

VISIONS OF SONWAI

VERMA NEQUATEWA

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Verma Nequatewa's Signature



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VERMA NEQUATEWA

By Annie Osburn

By definition, *Sonwai* is the Hopi feminine form of beauty. By Verma Nequatewa's translation, it is the expression of her vision of the beauty in others. *Visions of Sonwai* captures the essence of Verma Nequatewa's 40-year career as an award-winning jewelry designer and stone inlay master. First apprenticing with her uncle, the renowned Hopi artist and legendary jewelry designer, Charles Loloma, Verma has gone on to reach new heights with her own creations.

Visions of Sonwai takes us deeper into Verma's world, providing an intimate view of the daily life of the artist and her studio, perched on the edge of a rock on Third Mesa, Hotevilla, Arizona—an island mesa in the sky. In a land where kachinas dance, night spirits hear the prayerful wishes of quiet souls and corn brings blessings beyond imagining, a treasure of rough stones becomes a sacred mosaic in the hands of the artist.

Recognized and respected by her peers and collectors, Verma Nequatewa's intricate jewelry is a contemporary expression rooted in the traditions of her Hopi culture. More than 150 color images of remarkable one-of-a-kind jewelry, personal photos and original poetry invite you to join Verma in her vision of *Sonwai*.



VISIONS OF SONWAI

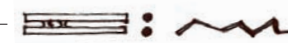
VERMA NEQUATEWA



Written & Developed by Annie Osburn

Designed by Justin Boll

Foreward and Original Poetry by James McGrath





From left: Tufa-cast and fabricated 14K figure pendant, coral head, inlay of sugilite, turquoise, coral and gold. 2003. Fabricated 18K gold bracelet, inlay of red and pink coral, lapis lazuli, turquoise and gold. 2005. Tufa-cast sterling silver ring with Nevada Blue turquoise cabochon. 2002. Private collections.

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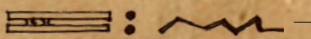
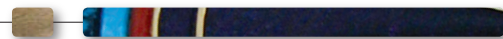
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Visions

ISLAND MESA IN THE SKY



Beyond the never-ending horizon, in a world ruled by ancient clans, the cycles of nature and ceremonial dances, Verma Nequatewa peacefully grinds and cuts corals of ox-blood and pale pink, rare lapis lazuli, turquoise of brilliant blue filled with spider webbing, fossilized ivory and exotic woods from far away places. After nearly 40 years of cutting stones and creating extraordinary one-of-a-kind inlaid bracelets, pendants, rings, earrings and bolo ties, Verma Nequatewa lives her own legacy.

Much like the rugged terrain surrounding her airy studio perched atop a rocky ledge on Third Mesa, near the small Hopi village of Hotevilla, Arizona, the varied inlaid stones that take shape in Verma's hands fit together like the most perfect of puzzles. As if by mathematical design, each shape finds its perfect place. A room with a view, Verma's studio is an outgrowth of her rambling home, offering a breathtaking panorama of these sacred lands as it hangs on the edge of the mesa like a butterfly's cocoon knit to a sandstone crevice. It is here on this ledge that Verma carves rectangular stone shapes that reflect the vertical, stacked-rock landscape around her. It is here that she came to be, like the rough stones she polishes to perfection, a master of her art form.

"Be happy with yourself," Verma says. "You have to be when you're working to create a major happy piece. You just smile when it's finished. This kind of work—

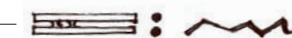
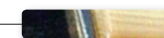
the whole design phase of jewelry—stems from that deep feeling. A lot of my inspiration comes from deep within me."

Perhaps the most profound influence on Verma's evolution as an artist and jewelry designer was that of her uncle, the legendary Hopi artist and jewelry designer, Charles Loloma (1921 – 1991), with whom Verma, at the age of 17, began apprenticing in 1966. "Charles was an inspirational teacher," she says. "He always



encouraged me to be daring and try my own designs. He complimented my creativity and suggested directions for the next piece."

Fabricated 14K gold pendant, inlay of fossilized ivory, coral, turquoise, sugilite and gold on 30 strands of heishi beads. 1993. Private collection. At their benches, Verma works at the grinding wheel while Charles works on a new lost wax creation, in the Loloma studio, 1969.



a goal or some kind of direction that I am working towards,” she admits. “Our plane was one of those. Charles had so many planes, six or so, at one time. He used them to get to shows and back and forth to Phoenix and Santa Fe. We also use our plane to fly around Hopi and places like Canyon de Chelly to look at the rock formations. The stones on the mesas are how our inlay designs came about. It’s really nice from the plane. It’s a bird’s-eye view.”

Verma is a firm believer that a luxury, such as a Jaguar automobile, echoes her philosophy of setting her sights on a dream and attaining it through patience and perseverance. “I focused on my dream car,” she says. “I wanted to own a Jag some day. Just like Charles used to say, ‘If you want something in life, keep it in your vision. It’s just right here, right in front of you. You can have it,’ he would say. I have a Jag now.”

More than the pleasure of attaining conveniences in life, Charles impressed upon his niece the importance of working with the finest materials money can buy. Verma’s workbench tells the story: coral from the Mediterranean and the Philippines, Lone Mountain, Landers, Nevada Blue and Bisbee spider web turquoise from the American Southwest, lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, fossilized mastodon, mammoth and walrus ivory, Australian opal, sugilite from South Africa’s Kalahari Desert, ebony, ironwood, vermillion and other exotic woods from the Philippines, black and green jade, onyx, pearls and ample amounts of 18K gold and sterling silver. From this abundance of some of Earth’s finest resources, Verma creates unique stone inlay for her award-winning jewelry. Yet, she never sacrifices quality for quantity and, in fact, has months of orders waiting for the day that her hands have time.

“Doing your own lapidary work requires so much time and dedication,” Verma says. “I see a lot of jewelers mass producing and always trying to sell more. I want to stick with just doing my own construction instead of doing wax molds and reproductions. Each one of my pieces begins with a flat sheet of gold and turns into something that suddenly comes alive, like creating children. When I worked with Charles, he never wanted to make copies or mass produce molds just to fill in with different stones. That won’t ever happen with my work, either.”



Clockwise from left: Fabricated 14K gold bracelet, inlay of coral, lapis lazuli, sugilite, turquoise and gold. 1994. Fabricated 18K gold maiden pendant with coral and sugilite. 2001. Tufa cast and fabricated 18K gold ring, inlay of coral, turquoise and gold. 1994. Facing page: Multi strand necklace of coral, fossilized ivory, turquoise and ironwood beads. 1998. Fabricated 18K gold bracelet, inlay of coral, turquoise, ebony, fossilized ivory and gold. Second Place, Lapidary in Gold, Santa Fe Indian Market. 1998. Private collections.

