials and styles into Native jewelry. The Spanish colonists (1598–1821) and later the Mexicans (1821–1846) introduced metals into the Southwest. The Zuni and Navajo made their first rings of copper and brass by melting down discarded pots and kettles. By the 1890s, silverwork had spread throughout the Southwest. The first turquoise was set in a ring in about 1880, and by the early 20th century it would become the stone of choice for Native silversmiths.

Throughout the 20th century, increasingly sophisticated tools and lapidary equipment allowed jewelers to decorate rings with bezel-set stones, channel inlay designs, cluster work and overlay patterns. Gold was introduced into Indian jewelry in the 1950s. By the 1980s, materials in rings included opals, diamonds and stones from around the world.

Today, the explosion in technology is palpable in Native jewelry. Industrial and computer technology stand alongside casting and stampwork as legitimate tools for jewelers to use, while the plethora of materials spurs innovative designs. The following artists exemplify exciting new directions taking place in the ring cycle.



COURTESY, VERONICA BENALLY

Flower ring by Veronica Benally. Sand-cast with hand stamped and flat channel inlay top. Orange spiny oyster shell, sterling silver round wire and tubing, Sleeping Beauty turquoise, sugilite and lapis lazuli.

VERONICA BENALLY

"I'm just a turquoise girl," exclaims Veronica Benally (Navajo). "It's a sign of wealth. It should be in everything!" Also a fan of spiny oyster, white shell and jet—the other colors of the four directions and four sacred mountains of the Navajo—Benally began making jewelry when she was 21 in 1993. "I started by watching Ernest inlay," she says, referring to Ernest Benally, her husband and an award-winning jeweler. "He taught me how to cut stone and inlay." In 2000, she began making jewelry under her own name in their Gallup studio.

Adept at channel inlay and mosaic, Benally prefers the raised corn-roll inlay in which stones are individually cut and domed. In 2009, she won Best of Show at the San Diego Museum of Man Indian Art Market for a concha belt that was purchased by the University of San Diego. Also in 2009, she began designing a separate line of jewelry for QVC. Asked about her goals, she says, "I want to create a pathway for my kids and other aspiring artists to encourage them that everything is possible."

Her jewelry can be seen at the Heard Museum, Phoenix; Museum of Indian Arts and Culture (MIAC), Santa Fe; Robert Dean Collection, Phoenix and Jackson, Wyoming; Autry Museum of Western Heritage, Los Angeles; and Cactus Wren Gallery, New Castle, Delaware. She also shows at the Santa Fe Indian Market. Contact: 505/879-8418 or e-mail vbenally@aol.com.

SHAWN BLUEJACKET

Shawn Bluejacket (Shawnee) loves colored gemstones and minerals—Australian opals, Brazilian tourmalines and drusies with their sparkly crystalline patterns. "I grew up around gorgeous specimens," she says, referring to the stones her father, a petroleum geologist, brought home from his travels. When she was five, her father's job took the family to New Zealand for seven years, where she grew up amidst Maori, European and Polynesian cultures. "The real culture shock," she recalls, "was returning to Newport Beach for junior high school." Bluejacket earned an associate of fine arts degree in fashion design from the Brooks College of Design in 1986. In 1990, she landed in Santa Fe with a scholarship to the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), receiving an associate of fine arts in metalsmithing in 1992.

She cites her childhood in New Zealand and her love of Middle Eastern antiquities as major influences on her jewelry. Known for her striking gemstones, Bluejacket adorns her jewelry with granulation, a characteristic of Byzantine jewelry. She has exhibited at the prestigious Philadelphia Museum of Art Craft Show and been featured in *Ornament* magazine and on the cover of *Lapidary Journal*, among many honors. Her jewelry is in the permanent collections of the Heard and IAIA.

Her jewelry is carried by Four Winds Gallery, Pittsburgh; Heard Museum, Phoenix; Faust Gallery, Scottsdale, Arizona; Autry Museum of Western Heritage, Los Angeles; National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), Washington, D.C.; and Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, Santa Fe. She also shows at the Santa Fe Indian Market. Contact: www.shawnbluejacketjewelry.com.

DAVID GAUSSOIN

David Gaussoin (Picuris Pueblo/Navajo/French) made his first piece of jewelry at eight, learning basic techniques from his mother, Connie Tsosie Gaussoin. "She is my biggest inspiration," he says. "She has always encouraged me to follow my own path." Born in Santa Fe in 1975, Gaussoin pushes the limits of jewelry design and metalsmithing to create ultra-contemporary sculptural jewelry. Equally talented at fashion, he has mounted runway shows with his brother Wayne Nez Gaussoin to showcase their wearable art jewelry. In 2009, the Gaussoin family was included in *Native Couture II* at MIAC. With a degree in business from the University of New Mexico, Gaussoin also manages the family jewelry business. Besides his many jewelry awards, he won a 2007 "40 Under 40" award from *New Mexico Business Weekly*.

Gaussoin has taught jewelry at IAIA, the Poeh Arts Program and Santa Fe Community College. His museum exhibitions include *Changing Hands* (Museum of Arts and Design) and *Young Jewelers* (Heard Museum). His jewelry is in the permanent collections of the Heard, Museum of Arts and Design, MIAC and San Diego Museum of Man.

His jewelry is available at MIAC, the Wheelwright Museum and New Mexico History Museum, Santa Fe; Heard Museum, Phoenix; NMAI, New York and Washington, D.C.; and Autry Museum of Western Heritage, Los Angeles. He also shows at the Santa Fe Indian Market. Contact: www.tsosie-gaussoin.com.



"Star Trail" ring by David Gaussoin. 14k gold, wax cast, diamonds.



COURTESY WADDELL TRADING CO.



SHANE HENDREN

Left: Sterling silver ring inlaid with Mediterranean coral by Vernon Haskie. Right: Wright's Mountain Ring by Shane Hendren. Hollow ring with Mokume-gane, sterling silver and 14k inlay with natural Wright's Mountain turquoise.

VERNON HASKIE

Since entering his first Santa Fe Indian Market in 1998, Vernon Haskie (Navajo) has consistently taken top honors for his jewelry. In 1999, he received a SWAIA Fellowship, followed by two Best of Show awards at the Heard Museum Guild Indian Fair & Market in 2000 and 2007. In Santa Fe, he has won five Best of Classifications in jewelry.

Largely self-taught, Haskie grew up watching his parents make jewelry—his mother did inlay and his father was a silversmith—but he did not become a full-time jeweler until 1998, when he was 30. Renowned for his diverse inlay styles, he says, "I have four styles that I jump between": overlay with cabochon stone settings, geometric designs in channel inlay, figurative designs in mixed inlay, and three-dimensional realistic designs. Haskie's almost mathematical approach to his designs reflects his academic background. He holds a bachelor of science in biology from the University of New Mexico and has taught math and science at Diné College in Tsaile, Arizona. In 2004, he was in *Totems to Turquoise*, mounted by the American Museum of Natural History. When he is not making jewelry, Haskie raises sheep and horses on his farm in Lukachukai, Arizona, where he grew up.

His jewelry is available at Waddell Trading Company, Scottsdale; and at www.leotasindianart.com. He also shows at the Santa Fe Indian Market. Contact: 928/787-2381.

SHANE HENDREN

Shane Hendren (Navajo) has a keen sense of family history: "I am who I come from," he says. Reared in a traditional Navajo family, Hendren is also proud of his Choctaw and Comanche Cherokee heritage. He cites his grandmother's non-bordered weavings as an important influence on the minimalism in his jewelry. At the same time, he pushes the envelope on tradition. "I had to fight against preordained ideas about Navajo jewelry," he says.

Growing up in a ranching and rodeo family between Nevada and New Mexico, Hendren turned down college scholarships in agriculture to enroll in museum management at IAIA, graduating in 1991. His jewelry career began at 19, when he took metalsmithing at IAIA from Lane Coulter. Skilled at casting, fabrication and hollow form, Hendren is noted for his use of *mokume gane*, the Japanese process of laminating diverse metals to produce variegated patterns. In 1997, he received a bachelor of fine arts from the University of New Mexico. His honors include the 2007 Best of Show and Artist of the Year from the Indian Arts and Crafts Association. He is the 2010 president of IACA.

His jewelry is available at Cactus Wren Gallery, New Castle, Delaware; Wright's Indian Art, Albuquerque, New Mexico; River Trading Post, Santa Fe, Scottsdale and Dundee, Illinois; Indian Craft Shop, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C.; Dancing Bear Gallery, Evanston, Illinois; Heard Museum, Phoenix; and www.newmexicocreatas.com. He also shows at the Santa Fe Indian Market. Contact: www.shanehendren.com.

AMELIA JOE-CHANDLER

Amelia Joe-Chandler (Navajo) has always looked to the land and her Navajo culture for inspiration. One of eleven children, she was born in 1962 and grew up in a traditional family on the Navajo Reservation near Newcomb, New Mexico. "My father is a medicine man and sandpainter," she says. "He taught me to make sandpaintings when I was 10." When she was 11, she learned basic jewelry skills from her parents. By 16, she was supporting herself with sandpaintings made in an improvised studio at the Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school she attended.

Joe-Chandler is noted for her sandstone inlay technique derived from sandpaintings. She is also fond of placing unusual agates in contemporary designs. "I look for paintings in stones that reflect the beauty of the land," she says. She holds a bachelor of science degree in art education from New Mexico State University and a master's of science in art education with an emphasis in metalsmithing and jewelry design from Indiana University. Among her popular designs is the hogan ring, replete with miniature furniture inside. In 2006, IACA named her "Artist of the Year." She currently teaches middle-school art in Cortez, Colorado.

Her jewelry can be seen at the River Trading Post, Scottsdale, Santa Fe, and East Dundee, Illinois; Home and Away Gallery, Kennebunkport, Maine; Hopi House Gallery, Grand Canyon; and the Museum of Northern Arizona, Flagstaff. She also shows at the Santa Fe Indian Market. Contact: www.amelijochandler.com.

KENNETH JOHNSON

"I like to keep my game up by finding new technology," states Kenneth Johnson (Muscogee/Seminole), referring to his latest experimentation with CAD/CAM technologies in his jewelry. Well known for his intricate stamped and engraved designs based on his Seminole heritage, Johnson likes the freedom of "virtual stampwork." His penchant for technology comes naturally. Reared in Oklahoma, Johnson attended the University of Oklahoma to study mechanical engineering. In 1988 he transferred to the University of New Mexico to complete his studies. Instead, he met Johnson Bobb, a Choctaw metalsmith, and began a jewelry apprenticeship at 21, making New Mexico his home.

A master metalsmith, Johnson works with precious metal coins from around the world. Recently, he has added palladium 950 to his cache of materials. "It behaves like platinum, is cheaper than gold, and weighs the same as silver," he says. His many honors include a 1997 SWAIA Fellowship, 1999 Artist-in-Residence at NMAI and a 2005 "Most Creative Use of Stampwork" award at the Santa Fe Indian Market. In 2010, he is once again a student, this time at IAIA in studio arts.

His jewelry is available at www.kennethjohnson.com. He also shows at the Santa Fe Indian Market. Contact: www.kennethjohnson.com.



ERIC CHANDLER

Above: "Day and Night" double-sided ring/pendant by Amelia Joe-Chandler. Fabrication, smithing, sandstone inlay techniques with sterling silver, coral and natural sandstone. Below: "Woven Sun" custom anniversary ring by Kenneth Johnson. 18k yellow gold, 6.79 Diamond total carat weight, hand fabricated, stamped and engraved, bead set melee diamonds.



COURTESY KENNETH JOHNSON STUDIO



MARK HENDERSON

Above: Contemporary, free-form ring by Jesse Monongya. 18k yellow gold, sugilite, gaspeite, Acoma jet, lapis, oxblood coral, Australian opal, Lightning Ridge opal. Right: Ring by Emery Ohmsatte. 18k yellow and white gold, Burmese ruby (43 pts.), Australian opal.



JEFF SOYKA

JESSE MONONGYA

In December 2010, the Heard Museum opens a one-person show for Jesse Monongya (Navajo/Hopi), capping his long and distinguished career documented by Lois Sherr Dubin in *Jesse Monongya: Opal Bears and Lapis Skies*. Born in 1952, Monongya grew up in the Two Grey Hills region of the Navajo Reservation with his adoptive grandparents, who imbued him with knowledge of Navajo traditions and religion. In 1975, he moved to Scottsdale, where he lives today, and met his father, Preston Monongye, for the first time, becoming his apprentice. In 1977, Monongya made his first inlaid bear pendant, which would become a signature piece. By 1979 he was included in the groundbreaking issue of *Arizona Highways* titled "The New Look in Indian Jewelry." He recalls, "That issue was the turning point in Indian jewelry."

A standard bearer of inlay, Monongya's imagery includes the Navajo night sky filled with constellations, shooting stars, moons and comets—all natural phenomena he experienced growing up at Two Grey Hills. He has popularized opals in jewelry and refined stone-on-stone inlay. His jewelry is in the permanent collections of the Denver Art Museum, Heard Museum and NMAI. His museum exhibitions include *Changing Hands* and *Totems to Turquoise*.

His jewelry can be seen at the Heard Museum and Santa Fe Indian markets. Contact: monongya@cox.net.

EMERY OHMSATTE

Over the 27 years of his career, Emery Ohmsatte (Zuni Pueblo) has become known for the elegant shapes and precise lapidary work in his jewelry, which he modestly considers part of his Zuni DNA. "The most amazing jewelry comes out of Zuni Pueblo with just the simplest tools," he says, discussing the realistic wildlife inlay of his parents, Silas and Bessie Ohmsatte.

Eager to earn a little money during high school, he asked his uncle Lynn Neumeyah to teach him jewelry. But his real motivation to pursue jewelry came from an Indian-art store in Scottsdale, where he worked in sales from 1981 to 1982. "The most important

decision I ever made was accepting that job," he says. "They had an in-house casting department. I learned about lost-wax casting, and it opened the door to create forms not possible with traditional casting." Largely self-taught, Ohmsatte creates designs inspired by organic forms, architecture and jewelry from around the world, as well as his Zuni culture. His awards include a 1990 SWAIA Fellowship and Best of Division awards at the Santa Fe and Heard Museum Indian markets.

His jewelry can be seen at the Heard Museum and Santa Fe Indian markets. Contact: P.O. Box 1, Overgaard, AZ 85933; 928/535-4884.

ROBIN WAYNEE

When Robin Waynee (Saginaw Chippewa) was growing up in Michigan, she did not envision becoming the first Native American and resident New Mexican to win a 2010 Saul Bell Design Award in silver. "I was one of seven children," she says. "My parents were both creative people, but we moved a lot to find work." That entailed a move from Michigan to North Carolina and eventually to New Mexico in 1993, when she was 22. Waynee learned jewelry-making from her father, Robert Lone Eagle Waynee, a sculptor and woodworker. In 1998, she began an apprenticeship with Ryan Roberts, an award-winning jeweler and her future husband. "Working with my hands comes easy, and I learned by sitting down at the bench and doing," she says.

Waynee is noted for her unusual metal finishes, innovative stone settings and use of fine gemstones. She says, "I like the contrast of patinated silver with colored gemstones like tourmalines, garnets, sapphires, diamonds and untreated spinel (the ruby "imposter")." Most recently, Waynee has incorporated black pearls into her innovative jewelry. She has also added many awards from the Heard and Santa Fe Indian markets to her growing résumé.

The Golden Eye in Santa Fe carries Waynee's jewelry, and she also shows at the Santa Fe Indian Market. Contact: www.robinwaynee.com.

LEO YAZZIE

Born in 1940 at Black Mesa, Arizona, Leo Yazzie (Navajo) has been making award-winning jewelry for more than 30 years at his studio in Flagstaff. Part of the boarding-school generation, he attended Chemawa Indian School in Salem, Oregon and Fort Sill Indian School in Lawton, Oklahoma, working summer jobs to support himself. A traditional Navajo and member of the Native American Church, his path to jewelry did not unfold until he was in his late 20s and a student in sociology at Northern Arizona University. To meet his requirements in art, he took a metals course, winning his instructor's praise for his artistic ability. "It was the early 1970s, when Indian jewelry was just taking off," he recalls.

Yazzie soon dropped social work for jewelry inspired by his Navajo culture. "My grandmother, mother and aunt were all weavers," he says. "A lot of my designs are Navajo rug designs." Yazzie was one of the first jewelers to popularize side inlay around the bezel of a stone and to combine multiple inlay techniques in the same piece. He is well known for using the best natural turquoise, of which Nevada Blue spiderweb is his favorite.

His jewelry can be seen at Garland's Indian Jewelry, Sedona, Arizona; Wright's Indian Art, Albuquerque; and www.sedonaindianjewelry.com. He also shows at the Santa Fe Indian Market. Contact: 928/526-8247.

RAYMOND YAZZIE

When Raymond Yazzie (Navajo) entered his first Santa Fe Indian Market in 1997, he had been working for nearly three decades as a jeweler, earning many awards over his career. He was only 14 in 1973 when he won Best of Show with Manuel Hoyungwa at the Gallup Inter-Tribal Ceremonial for a collaborative concha belt. More recently, he took home Best of Jewelry for a ring at the 2010 Heard Museum Indian Market. "The award opens doors for artists to do really great work in smaller pieces," he says.

One of 13 children, Yazzie grew up in a family of silversmiths in a one-room hogan south of Gallup, eight miles from where he lives today. As a young boy, Yazzie apprenticed with his older brother Lee at Tanner's Indian Arts in Gallup, learning to cut cabochons. No longer Lee's "little brother," Yazzie has become famous for his ability to cut stones in multiple shapes and to put a polish on the stone, no matter how small it is. His museum exhibitions include *Totems to Turquoise* and *Changing Hands*.

Yazzie's work is available at www.leotasindianart.com and the Heard Museum. He also shows at the Santa Fe Indian Market. Contact: www.yazzieindianart.com.

Dexter Cirillo is author of Southwestern Indian Jewelry (Abbeville Press, 1992) and Southwestern Indian Jewelry: Crafting New Traditions (Rizzoli International, 2008), winner of a 2008 New Mexico Book Award. She has a Ph.D. from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She wears a ring by Leo Yazzie every day. Contact her at www.dextercirillo.com.



COURTESY ROBIN WAYNE



COURTESY WRIGHT'S INDIAN ART / NAVAJOIAN ZIEGLER



COURTESY HEARD MUSEUM / PHOTO BY EUSTACIO NINO

From top: Ring by Robin Wayne. 18k gold and sterling silver with an 11.5mm Tahitian pearl, VS1 diamonds and natural yellow sapphires. Hand made, brushed gold, patinated silver. Opal, gold and silver ring by Leo Yazzie with channel inlaid coral and opal sides. Ring by Raymond Yazzie. Sterling silver, Japanese salmon coral, Australian and Mexican opals, Orvil Jack and Lone Mountain turquoise, 14k gold accents.