Scholar to discuss Pletka’s art in Sunday talk at OU museum

A free lecture by Ronald McCoy, professor of history at Emporia State University in Emporia, Kan., will examine the historical and anthropological significance of the Paul Pletka paintings on view at the University of Oklahoma Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art.

McCoy’s topic, “Falls the Shadow: The Shamanic Paintings of Paul Pletka,” is set for 2 p.m. Sunday in the west gallery of the museum.

Pletka’s paintings focus on the culture of the American Indian and reveal the artist’s extensive research into North American cultures, as well as his powerful imagination and his dedication to historical accuracy.

McCoy’s interest in the Plains Indians and Indians of the Southwest came from his father, Tim McCoy, a cowboy movie star of the 1930s.

After earning a master’s degree in anthropology and a doctoral degree in history at North Arizona University, McCoy lived for over three years on a Navajo Indian reservation studying customs and culture first hand.

His writing has won many awards, including the Cowboy Hall of Fame Wrangler Award for “Tim McCoy Remembers the West” and an American Association of Museums Award of Distinction for “Circles of Power.”

“McCoy’s interest in Pletka’s paintings is that of an anthropologist and an historian, not that of an art critic,” said museum assistant curator of education Sue Schofield-Cole. “He studies the art to learn about the history and the values of a culture.”

McCoy says he is most interested in Pletka’s transformational or shamanic paintings, in which the subject is in the actual act of becoming something else. He believes Pletka’s paintings “bridge the gap between what Western minds call the natural and the supernatural.”

“Pletka understands that, for Indians, objects have great power or medicine,” McCoy said. “His subjects are very well painted, and this is very rare today. Once you recognize these magical transformations in his work, the paintings change forever.”

“Ceremony, Ritual and Magic: The Paintings of Paul Pletka” will remain on view through Sept. 12 at the museum, 410 W. Boyd.

The museum is open from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays; 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Thursdays; 1 to 4:30 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays; and 10 a.m. until kickoff on home football game Saturdays. Admission is free and free parking passes for use in reserved spaces on the Parrington (north) Oval may be obtained at the museum’s security desk.

For more information or accommodations on the basis of disability, call 325-3272.