

New Acquisition: Gail Bird and Yazzie Johnson

Roshii Montaña, Assistant Registrar

In May 2023, Robin Chemers Neustein donated a significant collection of five pins and four necklaces by Gail Bird (Laguna Pueblo/Santo Domingo Pueblo) and Yazzie Johnson (Navajo) to the Heard Museum.

For more than 51 years, in a partnership that began in 1972, Bird's keen design sensibilities and Johnson's adept skills in fabrication and metalwork have combined to create uniquely innovative fine jewelry. Together, the artists preserve the inherent natural beauty of the materials they use, recalling Southwest landscapes and shifting skies.

The Heard Museum first purchased from Bird and Yazzie a thematic belt titled *Route 66/Tourism* in 1995, beginning a collection that today has grown to 25 works. In 2007, Chief Curator Diana Pardue authored *Shared Images: The Innovative Jewelry of Yazzie Johnson and Gail Bird*, publishing the first monograph on the artists.

The necklace pictured demonstrates a remarkable use of gemstones, pearls and metals. The three-strand necklace features South Sea keshi pearls with labradorite clasps and double-sided labradorite satellites set in an 18K gold sawtooth bezel. The reverse of the clasps and satellites feature an overlay of stylized birds and geometric motifs that recall Pueblo pottery designs.

Carved stone appealed to Bird and Johnson, who first incorporated it into their pieces in 1991. The pin shown here features a carved agate by renowned German lapidary artist Dieter Lorenz. The dark grey banded agate is carved in a diagonal curve to accentuate the clouded milky streaks. The South Sea keshi pearl placed above the carved stone mimics the undulating surface. Both pearl and stone display a balance of visual textures, enclosed by an 16K gold sawtooth bezel.