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Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art Celebrates Twenty-Fifth Anniversary

The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art will open its fall season with Anniversary Exhibition: Celebrating the Permanent Collection, September 27 - December 15. These works have been acquired in the 60 years of the museum’s history, focusing especially on its 25 years in the current location.

In 1915, when Oscar Brousse Jacobson, the first director of the School of Art, came to the University of Oklahoma, there were no art museums or collections in the state which were open to the public. The University of Oklahoma’s art collection, which he established, was housed in offices, halls, and classrooms, awaiting a permanent home. Jacobson dreamed of a space in which to showcase good paintings and sculpture as part of his students’ education, and set about collecting gifts from student organizations, friends and alumni.

In 1936, when he acquired the Wentz-Matzene collection of Oriental art, a grouping of 758 ancient paintings, sculptures, precious stones, and textiles, the Board of Regents approved the Museum of Art as a separate institution and appointed Jacobson its first director. The collection was housed in Jacobson Hall, part of the old University Library, with limited space and inadequate storage. It was not until decades later, under Director Sam Olkinetzky, that Jacobson’s vision of a permanent facility came to fruition.

In the early 1950’s, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Jones, an Oklahoma City family, approached the university about a memorial to their son, Fred Jones Jr., who had died in a plane crash in 1950. After weighing several options, including a nonsectarian chapel,
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the family settled on a building to support the fine arts. The resulting structure, the Fred Jones Jr. Memorial Art Center, housed the Museum of Art, the School of Art, and the offices of the College of Fine Arts.

Opened in 1971, the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art includes two floors of gallery space with moveable walls for maximum flexibility in hanging exhibitions. A recent renovation tripled the museum’s storage capabilities and allowed for independent temperature and humidity control for works of art not on exhibition. Phase II of the renovation, scheduled for this year, will include construction of a conference room and education office.

Today the museum’s permanent collection contains over 6,000 objects, a great number the result of the philanthropy of individual donors. Under current director and chief curator Tom Toperzer, museum attendance has grown steadily, reflecting a healthy mix of international and regional art, as well as traditional and contemporary artists. In his twelve-year tenure Toperzer has brought such shows as Rembrandt: Etchings, Sandy Skoglund: Photographs and Sculpture, and Allan Houser: Retrospective, to the museum, and established an endowment of over $1.5-million.

He has also helped to fulfill Jacobson’s vision of establishing a place to showcase art. According to Toperzer, “Now, more than ever, people need a place to be inspired and refreshed, to get away from the pressures which we all face in our day-to-day lives. A place to keep in touch with our past while looking to the future. An art museum provides such an environment. We collect the finest expressions of an artist, both past and present, which provides the ideal setting for meditation, inspiration, or renewal. Besides, it’s just fun!”

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through December 15, contains samples of works collected from 1915 to the present. These include Native American works from the Kiowa Five and the Studio; the Jacobson collection of North African arts and crafts acquired during his sabbatical year; and prints by American and European artists such as Whistler and Matisse.

"New Deal" art, kimonos from the Wentz-Matzene collection, pieces from the Tang Dynasty, and State Department works by O'Keeffe, Hopper, and Shahn, as well as photography by Ansel Adams and Berenice Abbott are included. Oklahoma artists and past faculty members Oscar Jacobson and Eugene Bavinger are represented, as are contemporary artists Glassco, Andoe and Bradley.

To see the fruits of sixty years of acquisition, the public is invited to the opening of the anniversary exhibition Friday, September 27, from 7 to 9 p.m. Regular museum hours are Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday, 10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.; Thursdays from 10:00 a.m. - 9 p.m.; and Saturdays and Sundays, 1 until 4:30 p.m. On home football game Saturdays, the Museum is open from 10 a.m. until kickoff, and there is no charge for admission.

--Debra Krittenbrink, Public Relations, Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art