



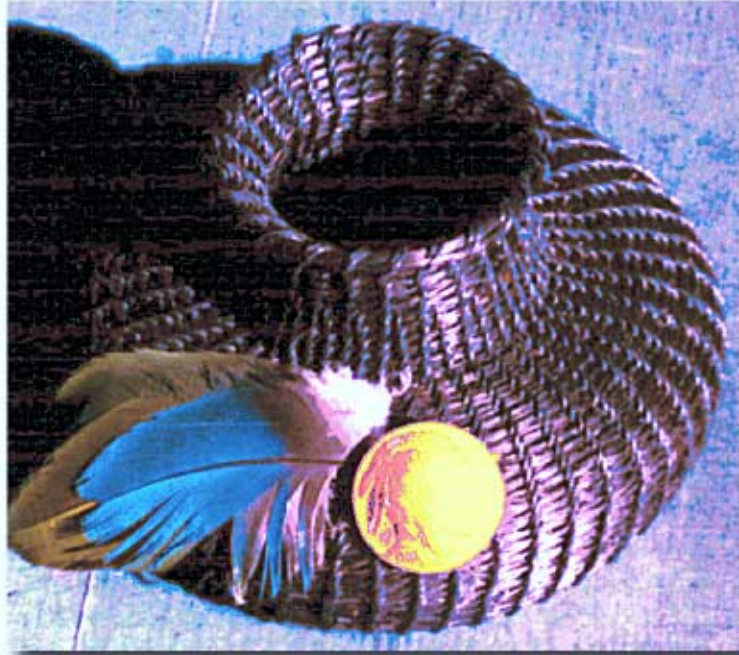
# Aguilar

## “Beautiful Eagle”

Recent master-works in the  
tradition and evolution of  
Chumash (California)  
Basket-weavings  
and other objects.  
1995

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## **A Meeting in a Remote Place**

October 1995. For some years I lived and worked in the remote Mojave Desert. I was often visited by Native American artisans from equally obscure domains. Of all the many rare and unique people I have met, Linda Aguilar holds a special light. While we visited she allowed me to scan some of the photographs she herself has of her work. I was very, very new to the practice of image scanning. Between the not so great technical quality of the photographs and my own inexperience in image scanning, we nevertheless did produce this modest archive.

I felt at the time that it would be very important to have this record of this rare artist. I looked forward to seeing more of this good person, this artist, but we have not seen her now in some years. Linda leads a hard life, like many Native Peoples.

## Baskets: Materials

Traditional materials are disappearing. Gathering grasses, roots and other natural materials is also very dangerous. Pesticides and other chemicals can cause sickness in those who gather traditional materials. The poisoning of our natural environments is more widespread than almost anyone can imagine. Learning this from Linda was very painful.

Linda often works with horse hair. She got into doing this from experiencing first hand the many dangers and risks of gathering natural materials. Over time her horse-hair baskets have become so well-known that she gets requests for them.

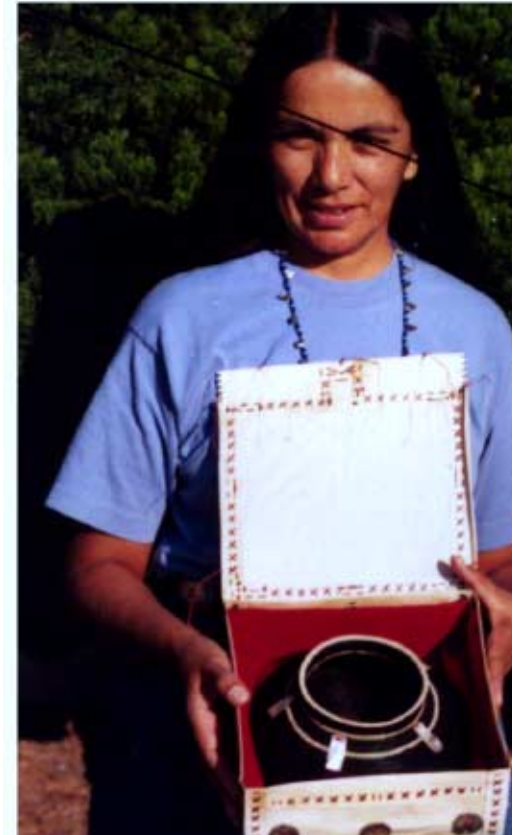


Linda dresses up all her baskets with little findings. She travels around a lot, always looking for materials and places to sell her works. We have traded her many little things made of stone and other materials. We own a gallery which features our own work and the work of our friends. Linda showed a lot of interest in the smaller, odd little things we had on hand. These treasures add a tremendous depth, a spirit, to her works.



Large and spectacular horse-hair basket and a formal house for it to live in.

Linda describes this as a serious ceremonial object, a “bundle” to be used in a sacred or spiritual manner.



Though the photographs here are rather poor in quality, the drama and excellence of Aquilar's works is clearly evident.

In this basket she has used black horse hair with white horse hair and abalone accents. The weaving on this basket is so tight it will hold liquid.

Mary is a very humble and shy person. During good weather she travels with her long-time companion in two old cars, camping, cooking, working in the cars wherever they can find a good stopping place. One car carries all the food and equipment and the other carries the finished baskets and supplies needed for that. That has been her habit for many years. For this reason we never know quite where she is or how to reach her.





Black horse hair and attachments. Careful, tight weaving combined with very active spirit-offerings. Not only does Aguilar make great weavings, she treats them as “spirit-offerings”: the attachments are offerings and prayers.

One thing always rattles me. As Aguilar takes her work to gallery owners, they all want a discount, a “deal”. She has ended up selling these works to galleries for so little; the gallery owners turn around and sell them at a huge marked-up price. Those people who deal in Native American Arts are far too often little different than the thieves who took fine objects from the dead bodies of slain Indian people.

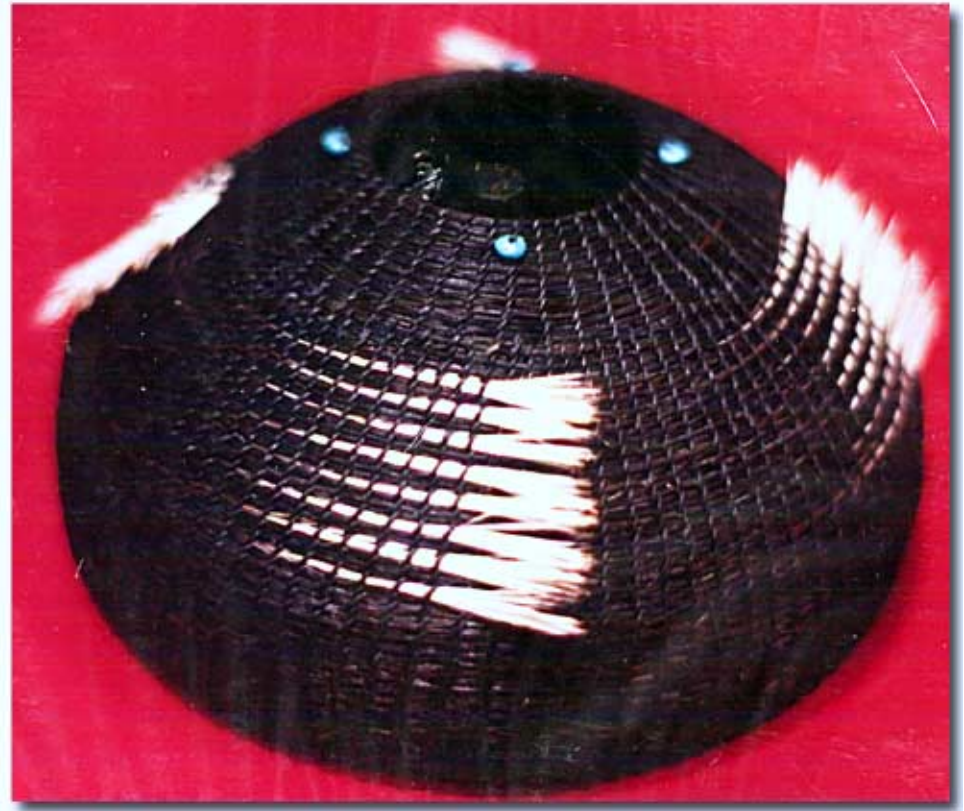
There are times when one should make a good deal. A good deal honors both parties. It is not something where the well-to-do feed off the immediate needs of the poor. I live in Taos and I watch every day while artist friends of mine are talked down to pennies by millionaires. My own practice is to always pay at least 10% more than the artist is asking, even more if I can afford it and the piece justifies it.

## The Chumash

Ever heard of LA? Los Angeles? That is pretty much the center of many of the ancient Chumash People. From the High Deserts to the Great Sea, the Chumash were diverse and rather far-reaching.

While it is not well-known, the Chumash culture has produced some of the most magnificent cave paintings in the history of the world. Most of these paintings are within territory forever fenced-off and used by the US Military for bombing, shelling and testing of modern weapons.

There seems to be some unspoken urge to forget, to refuse to see what is before our very eyes. American Indian people and cultures attained a very evolved personal consciousness of the earth; they were nurtured by it directly. Art can be, when it is this good, actual food to sustain the body of the artist and the soul of the collector. Very few works of art can say this.

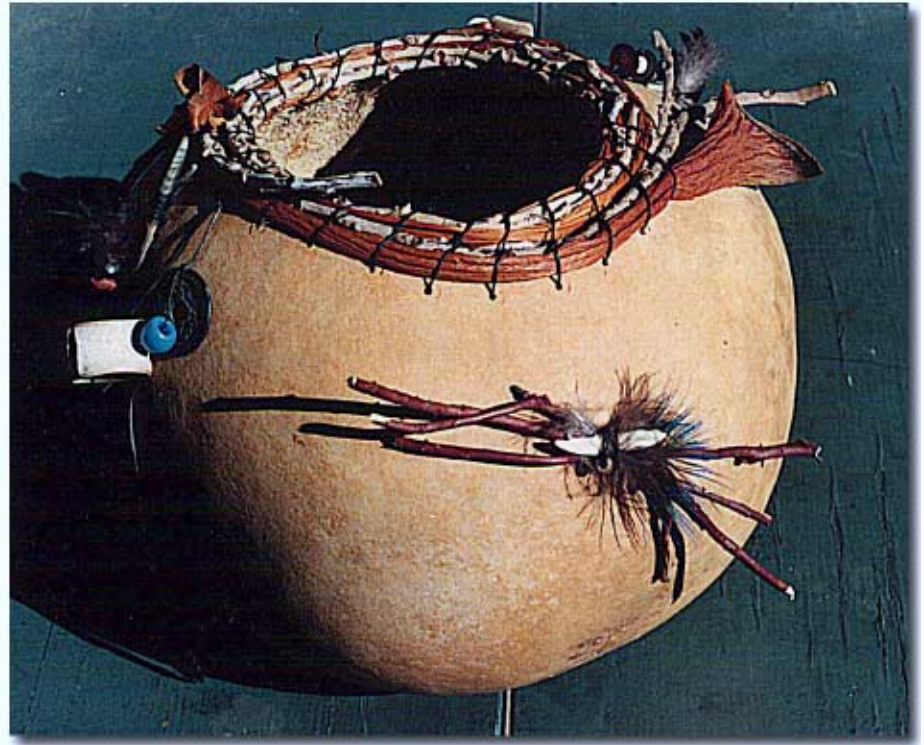




Are you not astonished? These grasses are all dressed up with rusted and flattened bottle tops. The power of this work is in its respect for the natural earth and its compassionate harmony with the forces that are destroying it.

## Painted Gourds

Aguilar combines the primitive with the spiritually refined in her treatment of gourds. Among many tribal people, it is understood what we mean when we say “spirit plate” or “spirit offering”. One thing I have learned about many traditional artists is that they are often praying or meditating along spiritual lines when they work. It is almost as if the works were themselves an offering to the great mystery for a good life, for humility and a heart brave enough to accept the gifts of the earth. That is what Aguilar’s work is.



Aguilar’s painted and dressed-up gourds really display some very old Chumash elements. These gourds sell very fast.

We purchased a few for our little gallery and they only lasted a few days. Boo-hoo. I regret that we sold any of her work. I wish I had kept it.



These gourds are dressed up with sea-weed grasses and little findings Aguilar gathers on her travels.

Aguilar is quite unique in her treatment of baskets and gourds. I have not seen any other significant tribal works that are so adorned.

This is very illustrative of how strongly the traditional religious and cultural forms of her spirit

are integrated into the work of her fingers. Good tribal art contains teachings and it contains offerings.

**Linda Aguilar**  
**“Beautiful Eagle”**

Earlier in life, here is the artist gathering natural materials for her basket-weaving. Notice the little bundles there, carefully prepared and wrapped. This is somewhere in Southern California.

Aguilar has been featured in several video productions of California Basket-Makers, and she is a member of the California Basket Weavers Association. This is a small group of Native Americans who meet and work together to preserve the techniques and knowledge of California basket-makers.

She has give some workshops and you should keep your eye out in your area for any announcements of these arts in your area. Aguilar travels widely.





Large horse-hair basket with unusual detail of individually wrapped elements and fetish material.

It has only been recently that any real photos of Aguilar's works have become available. I am really grateful to her sense of patience. She stayed over one full day so that I could scan these pictures and talk with her.

She has a long-time companion, a man whose name I forget. He is very obnoxious and talks ceaselessly. Every time I asked Aguilar a question he would start answering it. I had to remind him that I wanted to hear from Aguilar, and I had to do this repeatedly. She is very dedicated to him and I respect that. However, it was very frustrating dealing with this self-involved fool, for my part.

## Endangered Species:

Aguilar is a fragile treasure. She spends a lot of time camping in her 2-car-on-the-road home. Maybe that has changed. In any event, I was worried and concerned about her fragile life on the road. This all came from me. She lives without complaining, so I had no way of knowing how easy or how hard the life is. It looked from the outside to be a pretty hard life.

That's how it is for many tribal artists I know. They really believe in what they are doing. Tribal artists are very important to the world's view of what remains of the culture and the people. Tribal artists are also very important to the larger tribal community. A visible presence for the youth and a repository for the elders. They struggle to make and sell their

works to dealers and tourists who are always looking for a deal, for a discount. They sell their works too cheaply and the buying public seems to know only selfishness.

That's enough from me. Continue on and just enjoy photos of these fine works.

















Hand-Game set-up by Aguilar.







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