Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art Celebrates 100 Years Of Artist-Founder Oscar Jacobson

NORMAN, OKLA. – In 1915, Swedish-born artist Oscar Jacobson joined the University of Oklahoma art faculty. During his lifetime, the Southwest painter created more than 600 works of art, expanded the OU School of Art, formed the university’s art museum and brought international attention to the early Kiowa artists.


The opening begins with a public lecture at 7 p.m., followed by a reception. Admission to the events is complimentary.

A World Unconquered commemorates the centennial of Jacobson’s appointment at OU with a retrospective of his influential 40-year career, including more than 50 works from the museum’s and university’s permanent collections, as well as other private collections.

The exhibition also includes selected works Jacobson was responsible for acquiring for the OU Museum of Art, which eventually became the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art. Additionally, a special micro-exhibition explores the sites in which Jacobson worked through the sense of smell.
“Oscar Jacobson was a prolific artist who devoted much of his career to the depiction of the wilderness of the American West, especially Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Oklahoma,” said Mark White, interim director and Eugene B. Adkins Curator. “He also became a passionate supporter of the visual arts in the Southwest and an enthusiastic promoter of Native American fine artists such as the early Kiowa artists, Acee Blue Eagle, and others. He balanced a productive painting career with an inexorable desire to promote appreciation for and knowledge of world cultures in the new state of Oklahoma.”

Anders Oskar Jakobson was born in 1882, possibly on the island Västra Eknö, Sweden. In 1890, his family emigrated to Lindsborg, Kansas. He began his study at Bethany College in 1895 with artist Birger Sandzén and then continued at Yale University in 1905, eventually earning his master of fine arts degree in 1916.

After a brief tenure at Minnesota College and Washington State College, where he met his wife, Jeanne d’Ucel, Jacobson joined OU in 1915 as an art professor.

The Jacobsons traveled frequently during the summers in search of artistic inspiration and, in a 1925-26 sabbatical trip, visited North Africa.

“For an artist inspired by both nature untamed and the romance of the Orient, northern Africa, and especially the Sahara, proved irresistible,” White said. “A naturalist curiosity drew him in coming decades to consider the ‘dramatic beauty’ of elemental forces in a world unconquered.”

They returned to the United States in 1926 with nearly 800 objects for a future museum collection.

Jacobson’s work with Native American cultures accelerated after his return from Africa. He began working with contemporary Native artists following his introduction to six Kiowas in 1926–27: Spencer Asah, James Auchiah, Jack Hokeah, Stephen Mopope, Bou-ge-tah Lois Smokey and Monroe Tsatoke. Jacobson began looking for ways to promote their work and acted primarily as a cultural broker between Native American artists and art markets, museums and, later, New Deal art projects.

A close bond developed between Jacobson’s family and his Native American students, primarily because the Kiowas viewed his ongoing efforts on their behalf as both genuine and sincere, but also because his high regard for Native people in general remained readily apparent.

Jacobson helped organize exhibitions at the university, as well as in other states, that included Kiowa artists. One such exhibition attracted the attention of Royal B. Farnum, director of art education for the state of Massachusetts, who helped
arrange for an additional exhibition of the Kiowa paintings at the International Congress for Art Education in Prague, Czechoslovakia, during the summer of 1928.

That same summer, the Kiowa tribe wanted to demonstrate their appreciation for Jacobson’s contributions and his personal respect for their people and culture. In a ceremony in Anadarko, they officially and fully adopted him into the tribe as a war chief, the highest rank, giving him the name Nah-go-ey. With more than 1,000 American Indians in attendance, the induction powwow was an enormous affair. The Jacobsons and their domestic worker were the only non-Natives allowed to attend.

The future museum materialized in 1936, after a substantial gift of Asian art from photographer R. Gordon Matzene and oilman Lew Wentz. Jacobson became the director of the new OU Museum of Art, a job he held until his retirement from OU in 1952. He balanced a career as a painter, educator, administrator and writer for more than 50 years, until his death in 1966.

White titled the exhibition *A World Unconquered*, based on a written 1948 quote from Jacobson.

“It may now be considered old fashioned but I seem to prefer to paint the world unconquered by man, unviolated by human greed, a world untouched by misery and despair,” Jacobson said. “Every summer for 30 years or more, I have wandered over the south-western States attempting as best I may, by means of paint, to interpret their dramatic beauty, not neglecting the lyrical melancholy charm of Oklahoma’s winters.”

In addition to selected paintings by Jacobson, *A World Unconquered* features *Aroma of the Uncorrupted*, an installation of three olfactory works drawn from specific Oklahoma locations in which Jacobson painted. Cathleen Faubert, an artist and assistant professor of art, technology and culture at OU, assembled the unique art experience to complement Jacobson’s artwork.

“Fragrance has the instantaneous and invisible power to penetrate consciousness,” Faubert said. “Odor can immediately evoke the details and mood of an old or new experience. In an effort to focus on our olfactory understanding, *Aroma of the Uncorrupted* uses fragrance to consider the Oklahoma landscape in relation to Oscar Brousse Jacobson’s paintings.”

The three scents in the exhibition are influenced by Jacobson’s paintings *Medicine Park* (1925), *The Glass Mountains* (1949) and *Horse Thief Canyon, Oklahoma* (1949). The fragrances are designed as subjective interpretations of both the paintings and ideas of the places themselves, she said. Scent notes are presented
as an element of storytelling, revealing the power of suggestion implicit in the unseen nature of fragrance.

“In the same way that Jacobson flattened forms, smoothed planes and generally reduced the landscape to basic patterns, the aromas are spare accords rather than overly populated complex formulas,” Faubert said.

The exhibition also includes several gas chromatography charts of various scents, which use an analytical chemical method that separates chemical substances into individual fragrances, much like the human nose.

A World Unconquered: The Art of Oscar Brousse Jacobson remains on display through Sept. 6, and is made possible, in part, by the Norman Arts Council Grant Program.

Additional public educational programs scheduled at the museum to coincide with the exhibition include monthly Art After Noon programs at 12:30 p.m., February through June; an Evening for Educators on March 5; a College Night on March 26; a Faculty Focus discussion with faculty members from environmental history, geology and Native American studies on April 2; and a Family Day and Jacobson House event on May 17.

More information about the exhibition 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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**IMAGE CREDIT**

The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art opens a retrospective exhibition of works by Southwest artist and art historian Oscar Jacobson on Thursday, Feb. 26. A World Unconquered: The Art of Oscar Brousse Jacobson examines the 40-year career of the prolific Swedish-born artist who founded what eventually became the FJJMA. The exhibition displays more than 50 works, including this 1938 painting, In the Navajo Country.

In the Navajo Country, 1938

Oil on canvas, 20 x 26 in.

Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, The University of Oklahoma, Norman; 1987