

Navajo Yei Rug.

Navajo weaving has been highly valued since Europeans first came into contact with the Navajo people in the early 16th century and quickly became the standard by which textile goods were measured for centuries. Michaan's Auctions is proud to offer a **Navajo Yei Rug** (\$8/1,400) for sale in our July Gallery Auction, held on Friday, July 19th.

The rug, woven from wool, is approximately six feet, eight inches tall by three feet, ten inches wide, and consists of a Yei figure within nested borders. The Yei figure takes the form of a corn stalk and is woven with light brown and cream yarn. The figure is centered on the rug's dark brown field, with added highlights in bright red and green near its head and feet.



Surrounding the Yei figure are several geometrical motifs, as well as a number of arrows and at least four swastikas. Most striking of these motifs are two stars made of eight alternating points, positioned at the head and foot of the

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rug. The guard border is a consistent brown field, while the interior border is a brown Greek meander motif on an off-white field.

The Navajo people are a group of people indigenous to the United States whose recognized sovereign tribe the Navajo Nation, consists of nearly 400,000 members. The Navajo people descended from Alaska and the Canadian Yukon Territory around 1000 CE, possibly due to the effects of a volcanic eruption in the area. They developed a close relationship with the Pueblo people, with whom they frequently traded and developed agricultural practices and sheep-herding. The Navajo were largely able to maintain peaceful relations with the Spanish, but American forces quickly overwhelmed the tribe's military. The U.S. government moved the tribe to various reservations, required children

to be sent to boarding schools, and faced general harassment from the federal government. These policies eased slightly following their integration into the armed forces during World War II, where the Navajo language was used as a secret code for military operations. Today, the Navajo Nation comprises a landmass that would make it the 39th largest state (slightly larger than West Virginia), situated on the boundary between Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado.

The Yei figure is now a common motif in Navajo rugmaking that was originally borrowed from the tradition of Navajo sandpainting. These sandpaintings were used to request spiritual help in the healing of a sick person and are always quickly erased after the ceremony's conclusion. The Yei, a term that encompasses many spirits or minor gods, are capable of

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communicating with both humans and the most divine beings, such as the Yéibichai, and were therefore essential motifs used in the ceremonies. While it is considered profane to produce sandpaintings solely to be viewed, the change in material from sand to wool changes the religious significance, allowing many of these motifs to be used in blankets, rugs, and other textile works.



The Navajo people have been producing textile goods for as long as the historical record exists, in fact, the origin story of the Navajo religion

features a loom. Typically these textiles took the form of blankets and other wearable goods, which were highly useful to the community. However, contact with the Spanish in the early 16th century introduced a new and higher quality wool to Navajo artisans, which combined with European loom designs to vastly increase production. The quality of Navajo blankets was known throughout the continent and continued to earn high prices until challenges from industrialized companies such as Pendleton Woolen Mills disturbed the market. By this point, the various motifs common in Navajo weaving had become popular across the country, and artisans began producing rugs and other home decorations as a result, which maintained demand for Navajo textiles well into the 20th century.

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portfolio of woodcuts by the preeminent
Surrealist Salvador Dali, and an
impressive Rolex watch in black and
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