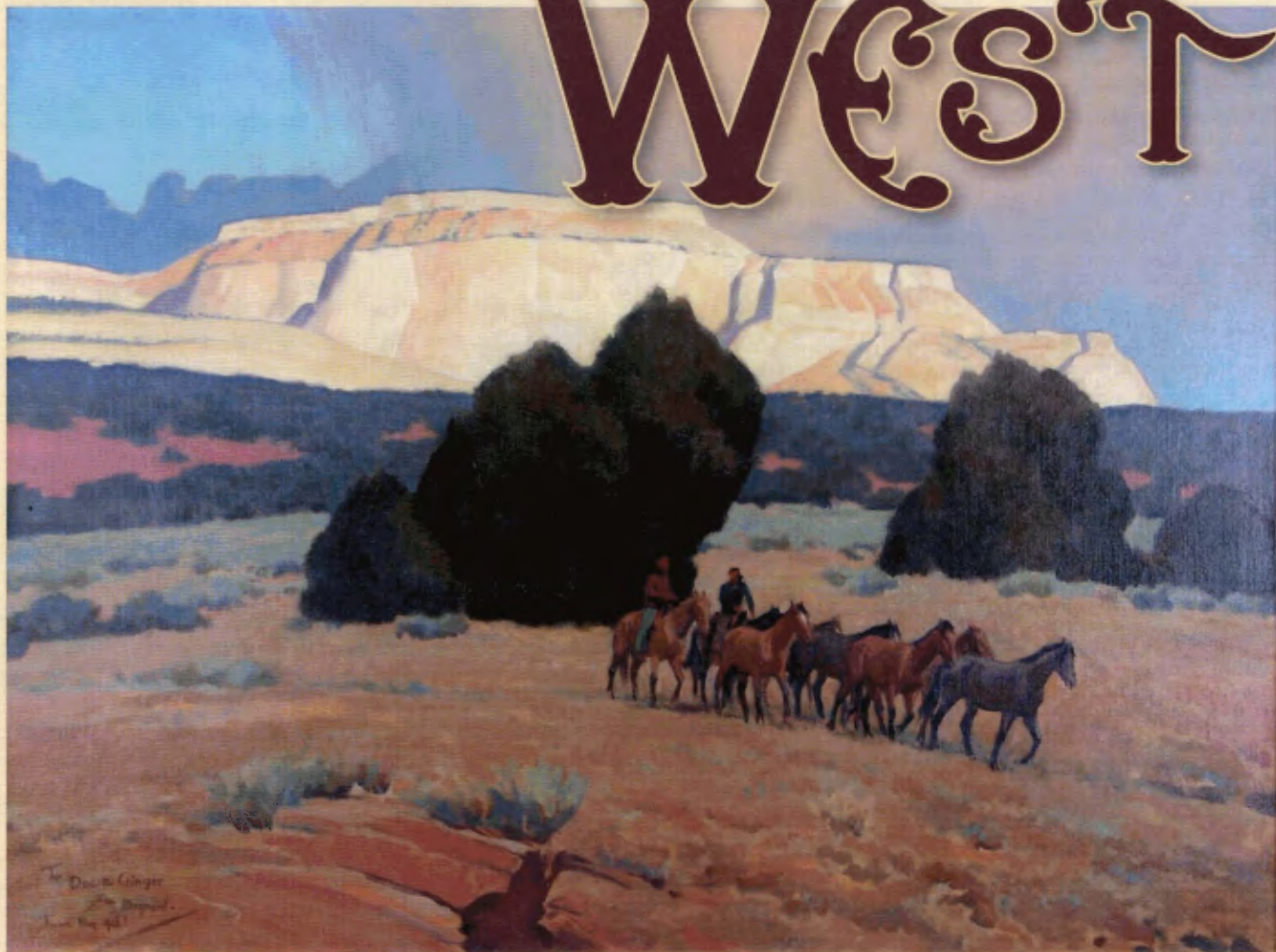


BEST

OF THE

WEST

BY LYNETTE LOBBAN



Maynard Dixon, 1875-1946, *Land of White Mesas* - Oil on Canvas 30x40"

One man's passion for American Western art has found a home at not one, but two Oklahoma museums, where it will preserve the past and provide an education for the future.

When W. Tate Brady came to Indian Territory at the age of 17, he took a good look around and decided that if one did not own a ranch outright, the next best thing was to sell supplies to those who did. In 1890, Brady opened a mercantile store in the boomtown that was to become Tulsa, catering to the barons of the cattle industry. The young entrepreneur did so well he grew into a prominent civic leader and developer, establishing the fashionable Brady Heights district, the luxury Brady Hotel, and the Louvre (Cain's) Ballroom, still one of music fans' favorite venues in the Southwest.

Now his grandson, Eugene Brady Adkins, has added a new tier to the family legacy. Oklahoma born and bred, Adkins was a lover of the art of the American West. Like a sculptor, he built and shaped and polished a collection with his own hands, carefully assembling 20th century masterpieces of Western, Southwestern and American Indian art for his Tulsa home. After his death in 2006, more than 3,000 collected works—valued at \$50 million—were on the verge of leaving Oklahoma.

Then a creative partnership, brokered between University of Oklahoma President David L. Boren and Randall Suffolk, executive director of the Philbrook Museum of Art of Tulsa, secured Adkins' life's work for all Oklahomans to share.

Although rarely on display, the Adkins Collection was known to connoisseurs of Southwestern and Western art. Visitors to his Tulsa home reported that every inch of wall space—and a great deal of the floor—was devoted to paintings, ceramics and sculpture any art museum would envy. So when the Adkins Foundation announced that it would be accepting proposals—not bids—for the entire collection, a fuse was lit in the museum world.

Heavy hitters from Los Angeles to Denver weighed in with their most persuasive arguments, hoping to claim the privately held treasures by Taos artists such as Victor Higgins, Walter Ufer and Joseph Sharp, modern masterpieces from American Indian painters T.C. Cannon and Jerome Tiger, pottery by Maria Martinez and jewelry by Charles Loloma.

In the end, the joint proposal submitted by OU's Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art and the Philbrook brought to the table something no other museum in the world could offer—the ability to make the collection accessible to Oklahomans in their own state and to offer the art as a teaching tool to enrich appreciation for American Indian and Western art throughout the

region. The university component strengthened the cause.

"We promised the Adkins Foundation to keep Mr. Adkins' legacy, which is showing the collection to the people of Oklahoma and to the country and to promote the education of

Western American and Native American art," says Ghislain d'Humieres, director of the Fred Jones.

As part of the proposal, the OU museum will add a curatorial position for the collection, additional graduate fellowships and an Adkins Presidential Professorship in the History of Western American Art. A separate \$1 million gift from the estate of OU alumna Mary Lou Milner Carver will provide for three additional endowed faculty positions in the School of Art and Art History, greatly expanding research and curriculum in Southwestern, Western and American Indian art.

OU Regents have approved \$6 million for the construction of a new gallery at the Fred Jones to showcase the collection. The gallery, which will enclose the former sculpture garden on the roof of the original museum building, is scheduled to open in 2010. The Philbrook also will embark on a building project to

create the Adkins Collection and Study Center, expected to open in summer 2009.

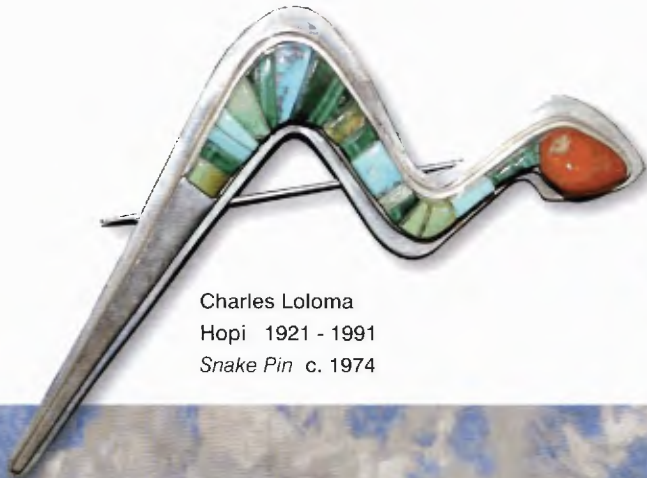
With this partnership, works of art will travel freely between Tulsa and Norman, increasing the availability of the collection



Robert Taylor

Ghislain d'Humieres, director of the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, shows off a portrait of Margo Phillips Beutler by W. Herbert "Buck" Dunton, one of the founding members of the Taos Society of Artists.

Fannie Nampeyo
Hopi 1904 - 1989
Ceramic 1970s 6.375 x 12.91"



Charles Loloma
Hopi 1921 - 1991
Snake Pin c. 1974





Nicolai Fechin
 U.S. b. Russia 1881 - 1955
Woman with Cigarette
 Oil on Canvas 30x31"

OPPOSITE PAGE:
 Walter Ufer
 U.S. 1876 - 1936
Going East
 Oil on Canvas 50x50"

to people on both sides of the state. Even divided between two museums, the volume is impressive.

With more than 800 paintings and works on paper, 400 works of pottery and 1,200 pieces of jewelry in the collection, it took d'Humieres and the assistance of four curators to select 200 works for the inaugural exhibit, which will run through December 2008.

In addition to complementing the museum's extensive holdings of Southwestern art from the Fleischaker, Thams, Tate and Mansfield Collections, the Adkins has added some missing names to the museum's Who's Who of Western masters.

Ropin', a pen and watercolor by Charles M. Russell was a "first" worth noting for B. Byron Price, director of OU's Charles M. Russell Center for the Study of Art of the American West and the Charles M. Russell Memorial Chair. Other artists new to the Fred Jones include Dorothy Eugenie Brett, Randall Davies and Carlos Vierra.

"This addition takes our permanent collection and expands it many fold, not only with new artists, but in adding depth and breadth overall. Where we had a couple minor Maynard Dixons, now we have several major works by that artist," explains Price. "The same with [Ernest] Blumenschein. We had the first-rate *Haystack, Taos*; now we have several from different periods in his career. It really does place the Fred Jones in one of the pre-eminent positions for art of the Southwest."

Price sizes up art in the no-nonsense way one might expect from a man who wears cowboy boots to a museum. "That is the best Laverne Nelson Black I have ever seen," he says pointing to

the oil painting *Mexican in Wagon*. "He's getting a lot out of a few strokes. Controlled, but complex, it pulls your eye right into the painting."

Other highlights include the stunning *Falconry in Central Asia*, a portrait of two brilliantly robed hunters by Leon Gaspard, and *Going East*, an oil on canvas by Walter Ufer, rumored to have belonged to the late Texas governor John Connally.

Price says *Going East* is an important work from a variety of standpoints. The four American Indian figures walk across the nearly life-size canvas without acknowledging the viewer, as if rejecting the idea of being on display. Many of the Taos painters grew supportive of the native people and their efforts to avoid the assimilation policies of the government, Price explains. Because of this, many of the Taos paintings are now being looked at as statements or expressions of the indigenous people rather than as romantic portraits.

Edward S. Curtis also captured the voice of the American Indian, not on canvas, but with his camera. The 1906 photogravure, *The Storm-Apache, Plate 6*, shows four Apaches on horseback. As three ride unconcerned, one turns his face to the sky and sees a violent storm approaching. Whether Curtis meant this as an allegory for the future, it is hard to say, but the image is haunting.

Other works of interest to Oklahomans and historians permeate the collection. Adkins includes paintings by James Erwin Boren, cousin of OU President David L. Boren and the first art director of the National Cowboy Hall of Fame, a position he gave up to pursue his painting career.

"We have sketchings of the fur trade by Nicholai Fechin,



Robert Taylor

Hadley Jerman, research assistant at the Charles Russell Center, sorts through boxes of letters, photos, newspaper clippings and family scrapbooks from the estate of Eugene B. Adkins. The correspondence from artists and art dealers tracks the evolution of the Adkins Collection over the past 40 years.



Robert Taylor

Byron Price, director of the Charles M. Russell Center for the Study of Art of the American West, reads an entry in one of several journals kept by Eugene Adkins. Since Adkins' father was an early Muskogee businessman and his grandfather a Tulsa entrepreneur, family records provide insight into the art collection and state history.

which are among the earliest examples of Western art," says Price. "Amon Carter [Museum] already wants to borrow them. This collection gives us leverage that we didn't have before."

The Adkins also gives students and researchers a history of the Pueblo Indian families through examples of their pottery. "The pueblos of San Ildefonso, Santa Clara, Acoma, Santo Domingo—they are all here," says Jane Aebersold, professor of art and curator of ceramics at the Fred Jones.

"I am so excited by the Zia pieces. The Zia pots are big and beautiful, and the imagery on them is just so compelling."

Aebersold says the pottery is arranged so students walking through the gallery can contrast and compare styles and techniques. "One of the things you'll begin to see is the images that come across in all the pueblos. The *avanyu*, the deer, the birds, turtles."

The differences are equally striking. The massive Santa Clara pots with their signature bear claw design contrast sharply with intricate patterns, spider-leg thin, perfected by the Acomas. Contemporary artists like Hopi-Navajo Nathan Begay, Russell Sanchez and Christine McHorse bring the collection up to present day.

Perhaps no one is happier with the collection than Mary Jo Watson, director of OU's School of Art and Art History. "This is an incredible teaching tool. Mr. Adkins collected the best of the best. There is not one piece in this collection that is not of superior quality. He had an incredible eye."

Watson, a scholar in American Indian art history, is especially pleased with the Native American paintings represented in the collection. "The Adkins Collection provides paintings of top men and women artists of the 20th century—Joan Hill, Tonita Peña, Pablita Velarde, for example, are three of the best women painters for this time period and carved a place for Indian women artists."

Traditional women's arts, like basket weaving, also are represented. The baskets, whether coiled, stitched or plaited boast incredible design elements of birds, beasts and other symbols of nature. "The women didn't have a computer to develop complex designs," says Watson. "These Southwestern ladies imagined the designs and came up with incredible woven baskets with extraordinary details."

Also stunning is the jewelry—a wide variety of craftsmen, tribes and stones represented from the traditional squash blossom necklace to the innovative works of Charles Loloma, who changed people's

perceptions of "Indian jewelry" with his radically different designs of the 1970s.

"The Adkins Collection gives us enormous educational opportunities, both from an artistic and historic perspective," says Watson. "It's more than an art collection; it's a visual reference to the 20th century."

Lynette Lobban is associate editor of Sooner Magazine.