



## MULTIVOCALITY OF THE KATSINA MASK AMONG PUEBLO PEOPLE IN THE AMERICAN SOUTHWEST

*Jessica Joyce Christie\**

### **Abstract** - Multivocality of the Katsina Mask among Pueblo People in the American Southwest

In the American Southwest, Katsina iconography has been documented since the fourteenth century. Katsiman are known as complex supernaturals related to the dead, rain, and agricultural fertility. They manifest themselves as spiritual entities who are incarnated by ritual performers and represented by carved wooden dolls. A unique mask identifies each Katsina and these masks have been recorded in rockart and on pre-contact ceramics. While most Southwest rockart displays abstract petroglyphs, Katsina masks stand out as intriguing figurative images and probably as the earliest evidence for the use of masks. Some of them can be linked to masks used by contemporary Pueblo, Hopi, and Zuni peoples. Further, Katsina masks have come to mark vast quantities of tourist commodities and Southwest souvenirs.

In this paper, I will explore the communicative role of the Katsina mask in its multiple contexts. I will compare the meaning and resulting messages of the traditional mask as a three-dimensional sacred object with those of its replicas. Materials and techniques, portable versus immobile images (as in rockart), private versus public settings, local and global audiences will be evaluated. I will argue that a private setting of vision quest most likely applied to the rockart images as opposed to the public performances of the Katsiman in the village plazas. The point of this paper is to emphasize that images are not simply form and iconography but that their power of communication rests in their shifting contexts.

### **Riassunto** - Uso multiforme delle maschere di Katsina presso i Pueblos del sud-ovest americano

Nel sud-ovest americano, l'iconografia Katsina è documentata fin dal XIV secolo. I Katsiman sono esseri sovranaturali legati al culto dei morti, alla pioggia e alla fertilità dei campi, incarnati rappresentati, durante i riti, con sculture di legno. Alcuni Kachina sono identificati da maschere con un'iconografia particolare riscontrabile sia nell'arte rupestre che sulla ceramica pre-colombiana.

La maggior parte dell'arte rupestre del sud-ovest è astratta, mentre raffigurazioni di Kachinas sono curiosamente figurative, questo genere di iconografia è probabilmente la prima testimonianza del loro uso. Alcune raffigurazioni rupestri confrontate con le maschere usate ancora oggi dai popoli indigeni Pueblos, Hopi e Zunis e sono largamente usate nella decorazione di una grande quantità di articoli per turisti. Nell'articolo si analizzano le maschere Kachinas come strumento di comunicazione nei diversi contesti: le maschere tradizionali delle sculture sacre e le loro riproduzioni; saranno valutati i materiali e le tecniche, gli artefatti mobiliari e il loro corrispettivo immobiliare (come l'arte rupestre), le opere realizzate per le cerimonie sacre rispetto a quelle realizzate per il pubblico.

Dimostreremo infine che, nel caso delle immagini di arte rupestre, si tratta probabilmente di una ricerca della visione privata che si oppone alla celebrazione pubblica delle Kachinas sulla piazza del villaggio. Il nostro obiettivo qui è di sottolineare non sono le forme e un'iconografia ma che il potere comunicativo rimane pur nella mutevolezza del contesto.

### **Résumé** - La multivocauté des masques Kachinas chez les Peuples Pueblos du Sud-Ouest Américain : les masques actuels et leurs reproductions dans l'art rupestre, les céramiques traditionnelles et les articles pour touristes

Dans le Sud-Ouest américain, l'iconographie Kachina a été repérée pour la première fois au XIVe siècle. Les Kachinas sont connus comme étant des êtres complexes surnaturels liés aux morts, à la pluie, à la fertilité agricole. Ils se manifestent comme des entités spirituelles incarnées lors de rites et sont représentés par des poupées de bois sculptées. Chaque Kachina est identifié par un masque particulier. Ces masques sont présents dans l'art rupestre et dans la céramique d'avant le contact. Alors que la plupart des arts rupestres du Sud-Ouest présentent des pétroglyphes abstraits, les masques kachinas apparaissent comme de curieuses images figuratives, qui sont probablement la plus ancienne preuve de leur utilisation. Certains d'entre eux peuvent être mis en relation avec des masques utilisés actuellement par les peuples pueblos, hopis et zunis. En outre, les masques kachinas ornent aujourd'hui une large quantité d'articles pour touristes et de souvenirs du Sud-Ouest.

Nous allons explorer le rôle communicatif du masque kachina dans ces différents contextes. Nous allons comparer la signification et les messages du masque traditionnel en tant qu'objet sacré en trois dimensions avec ceux de ses reproductions. Nous évaluerons les matériaux et les techniques, les images mobiles par rapport aux images immobiles (comme dans l'art rupestre), les créations privées par rapport aux créations publiques et le public local par rapport au public général. Nous montrerons ensuite que, dans le cas des images d'art rupestre, il s'agit probablement d'une quête de la vision privée, ce qui s'oppose aux célébrations publiques des Kachinas sur la place du village. Notre but ici est de souligner que les images ne sont pas que forme et iconographie, mais que le pouvoir de communication réside dans leurs contextes changeants.

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\* Jessica Joyce Christie

PhD, Associate Professor School of Art and Design  
Mailstop 502 East Carolina University  
Greenville, N.C. 27858 US

## INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I will investigate how the *Katsina* (*Katsiman*, pl., in the Hopi language) has communicated in pre- and post-contact times. *Katsiman* are powerful supernaturals in the American Southwest, related to clouds and the ancestors, to rain and agricultural fertility. They manifest themselves in their costumes and ritual paraphernalia, in particular, specific masks, as ritual impersonators who put on these costumes, and in the form of carved wooden images in their likeness. *Katsina* iconography has been documented in pre-contact Ancestral Pueblo sites and they continue to perform in contemporary Pueblo and related Hopi and Zuni villages, all situated in the larger area of the Four Corners region (the point where the state lines of New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Utah meet at 90 degree angles) in the southwestern United States (Fig. 1). I will place the *Katsina* in the human dynamics of shifting culture change, which means that I cannot present a traditional research question followed by a new answer. Instead the discussion will be based on texts with the *Katsina* itself regarded as primary "text" which appears in multiple media and which can be read through a number of frames or theoretical perspectives. The questions asked are what and how does the *Katsina* communicate? We will quickly see that we arrive at layers of answers, texts about texts, and that my essay and its frame add yet another text. My own theoretical frame is informed by studying various texts in archaeology and anthropology and some fieldwork at rockart sites as well as by visiting Native American villages and my own ethical sense about learning from and writing about indigenous people.

## KATSINA ICONOGRAPHY

**The Three-Dimensional Mask.** *Katsiman* are identified by their masks. Although they wear a full body costume, it is the mask which defines their individual identity. In Hopi villages, *Katsina* masks are powerful ritual objects which are kept wrapped and stored away and only taken out for use in performances. Armin Geertz (1986:45) reports about the mask:

Every boy who is initiated into the *Katsina* Cult has the right to own a mask. A mask is made of leather but it is believed to be alive. Therefore it must be kept fed and hidden when stored, just like other animate ritual objects. The term for the mask is *tuviku*, but this term is seldom used, since the uninitiated children would learn that the *Katsinas* are not gods but their uncles, fathers and brothers in masks and costumes. Thus the masks are always called *kwaatsi*, "friend".

Thus the potency of the mask is of beneficial nature to the Hopi people and must be carefully guarded and protected. Louis Hieb (1994:28-30) reports specific meanings of the mask belonging to the Ma 'lo *Katsina* (Fig. 2): the mask is formed of a leather casing painted red and blue (or green) and has a tubular mouth. At the left side of this mask, there is a squash blossom and at the right side two tall feathers with a tuft of red hair. The mask rests on a wreath of Douglas fir. All the elements of the mask hold specific meanings which local consultants identify: the colors of the *Katsina*, yellow, blue, red, and white, are related to the four directions (Hieb 1994:29). Alexander Stephen (1936:215-216) explains that the eye of the *Katsina* is the seed of all plants and vice versa that the seed of any plant is its eye (*poosi*). It follows that the eyebrow becomes a cloud over the seed ready to release rain and start germination. The two black tipped feathers represent the Above and the feather spray on top of the mask represents the Below (Hieb 1994:29). Stephen (1936:216) further elaborates that the mouth is an ear of corn with open slits through which the impersonator emits his song-prayer. The Hopi usually depict the corn ear in a realistic manner but here it is only shown in a cylinder form to indicate its prototype. The reason for this is that "through the mouth come prayers, not only for corn, but for all other essentials, hence the corn ear should not be too specifically manifest" (Stephen 1936:216). In these ways, the *Katsina* mask communicates on multiple levels setting up Hopi moral space and cosmology as well as the place of humans within it to those literate in the traditional iconography. We should keep in mind, though, that these explanations were given to Alexander Stephen in the 1930s. When we visit the reservations today, Hopi individuals will probably not repeat the same information for us. Some may no longer know and Hopi traditionalists may not wish to share this kind of knowledge with us. Nevertheless, our conversations will generate a new text about *Katsiman*. *Katsiman* continue to visit the Hopi villages according to the ritual calendar: they arrive around the time of winter solstice in the middle of winter and stay through the planting and



growing season. At harvest time, in mid-summer, they return to their homes in the San Francisco mountains.

It follows that the field of communication of the Katsina mask is carefully controlled: all Hopi adults are members in Katsina Societies (Adams 1994:36-37) and have the right to own a mask. Most acquire their proper mask and keep it concealed in a protected place and only don it during rituals performed in kivas (semi-subterranean roofed structures reserved for ritual purposes) and village street and plaza settings. The specific meanings of all the visual elements on the mask are primarily known to its owner and communicate to the members of his/her Katsina Society and to some extent, to Hopi belonging to other Katsina Societies. It must be noted that traditional Hopi consider all knowledge of Katsiman as private and as the privilege of their associated Societies. The following is an excerpt from a statement issued by the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office under the heading "Respect for Hopi Knowledge":

Certain activities are considered the private domain of specific clans, societies, or individuals. Therefore, Hopi individuals typically will not inquire about specific sacred matters concerning certain ceremonies and practices from other tribal members. This helps guard the integrity of specific cultural knowledge for those members who are privileged to that knowledge. Asking questions about such things is not a common practice .... Protection of Hopi wisdom over the centuries has helped it to survive as a wellspring of social and spiritual nourishment for our own future generations and the world at large (in Spencer 2001:172).

One question my essay will pursue further is how can Katsina imagery protect traditional Hopi wisdom and at the same time, communicate to a global world?

Researchers agree that Katsina cults have pre-contact origins (Adams 1994:37-39; Schaafsma 1994; Hays 1994; and many others). Spanish documents dating as early as 1582 report on Katsina ceremonies and depictions of Katsina figures in murals on the walls of rooms (for example, White 1932). Two-dimensional images of Katsina masks have been documented in rockart and ceramics dated to approximately the late 1200s to 1450 (Adams 1994; Schaafsma 1994). These two media will provide the focal point of the following two discussion sections.

**The Two-Dimensional Mask in Rockart.** Polly Schaafsma, together with her husband Curtis, have devoted a lifetime to the investigation of rockart in the Southwest and have accumulated vast amounts of data. Many of Polly's publications concentrate on the eastern or Rio Grande Pueblos (Fig. 1). Concerning the origins of Katsina imagery, she offers a compelling model developed from rockart (Schaafsma 1994). According to Schaafsma (1994:64-65,78-79), images of Katsina masks abound in Jornada Mogollon and Rio Grande rockart in the fourteenth century. Jornada Mogollon sites are situated in the lower regions of the Rio Grande River corresponding to southern New Mexico and have been dated between 1000 and 1450 C.E.. Rio Grande Pueblo sites are located along the contiguous upper sections of the Rio Grande and date slightly later with a temporal overlap between about 1300 and 1400 C.E.. Katsina-style imagery in the form of mask depictions spread from the Mogollon to the Pueblo areas and is visible in the form of possibly a thousand petroglyphs portraying Katsina-like masks. Petroglyphs were created by scratching and pecking dark patina from rock surfaces to expose the lighter colored rock underneath. The lighter color makes up the lines and solid areas which compose the images.

Three Rivers is a Jornada Mogollon site located in southern New Mexico to the east of the Rio Grande River (Fig. 1). Its dates range broadly from about 1050 and 1450 C.E.. Three Rivers exhibits the foundations and walls of a Pueblo-style settlement. Further uphill, dark boulders are scattered along a ridge line, which display hundreds of petroglyphs (Fig.3). Many of these petroglyphs are figurative and include images of masks (Fig. 4). Schaafsma (1994:66-67) explains the Jornada-style masks as links between the earlier human and animal figures on Classic Mimbres funerary ceramics (c.1050 - 1150 C.E.) and later Rio Grande Pueblo IV Katsina imagery. Cerro Indio (Fig. 1) is a fourteenth century Piro site belonging to Rio Grande Pueblo IV and is situated north of the city of Socorro in central New Mexico, a short distance east of the Rio Grande. The site layout is similar to that of Three Rivers: on a hillside, near the ruins of a settlement, dark colored boulders exhibit hundreds of petroglyphs a majority of which represent masks (Figs. 5a,b). Sally Cole (1990:148-150) documented Katsina imagery in rockart of the Little Colorado River Basin west of the Rio Grande (Fig. 1) and has assigned dates of 1250 - 1300 C.E. based upon their association with radio-carbon dated pueblos (Fig. 6).

How would these petroglyphs have communicated? In the absence of archaeological material directly associated with the boulders or ethnographic accounts which would describe visits of the petroglyphs by local people, I take the approach of analyzing their spatial setting. Physical space surrounding the petroglyph boulders is limited, precarious, and does not accommodate large audiences. This would suggest that the mask petroglyphs were created for personal and individual encounters with Katsiman or visions thereof as opposed to Katsina performances in Pueblo plazas organized for the entire village. Although Adams (1994:42-44) argues that Katsina iconography appeared in conjunction with enclosed plaza-type Pueblo communities, Katsiman seem to have communicated in multiple settings in pre-contact times: public appearances in Pueblo plazas and individual interactions at rock art panels as well as between dancer and mask if we project current practices back into the past (see above).

**The Two-Dimensional Mask in Ceramics.** Depictions of masked human-like faces on Pueblo pottery have been documented as early as the late 1200s and became widespread by the mid-1300s (Hays 1994). Katsina-like masks are shown on different pottery types from the southern areas of the Four Corner region (Hays 1994:48-49, Table 6.1) (Fig. 7). For most examples, provenience and ceramic style are known but a more specific context of use patterns is lacking: for example, one vessel with a Sun Katsina was excavated from a habitation room at Homol'ovi II, a large pueblo site near Winslow, Arizona (Hays 1994:51). This kind of record indicates that the pot was used in a domestic setting as opposed to the ritual space of a kiva or in a burial context. Was it a dinner dish in an upper-class family? We cannot be sure in the absence of more contextual data.

The argument I will make, though, is that the pre-contact ceramic evidence of Katsina imagery provides further proof that Katsiman communicated on numerous levels in a complex and dynamic net of human and supernatural relations which incorporated public and private, ritual and domestic settings. This line of reasoning strongly suggests that the Katsina was not just one concept or "text"; instead the Katsina had various aspects which can be read as separate yet interrelated texts. Barton Wright (1994:140) explains that among the Hopi, there exist various classes of Katsina-like beings: deities and divinities, chief Katsiman and dancing Katsiman, priests, folk heroes, and animals. Dennis Tedlock (1994:164-165) goes so far as to state that at Zuni, people were not full and complete humans until they developed Katsina relations.

This multivocality of Katsina iconography blooms today. It is always tempting to identify pre-contact examples by purely visual resemblances with post-contact figures but such identifications face many pitfalls as the discussion below will show.

**Katsina Dolls (Tithu, tihu singular, in Hopi) and More.** Most contemporary Katsina figures are derived from the nineteenth century wooden dolls reported and illustrated in ethnographic reports. Hopi consultants explain that they used to give carved and painted replicas of the sacred Katsiman to their children so that they would begin to recognize and learn about their supernaturals (Pearlstone 2001:46-47). As tourism expanded in the Southwest during the later nineteenth century, Native carvers quickly realized that Katsina dolls could take on another role as desired souvenirs to be sold to visitors. In the twentieth century and continuing today, Katsina dolls have become prized commodities in the tourist market. The original dolls made for educational purposes within the community exhibit a simple and abbreviated style which focuses on the features which identify specific Katsiman (Fig. 8). Now Hopi, other Native, as well as US carvers are pursuing many new directions in their portrayals of Katsiman. One approach taken, for example, by the Hopi carver Loren Phillips is to transform the traditional static dolls into living and wildly dancing beings with a heavy dose of Western realism (Fig. 9). In her artist statements (Jacka and Jacka 1994:36), Loren explains that she feels similar about her work as Western (European or US) artists do. She studied anatomy books to compensate for figure drawing classes and she claims her right to work in artistic media she is comfortable with – even though sculpting is a traditional male activity in Hopi villages – as well as her right of freedom of expression. Other approaches are to turn Katsiman into abstracted forms to add calculated aesthetic accents and to experiment in non-traditional media such as bronze as well as with humorous contexts (Figs. 10a,b).

During the last decades, the global market has broadened further: Katsina dolls are copied in various parts of the world and simplified Katsina faces have come to adorn many items of daily use, such as gift wrapping paper, watches, book stands, wrappers and bags containing foods made of corn, and so on (Fig. 11). In the art world, Katsina iconography has inspired opera performances and artists in other continents as far as Japan (Fig. 12) (Pearlstone 2001:38,121). The Hopi commu-



nity is deeply divided about the proliferation of Katsina-related images and has established the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office as the body to negotiate cultural heritage issues with the outside world. Leigh Kuwanwisiwma (Kuwanwisiwma 2001:17-18), the director of this office, explains that their task is to represent all Hopi and that most carvers happily participate in the tourist market and depend on it economically. Traditionalists and elders, on the other hand, are highly critical. Kuwanwisiwma (2001:18-19) recalls that his office was attempting to claim a trademark or copyright for all Katsina imagery but his lawyers educated him that Katsina is an entry in Webster's Dictionary and this places it into public domain, a legal status for published material for which no copyright can be claimed. Thus the messages of Katsiman continue to spread without control in a globalized world.

#### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Does the indigenous Katsina still communicate? Or has it become an empty image, a stereotype which everyone manipulates for their own desires and profits? I argue that the power of communication the Katsina still exercises has to be accessed through the methodology of layers or "texts" about Katsiman which different agents and patrons read through various frames or theories as outlined at the beginning of this essay. Yes, there clearly exists the basic short version text of the Katsina as an icon of the Southwest which is read in this manner by tourists who bring back a Katsina doll to place on their mantle piece in the living room or by the Japanese artists who in turn melt Katsina icons into texts informed by their Asian cultural background. There are texts about Katsina which fill the academic literature and more or less desperately try to access Hopi mindset and values. And at the same time, there exist many texts about Katsiman to which we have no privilege as cultural outsiders. In this manner, the Katsina continues to communicate on multiple levels and in numerous texts.

To understand the concept of Katsina better, we have to realize that the question of "what are Katsiman?" cannot be answered by a one-fits-all definition and only by multi-layered texts. To clarify this point, I refer to oral narratives about creation and origin of Acoma Pueblo. Leslie White (1932:148-150) reports in the *GuitiDa'nic* (Performing Miracles), A Story of the Fight at Kacikatcutia: when the people of Kacikatcutia, ancestors of Acoma, began to form relations with the k'a'tsina [Katsiman], there already were divisions among the k'a'tsina. There was a *hotceni* (chief) as well as eleven k'a'tsina who assisted the people in their fight against the rest of the k'a'tsina. Among the friendly k'a'tsina were Masewi and Oyoyewi who held parallel roles as culture heroes and leaders of the people (White 1932:142-147). Wright (1994) elaborates on how Katsiman change over time due to outside interference, intercultural drift, and/or variations on a theme. It becomes obvious that Katsiman are not static and timeless cultural icons and symbols but play active roles in dynamic and complex human discourses. I argue that the evidence of Katsina iconography from rockart and ceramics confirms a similar multivocality in pre-contact times: these disparate media and spatial settings indicate that people communicated with various Katsina beings in different contexts. It follows that the methodology of identifying Katsina masks in rockart and on potsherds based upon visual features shared with post-contact examples is superficial.

I suggest that herein lies the key to the longevity of Katsina and ultimately the answer to the question posed above: how can "protection of Hopi wisdom ... help[ed] it to survive as a wellspring of social and spiritual nourishment for our own [Hopi] future generations and the world at large" ? (in Spencer 2001:172). The Katsina has been such a power-packed being because it can do so by assimilating multiple texts: some texts can only be read by indigenous people while others are accessible to Natives and outsiders and ultimately to a global world. Of course, the messages in the texts and the frames through which they are read are not identical yet they all construct the Katsina.

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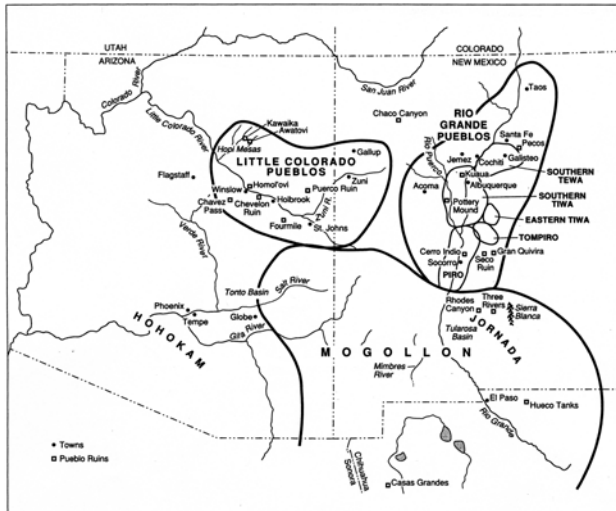


Figure 1: Map of Ancestral Pueblo sites, contemporary Pueblos, and Pueblo-related cultures. Adapted from Adams 1994:Fig.5.1



Figure 2: Drawing of Ma'lo Katsina mask. Adapted from Hieb 1994:Fig.4.4a



Figure 3: Three Rivers, southern New Mexico, view of site. Photograph by the author.



Figure 4: Three Rivers, petroglyph portraying Katsina-style mask. Note the visual resemblance with the Eagle Katsina in Figure 9 below. Photograph by the author.



Figures 5a,b: Cerro Indio, petroglyphs of Katsina-style masks. Note the visual resemblances with the Eagle Katsina in Figures 4,9 and the terraced tablita headdresses symbolizing clouds in Figures 8,10. Photographs by the author.

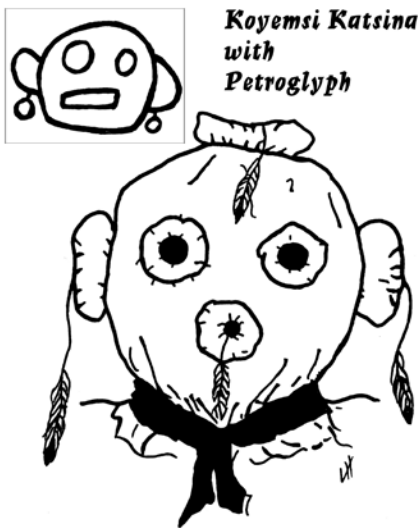


Figure 6: Petroglyph of Koyemsi Katsina near Homol'ovi II on the Little Colorado River, Arizona, and post-contact Koyemsi mask. Adapted and combined from Adams 1994:Fig.5.2 and Hieb 1994:Fig.4.4b

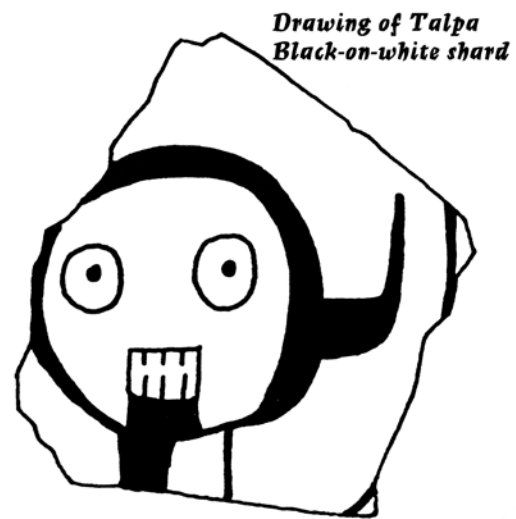


Figure 7: Sherd (also shard) from a Talpa Black-on-white pot with Katsina mask, origin: Pot Creek Pueblo, Rio Grande. Adapted from Hays 1994:Fig.6.8



Figure 8: Sa'lakwmana (a Cloud Maiden) tihu from Orayvi, 1899. Adapted from Pearlstone 2001:Fig.4.1



Figure 9: Eagle (Kwahu) Katsina doll carved by Loren Phillips. Adapted from Jacka and Jacka 1994:135



Figure 10a: *Tablita with Qa'otiyo (Corn Boy) Katsina* (which combines a tablita headdress with a Katsina mask) created by Leroy Kewanimpewa in 1995. Adapted from Pearlstone 2001:Fig.3.59



Figure 10b: *Koyaala Tihu* by Neil David Sr., 1980. Adapted from Pearlstone 2001:Fig.3.8



Figure 11: *Napkin holder, tissue box, and pencil holder with simplified Katsina imagery.* Adapted from Pearlstone 2001:3.114A-C



Figure 12: *Installation Arizona inspired by Katsina icons, created by Japanese artists Issey Miyake and Genichiro Inokuma.* Adapted from Pearlstone 2001:3.135