OU Receives Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Grant for Native American Arts Initiative

Norman, Okla.—The University of Oklahoma has received an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation grant for $750,000 to support a four-year initiative to increase cultural diversity while seeking to grow a mutually beneficial relationship between OU’s doctoral program in Native American art and the Institute of American Indian Arts. The comprehensive program will increase the representation of Native Americans in curatorial and academic positions through collaboration, creativity and commitment toward the goal.

“The university is extremely pleased to receive this grant from the Mellon Foundation. It is a recognition of OU’s strong reputation in the field of Native American art,” said President David L. Boren.

The program will include six core projects, including paid internships for the museum’s Native American art collection and pre-doctoral fellowships, accompanied by a teaching assistantship to students dedicated to the study of Native American art and culture. A biannual museology course will provide graduate students an opportunity to study museum theories and practices and learn curatorial skills by building an exhibition from concept to installation using the museum’s Native American art collections.

The OU School of Visual Arts’ nationally competitive doctoral program in the study of Native American art will be expanded in order to broaden students’ exposure to leaders in the field and improve their critical analysis of current scholarship. Graduate students will manage a symposium on a current topic in the field of Native American art history, museum studies and pedagogy, and a Mellon Foundation Distinguished Lecture Series will be established. Finally, the OU School of Visual Arts will collaborate
with the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe to create a pipeline of institute graduates for OU’s
graduate program to study Native American art history.

The program will be led by Heather Ahtone, James T. Bialac Associate Curator of Native American and
Non-Western Art at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art; W. Jackson Rushing III, Eugene B. Adkins
Presidential Professor of Art History and Mary Lou Milner Carver Chair in Native American Art; and Mark
Andrew White, Wylodean and Bill Saxon Director of the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art.

“The museum is deeply honored to receive this transformative grant from the Mellon Foundation,”
White said. “The Mellon internships will allow the museum to build upon its scholarly commitment to
Native American art and to continue to create innovative exhibitions and programs using resources such
as the James T. Bialac Native American Art Collection and the Eugene B. Adkins Collection.

The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art has one of the most significant collections of Native American art in
the country with more than 6,000 objects from artists of diverse tribes and nations that dates from the
early twentieth century to present day. The museum works closely with faculty across campus and has
collaborated with multiple departments, including the OU School of Visual Arts. In May, the museum will
open the 103rd Annual OU School of Visual Arts Student Exhibition, which highlights the diverse works of
art created by visual art students from OU.

“The OU School of Visual Arts is thrilled to have received this significant grant from the Mellon
Foundation, which both recognizes our past achievements and generously supports expanded future
efforts. It will allow us to develop an exciting series of initiatives, reaching out to students and enabling
them to excel in the study of our country’s indigenous art. Supported by the Mellon funding, and in
collaboration with our colleagues in the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, we will guide a diverse group of
talented students toward significant careers as scholars and curators of Native American Art,” said Bette
Talvacchia, director of the OU School of Visual Arts.

The OU School of Visual Arts is one of the only schools in the nation to have a dedicated concentration
in Native American art history, which was first established by Mary Jo Watson (Seminole), Regents
Professor and Director Emeritus. In the early 1990s, Watson founded a Native art history curriculum that
included a popular seminar on American Indian women artists. The OU School of Visual Arts is the only
program which features two named professorships in Native American art history.

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