Commentary II: Ceremony

Edna Glenn

Texas Tech University

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Ceremony

Edna Glenn

A typical Hopi ceremonial day offers a visual reality. At Walpi, a village on First Mesa, it is summer and Niman time, and a thanksgiving ritual is beginning. The Kuwan Heheya Kachinas set the first foot movements. Their body actions of their dance begin while their “uncle,” Tu-uqtí,1 vigorously performs his solo act in front of their dance lines. A cluster of Koshari clowns,2 starkly visible in their body-paint stripes, collect their parade paraphernalia for antics later in the day. The plaza is crowded, action is anticipated. It is a Hopi celebration day.

The sacred period of Niman is recognized throughout Hopi-land. In the six-part Hopi calendar year, observance of summer solstice signals “. . . the ripening of the first early corn crop, and the departure of the kachinas to their home in the underworld with the fruits of their harvest. Here they re-
main until called forth in the New Year,”⁵ which begins at the time of winter solstice. Niman religious rites are also referred to as “Going Home” rites since essentially they express ritual farewells to the spirit beings, the kachinas, who have been present on the mesas during the planting and growing seasons. Now, in July at First Mesa, there is reassurance of rain and a bountiful harvest. There is cause for celebration and reason for prayers of praise.

The photographed scenes of the Kuwan Heheya Kachina ceremony provide valuable insights toward a definition of HOPI. John Collier writes of the Hopi “power for living,”⁴ the “holistic and artistic bent of mind”⁵ that uniquely identifies HOPI. Probing one of the ceremonial scenes in a three-way interpretative analysis releases further significant findings. Foremost is the confrontation with historical
reality. The scene is a photograph made by Joseph Mora when he was on First Mesa in approximately 1904–1906; cameras have been banned at Hopi ceremonial occasions since about 1911. It is, then, an important historical document giving visual proof of the Kachina dance. Tribal traditions continue; the photograph could have been made in the “Year of the Hopi,” 1980.

The all-encompassing character of the scene itself intrigues; the complexities overwhelm. The Kuwan Heheya Kachinas move into Walpi plaza at the left, an environment pre-energized by the presence of tribal leaders, dancers, musicians, onlookers, and meandering Hopi. With mighty but disciplined movements, seemingly measured and transfixed by centuries of rehearsal, they begin their strenuous ritual routines. Present off on the right is a second dance line composed of female Alo Manas. The two distinct line-dance groups are chosen for this special occasion on First Mesa. It is only one ceremonial event, the major public event, in an ongoing Niman observance which consumes sixteen days.

Imagine this compelling moment. A constant earth rhythm is firmly fixed by footsteps of the Kachina and Mana groups, pulsating rasp resonances from drum chambers, gourd rattles, and chants. Rhythm is dramatized by a monumental wave of bent bodies turning and twisting amidst swirls of circulating dust. The intensity of the situation suddenly erupts and it seems that all of the natural and supernatural forces of the universe, in all time and space, are instantaneously released; a dynamic flow of energy engulfs the sacred plaza at Walpi. Surely, a cosmic spectacle is occurring. All elements are at once unified and exalted to the great Creator and Provider of Hopi blessings. Only Hopis dance, but every viewer, Hopi or not, is a participant by his or her presence.

Hastily, the koshari remove themselves from the dance area to plaza perimeters. In this event they are watchers, not participants. Two Alo Manas break from their line dance, and still keeping the rhythms, kneel on blankets to rasp the pulse beats on a decorated box and a hollow pumpkin shell. Photographic implications are that there are dozens of Hopi dancers and dozens of onlookers. Yet within this complicated situation there is perceived an intended progressive order, unity and harmony. These people, possess “the capacity to entertain complex wholes and to maintain the complexities in a dynamic equilibrium.” In truth, this is evidence of the Hopi holistic bent of mind, of a life passion that centers within the Hopis, a passion patterned and controlled by all Hopis in all cycles of time.

A consideration of Hopi iconography and aesthetics extends the holistic viewpoint to the “artistic bent of mind” that also defines HOPI. In this interpretive analyses, again utilizing Mora’s photographs, the physical dimensions of the ceremonial day move to the abstract, symbolic realm. The scene offers a great profusion of costumes, masks, and ritualistic accessories. The quantity and variety of these elements create an unreal, other-worldly kind of atmosphere directed toward the idea of spiritual praise in concert with environmental and iconographical meaning. In itself, the Heheya Kachina regalia attests to the acclaim that this particular Hopi ceremony provides one of the most festive experiences of all Niman Kachina rituals on First Mesa; it also suggests a reason why the Kuwan Heheya bears a second label, the “Colorful Heheya.” With brilliant intensity, the total realm of rainbow color, symbolically associated with life essence as conceived by Hopi people, is purposely utilized in the regalia design.

By being imaginative with the uncolored photograph, the bright yellows, reds, and greens predominate. They are warm colors; they represent earth, sun, germination and growth: bountiful crops of corn, squash, and beans. Bold, green-faced head masks worn by Kuwan Heheya male-impersonators are, in themselves, major icons. Rain symbols of lightning streaks at hair line, and cloud-altar designs
on cheek spaces activate the green mask forms, invoking the spirit kachina that upon their return to the underworld at Niman time or “Going Home” time, they will “tell the supernaturals to bring rain.” Both human and crop reproduction are desired; spirit kachinas are believed to possess powers conducive to these blessings of fertility.

The Kuwan Heheya head mask observed on each of the line dancers occupies an altar-like position, enthroning, at neckline, a circular ruff of live evergreen spruce, symbolic of universal, non-ending growth. Crowning the mask is an exotic array of bird feathers, the most important being those from an eagle, representative or the regeneration of life, power, wisdom, and communication with spiritual forces of zenith, the above. The regalia kilt is predominantly white, designating the direction East, and life fertility; from this direction the sun, supreme icon of Hopi creation, emerges each new day. The kilt is bound at the hips by a wide, white ceremonial sash from which long white cotton fringe and tassel movements extend body dance rhythms. Metaphorically, the broad sweeping motion of the sash fringe activates the ritual environment in the manner of gently falling rain. It also serves as a symbolic binding element, pulling together a unity of earth elements, human beings and spirit beings. The de-
Figure 62. HEU-MISH KATCHINA (HEMIS)
Joseph Mora
painting, watercolor, 1904–1906 (Courtesy of John R. Wilson, Tulsa, Oklahoma)
Figure 63. SKETCH, MASK AND HEADGEAR FOR THE HEU-MISH KATCHINA (HEMIS)
Joseph Mora
painting, watercolor. 1904–1906 (Courtesy of John R. Wilson, Tulsa, Oklahoma)
sign patterns structured by iconographical and aesthetic elements establish a singular sense of Hopi beauty. Through the interplay of colors, textures, tonal and spatial variations, insight is derived into Hopi sensibility - the Hopi “artistic bent of mind.”

The one kachina icon that so completely summarizes this Hopi characteristic is the painting and the sketch by Joseph Mora, “Heu-mish Katsina.” Mora wrote of the majestic and spectacular appearance of this supernatural being. Barton Wright comments:

Probably one of the most beautiful and best known of all Hopi Kachinas is the He-mis Kachina. Often he is incorrectly called the Niman Kachina from the ceremony in which he is most often seen. At sunrise, when the Kachinas come to the plaza to dance for the first time, they bring with them entire corn plants, the first corn harvest of the year, to distribute to the audience.10

The elaborate Hemis regalia are perhaps the most impressive, visually and symbolically, of all kachina costumes. Rainbow colors suggestive of growth are again utilized in body paint and ritual accessories, but the impersonator is laden with a lavish display of live evergreens, furs, and feathers. The crest of the mask flows upward into a dynamic ceremonial tablet, a work of art in itself. Mora was so inspired by the elaborate symbolism and beauty of this head-tablet that he made a detailed pencil sketches depicting “rain clouds, the showers, the appearance of the frogs with the moisture, the budding dormant vegetation and the fully developed ear of corn,”11 all metaphors expressive of crop fertility, germination and growth.

Mora was also intrigued with the image and role of the “Koshari” or Clown identified with Tewa-Nano Hopi on First Mesa. The Hano Koshari presents a contrast element to the more serious kachina spirit-figures, revealing the humorous aspect of Hopi character. One of the roles pursued by the koshari clown on ceremonial day is that of a glutton who accepts too much food, too many blessings. In the Mora painting he is “shown with food bowl in one hand and a bundle of green ‘piki’, Hopi paper bread, in the other. At his waist he has a wooden doll (tihu) impersonation of himself.”12 In the Neil David sculpture of the Koshari, he is shown with a food bag hanging from the neck, watermelon in one hand, clusters of fruits and vegetables tied to his waist—, begging and eating all that he can carry. The three-dimensional koshari, carved of cottonwood, displays a disproportionate uncoordinated body which emphasizes the clown character: “boisterous conversation, immoderate actions, and gluttony.”13 These clowns teach how not to behave, how not to follow their example.

The metaphorical unity of the Niman ceremonial scene finds completeness in the Walpi environment itself, a backdrop for the unfolding Hopi mystery play. Designated as the sacred center, the village plaza brings into focus all Hopi people and their activities, their prayers and blessings. . . Just as the “kivas are universes in miniature,”14 the plaza is “the center” from which the universal patterns of creation and life growth are compounded each day, in each ceremonial occasion, and evolve outward to unseen spiritual realms. The Walpi environment, structured of sky and earth, stone and adobe, ladders and steps, presents, in distinct hierarchical order, a physical and spiritual access to spaces below and spaces above. Michael Kabotie, in describing his people, states that “we settled on the high mesas, and as Cloud People, we designed our buildings after the cumulus clouds. . . . Our multi-storied Hopi architecture is a reflection of the high climbing cumulus clouds.”15
Figure 64. KA-HOPI KATCHINA (KOSHARI) WITH “TIHU”
Joseph Mora
painting, watercolor. 1904–1906 (Courtesy of John R. Wilson, Tulsa, Oklahoma)
Thus, it is the Hopi ceremonial day in 1904–06, or in 1981. This day proclaims harmony within the universe, dramatizes the unity of dualistic vital forces, confirms the structured course of an evolutionary past within the sanctioned present; and for the individual journeying on the Hopi “Road of Life,” it marks one more-step in an experience through space and time. No living thing is denied the blessings—the land, the waters, the plants and animals, and humans, wherever they may be.

Figure 67. KO-YA-LA, CLOWN BOY (opposite page)
    Owen Seumptewa, photograph, 1980 (Courtesy of the photographer, Second Mesa, Arizona)
Notes


5. Ibid., p. 164.


10. Ibid.


12. Ibid., p. 54.

13. Wright, *Kachinas*, p. 239.
