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Art Exhibition Exploring Oklahoma History Opens Oct. 6 at OU

NORMAN, Okla. - Oklahoma history comes to life through paintings, lithographs, drawings and other media in a new exhibition at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art on the University of Oklahoma Norman campus. Picturing Indian Territory, 1819-1907 opens with a public, complimentary reception at 7 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 6.

Picturing Indian Territory is the first of its kind: a scholarly examination of the visual history of Oklahoma and its previous incarnations as Indian and Oklahoma Territories, as told through the eyes of the artists who visited the land over the course of nearly a century.

“This exhibition provides an opportunity to see how artists, illustrators and journalists constructed an image of life in the Indian and Oklahoma Territories for a larger national and international audience,” said Mark White, the museum’s Wylodean and Bill Saxon Director and co-curator of Picturing Indian Territory.

“Visitors may be surprised to see the unique outsider’s perspective presented in the historic works on display.”

The relocation of Native American tribes to the territories created a unique socio-political climate that prevented American artists from seeking residence or even an extended sojourn. Yet, the 19th-century fascination with Native cultures and the “undiscovered” frontiers of North America did encourage numerous artists...
to depict the cultures and spaces of the territories.

_Picturing Indian Territory_ surveys how the people, land and history of Oklahoma were constructed visually from the early decades of the 19th century before and after the creation of Indian Territory in 1834; to the inception of Oklahoma Territory in 1890; and finally to the unification of Indian and Oklahoma Territories to create the state of Oklahoma in 1907.

“Newspaper and magazine reporters, government functionaries and artist-travelers were drawn to the region by the rapidly changing fortunes of the region’s traditional Indian cultures in the wake of war and non-Indian settlement,” said B. Byron Price, director of the Charles M. Russell Center and OU Press.

“In crafting their images, they relied, in at least a few cases, on written accounts and fertile imaginations rather than personal experience. Whether or not they were eyewitnesses to scenes they portrayed, they painted, sketched and photographed what interested them.”

Price, who is co-curator of the exhibition, will present a lecture during the exhibition’s opening festivities.

Visitors may recognize Oklahoma landmarks such as the Wichita Mountains, the Red River and Fort Reno, as well as figures from the state’s history such as Pawnee Bill, Quanah Parker and Geronimo reproduced in selected works. Historic events such as land runs, complete with Boomers and Sooners, battles and diplomatic resolutions are coupled with stirring portraits of Native sitters and life on the plains.

_Picturing Indian Territory_ includes paintings by notable artists such as George Catlin, Frederic Remington and John Mix Stanley; drawings by artists such as James Wells Champney and Balduin Mollhausen, who helped to explore Indian Territory; and important memorabilia from the 19th century that helped to define Indian and Oklahoma Territories pictorially.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a book authored by the exhibition’s curators and published by OU Press in conjunction with the Charles M. Russell Center for the Study of Art of the American West.

White said this collaboration between multiple university departments is key to the success of the exhibition.

“_Picturing Indian Territory_ utilizes considerable resources on the OU campus in the form of the Charles M. Russell Center for the Study of Art of the American West.”
West and the OU Western History Collection,” he said. “Additionally, we are grateful to the private lenders and multiple state organizations that have loaned works to complete this exhibition, such as the Gilcrease Museum, the Oklahoma Historical Society, the National Cowboy and Western History Heritage Museum, and the Philbrook Museum of Art.”

The exhibition remains on display through Dec. 30 in the Nancy Johnston Records Gallery and is made possible, in part, by a grant from the Norman Arts Council Grant Program.

An educational space within the exhibition provides hands-on art activities and a picture hunt encouraging visitors to look more closely at the works in the show. A day symposium on Thursday, Nov. 3, will feature guest speakers Sterling Evans from the OU history department; Clara Sue Kidwell, the former director of the American Indian Center at the University of North Carolina; Bob Blackburn, the executive director of the Oklahoma Historical Society; and Dan Flores of the University of Montana.

Families are invited to Night at the Museum on Friday, Nov. 4, which features crafts, a rope-twirler, a Kiowa fancy dancer and other kid-friendly activities.

On Saturday, Nov. 5, Ron Frantz from the OU School of Architecture will lead a walking tour of historic Guthrie. Transportation will not be provided; participants will meet in Guthrie at the northwest corner of Harrison Avenue and Division Street to begin the tour.

These events are complimentary and open to the public.

Additionally, the museum has created an iTunes U course and online film series that will debut with the opening of the exhibition.

More information about Picturing Indian Territory and programs is available on the museum’s website at www.ou.edu/fjjma.

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 the generosity of the OU Office of the President and the OU Athletics Department. The museum is closed on Mondays. Information and accommodations on the basis of disability are available by calling (405) 325-4938 or visiting www.ou.edu/fjjma.

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A new art exhibition at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art reveals a unique outsider’s perspective of Oklahoma history. *Picturing Indian Territory, 1819-1907* opens with a public reception Oct. 6 and features works from artists, journalists and illustrators visiting Indian and Oklahoma territories over the course of nearly a decade, including this 1890 painting, *Horseman, Anadarko, Oklahoma (Chief Ahpeahtone)* by Julian Scott.

Julian Scott (U.S. 1846-1901)
*Horseman, Anadarko, Oklahoma (Chief Ahpeahtone)*, 1890
Courtesy of private collection