



KACHINAS: THE SACRED BUFFALO

Kachina “dolls” are miniature representations of human-sized kachinas. The “dolls” are traditionally carved from cottonwood root. They are given to children, principally girls, so that they can become familiar with the over 400 kachinas in Pueblo and Hopi life. The figurines are distributed at kachina ceremonies. The children are to take them home and hang them on the wall or from the ceiling so that they are constantly in view. In this way, children can incorporate the image along with the symbolism associated with it as they go about their daily routines. The Hopi, the Zuni and the Pueblos of Acoma and Laguna participate in this practice. Navajo kachinas are produced principally for the tourist industry in the Southwest. Kachina “dolls” are also part of kiva ceremonies, however, their significance and the specific roles they play are cloaked in the secrecy of religious practice.

THE SACRED BUFFALO KACHINA

Experts have tentatively identified this kachina doll as a Secret Buffalo Kachina. It is 15.5 inches tall. It was created sometime between 1880 and 1900. The Secret Buffalo kachina is from the Hopi tradition. The following characteristics are part of our kachina doll and are representative of the Secret Buffalo:

- The Secret buffalo wears a two-horned helmet.
- The Secret buffalo kachina’s forearms and calves are painted black.

The Secret Buffalo is the sign of prayers being heard. It is also a spiritual protector and can kill evil thoughts.

Kachina dolls are normally painted when used in a kiva and dressed when in public. As this kachina is painted only, we can assume that it was utilized in kiva ceremonies. Special notice should be made of the hole on the left horn, which would allow for leather string to be attached for hanging. The corresponding piece on the right ear seems to have been broken off. Also, note should be made of the worn spot on the back of the kachina between the shoulders. This would indicate the place where the kachina rested against the wall as it hung.