OU Receives Major Gift of Native American Art

NORMAN, OKLA. – University of Oklahoma President David L. Boren announced Thursday that the university has received one of the most important private collections of Native American art in the country. The gift comes to OU from the private collection of James T. Bialac of Arizona.

The multimillion-dollar collection of more than 3,500 works represents indigenous cultures across North America, especially the Pueblos of the Southwest, the Navajo, the Hopi, many of the tribes of the Northern and Southern Plains and the Southeastern tribes. Included in the James T. Bialac Native American Art Collection are approximately 2,600 paintings and works on paper, 1,000 kachinas and 100 pieces of jewelry representing major Native artists such as Fred Kabotie, Awa Tsireh, Fritz Scholder, Joe Herrera, Allan Houser, Jerome Tiger, Tonita Pena, Helen Hardin, Pablita Velarde, George Morrison, Richard “Dick” West, Patrick DesJarlait and Pop Chalee.

“The university community is deeply grateful to Jim Bialac for this important and generous gift,” said OU President David L. Boren. “This collection will expose our students and people all across the country to some of the most important works of Native American art ever created. It will provide new insight into Native American culture. In addition, the collection will be an important source for art history students, including graduate students in OU’s Ph.D. program in Native American art.”
Selections from Bialac’s almost 50-year collection will be displayed at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, the Donald E. Pray Law Library and other campus locations as a major educational tool.

“It was truly a pleasure to work with Mr. Bialac on the donation agreement, as his first requirement was education and the use of the collection for this purpose,” said Ghislain d’Humières, the Wylodean and Bill Saxon Director of the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art.

Bialac’s gift elevates the museum’s strong Native art collection, said Mark White, Eugene B. Adkins Curator at the museum. “The Bialac collection offers a comprehensive survey of 20th-century Native American art,” White said. “Every artist of influence or importance from the beginning of the century onward is included this collection. It is invaluable as a teaching resource. With the addition of the Bialac Collection, the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art and the University of Oklahoma will become one of the most important centers for the study of modern Native American art and culture in the nation.”

Upon completion of the new Stuart Wing in fall 2011, selections from the collection will be rotated every year within a new permanent exhibition space at the museum designated specifically for the James T. Bialac Native American Art Collection. A catalog of selected works is planned in conjunction with a larger exhibition scheduled for 2012.

In addition, paintings currently on loan from the James T. Bialac Native American Art Collection will remain on loan to the University of Arizona, Arizona State University and the Arizona Court System for as long as they wish to retain them.

In 1964, Bialac purchased a painting by Robert Chee (Hashke-Yil-Cale), the first of what would become a nearly 50-year journey into collecting art. As a successful lawyer over the past few decades, he has become close friends with many prominent artists through his legal practice, including Houser, a Chiricahua Apache artist whose sculpture *Sacred Rain Arrow* is now reproduced on the Oklahoma state license plate, Houser’s sons Bob and Phillip, Hopi artist Charles Loloma and others.

Bialac also has served as a juror for many of the more important exhibitions of contemporary Native art, including the Santa Fe Indian Market.

Works from Bialac’s collection have appeared in many books and periodicals, such as *National Geographic* magazine and Smithsonian publications. On the whole, his lifetime collection spans 100 years of Native culture in a wide variety
of media from across North America.

The Bialac collection will complement other outstanding Native and Southwest collections held by the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, including the Eugene B. Adkins Collection, which is shared with Tulsa’s Philbrook Museum of Art, and the Rennard Strickland Collection, both of which were given in the last few years.

Additional collections include the Richard H. and Adeline J. Fleischaker Collections, the museum’s first major collection of Taos art; the Thams Collection of Southwestern masterpieces; the Tate Collection of masterworks by the Taos Society of Artists; and the R.E. Mansfield Collection by some of the world’s most celebrated Native American artists.

The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art is located in the OU Arts District on the corner of Elm Avenue and Boyd Street, at 555 Elm Ave., on the OU Norman campus.

Admission to the museum is free to all OU students with a current student ID and all museum association members, $5 for adults, $4 for seniors, $3 for children 6 to 17 years of age, $2 for OU faculty/staff, and free for children 5 and under. The museum is closed on Mondays and admission is free on Tuesdays. The museum’s Web site is www.ou.edu/fjjma. Information and accommodations on the basis of disability are available by calling (405) 325-4938.

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IMAGE CUTLINE

James T. Bialac, a private art collector based in Arizona, recently gave a multimillion-dollar gift of more than 3,500 Native American works of art to the University of Oklahoma. The collection includes approximately 2,600 paintings, such as Winter Awakening of the O-Khoo-Wak by Helen Hardin.

Image credit:
Helen Hardin
Winter Awakening of the O-Khoo-Wak
14 ¾ x 29 ½ in.
Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, The University of Oklahoma, Norman; James T. Bialac Native American Art Collection, 2010