NATIVE AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBIT AT OU SUPPORTED BY NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS GRANT

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NORMAN – Historical photographs by noted 20th-century photographer Edward Curtis and new works by Navajo photographer Will Wilson to be shown together when the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art opens the exhibit, PHOTO/SYNTHESIS, in spring 2017. The exhibit is supported by a $40,000 National Endowment for the Arts grant recently awarded to the University of Oklahoma.

Wilson’s photographs of contemporary descendants from the Curtis portraits will shed light on the historic role and misuse of photography in the depiction of Native Americans. Wilson will visit Oklahoma this summer to photograph the living descendants and tribal members of those originally photographed by Curtis, and these photos will be featured in the exhibition. In contrast to the approach used by Curtis, Wilson will work closely with tribal members while photographing them.

Work by Curtis also is featured in a rare multivolume portfolio on the Indians of the United States and Alaska, and is housed in OU’s Western History Collections, one of the largest collections in the world of documents and photographs.

“We are grateful to the National Endowment for the Arts for making possible this exceptional exhibition,” said OU President David L. Boren.

“We are extremely delighted that our major spring 2017 exhibition was awarded this grant from the National Endowment for the Arts,” said Mark White, the museum’s Wylodean and Bill Saxon Director. “The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art serves as a hub of art history and culture at the University of Oklahoma, and this support enables the museum to continue providing quality exhibitions and programs to our community and visitors.”

Heather Ahtone, the James T. Bialac Associate Curator of Native American and Non-Western Art at the museum, is curating the exhibition and working closely with Wilson and tribal leaders.

“It has been a pleasure to work collaboratively with Will Wilson and cultivate PHOTO/SYNTHESIS as a project that directly serves our Oklahoma tribal community,” Ahtone said. “His photography is arresting and will convey a powerful message about the dynamic vitality of our tribal presence. As we continue to develop this project, we appreciate the support of the National Endowment for the Arts and the recognition the award brings to our work at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art.”

The National Endowment for the Arts approved more than $82 million to support local arts projects and partnerships in the NEA’s second major funding announcement for fiscal year 2016. The Art Works category supports the creation of
work and presentation of both new and existing work, lifelong learning in the arts and public engagement with the arts through 13 arts disciplines or fields.

“The arts are all around us, enhancing our lives in ways both subtle and obvious, expected and unexpected,” said Jane Chu, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts. “Supporting projects like PHOTO/SYNTHESIS offers more opportunities to engage in the arts every day.”

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 complimentary to all visitors, thanks to a generous gift from the OU Athletics Department. The museum is closed on Mondays. Information and accommodations are available by calling (405) 325-4938.

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**IMAGE CREDIT**

The University of Oklahoma’s Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art is the recipient of a $40,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Next spring, the museum will open an exhibition of contemporary Native photography by Navajo artist Will Wilson, including this 2012 photograph, *Kevin Gover, Citizen of the Pawnee Nation, Director, National Museum of the American Indian.*

Will Wilson (U.S., Navajo, b. 1969)

*Kevin Gover, Citizen of the Pawnee Nation, Director, National Museum of the American Indian,* 2012

Archival pigment print from wet plate collodion scan, 36 x 25 in.

Courtesy the Critical Indigenous Photographic Exchange, New Mexico Museum of Art, Santa Fe Indian Market