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NATIVITIES OF THE WORLD

SUSAN TOPP WEBER



NEARLY ONE HUNDRED NATIVITIES FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD—most of which have never before appeared in any book—are collected here. Artisans from locales as diverse as the Czech Republic, Guyana, Burkina Faso, and Bangladesh are represented, working with materials ranging from hand-carved wood, blown glass, and wool, to more unique materials such as salt dough, dried maguey cactus, and recycled bicycle parts. The artistry, ingenuity, and diversity of these creations are greatly prized by thousands of nativity collectors worldwide, many of whom have graciously allowed pieces from their own collections to be photographed for this book.

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GIBBS SMITH

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SUSAN TOPP WEBER has owned and operated Susan's Christmas Shop in Santa Fe, New Mexico, for more than thirty years. She has a prized collection of nativities herself, which began with a gift in 1965, and has sold nativities at her shop since 1978. She is the author of *Christmas in Santa Fe*.



FRONT COVER: Raku pottery nativity made in South Africa (1995).

Collection of Max and Joyce Douglas, Denver, Colorado.

Photograph by Randy Mace.

BACK COVER: Hand-carved German nativity figures (2012).

Photograph by Blair Clark (see page 32).

FRONT FLAP: Photograph by Randy Mace.

BACK FLAP: Photograph by Blair Clark.

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WESTERN EUROPE

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY REPRODUCTION NATIVITY FROM NAPLES, ITALY (2006)

31 in. (78 cm.) tall

Collection of Max and Joyce Douglas, Denver, Colorado

PHOTOGRAPH BY RANDY MACE

This is an example of the famous Italian Baroque-style nativity from Naples, Italy. The ruins of Roman civilization are often included in eighteenth-century Italian sets, alluding to the rise of Christianity over pagan Rome. Beneath Mary's feet is a piece of a broken Roman column caught beneath an arch. The fabrics used are fine silks. The hands and heads are terra-cotta. Antique examples that are not already in museums are very costly, so reproductions are now made for those who enjoy this classic eighteenth-century style of nativity. This one is especially large and well made. It was ordered from a shop on the famous nativity street in Naples and shipped to the collector's home in the United States.





CLAY NATIVITY WITH ETHNIC COSTUMES FROM THE VILLAGE OF SAN ANTONIO PALOPO' ON LAKE ATITLÁN, GUATEMALA (2011)

The tallest figure is 4½ in. (11 cm.)
Collection of Max and Joyce Douglas, Denver, Colorado
Photograph by Rainer Mace

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Maya women are famous weavers, and the figures of this clay nativity show in great detail the traditional hand-woven clothing of their village on Lake Atitlán. The shirts, the belts, and the pants of the men all show the way men dress so specifically that an anthropologist would know immediately which village produced this nativity. Weaving also seems to be one of the gifts on one of the burros. Other gifts are squash and bananas, but the contents of the white sack is a mystery.



WOODEN POSTCARD FROM COSTA RICA (1989)

6 in. (16 cm.) long
Collection of Max and Joyce Douglas, Denver, Colorado
Photograph by Rainer Mace

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It's all here on a wooden postcard: the humble stable, the barefooted Mary and Joseph reverently looking at the baby Jesus, the star in the sky, the ox and the ass, and a visitor holding a gift of a rooster. Joseph holds his hat. Mary holds her hands together. The details of their peasant dress are charming. Baby Jesus is laid in a wheelbarrow. He looks happy and his hands are raised. The wood is carefully stained. The talented artist who originally drew this lovely scene remains anonymous. This basic composition has since been borrowed for use on brightly painted, flat, thick, wooden nativity scenes made in El Salvador, but these have none of the charm of this thin wooden postcard.



AFRICAN FABRIC NATIVITY FROM AN UNIDENTIFIED AFRICAN COUNTRY (2004)

The tallest figure is 10 in. (26 cm.)
Collection of Max and Joyce Douglas, Denver, Colorado
Photograph by Rainer Mace

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Distinctive, colorful African fabrics adorn each figure of this nativity, giving it an unmistakable identity of that continent, even if the specific country of origin remains to be discovered. A few beads make a necklace for Mary. The kings wear crowns and bear gifts. The animals are much too small to be real, but consistency of scale seldom matters in ethnic folk art activities.



BANANA LEAF FIBER NATIVITY FROM KENYA (2003)

The tallest figure is 5 in. (12 cm.)
Collection of Mary Ann Adams, Albuquerque, New Mexico
Photograph by Brian Clark

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The anonymous gifted artisan in Kenya who made this nativity was able to capture African postures and gestures with such accuracy that these figures look like they could move when we look away. Simple banana leaf fiber was used, but the details, such as the kings' crowns, their gifts, and the elaborate sandals of the shepherds, are all admirable. Round wooden bases add stability to the figures. The two painted German gewer tree add color.