

***Fine Indian Jewelry of the Southwest: The Millicent Rogers Museum Collection.* Shelby J. Tisdale. Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2006. 215 pp.¹**

Reviewed by Deborah C. Slaney

Jewelry designer, model, and socialite Millicent Huttleston Rogers, known affectionately by her children as “MR,” was a fascinating woman. A courageous battle with rheumatic fever and its complications left her a fragile but determined soul who sought meaning in life through her creativity. Captivated by the Southwest in the 1940s, she brought her family to Taos in 1947 shortly after her friends, Hollywood couture designer Adrian and his actress wife Janet Gaynor, made the move. Ultimately, she befriended a circle of talented individuals known collectively as the Taos Society of Artists.

Shelby J. Tisdale’s *Fine Jewelry of the Southwest: The Millicent Rogers Museum Collection* details the story of Rogers’ life from her privileged beginnings in New York to her love affairs with princes and dukes, numerous marriages and divorces, and finally her eye-opening introduction to the history, landscape, spirituality, and cultures of New Mexico. Like many early 20th-century collectors, Rogers perceived that Native traditions were vanishing and felt compelled to collect major examples of Navajo and Pueblo art including weavings, pottery, and jewelry. Rogers collected until her untimely death in 1953, and her family honored her legacy in 1956 by founding the Millicent Rogers Museum in Taos.

Tisdale’s book serves the museum and anthropological community on several levels. In addition to providing an illustrated history of Millicent Rogers’ all-too-brief life, Tisdale traces southwestern jewelry making from prehistory to present using spectacular examples from Rogers’ collection, mostly donated by her son Paul Peralta-Ramos. The book, however, also includes significant examples acquired by the museum through other donors. Her survey is drawn from standard publications including John Adair’s classic *Navajo and Pueblo Silversmiths* and Larry Frank and Millard J. Holbrook’s *Indian Silver Jewelry of the Southwest, 1868-1930*, as well as more recently published sources.

The collection is wonderful and well illustrated, with makers and dates identified and provenance information included when known. This kind of information is useful to the museum community as it helps to establish makers and dates for other, often undocumented museum collections. Clearly Rogers had a good eye, choosing well-crafted traditional necklaces, rings, and bracelets, and examples with large, good-quality turquoise and careful lapidary work; Although some of the pieces do reflect the influence of tourism, they are still grounded in traditional forms or iconography. Documented examples include a stunning turquoise tab necklace by Leekya (Zuni) purchased at the Gallup Inter-Tribal Ceremonial in 1947. Tisdale also showcases contemporary jewelry (although not from Rogers’ personal collection) including major examples by Yazzie Johnson and Gail Bird (Navajo and Santo Domingo/Laguna), Charles Loloma (Hopi), and other cutting-edge jewelers whose works are listed with dates and catalogue numbers (Table I) to assist researchers.

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Tisdale closes with an overview of Rogers' own dramatic jewelry creations. While many of her designs were influenced by cultures outside of the American Southwest, some designs, such as her unusual cross shapes, reflect inspiration from Pueblo and Navajo silverwork. It would be interesting to learn if specific examples in her collection (such as the exquisite cross necklaces illustrated as figures 4.13 and 4.14) served as her points of reference, or if other types of Native art were an influence. One pin, *Cloud Mountain* (figure 8.1) suggests that Rogers also may have derived inspiration from Navajo weavings similar to those depicted in a photograph of the interior of her Taos home (figure 2.1).

In conclusion, *Fine Jewelry of the Southwest* is an alluring glimpse into the short life and creative endeavors of Millicent Rogers, and serves as a solid reference for scholars looking for a concise, well illustrated summary of the history of southwestern jewelry.

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