

Basic Detail Report



Rug

Date

c. 1890

Primary Maker

Navajo

Medium

Wool and pigment

Description

Rugs from the late 19th century were designed for trading purposes and as such lost much of the early design and craftsmanship present in Navajo blankets from previous times. This is underscored by the fact that two-thirds of the blankets the Navajo wove in the 1890s were produced for nontribal use. Because demand for these rugs increased, traders encouraged the weavers to employ different stylistic elements. The bright colors that were so often used to weave blankets were reduced significantly and replaced with more of wool's natural tones. Although the exact time period is unclear, it was at some point during this period that the weavings of the Navajo began to be used as and referred to as rugs and not blankets. This was reflected in weavings being produced in a wide variety of sizes and heavier weights. In this case the lack of a border element on this textile is also indicative of this being an earlier transitional rug without as much influence from traders. As for the swastika motif, despite its modern connotations it has been an auspicious symbol for at least thousands of years. For the Navajo, it was a figurative representation of the 'whirling logs,' a commonly depicted sand painting from the Night Chant and together with an axis with two legs—where the swastika instead has four—forms a visual pun of the Navajo mantra, "successfully attaining a ripe old age by daily spiritual renewal according to the universal beauty of the cosmos." It too was used more prevalently as a result of traders.

Dimensions

43 × 58 in. (109.2 × 147.3 cm)