Native Art Collector James Bialac to Give Public Tour of Exhibition at OU Art Museum May 12

NORMAN, OKLAHOMA—Few art collectors amass more than 5,000 works of art over their lifetime, and fewer still give those works to an institution in order to bolster education. Scottsdale, Arizona, attorney and collector James T. Bialac, who gifted his massive collection of Native American art to the University of Oklahoma for just that reason, will deliver a public gallery talk at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, May 12, at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art.

Bialac will give a walking tour of a recent installation, titled James T. Bialac Native American Art Collection: Recent Acquisitions, in the museum’s Ellen and Richard L. Sandor Photography Gallery.

In 2010, Bialac formally gifted his collection of Native American art to the university. One of the most significant private collections of contemporary Native American art ever accumulated, it originally contained 3,500 objects representing 128 tribes, including paintings, works on paper, sculpture, ceramics and katsinam. Since the arrival of the art at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, Bialac has continued acquiring art for the collection, adding approximately 300 new works each year. This exhibition, which is on display through early June, presents selected works representing the collector’s interests and his support of the museum’s initiatives.

“Mr. Bialac has been a steadfast supporter of the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art by continuing to grow his collection for the benefit of our patrons and the Native arts community,” said Heather Ahtone, the museum’s James T. Bialac Associate Curator of Native American and Non-Western Art.
“We have been able to support research into the field of contemporary Native art because of the depth and breadth of his collection. His visits are always highly anticipated by our museum patrons, and it is wonderful that he is willing to share his knowledge about the art he has collected over the last few years on behalf of the art museum.”

Through the gift of his collections to OU, Bialac has helped provide new insight into Native American culture. His collections provide an important research resource for art history students, including graduate students in OU’s Ph.D. program in Native American art.

As an attorney, he has built strong relationships with many prominent artists through his legal practice and served as a juror for many of the more important exhibitions of contemporary Native art, including the Santa Fe Indian Market. His multi-million-dollar collection encompasses more than 5,000 works that represent indigenous cultures across North America, especially the Pueblos of the Southwest, the Navajo, the Hopi, many tribes of the Northern and Southern Plains and the Southeastern tribes. It also includes approximately 2,600 paintings and works on paper, 1,400 katsinam and 200 pieces of jewelry representing major Native artists.

Works from the James T. Bialac Native American Art Collection currently are installed at multiple OU Norman campus locations, including the College of Law, College of International Studies, College of Arts and Sciences, Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education and Bizzell Memorial Library; the Peggy and Charles Stephenson Cancer Center at the OU Health Sciences Center; and the Schusterman Center at OU-Tulsa, where they serve as a major educational tool.

Bialac’s visit coincides with the receipt of an honorary doctoral degree, which will be conferred upon him during the university’s May 13 commencement ceremony at the Gaylord Family – Oklahoma Memorial Stadium. Bialac is being honored with a Doctor of Humane Letters for his role as a devoted collector of American Indian art, which he has generously shared with others, thereby advancing appreciation in the art form and scholarship in this field both at OU and around the world.

The May 12 gallery talk and informal reception afterward in the museum’s Sandy Bell Gallery are open to the public; admission to both is complimentary.

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 on the basis of disability are available by calling (405) 325-4938.

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Scottsdale, Arizona, art collector and attorney James T. Bialac is giving a complimentary gallery talk, which will be followed by a reception, at 6 p.m. Thursday, May 12, at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art on the University of Oklahoma Norman campus. Bialac, whose 2010 gift of Native American art to the university has grown past 5,000 works, will lead a public walking tour of the spring exhibition, *James T. Bialac Native American Art Collection: Recent Acquisitions*, in the museum’s third-floor mezzanine gallery. Bialac is shown here at his home in Scottsdale next to Tony Abeyta’s 1996 mixed media piece, *Night Visitor*. 