



THREE HOPI CLOWNS/PUPPETS

Hopi clowns are an integral part of kachina activities. They accompany the kachinas in dances and ceremonies and interact with the people in the crowd. They insure that the crowd follows proper behavior during the ceremonies but they also provide entertainment during the intermissions as they perform their own clown dances. In addition, Hopi clowns possess a sacred function in kiva ceremonies. As such, their role is ambiguous to outsiders. Because of the spiritual nature of this role, the Hopi are reluctant to, and have not as yet, divulged the full role that clowns play in Hopi life.

In the Spin Set image of the Hopi clown puppets there are three miniature Hopi clowns. Two, the grey puppet and the red puppet are “mudhead” or “koyemsi” clowns. These are ones who play with the audience at dances and ceremonies. Mudhead clowns drum, dance and play games of juggling and balance to entertain between ceremonies. The third clown puppet is a “Hano.” This clown first appeared in the Tewa Village on the Hopi reservation in the 1880s. The Hano is notorious for overdoing everything. Most often he is seen overeating to the point of gluttony.

These clown puppets were created in the 1940s and 1950s. The articulated bodies, arms and legs indicate that they were made for children to play with, rather than to be hung on the wall. Not all of the Hopi were convinced that this was proper. When the makers of these items died, the puppet making ended.

NOTE:

While clowning can be viewed as comic relief, it is also a way of reinforcing social norms. Openly breaking taboos and reversing normal behavior demonstrates the danger and damage caused by violating the rules of Hopi society. Clowning reminds the on-lookers of the importance of basic Hopi values: moderation, respectful relations, non-aggression, harmony and non-acquisitiveness.