

Heart of the Community: Baskets from the Basha Family Collection of American Indian Art

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On Oct. 9, at a special event held on Indigenous Peoples Day, the family of Eddie Basha Jr. announced their gift of the Eddie Basha Collection of American Indian Art to the Heard Museum's permanent collection. The event included remarks by Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs and Gila River Indian Community Governor Stephen Roe Lewis, who is also a Heard Museum trustee. In his remarks, Heard Museum Dickey Family Director & CEO David M. Roche said, "Eddie supported many tribal organizations, a fact that is not well-known off the reservations. Indeed, Eddie was the quintessential philanthropist, giving without asking for recognition or acclaim."

Baskets, ceramics, katsina doll carvings and jewelry of exceptional quality are all part of this major gift. We will be sharing the artworks with our visitors through a series of exhibitions, beginning with baskets on Feb. 2, 2024. The exhibition is titled *Heart of the Community: Baskets from the Basha Family Collection of American Indian Art*. The title recognizes not only Eddie Basha Jr.'s dedication to the good of the many communities he was part of, but also the meaning the baskets carry, expressing the creation of beauty in American Indian communities of which art is an integral part—the heart of the community.

Eddie Basha began collecting art in 1971. The Basha collection has been shared with the public in the Zelma Basha Salmeri Gallery at the Bashas' corporate headquarters in Chandler since 1992. The gallery name honors Eddie Basha's aunt Zelma, who encouraged his appreciation of the arts. He combined that appreciation with his interest in history, a subject in which he received his bachelor's degree from Stanford University. Speaking with Nadine Basha, a Heard Museum trustee, she noted that her interest in collecting baskets sparked an interest in that particular art form on the part of her husband. Their shared interest was based on an appreciation of the partnership the weavers had with nature and the way in which weavers created works of both function and beauty. Eddie's regard for Arizona history also influenced his selections, as many of the baskets he collected were woven in the late 1800s and the early decades of the 1900s. As international collecting of these baskets grew, Eddie became concerned that many baskets were being taken far from Arizona. He wanted to see the art remain here and be shown near the communities in which it was created.

Collecting the baskets made by Akimel O'odham weavers is particularly close to the history of Bashas' grocery stores. The Akimel O'odham were among Bashas' stores' first customers. Johnny Basha, senior vice president at Bashas' Corporation, said that "The Pima were our founders' first customers in what is now called Ocotillo but in the [19]30s was the town of Goodyear Eddie's father, uncle and aunts all traded with the Pimas. In those days, wood stoves were common, and the Pimas would bring in mesquite wood to trade for groceries. Eddie's late aunt would sing him songs in the Pima language. Many times I heard Eddie telling others the story of our roots with Native people beginning with the Pimas."

In addition to Akimel O'odham, baskets in the collection are creations of Western Apache and Yavapai weavers. The baskets were woven at a time when weavers were fully exploring their art form, creating designs important to their lives and cultural traditions. Inspired by the popularity of the Arts and Crafts Movement, collectors wanted to incorporate baskets into their home décor. Weavers responded with larger baskets, using dyes to add color to the natural willow and martynia fibers. Their designs also honored the animals that were so important to their lives. A few weavers even included camels, which had been imported to the Southwest by the U.S. Army prior to the Civil War. The baskets reflect weavers at the height of their skills, expert in their knowledge of how to gather and prepare their materials.

Many of the baskets in the collection come from a time when the artists were not known by name. An exception are the baskets woven by Virginia S. Newton, Tonto Apache (Camp Verde/Yavapai), an Arizona Living Treasure Award recipient. We will be showing those baskets and hope that in researching and sharing the baskets with our visitors, more weavers' names will come to light. They truly are the heart of their communities.