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## Exemplary Arts: Section B — Subject: Corn as Life Essence

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SUBJECT: **Corn as Life Essence**

Edna Glenn

**Five Paintings by the Artist Hopid**

Figure 13: Four Mother Corn  
Dawakema (Milland Lomakema)

Figure 14: Kachina Maiden Watching Fields  
Coochsiwkioma (Delbridge Honanie)

Figure 15: Harvest Prayer  
Honvantewa (Terrance Talaswaima)

Figure 16: Kachinas Germinating Plants  
Dawakema (Milland Lomakema)

Figure 17: Angak' China (Long-haired Kachina)  
Honvantewa (Terrance Talaswaima)

“Hopi basically are corn people. We believe in agriculture because our greatest symbol is the corn, the ‘Corn Mother’.”

Lomawywesa



Figure 13. FOUR MOTHER CORN  
Dawakema (Milland Lomakema)  
painting, acrylic (Courtesy of Artist Hopid, Second Mesa, Arizona)

Dawakema celebrates the sacredness of corn. Utilizing only four major compositional elements, four corn ears, he explains the Hopi concept that corn is a life spirit and that it exists in both earthly and spiritual realms.

The title of the painting indicates the content: the four corns are “mother corns” or “tiponis,” ceremonial objects primarily symbolizing fertility. A single “tiponi” exemplifies the universal mother-of-all image, the originator of all life, who brings to living beings the life-essence of creativity. Spiritually endowed on an altar or carried by certain designated chieftains, priests, or kachinas, the corn “tiponi” petitions the appropriate gods for special kinds of blessings. Perhaps in this painting the particular blessings of an abundant harvest are implied.

Visually, the four painted corns construct an altar. They consume the total picture space, and they confirm their ceremonial presence with such authority and grandeur one does not question that the entire hierarchy of Hopi gods is summoned to their command. Symbolically, they reveal the universe. Their four distinct colors designate the four cardinal directions: yellow for north, blue for west, red for south, and white for east. They also indicate the daily path of the sun, east and west; and the yearly journey of the sun, north and south. It is said that when the four mother-corn are placed on Hopi kiva altars, they become ritualistic directional signs. Implied also is the belief in the sacredness of Hopi corn fields, the corn fields that each year yield corn ears in these very colors.

Indeed, the composition is carefully controlled. The artist depicts each mother-corn with particularity; each is represented as being ceremonially wrapped and tied, and deified through the addition of an eagle feather. At lower picture center Dawakema stabilizes the four-part ensemble in an earth mound contoured by corn husks. Yet he endows the ensemble with a life energy that causes them, visually, to emerge from the brown-earth altar and to ascend to a higher level of existence. They now inhabit an unbounded blue domain that encompasses the top-most sections of picture space. Symbolically, they move within an aura of cloud formations and migrational signatures of the past. Ultimate spirituality is attained.



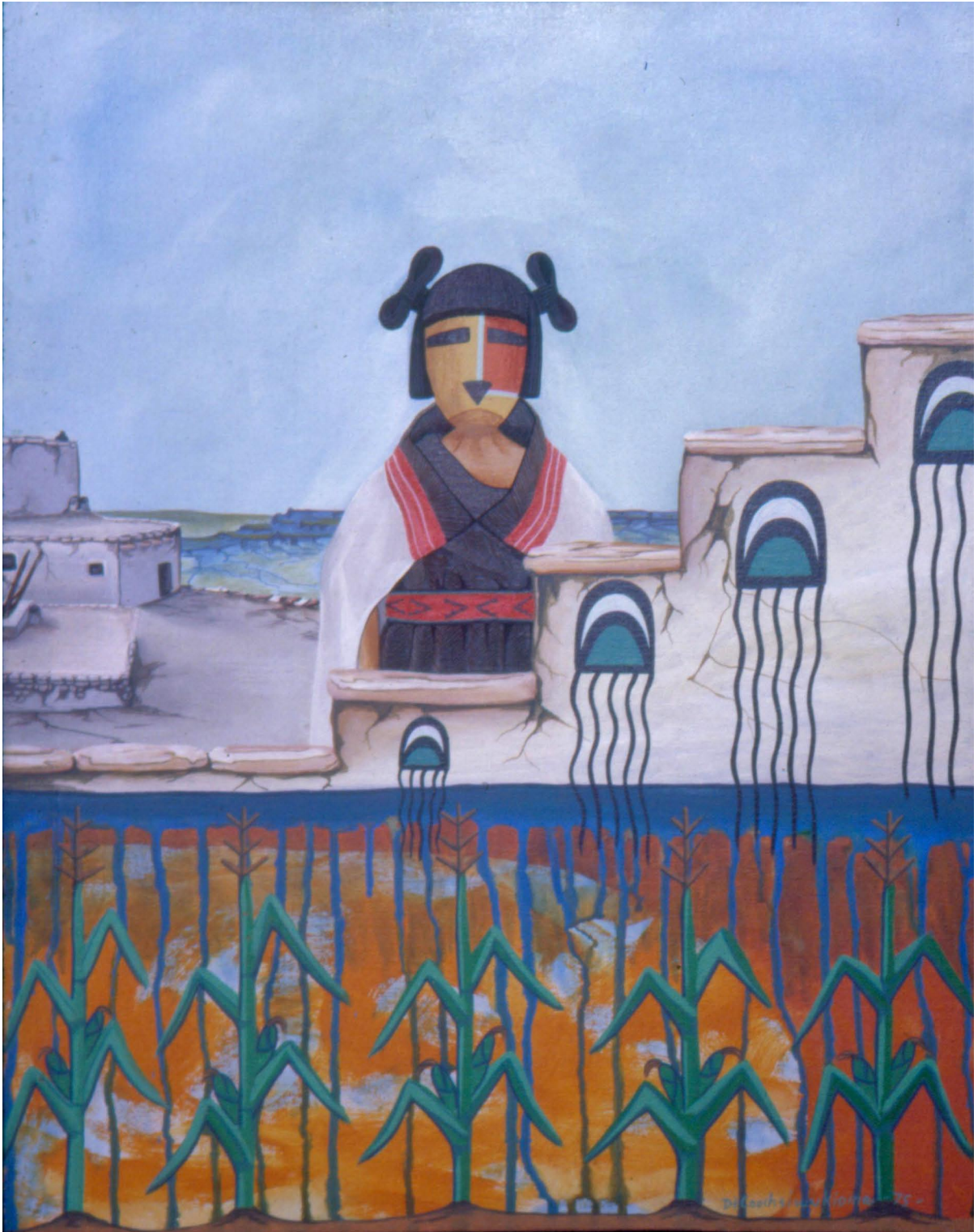


Figure 14. KACHINA MAIDEN WATCHING FIELDS  
Coochsiwukioma (Delbridge Honanie)  
painting, acrylic (Courtesy of Artist Hopid, Second Mesa, Arizona)

A Hopi maiden wearing hair in squash-blossom whorls dominates Coochsiwukioma's painting. She stands at the exact center of the formalized composition, realistically positioned among environmental elements indigenous to the Hopi mesas. There is arid land that stretches through space to the horizon, an expanse of blue sky, communal dwellings and a kiva built of rock, and corn plants. But a more intent examination of the painting proves that the picture presented is not for scenic purposes; it is a visual description of Hopi ceremonialism.

Actually, the young maiden in the composition is a masked Kachina Mana appropriately clothed in ritual garments: a hand-woven "maiden shawl" bordered in red and indigo blue contains her body, a red ceremonial sash encircles her waist. She is one of the female members of kachina families who reside ceremonially with Hopi people during the spring and summer months, the seasons of planting and harvesting. In the context of this painting, she perhaps could be called "Corn Girl." The presence of the Kachina Mana in the Hopi environment indicates prayers for moisture and healthy corn plants. Steadfastly, she stands on the kiva steps, a lone figure enveloped by a sense of earth and sky space that is permeated with beauty, peace, and harmony. A placid calm is so strongly expressed by the artist, the viewer at this very instant seems to be intruding, to be disrupting the vigil of the meditating mana.

Meaning is derived through particular painted symbolisms and their placement on the picture plane. Single cloud forms, colored green and emitting gently falling rain, scale the altar-like stair-step arrangement to the maiden's left. On her right the kiva and kiva ladder images denote deification of space. Below her, fertile and moist cornfields are in the process of becoming lush with green corn plants. Here, the ritual of life growth takes place; it focuses on the kachina maiden. She commands the blessings of rain.

The purpose of the painting is to show the significance of ceremony to the cultivation of Hopi corn. The painter, however, tells about himself. With such precision and care, Coochsiwukioma delineates the natural and manmade forms of the Hopi environment. Immediately evident is his innate devotion and love for the native land, a concern and respect for the processes of the earth, and a reverence for the ancient tribal people. He will continue their life patterns.





Figure 15. HARVEST PRAYER  
Honvantewa (Terrance Talaswaima)  
painting, acrylic (Courtesy of Artist Hopid, Second Mesa, Arizona)



A Hopi drama is staged in the painting by Honvanteewa. How simple and refined the performance is; only three figures play the parts, two Hopi-beings and a single corn plant. Action centers on the corn object around which the two Hopi figures move and offer prayers for a successful corn harvest. One could designate the three-part scene a religious triptych bearing the title "Adoration."

The drama is performed on a high, earth-like stage. With this point of view, the observer watches from below, making an effort to understand the plot as it unfolds. A male-being and a female-being provide the action, as indicated by costumes and hairstyles. They perform with restrained, measured movements as if the parts have been played many times before, perhaps throughout all centuries of ceremonial time. One reminisces about Awatovi kiva murals where ancient wall paintings reveal a similar type of ceremony, figure style, and spatial composition. Images are simplified, reduced to colored areas of flat planes, frontalized, expressive. These characteristics are noted in Honvanteewa's painting. The stage space is narrow and so limited that the two actors stand on the very front of the stage, their feet at the edge of a base line. The picture plane is divided symmetrically. Except for a few variations the Hopi-beings are identical, their arms outstretched in interchangeable votive positions. They gesture to the centralized corn-god figure and pray that each corn stalk in Hopi fields will mature to perfect growth and productive harvest as symbolized by the adored corn plant.

It is a time of quiet devotion. The female figure on the left offers a ceremonial bowl that shows a decorative corn ear painted on the surface. At right, the male figure extends the worshipful gift of a pipe. Hopi people often refer to ceremonial pipes as "cloud blowers." They believe that sacred messages ascend with smoke clouds from ritual pipes just as rain messages emerge from sky clouds. Each actor holds one prayer feather and each wears a single feather as hair adornment. These are eagle tail feathers and important ceremonial objects because they are symbolic of white clouds with black rain falling below. In this scene the feathers also are primary indicators that the stage space encompassing the corn-icon is sacred space. A wealth of Hopi symbolism decorates the wide, reddish-brown band at lower picture-edge. This might be interpreted as earth floor space; it seems intrinsic to the deified corn plant. Symbols in the band link the "Harvest Prayer" ceremony to the past: migrational patterns, petroglyph figures, and design elements from ancient pottery and cloth fragments.

There is evidence of energy penetrating the total scene. Intersecting yellow and green spaces suggestive of sun rays envelop the corn plant and extend outward as symbols of creative growth. Strangely, one observes this solar phenomenon through a subtly-painted theatrical backdrop. It is a transparent curtain of gently-falling rain saturating the earth. Honvanteewa's ceremonial drama of harvest prayer is made complete.



Figure 16. KACHINAS GERMINATING PLANTS  
Dawakema (Milland Lomakema)  
painting, acrylic (Courtesy of Artist Hopid, Second Mesa, Arizona)

Of the five paintings in the group this one presents to the viewer the most involved Hopi iconography and ideology. It is a six-part composition, the various sections, colors, and figures denoting the ceremonial process of corn germination.

Dawakema's painting shows that the ritual of germination occurs at night, indicated by moon and stars that appear in the dark space at upper left picture-edge. Also, it occurs at winter-solstice time in the underground kiva, indicated as a grayish picture-space that contains the kachina figures actively involved with the process of germinating corn. A black section at lower picture-edge represents the sacred earth from which each fertilized, moisturized corn-plant emerges into the kiva and symbolically achieves life-growth through germination.

A single kachina-mana centers the kiva. Her figure is visually and spiritually integrated to three spatial regions: the earth, the kiva, and the sky-like area above, painted blue and hung with circular loops that are Hopi fertility signs. A projecting green-red-yellow altar-form dominates all space and all symbolism. It encloses the meditating mana and emits continuous rainfall to all plants within the kiva, to the extent that a patterned flow of water borders the black earth at lower picture-edge from left to right. The altar-form is a Hopi icon which represents, generally, the reproduction of all living things. Specifically, in this painting, the form infers that the inception of life to corn kernels is taking place and that this is happening in the kiva through the spiritual powers of the female kachina-figure and the two male kachina-figures who represent Hopi Germ Gods. Female and male symbolic elements are unified to make a complex whole. Pictorially, germination occurs and corn growth is confirmed.

Six corn plants consume the foreground of the artwork. Compositionally, three separate plants flank the kachina-mana on each side. And at each outer edge of the painting, one plant grows to full maturity within a yellow, sunlit area, perhaps revealing the creative strength of the sun. A significant rainbow is also observed. It enters the picture space at lower right, and moving upward, serves as a three-way link to fertility symbols; it ties together the mature corn-plant, the kachina within the kiva who is attending to plant germination, and the fertility altar-form itself. Thus, all forces of the Hopi universe are collectively summoned to the creative act of growing corn.

Dawakema presents an intriguing composition, loaded with symbolic clues, primarily for expressive purposes. Just as the growing of Hopi corn is more than the manipulation of a planting stick, the artist displays his compositional and painting skills for the purpose of presenting a strong personal belief about his people, the Hopi. The pictorial message says that the germination and growth of corn is intrinsic to a broader concept of life, the concept that life-growth is an ongoing, creative, regenerative process.







The title of Honvantewa's painting is "The Long-Haired Kachina." The painting, however, could bear any one of the following labels: "Germination," "Emergence and Migration," "Kachina Mana," "Spiritual Essence," or simply, "Sacred Corn." On one canvas there are pictorial references to all of these facets of Hopi ceremonial life, and for every Hopi, these also are facets of daily life. They construct the sign posts on the Hopi Way.

In one interpretation of the painting, it seems that Honvantewa builds a contemporary sign post to inform the viewer about the painted imagery and the spiritual relationships taking place. The sign post is a shield-like shape that dominates the entire composition. It bears two important heraldic heads: those of the Long-Haired Kachina and a kachina mana. The formal placement of the single, masked heads reveals their noteworthy presence.

Topmost in the arrangement is the Long-Haired Kachina, appearing as a decorated chieftain who commands all of the surrounding elements, including the kachina mana whose head is contained within the shield-shaped structure. A third, major figure moves into the composition at the right. It is a deified corn plant to which the masked kachina pays reverent respect. As if eye-to-eye, there is evidence of a dynamic confrontation, a spiritual interchange that takes place between the Long-Haired Kachina and the corn-god. The content of the painting is clearly evident: ceremonial activity that brings a plentiful corn crop, the life-necessity for Hopi people. And it is the Long-Haired Kachina who provides spiritual blessings for the ritual request.

All Hopi adore and desire the Long-Haired Kachina. Certainly, he is one of the most beautifully attired ceremonial figures: a turquoise-blue mask bordered at lower edge by a rainbow band and beard; and long, flowing black hair, worn loose, with enhancement of white, downy plumes from an eagle's breast. This kachina is primarily adored, however, because he brings rain to Hopi arid lands, providing moisture for bountiful corn and beautiful flowers. In this respect, the Long-Haired Kachina, at times, is associated with sacred cloud forms; cloud blessings also bring rain. And both, the kachina and the clouds come to the Hopi mesas from the San Francisco Peaks as rain-messengers from spirit-beings who reside there. With the aid of the kachina mana, the Long-Haired Kachina germinates and fertilizes young corn plants. This is a ceremonial assurance that the corn will reach maturity and will be productive.

Color is a major device used by the painter to indicate the creative-life process. A dominance of strong greens and blues throughout the composition presents the idea of moisture and growth. The corn plant, itself seems to have evolved from the ongoing, fertilization process at mid-center of the composition, unfolding at left-edge, and developing life as it continues across the lower-expanse of the painting. An encounter with symbolic emergence and migration spiral patterns strengthens the movement. Always, the painter edges the greens with red, symbolically suggesting the presence of sun energy from the direction, south. The painter presents a white linear area that borders, on the left, the

Figure 17. ANGAK' CHINA (Long-Haired Kachina)  
 Honvantewa (Terrance Talaswaima)  
 painting, acrylic (Courtesy of Artist Hopid, Second Mesa, Arizona)

long, flowing hair of the Kachina. White is symbolic of the direction east, and indicates the source of the sun as the Creator of life itself. Contouring the white area are migrational paths of the Hopi, accented by clusters of four, small, black lines. Perhaps these lines show that the Hopi today live in the Fourth World, having emerged from three previous worlds.

A mottled, painterly technique employed by the artist, includes rainbow colors and implies the effect of active, atmospheric particles accompanying the dynamic germination process. Particularly intense is the reddish, mottled area enclosing the kachina mana's female presence. Here, the symbolic unity of male and female elements as the sacred act of creation is exclaimed by all pictorial elements.

In Honvante's painting the corn grows through kachina blessings. It is the ritual wish of every Hopi farmer that the Long-Haired Kachina is present in his corn field each spring season to caress the corn plants and to wrap them with long flowing hair, so suggestive of gentle rainfall.