

**“Walking Thunder: Dreams Made of Sand,”**  
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MUSEUM NEWS

## Walking Thunder: Dreams Made of Sand

The ancient art of sandpainting has found a gifted contemporary interpreter in Walking Thunder, a Diné woman of the Hashtl'ishnii (Mud People) clan. Born on May 8, 1951, in Shiprock, N.M., Walking Thunder lives and works on the Navajo Reservation, which stretches from Arizona into Utah and New Mexico and is the largest in the United States. Walking Thunder made her first sandpainting under the watchful eye of her father-in-law, a medicine man. Sandpaintings fall into two categories: those made privately in healing ceremonies and those created publicly for artistic or commercial reasons. Walking Thunder will demonstrate the latter from April 11 to 21, 2002 at the National Museum of the American Indian in New York City.

“All the details of my sandpaintings come from my dreams,” Walking Thunder says. In her artistic works, Walking Thunder varies time-honored designs and adds her own elements to depictions of earth, sky, the four directions, animals, and plants. For instance, she combines tradition and personal interpretation when she brightens traditional colors that represent the four directions: white (east), blue (south), yellow (west), and black (north).

Walking Thunder creates her pieces through an exacting process. First, she grinds stone into a powder and sifts it into sand. She chooses her colors before spreading the sand evenly on a flat surface. Then, she makes a mark on the sand to hold her focus and begins the painting, working on hands and knees and reaching across the sandy surface to execute her design. The size of each painting varies. The smallest commercial paintings measure approximately 8 by 12 inches; the largest can measure several feet square.

After the design is complete, Walking Thunder erases the design with her hands, mixes the sand together, and collects it into a large piece of fabric. Then, according to tradition, each painting must be destroyed and the sand returned to the earth before sundown on the day the painting is made.

Inspired by the work of Walking Thunder and Diné chants, the internationally acclaimed



Pilobolus Dance Theater will present the premiere of a new work from April 11 to 14 (see *Calendar of Events*) in the Museum's Rotunda. Walking Thunder and the Pilobolus Dance Theater are presented in association with Ringing Rocks Foundation. - Maria A. Dering

Photo by Kim L. Nickerson