

THE NAVAJO NATION

On the occasion of the XIX Olympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City, the Olympic Museum presents, from 13 December 2001 to 12 May 2002, The Navajo Nation, an Indian Community from the south-west of the United States, living near to the host city of the Games.



A Navajo couple today

In our imagination, the word *Indian*, which we almost immediately associate with cowboy, often sends us back to our childhood, to that proud and brave character. A band ties his long black hair and his face is painted. On important occasions, he wears a magnificent eagle-feather head-dress. He lives in a teepee and has to fight American soldiers to defend his ancestors' land. The memory is charming, but this exhibition will try to show a different facet of the Navajo Indians, who live in the biggest reservation in the United States.

The Navajos' sacred number is four - four sacred mountains, four plants, four stones, four stages of life and four original clans. There are also four areas in this exhibition to discover the "birth" of a people; their migrations; their ancestors; their suffering when the Spanish arrived; their deportation to Bosque Redondo, organised by Colonel Christopher "Kit" Carson and his scorched earth policy; the discovery of the concept of "nation"; and how certain Second World War battles in the Pacific were won thanks to the "Code Talkers".

In the section about cosmogony, the masks worn during the Night Chant ceremony will most certainly intrigue and enchant the visitor, and the sand paintings (represented here on cloth), the purpose of this ceremony, will definitely seduce them. The patient who has lost the *hozho*, an essential Navajo concept meaning beauty, harmony, and plenitude, takes his place in the centre of the healer's painting, his face turned towards the East. The Sacred Beings in the painting have the power to remove the forces of the "illness" and absorb them in the sand. This is why, unlike mandalas, these paintings, healing rites, are immediately destroyed.

The work of the goldsmiths, basket makers and weavers has not been forgotten. The *ketoh* (wrist guard), *concha* (shell) belts, the *squash blossom* necklaces, the different types of the chief's blankets and rugs show us what wonderful craftsmen the Navajos are.

The visit ends where it began: in a *hogan*. On one side, there is the fan-



Traditional doll

tastic calvacade with cowboys and Indians; on the other, a slide show demonstrates that, although the Navajo Nation has its own police, schools, language and customs, it is still American. Is it perhaps there that the confrontation between our memories and reality is to be found?



"Thunderbird" sand painting.