

NEWS RELEASE

National Gallery of Art
Washington, D. C.

RELEASE.

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 16: David E. Finley, Director of the National Gallery of Art, announces the opening tomorrow of a special exhibition of Navaho paintings, including eighteen depicting the War Ceremonial that accompanies the induction of Navaho tribesmen into the armed services.

This Navaho rite, originally used before raids into enemy territory, and now adapted to the new role of the Navahos in the present war, is shown in a series of paintings by Miss Maud Oakes, in the special exhibition room of the Gallery.

These sacred sand paintings of the Navahos, copied in gouache, form part of a large group executed by Miss Oakes. They are accompanied by another group collected by Miss Mary Wheelwright, illustrating Navaho myths of creation.

The sand paintings, according to John Walker, Chief Curator of the Gallery, are a highly developed and exacting art form, portraying the Gods and powers of Navaho religion. Done in sand, pollen, cornmeal or ground flowers, they are also used by tribal medicine men in rites for curing the sick.

"The paintings are executed by the male relatives and friends of the patient," Mr. Walker points out, "and are destroyed immediately after the ritual is over. For this reason the collecting and recording of these designs by Miss Oakes, Miss Wheelwright and others is of great importance for the understanding and preservation of Navaho culture."

The vast body of Navaho ceremonial, including prayers, chants, myths and paintings, long preserved only in the memories of the medicine men, is now in danger of becoming lost under the impact of white civilization, Mr. Walker adds. The present collection represents an effort in the preservation of some of these forms before they become extinct.

Miss Oakes, whose paintings were executed under a grant from the Old Dominion Foundation, has spent the last three years living on the Navaho Reservation, and her paintings are being published this month in a portfolio entitled Where The Two Came to Their Father. Miss Wheelwright, author of Navajo Creation Myth, is the founder and director of the Museum of Navajo Ceremonial Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico.