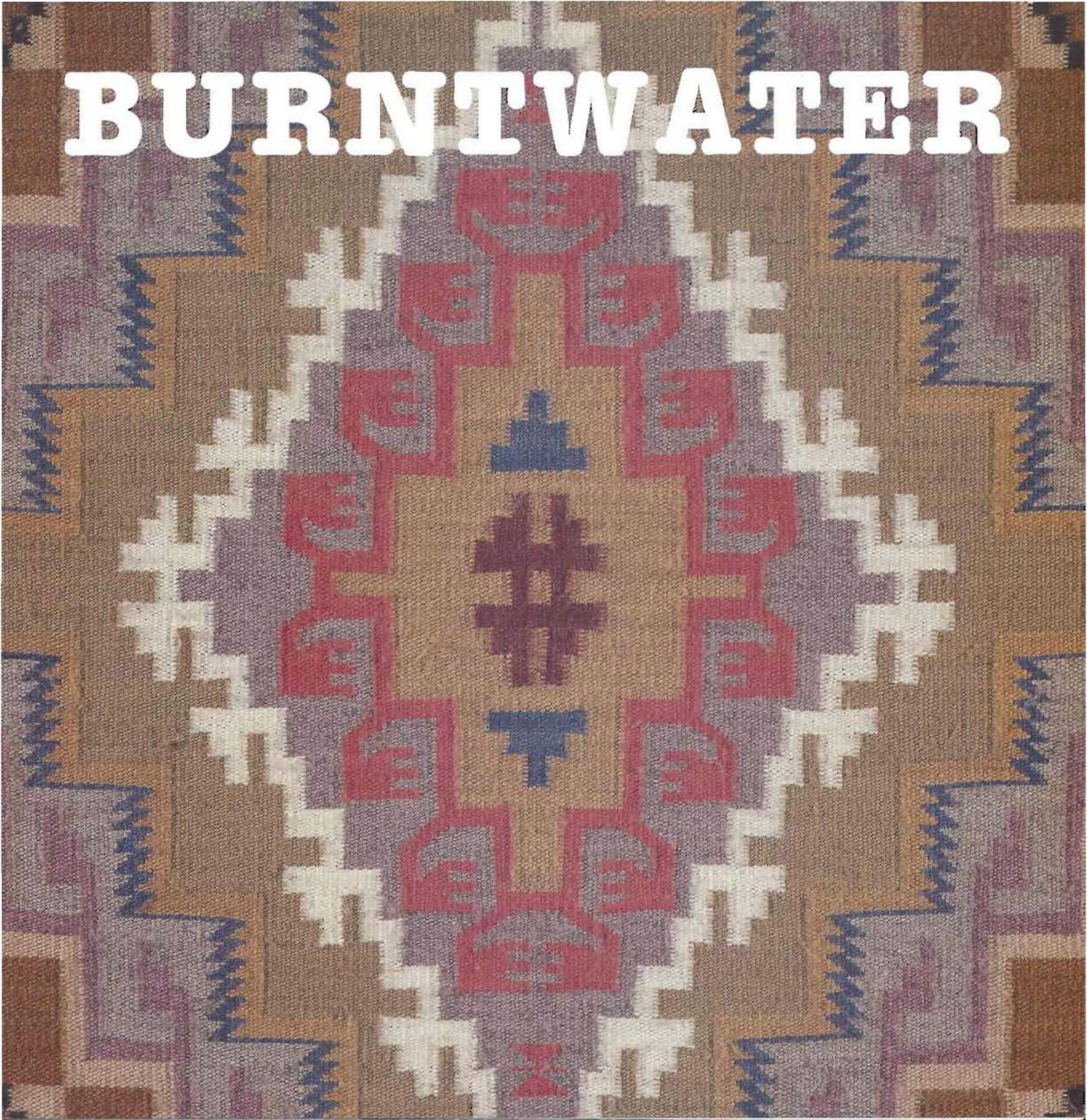


BURNT WATER





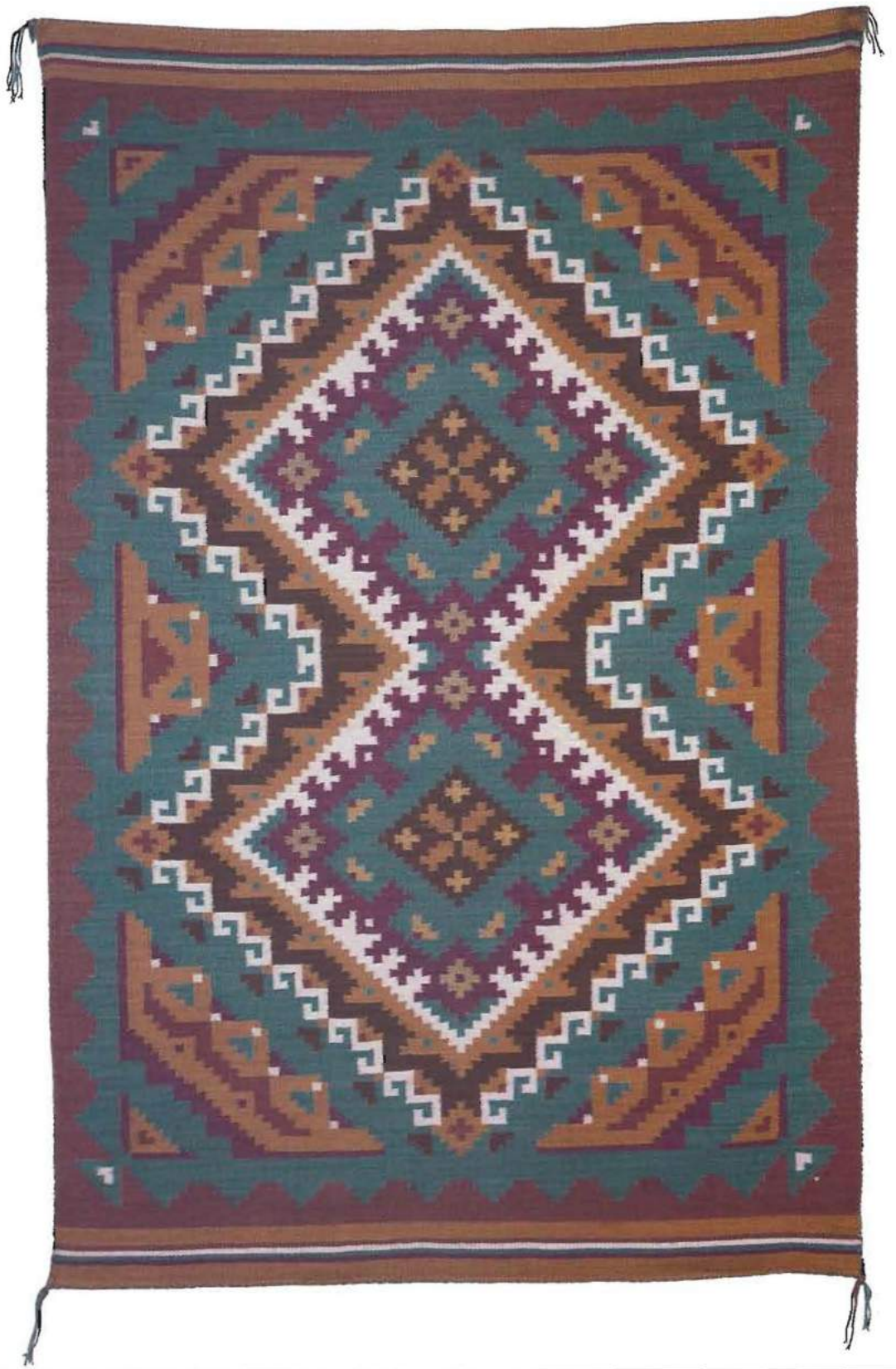
cover:
DETAIL OF BURNTWATER
RUG by Victoria Keoni.
1986, 33" x 48".
© 1987 Victoria Keoni.

left:
2. BURNTWATER RUG
by Marie Yazzie. 1986,
26" x 41".
© 1987 Marie Yazzie.

center:
3. BURNTWATER RUG
by Cara Yazzie. 1986,
45 1/2" x 60 1/2"
© 1987 Cara Yazzie.







right:

4. BURNTWATER RUG

by Marie Yazzie, 1986,
32" x 49".

© 1987 Marie Yazzie.



5. BURNTWATER RUG IN
RAISED OUTLINE by Marie
Watson. 1986, 36" x 56".
© 1987 Marie Watson.



BURNTWATER

An Exhibition, May 3 - June 3, 1987

Among the most exciting developments in contemporary American Indian arts are the changes taking place in Navajo weaving. Vibrant, stunning, and innovative, these textiles represent the ability of the Navajo woman to maintain her reputation among the finest weavers of the Western Hemisphere. During the past several decades Navajo weavers have achieved an ever increasing perfection not only in technical fineness and evenness of weave, but also in development of refined and complexly detailed design. To these perfections and refinements, more recently they have introduced an innovative, rich palette of pastel and earth-tone vegetal-dye colors, comprising a broad range of subtle, but strikingly decorative hues.

Turquoise, aqua, coral, mauve, pink, rose, slate, forest green, and yellow are combined in finely detailed and intricate patterns, taking us through a visual journey of hues and delicate motifs. Some of these tapestries have incorporated as many as twenty-four different colors, as in Cara Yazzie's large Burntwater rug (illus. 3).

This innovative use of decorative color began during the 1970s as the latest development in the vegetal-dye movement of contemporary Navajo weaving. It originated in the Pine Springs-Burntwater area in the far southeastern corner of the Navajo Indian Reservation, a region distinguished for multi-bordered, vegetal-dyed rugs featuring finely detailed geometric patterns, executed with masterful precision and balance (cover). Among the most impressive applications of more complex color schemes by these weavers is their use of the Raised Outline technique, an innovative weave first developed during the 1950s in the Coal Mine Mesa area. This technique of weaving, while executed in the tapestry-weave common to Navajo textile production, involves a "floating" of wefts to create a three-dimensional effect in the outlining of design elements. These very fine, very tightly woven textiles, now featuring exotic colors and patterns, are unmatched in their level of sophistication (illus. 5).

The concept of exploring new ranges of color has rapidly spread among weavers of all areas of the reservation, many of whom specialize in designs other than the Burntwater. Thus, today, one may find a Storm Pattern in yellow and pink, a Ganado-style rug done in mauve and blue, or a Two Gray Hills weaver using coral and purple in her rug. There are no rules! Quality and beauty are the primary criteria, as the weaver of today has gained a new level of artistic freedom to experiment and to pursue her individual inspirations.

This new freedom reflects changes resulting in the market place as well as in Navajo life styles. The most significant technical change has been in the use of commercial wool, rather than the time consuming and more costly hand-carded and handspun native wools. Compared to the limited range of natural wool tones - black, brown, gray, and white - the use of commercial wool has helped spur the greatly expanded palette of vegetal-dye colors. This in turn has provided the weavers the opportunity to concentrate on individual design creativity which, along with a greater emphasis on technical perfection of fine weave, has helped keep Navajo weaving vital and competitive through creation of more highly sophisticated textiles that will meet demands for a high quality product suitable for contemporary home decor. These developments also were spurred in part because of the decrease in Navajo sheep herds, in part because of growing competition from low-priced imports, such as Zapotec Indian weavings from Mexico that copy Navajo designs. Thus, the change-over to commercial wool has had other positive results. It has made it possible for many weavers without sheep to continue their age-old artistry. More competitive prices for these high-quality weavings also reflect the change. While an exquisite, large Burntwater tapestry can cost from \$5,000 to \$10,000 or more, one still can buy a smaller, less intricate rug for \$200. The prices easily would be double if the wool had been carded and spun by hand.

While market conditions, competitive imports, and other factors may still conspire to limit the weaver's remuneration for the products of her loom, many of the weavers have achieved higher prices today for their textiles as a result of the high quality and sophistication of their work, and weaving remains a vital source of income for many Navajo women working in the home.

The technical and esthetic achievements of these remarkable textiles are a tribute to the Navajo weaver's creative response to meeting the diverse and changing demands of her markets. The distinctiveness of these rich textiles, and the great expertise of the weavers, have become an important source of cultural pride to these artists, who justly regard their creativity and achievement as one of the highest summits in a vital Indian artistry with a venerable tradition of change and creativity. The current and future strength of Navajo weaving is clear in the work of younger weavers such as Victoria Keoni, 25 years old, whose creations well represent the Navajo loom artist's continued pursuit of perfection (cover).

Marquetta Kilgore Stevens

The Museum extends appreciation to Barbara Jean Teller Ornelas, Navajo weaver from Phoenix, Arizona who demonstrated upright loom weaving during the first days of the exhibition; to Margaret Kilgore and Marquetta Kilgore Stevens of the Margaret Kilgore Gallery, 6961 Fifth Avenue, Scottsdale, Arizona 85251, telephone 602/990-2890, for assistance in organizing the exhibition and for lending Navajo weavings for display. Appreciation for funding the exhibition brochure is extended to the Oklahoma Indian Arts and Crafts Cooperative. Price of weavings available for sale during the exhibition may be obtained from the Oklahoma Indian Arts and Crafts Cooperative, P.O. Box 966, Anadarko, Oklahoma 73005, telephone 405/247-3486. After the exhibit closes, please contact the Margaret Kilgore Gallery for further information.

SOUTHERN PLAINS INDIAN MUSEUM AND CRAFTS CENTER, HIGHWAY 62 EAST, ANADARKO, OKLAHOMA