University of Oklahoma Announces Fall Celebration of James T. Bialac Native American Art Collection


The collection, a gift from James T. Bialac of Arizona, contains more than 4,000 works representing indigenous cultures across North America, especially the Pueblos of the Southwest, the Navajo, the Hopi, many of the tribes of the Northern and Southern Plains and the Southeastern tribes. There are approximately 2,600 paintings and works on paper, 1,000 kachinas and 100 pieces of jewelry representing major Native artists such as Fred Kabotie, Awa Tsireh, Fritz Scholder, Joe Herrera, Allan Houser, Jerome Tiger, Tonita Pena, Helen Hardin, Pablita Velarde, George Morrison, Richard “Dick” West, Patrick DesJarlait and Pop Chalee.

“The opening of the exhibition of the James T. Bialac collection gives the university the opportunity to celebrate Jim Bialac’s incredible generosity and his commitment to increased understanding and appreciation of Native American art,” said OU President David L. Boren.

As part of the opening, the museum will offer complimentary admission Saturday, Sept. 22. A community celebration is scheduled from 1 to 6 p.m. Sunday, September 23, featuring artist demonstrations by Tony Abeyta, Anita Fields, Benjamin Harjo Jr., Linda Lomahaftewa and America Meredith. A special performance by the OU School of Dance, created by professors Derrick Minter and Austin Hartel, will feature choreography inspired by works from the James T. Bialac Native American Art Collection. The opening celebration is
complimentary and open to the public.

In addition to the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, works from the collection will be on display at the Sam Noble Museum of Natural History, the Donald E. Pray Law Library at the College of Law and the Charles M. Russell Center for the Study of Art of the American West each will showcase works from the collection, bringing a combined exhibition space of more than 40,000 square feet dedicated to the collection on OU’s Norman campus. The Sam Noble Museum opens a second exhibition of the works Friday, Oct. 5.

Free docent-led tours of the exhibits at the Law Library will be offered at 3:30 p.m. Friday, Sept. 21 and at 3:30 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 23. Additionally, the Russell Center, which is located across the street from the FJJMA, will be open with free admission 1-6 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 23.

A catalog of selected works is planned in conjunction with the museum’s fall exhibition.

In 1964, Bialac purchased a painting by Robert Chee (Hashke-Yil-Cale), the first of what would become a nearly 50-year journey into collecting art. As a successful lawyer over the past few decades, he has become close friends with many prominent artists through his legal practice, including Houser, a Chiricahua Apache artist whose sculpture Sacred Rain Arrow is now reproduced on the Oklahoma state license plate, Houser’s sons Bob and Phillip, Hopi artist Charles Loloma and others.

Bialac also has served as a juror for many of the more important exhibitions of contemporary Native art, including the Santa Fe Indian Market.

“It was truly a pleasure to work with Mr. Bialac throughout this process, as his first requirement was education and the use of the collection for this purpose,” said Ghislain d’Humières, the Wylodean and Bill Saxon Director of the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art. “We hope the community will join us for an exciting celebration of Mr. Bialac’s lifetime collection and his contribution to the university and the state of Oklahoma.”

Works from Bialac’s collection have appeared in many books and periodicals, such as National Geographic magazine and Smithsonian publications. On the whole, his lifetime collection spans 100 years of Native culture in a wide variety of media from across North America.

“It is an honor to share the James T. Bialac Native American Art Collection with our museum patrons because not only is it an example of the collector’s passion and generosity, but the work represents many of the best artists from, and the
cultural diversity of, Native America,” said Heather Ahtone, James T. Bialac Assistant Curator of Native American and Non-Western Art at the museum.

“The collection also serves as a model for how important the role of the collector is to these materials,” Ahtone said. “Mr. Bialac has taken great care in the preservation and conservation of his collection using the most recent archival techniques and materials. His considerations will benefit the enduring life of the materials and make them available for generations to come.”

Bialac’s gift elevates the museum’s strong Native art collection, said Mark White, Eugene B. Adkins and Chief Curator.

“The Bialac Collection offers a comprehensive survey of 20th-century Native American art,” White said. “Every artist of influence or importance from the beginning of the century onward is included in this collection. It is invaluable as a teaching resource. With the addition of the Bialac Collection, the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art and the University of Oklahoma will become one of the most important centers for the study of modern Native American art and culture in the nation.”

Portions of the collection will be exhibited continuously at the University of Arizona’s Daniel F. Cracchiolo Law Library, Arizona State University’s John J. Ross-William C. Blakely Law Library and the Arizona Supreme Court and Court of Appeals in Phoenix.

“The extensive exhibition of the collection in both Oklahoma and Arizona realizes Bialac’s hope that it be used to educate the public and the younger generation on a continuing basis as an example of the richness and complexity of Native American art and culture,” White said.

The Bialac Collection will complement other outstanding Native and Southwest collections held by the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, including the Eugene B. Adkins Collection, which is jointly stewarded with Tulsa’s Philbrook Museum of Art, and the Rennard Strickland Collection, both of which were given in the last few years.

Additional collections include the Richard H. and Adeline J. Fleischaker Collection, the museum’s first major collection of Taos art; the Thams Collection of Southwestern masterpieces; the Tate Collection of masterworks by the Taos Society of Artists; and the R.E. Mansfield Collection by some of the world’s most celebrated Native American artists.

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.
Regular admission to the museum is complimentary to OU students with 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 military veterans with proof and children 5 and under. The museum is closed on Mondays and admission is complimentary on Tuesdays. The museum’s website is www.ou.edu/fjjma. Information and accommodations on the basis of disability are available by calling (405) 325-4938.

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**IMAGE CUTLINES**

A celebration of the James T. Bialac Native American Art Collection begins Saturday, Sept. 22, at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma. The collection of more than 4,000 works was given to the University of Oklahoma in 2010 by James T. Bialac of Arizona. It includes approximately 2,600 paintings, such as *Winter Awakening of the O-Khoo-Wak* by Helen Hardin.

Image credit:
Helen Hardin (U.S., Santa Clara, 1943-1984)
*Winter Awakening of the O-Khoo-Wak*, 1972
Acrylic on board, 14 3/4 x 29 1/2 in.
Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, the University of Oklahoma, Norman; James T. Bialac Native American Art Collection, 2010
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