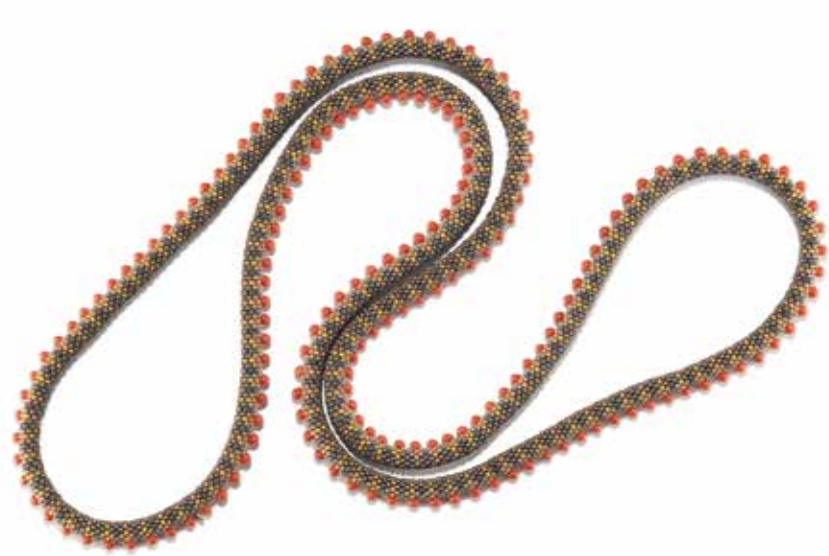




COURTESY RAMÓN LÓPEZ

**Ramón José López** of Santa Fe  
*Two Headed Plumed Serpent*, 1976–1977  
 Repoussé 14k gold, lost-wax cast gold, woven gold and turquoise  
 Collection of the artist



COURTESY PATINA GALLERY

**Claire Kahn** of Pojoaque  
*Mediterranean Coral*, 2015  
 Bead crochet using Italian coral, Japanese cylindrical glass beads and nylon thread  
 Collection of Patina Gallery



KEVIN P REBHOLTZ

**Maria Samora** of Taos and Taos Pueblo  
*Square Cuff*, undated  
 Pierced, textured and oxidized sterling silver, 18k royal yellow gold, 0.5Ct round diamonds and 0.10Ct round diamonds  
 Albuquerque Museum, gift of the artist



COURTESY PHIL POIRIER

**G. Phil Poirier** of San Cristobal  
*New Mexico Sky, Daybreak and Woven Lightning*, 2017  
 18k gold, fine silver, enamel, titanium screws and spring steel  
 Private collection

# ABQ Museum American jewelry from New Mexico

BY ROB DEAN

You know company is coming, and so is the question on the mind of nearly every Northern New Mexico visitor: Where can we see the best jewelry?

You'll have the answer this summer. *American Jewelry from New Mexico* opens June 2 at the Albuquerque Museum and runs through Oct. 14. A book published by the Museum of New Mexico Press complements the exhibition.

The collection focuses on what unifies, not what segments, jewelry making in New Mexico, curator Andrew Connors said. The show features about 300 objects, each the master work of a single artist or collaboration. Bridging cultures, traditions and lands, the jewelry pieces form a historical arc from 400 BC to the present day. Although the idea seems obvious, the show is the first of its kind.

"Telling all these diverse stories as one, focused on New Mexico, provides a glimpse into the American experience that is needed now more than ever," argued Connors. Innovation and invention are the heart of creativity, he said, and "New Mexican jewelers have been proving that for 2,418 years at least."

One of the jewelers is Ramón José López, an award-winning metalsmith, santero, painter and woodworker from Santa Fe. He said he is proud to contribute a piece of his jewelry because the collection, which for him communicates the joy and pride of making beautiful objects with one's hands, likely will inspire young and future artists.

"The significance of this exhibition is that it will only show one piece of jewelry created by an artist, capturing a moment of time that inspired the challenge of creating a work of art that helps other artisans awaken their own inspirations and dreams," López said. "I think the New Mexico jewelry tradition is such a big topic because it includes so many people and styles."

Connors agreed that the exhibition is ambitious and that it is important because it is culturally comprehensive. As curator, he challenged the traditional commercial and scholarly views that have divided Native American jewelry from the "high jewelry" represented by other American jewelers. "Unfortunately," he said, "by never telling the stories of these trajectories simultaneously, we have never been able to see the true breadth of artistic achievement in our nation's creativity."

Connors' emphasis on diversity and inclusiveness appealed to Claire Kahn, a maker of refined bead-crochet jewelry who moved from San Francisco to Pojoaque in 2016. Connors asked her to submit a piece. "I am in awe as a newcomer to New Mexico of the work in jewelry I see here," she said. "I come from a family that is devoted to exploring the art of ethnographic history and in particular Native American culture, but to live here has allowed me to more directly experience life, design, art and craft in New Mexico."

While many events successfully showcase New Mexico's rich tradition in fine art, metals, pottery and architecture, Kahn observed, jewelry shows tend to focus on a single culture, era, material or technique. "I also see a kind of change imposed by corporate, commercial and tourist industries that imitate history with careless disrespect," she said. For her, the Albuquerque exhibition celebrates the fresh ideas of artisans "inspired by, rather than derived from, the important examples and history surrounding us."

By showcasing jewelry making, the museum invigorates the art world debate about where to draw the line between art and craft.

"I think the significance of this exhibition is that it comes at a time when more artists are being recognized throughout the world for their impact as makers on design," said Allison Barnett, an expert in handmade contemporary jewelry and co-owner of Patina Gallery in Santa Fe. For the exhibition, she and her husband, Ivan, lent the museum a brooch they made together. The exhibition includes five other Patina artists: Claire Kahn, Kay Khan, Harold O'Connor, Phil Poirier and the late Carrie Adell.

"Auction houses and art fairs are recognizing contemporary jewelry, and the genre is crossing the line into becoming highly collectable," Barnett said, noting that millennials in particular seek authentic experiences, handmade works and personal connections with artists.

For Poirier, a Taos jeweler, the new museum show is an honor that comes after 45 years of working, studying, developing processes and teaching them to jewelry apprentices. Keeping company with other artists in the Albuquerque Museum show underscores for Poirier the qualities that unite New Mexican makers: the attention to detail and pursuit of originality. "My jewelry represents a classic styling with innovative flair," he said. "I'm always looking for old processes or techniques that could be altered to develop a new idea, style and design."

From the beginning, Connors knew that his vision, ambitious as it was, also had its limits. Because the scholarship of Native American jewelry is so rich, the collection was unlikely to shed new light in that area. However, he noted, the project is a guide to the way artists look outside their own traditions for ideas.

Contrary to the myth of New Mexico as remote and isolated, artists in the region have always felt the influence of distant groups. "This is illustrated so clearly," Connors said, "in a necklace dating to about 500-450 BCE in which white shell, hand carried from the Pacific Ocean, was strung on yucca fiber cordage to create an entirely new aesthetic, mixing materials that had never been combined before."

Ultimately, Connors said, the lesson from jewelry makers is that diverse influences overcome conflicts. "The greatest imagination is found at the place where cultures meet. The cacophony of aesthetic voices reflects perfectly the diversity of American heritage itself"

*Rob Dean, a retired newspaper editor, is a Santa Fe writer and researcher.*

## DETAILS

*American Jewelry from New Mexico*  
**June 2-Oct. 14, 2018**

**ALBUQUERQUE MUSEUM**  
 2000 Mountain Road N.W.  
 Albuquerque  
 505-243-7255  
[cabq.gov/culturalservices/albuquerque-museum](http://cabq.gov/culturalservices/albuquerque-museum)