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Book Review: The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma: Selected Works

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Jones Jr. Museum of Art, *Selected Works* is a genuine mix of many varying styles and media. After gifts of Asian art formed the beginnings of the OU art collection in the 1930s, a significant acquisition was made by founding director Oscar Jacobson in 1948 consisting of 117 American paintings from the “Advancing American Art” exhibition organized by the U.S. Department of State. Many of the works are illustrated. The paintings cover the gamut of American Modernism, including work by Georgia O’Keeffe, Romare Bearden, Adolph Gottlieb, Marsden Hartley, Edward Hopper, and Max Weber.

Another important aspect of the collections consists of the works by painters of the American West. Members of the Taos Society of Artists regularly painted scenes of Native Americans who peopled the Great Plains, particularly the High Plains of the Southwest. The Fleischaker (1996), Thams (2003), and Tate (2004) collections include work by members of the Taos Society of Artists, such as Ernest L. Blumenschein, E. I. Couse, Oscar E. Berninghaus, Bert G. Phillips, Victor Higgins, Walter Ufer, E. M. Hennings, Joseph H. Sharp, LaVerne Nelson Black, and Kenneth Adams.

The first seventeen pages consist of a foreword and an introduction to the collection and the history of the museum. The 101 catalogue entries cover more than a hundred artists and several cultures with some 280 illustrations. Each entry consists of at least two pages—artist’s biographical information and a full-page plate. Additionally, many of the entries are highlighted with thumbnail illustrations showing other works in the collection related to the main entry. The four pages devoted to Joseph Henry Sharp, for example, feature a large image of his 1926 painting, *Hunting Sun*, supplemented by seven smaller illustrations on the next two pages.

It is not unusual for catalogue entries to be organized by themes or movements, or alphabetized by name. With this eclectic range of artists and art objects, however, a different arrangement is employed. The first section of twenty-seven entries is mostly devoted

The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma: Selected Works. By Eric McCauley Lee and Rima Canaan. Norman: University of Oklahoma, 2004. xiv + 267 pp. Color illustrations, notes, index of artists, credits. \$59.95 cloth, \$39.95 paper.

In an effort to outline the depth of the collections of the University of Oklahoma Fred

to European artists, including some sixteen Impressionist and Post-Impressionist works, most from the 2000 Weitzenhoffer bequest. The next seventy-four entries feature the work of American artists and are chronologically ordered, beginning with an eighteenth-century portrait painting by John Singleton Copley. Rather than being separated, as is often the case, the works of Native American artists (weaving and pottery, as well as painting) are incorporated into this arrangement; so, for example, between a watercolor by Maurice Prendergast (entry 32) and a gouache by Henry Farny (entry 35) is an entry on Navajo weaving with five images and one of western Apache basketry (four images).

The catalogue also gives brief mention to the photography collection (Berenice Abbott, Ansel Adams, W. Eugene Smith, Alfred Stieglitz, and Edward Weston) and the beginnings of what promises to become an important collection of outdoor sculpture, including pieces by Barbara Hepworth, Allan Houser, Menashe Kadishman, and Jesus Moroles.

Art collections are gathered through diligence and perseverance. In the case of a museum, all the benefactors, directors, and curators in the institution's history are important to collection building and are duly noted. Since 1994, OU President David Boren has played an instrumental role in the expansion of the museum and its collections, and the Fred Jones Jr. Museum has blossomed under his leadership and the guidance of director Eric Lee.

Well worth the read (and viewing the images), this book brings to light an outstanding art collection at a well-known Great Plains institution. It provides a glimpse into the lives of some of the Impressionists and a significant group of American artists of the twentieth century—modernists, artists of the American West, and, in particular, the artists of Taos and Santa Fe.

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