New art unveiled

‘Borderlands’ starts new year for Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art

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Kicking off a full year of Native American and Western American artwork, the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art opened its latest exhibit Friday night.

“Borderlands: Images of the American West” is the first of a series of exhibits revealing a look at the Western United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Focusing on Native and Western American artwork, the collection contains a rare glimpse of the Western United States. The opening was accompanied by a lecture by Dean Porter, director emeritus at the Snite Museum of Art at Notre Dame.

The exhibit showcases rousing images of Western landscapes and Native American and Western American cultures by over 30 artists, including Maynard Dixon, Frederic Remington, and Edwin W. Deming. Historical events such as the Oklahoma land runs of 1888 and the Indian Wars of the 1880s are depicted in the collection and many of these works were originally published in magazines or used for military reports.

"Around the turn of the 20th century, American artists enchanted Eastern audiences with picturesque landscapes of Western terrain, images of the unfamiliar dress and customs of Native American communities and romanticized recounts of cultural conflict," said Mark White, Eugene B. Adkins curator for the museum.

Many of the artists of the time saw their works as a form of historical preservation, documenting the cultural conflicts of the time as well as the ever-changing landscape.

Contained within the exhibition are works from both the Native American and Western American perspective, with colorful landscapes, images of Native culture, Civil War troops, and more. Several dozen artists are represented, including one of the largest paintings by Maynard Dixon.

Artists accompanied military campaigns and scientific surveys in the years following the Civil War and their images appeared not only in exhibitions, military reports and scientific treatises, but also in the pages of "Harper's Weekly" and later such 10-cent magazines as "Collier's" and "The Saturday Evening Post".

Interesting stories accompany each of the amazing pieces contained within the exhibit. "Harper's Weekly," for instance, sent Rufus F. Zogbaum to Fort Reno in Indian Territory in 1888, on the eve of the Oklahoma land runs, to document the military's interaction with the Cheyenne at Darlington Agency. Frederic Remington, too, had been on assignment from Harper's when he accompanied General Nelson A. Miles on his campaign against the Apache in the 1880s as part of the journal's enthusiasm for the Indian Wars.

Although journals and newspapers often prompted artists to investigate life in the American borderlands, some artists, such as Charles Schreyvogel and Edwin W. Deming, visited Indian nations in the West throughout their careers, independent of journalistic sponsorship, in search of fresh inspiration.

Deming formed close relationships with the Native communities he visited, and even lived with the Yuma Apache for an extended period of time. Both artists also viewed their enterprise as a form of preservation that would record for posterity peoples threatened by assimilation.

Admission to the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art is free to OU students with a current student ID and museum a current student ID and 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. Admission is free on Tuesdays.