The Richard H. & Adeline J. Fleischacker Collection
The Fleischaker Collection

Art from the Plains, the Pueblos and the Painters of the Southwest

by Pam Fleischaker

The light and the landscapes of northern New Mexico are as brilliant and varied as the open skies and plains of Oklahoma are broad and expansive. Yet both places share a rich cultural heritage that has drawn artists for centuries.

That combination of intrinsic beauty and cultural depth captivated Richard and Adeline Fleischaker, moving them to search for, learn about and collect the art of the region. Between 1970 and 1994, they collected nearly four hundred pieces of art, broadly categorized in four groups. Their eyes for painterly works drew them to the paintings of many members of the Taos and Santa Fe colonies; their interest in the archeological, intellectual and social development of the region led them to gather excellent examples of Pueblo pottery, baskets and kachinas; Richard Fleischaker's affinity for Native American painters and their colorful, simplified work, set in motion his support of individual Indian artists, both in Oklahoma and New Mexico; and finally, the Fleischakers' broadening knowledge of Native American and regional art of the Southwest culminated in the collection of contemporary painters and sculptors.

Northern New Mexico: The Land of Enchantment

The spectacular land and colors of Taos attracted artists of both European descent and American origin, and in 1912 the Taos Society of Artists was founded. Joseph H. Sharp, Bert Phillips, Ernest Blumenschein, Oscar Berninghaus, E. Irving Conque and W. Herbert Dunton were the founding members of the Society.

Patricia Broder wrote, "[The Society] served primarily to encourage excellence in artistic creation and to provide marketing and exhibiting opportunities for those who chose to work in the desert of New Mexico." Later, the original colony invited E. Martin Hennings, Victor Higgins, Walter Ufer, Kenneth Adams and others to join them. They became the Taos Ten, and the Fleischaker Collection contains work by most of these men.

Cover: Ernest Martin Hennings, Afternoon Ride, oil on canvas, 30 x 24"  
Above: Western Apache, Arizona, Basket-Olla, NO. 11, 3/4"
Until 1927, when most members had achieved critical and financial success, the Society was the key source of support and organization for the many artists who gravitated to the region. Throughout the early part of the century, Taos continued to grow as an art center, expanding beyond the original Society members.

The Santa Fe art colony thrived from 1920, and although it was similar to Taos, it was a more accessible community—a center of commerce and government, distinguishing it from the more isolated Taos.

Approximately seventy-five artists, many of which are represented in the Fleischaker collection, made Santa Fe their permanent home, including Sheldon Parsons, William P. Henderson, Fremont Ellis, Willard Nash, Will Shuster, Walter Mruk and Joseph Bakos. . . .

“Many artists such as John Sloan, Robert Henri and John Marin visited Santa Fe during the summer painting season. Santa Fe offered the vast landscape, brilliant light and exotic color of Taos, as well as an aura of timelessness and a multi-ethnic society, but Santa Fe was less primitive in many ways and this appealed to some artists.”

The colony has continued to thrive, attracting contemporary artists such as Oklahomans T.C. Cannon, Glenna Goodacre and Alan Houser and New Mexicans Bettina Steinke, Randy Lee White and Clark Hulings, each of whom is represented in the Fleischaker Collection. “The wonderful and comprehensive collection of works acquired by [the Fleischakers],” wrote Peter Rathbone and Dara Mitchell, “include important examples by many members of the Taos and Santa Fe art colonies, which stood as the cultural and artistic centers of the West during the early Twentieth century.”

Richard H. and Adeline J. Fleischaker

Richard Henry Fleischaker was born in 1916 and lived his young life in Joplin, Missouri, one of six children. He was the son of immigrants—a Jewish merchant father and an Irish-Catholic immigrant mother whose lives centered around their family, their community and their children’s education. Richard graduated from the University of Missouri in 1937, and that university’s law school in 1940. He served in the U.S. Navy during WWII and moved to Oklahoma to become a partner in and general counsel to the independent oil and gas company, Singer-Fleischaker (today, Jolen Operating Co.).

Adeline Janette Singer Fleischaker was born in Enid, Oklahoma, in 1919, to Russian Jewish immigrant parents. Staunch Zionists (supporters of the newly emerging state and nation of Israel), the large, extended Singer family was prominent in northern Oklahoma, also working in oil and gas and focusing their lives around their religion and their family. Adeline graduated from the University of Missouri in 1940.

The Fleischakers moved to Oklahoma City in 1946, raised three children (David, Debbie and Bill) and lived there until their deaths in 1994 and 1996. In addition to many volunteer and philanthropic efforts (for example, Emanuel Synagogue, St. Anthony’s Hospital, OU Health Sciences Center, the National Cowboy Hall of Fame, the Oklahoma City Art Museum, and the Oklahoma City Philharmonic Orchestra), the Fleischakers began collecting the work of Oklahoma artists in the mid-1960s. They fueled their enthusiasm with an extended study/excursion to the Mexican art colony of San Miguel de Allende, then chose to establish a vacation home in Santa Fe, New Mexico in 1976.
It was there that the Fleischakers' interest in capturing the culture and beauty of the area was sparked. Richard was drawn to the romantic pull of the aboriginal and intellectual mix that marked the developing schools of New Mexican art. Adeline's lifetime love of beautiful antiques was channeled into the collection of Pueblo craft and painting. Together, they visited art museums, galleries and pueblos throughout the two states during the 1970s and 80s, training their eyes and learning about the history of the region, the artists and their achievements and working with art dealers.

At the same time, Richard's growing interest in Native American artists led him to help found the Center for the American Indian, a center for the study of Indian art and culture in Oklahoma City. In 1987, he and several others launched the Red Earth Festival. Held annually in Oklahoma City, the festival has become a gathering for thousands of Native American people throughout the nation to bring their art, their music and their dance for exhibition, demonstration and sale.

Richard became a self-styled recruiter of artists for Red Earth, approaching Indian men and women in remote New Mexico pueblos and throughout Oklahoma to come to the festival. Rarely did he visit an artist without buying a painting or offering financial support to the painter for encouragement. Richard believed in "giving back what you got," recalled a friend, and in sharing his good fortune with those whose work he admired and hoped to advance. He remained on
the board of directors for Red Earth until his death and was chosen Ambassador of the Year of that organization in 1994.

The Fleischakers' attraction to Southwestern art evolved from an opportunity to learn to a passionate quest for collecting, in a quiet and private way. They lived with the art surrounding them in their homes in Oklahoma City and in Santa Fe. Known for their generosity and their gentle approach to artists and art, private dealers would happily dip into their own collections for the Fleischakers, and artists would offer pieces, not usually meant for sale, to Richard after a quiet dinner with friends.

If there are threads that run throughout the Fleischaker Collection, connecting the pieces to the collecting, they are a combination of an appreciation of the beauty of the art and the region; an intense desire to learn about the history, methods and quality of the work; and a generosity that made the Fleischakers more than "patrons" of the art community—indeed, part of that community itself.

One anecdote illustrates this best. A Santa Fe legend, Tommy Macaione was an old, eccentric, talented painter who worked (and sometimes lived) on the streets of Santa Fe, capturing the beautiful flowers, adobe houses and abundant chamisa landscapes of that exotic city in his rich and swirling work. On his morning strolls around Santa Fe—his "education in art"—one of Richard's first stops would be a "check" on Macaione, who was inclined to spend his little income feeding his many dogs rather than himself. Not only did Richard purchase a large number of Macaione's paintings, but he often bought groceries and delivered them himself to the old man. Macaione also died in 1994.

Richard and Adeline
Fleischaker would be pleased to see their collection at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, which has, since the early years of Oscar Jacobson, had close ties with the art colonies of New Mexico. Their vision and appreciation for art of the Southwest can now be shared with students, the public and scholarly communities.

Special thanks to Dr. Mark Allen Everett, Louise Fent, Joie Singer, Bob & Milicent Sukman, Gerald Peters and Janie Dupree.
“At a time when our College of Fine Arts is increasing to an all-time high enrollment, and enrollment of art history students is breaking all records, this will be an important educational tool for our students.”

— DAVID WOODS, DEAN, COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS
“This collection moves the museum to a new level among university art museums in the United States. This gives us a collection of national stature and will serve to attract additional gifts.”

— DAVID L. BOREN, PRESIDENT, THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
“Richard H. and Adeline J. Fleischaker are excellent examples of the best in patronage of the arts. Their heart was in the right place, as is their children’s, in helping to make this personal and private collection available to the public. Generations of students and visitors to the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art will benefit from this legacy of encouraging both art and artists.”

— Thomas H. Topperzer, Director, Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art

The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art and the University of Oklahoma celebrate the addition of The Richard H. and Adeline J. Fleischaker Collection to the permanent collection of the museum. We acknowledge with enduring gratitude the following Patrons who, through their generosity, made this acquisition possible.

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