



Reference: 24724

Red Robin (1909-1991)

Mountain Chant, representing The Third Day of the Chant

Permanent Sand Painting, circa 1930s

original frame made by the artist, outer dimensions measure 46 x 52 inches. Image size is 41 x 47 inches

The Navajo Mountain Chant is the story of the mythic hero's odyssey of Dsilyi Neyani and his passage back to his family after escaping his captors, the Utes. His journey is filled with magical/mystical encounters that chronicle the origin of various rituals, symbolic talismans, influential gods, and sacred lands that the Navajo's still honor today. Once home, he recants the story and thus begins the tradition of the Mountain Chant ceremony.

Traditionally the Chant is performed as either a healing ceremony for an individual or performed on behalf of the tribe to restore order and balance in nature and assist in having a good harvest. Sand Paintings are an integral part of the Navajo ceremonies, or in Navajo, "places where the gods come and go," as they serve as symbolic representations of the stories and characters referenced in the chant.

This particular Sand painting is performed on the third day of the Mountain Chant and depicts Dsilyi' Neyáni meeting with the goddesses Bitsès-ninéz, (the Long Bodies or Tall Ones) at their home. The earliest recording of this ceremony is by Dr. Washington Matthews for the Smithsonian Institution – Bureau of Ethnology report in 1883. He writes, "The goddesses he meets (at the "Lodge of Dew") stand as tall as the heavens and each requires four garments, for no one garment, they say, can be made long enough to cover such giant forms. Their heads all point to the east as they mandated."

The four goddesses all face the same direction (east) as they are too tall to stand in the directional location they represent. Their chest, legs, and arms are painted in the corresponding colors for the direction each represents; black belongs to the north (far left), white belongs to the east, blue belongs to the south, and yellow belongs to the west (far right). There are two weasels at the top of the painting guarding the entrance to the lodge; One is brown and the other is white as weasels change from brown in the summer to white (ermine) in the winter. Each goddess holds a rattle, a charm and a blossoming choke cherry branch in their right hand. The red robes (of sunlight) are embroidered with 'sunbeams' and their arms and legs are painted with zigzags representing lightning. The colorful decoration at their waists are believed to be beaded bags made by the Utes or sunbeams.

There is a rainbow which wraps around the goddesses on three sides. At the far right of the painting or the southeastern terminus there are five white eagle plumes, five tail plumes of a blue bird at the southwest bend (lower right), the plumes of the red shafted flicker are at the bend in the northwest 'corner' (lower left corner) and the tail of the magpie is at the northeastern terminus.

During the WPA period, Red Robin made eight Ceremonial Sand Paintings for the Denver Art Museum and in 1938, the Museum of Modern Art included one of his Ceremonial Sand Paintings of Hasjelti Dailjis in a show titled, *New Horizons in American Art*. Combining his artistic talent with cultural richness, Red Robin's work stood out and was always well received by the public and art critics alike.