

*The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art celebrates the centennial of Oscar Jacobson, its first director, whose paintings still resonate with the spirit of the West.*

# A Man Unconquered

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Oscar Brousse Jacobson (U.S., b. Sweden, 1882-1966)  
*In the Navajo Country*, 1938  
Oil on canvas, 20 x 26 in.  
Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, The University of Oklahoma, Norman; 1987

**O**scar Jacobson and the Kiowa Five are grouped together so often they almost sound like a '60s pop band. Credited for introducing Native American art to the world through his gifted students, Jacobson is often overlooked as an artist in his own right.

With the new exhibition, *A World Unconquered: The Art of Oscar Brousse Jacobson*, the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art gives the first director of the University of Oklahoma art museum a well-deserved moment in the spotlight.

*A World Unconquered* commemorates the centennial of Jacobson's appointment at the university with a retrospective of his influential 40-year career, which produced some 600 paintings. Years of research went into locating and selecting 50 works from both the university's permanent collection and from private collectors, who loaned paintings to the museum expressly for this exhibition.

Although this is not the first retrospective of Jacobson's work, it is the first in more than 25 years and the most comprehensive. The artist himself would host an annual presentation of his recent works during the years he was director, and

previous exhibitions were held in 1941, 1961 and 1991, the latter two retrospectives organized by former museum directors Sam Olkinetzky and Tom Toperzer. What sets this one apart is the breadth and depth of the collected ensemble.

"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," says Mark White, the Eugene B. Adkins Curator and Wylodean and Bill Saxon Director of the Fred Jones. "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."



Oscar Brousse Jacobson (U.S., b. Sweden, 1882-1966)  
**Oklahoma Mosaic**, 1936  
Oil on canvas board, 20 x 26 in.  
University of Oklahoma, Elaine Bizzell Thompson Study Room, University of Oklahoma Libraries

The exhibition appeals on many levels. Those who call Oklahoma home will feel immediate kinship with many of the landscapes Jacobson re-created on canvas, notably “Oklahoma Mosaic,” a trio of small ponds separated by strata of red dirt and sage green vegetation; “The Glass Mountains,” which captures the glint of gypsum on the mesas of Major County; and “Light Soil,” formerly “On the Road to Chickasha,” which depicts the central plains as geometric shapes layered beneath a blue rectangle of sky.

The carefully curated exhibition also illustrates the range of Jacobson’s artistic influences, as well as his predisposition for adventure. A risk-taker even as a child in Sweden, Jacobson embraced the culture of the “Wild West” after his family immigrated to the U.S. As a teenager, he took a job herding cattle as a means to explore the Great Plains and the Southwest. He also formed a riding group in his Lindsborg, Kansas neighborhood called the Crazy Ridge Wild West Riders that lived up to its name at local fairs and social events.

An explorer by nature, Jacobson boldly experimented with technique and style in his paintings. One can see influences of Impressionism, Post-Impression, even Seurat’s pointillism in

a gorgeous rendering of Enchanted Mesa, New Mexico, a spot he visited often.

Jacobson captures the cool beauty of the night sky in “The Garden of Allah,” while “Horse Thief Canyon, Oklahoma” radiates so much heat visitors can almost warm their hands in front of it. Lush purples, pinks and oranges inhabit his deserts; deep greens, blues and browns his mountains. He embraced the wilderness of Colorado, especially the vistas around his beloved cabin near Estes Park. Hikers will recognize the winding Trail Ridge Road, the majesty of Long’s Peak and the glacial-fed Emerald Lake.

The accompanying catalogue to the exhibition, written by White and Anne Allbright, a doctoral student at Southern Methodist University who is writing her dissertation on Jacobson, contains not only gorgeous renderings, but also insightful text on the man they call a “culture broker” for his world view of fine art.

Jacobson was born in Sweden in 1882, and immigrated to Kansas in 1890. He began his study at Bethany College in 1895, with artist Birger Sandzén and continued at Yale University in 1905, eventually earning his master of fine arts degree in 1916. →



Oscar Brousse Jacobson (U.S., b. Sweden, 1882-1966)  
**The Red Tank or Indian Pool, 1940**  
 Oil on canvas, 22 x 28 in.  
 Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, The University of Oklahoma, Norman; Gift of Robert Long

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 says. “A naturalist curiosity drew him in coming decades to consider the ‘dramatic beauty’ of elemental forces in a world unconquered.”

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.

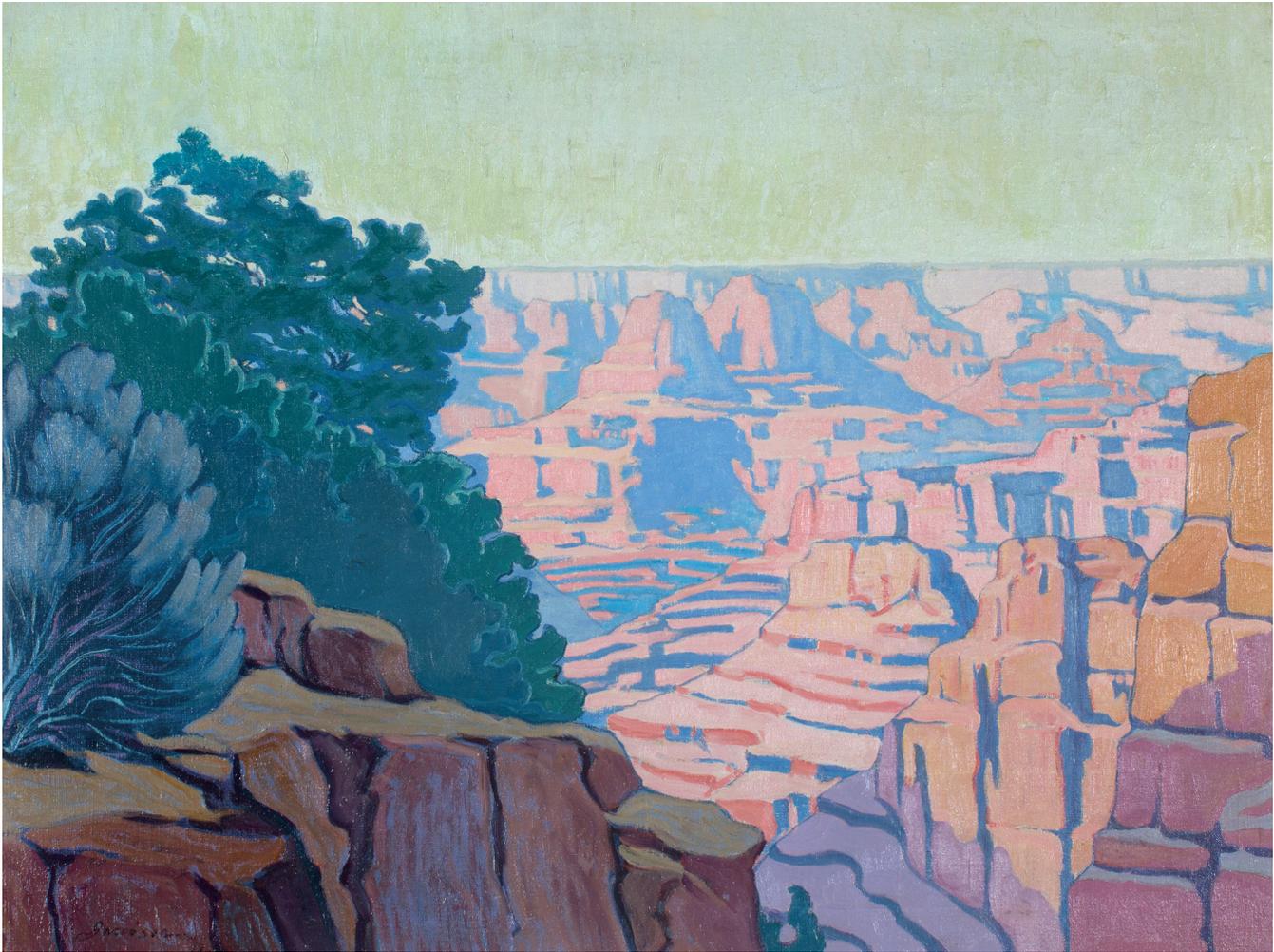
A close bond developed between Jacobson’s family and

his Native American students, primarily because the Kiowas viewed his ongoing efforts on their behalf as both genuine and sincere, and 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. He 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.

After a substantial gift of Asian art from photographer R.



Oscar Brousse Jacobson (U.S., b. Sweden, 1882-1966)  
**Grand Canyon**, ca. 1920  
 Oil on canvas, 26 x 34 in.  
 Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, The University of Oklahoma, Norman; Gift of Shirley McMillian

Gordon Matzene and Ponca City oilman Lew Wentz in 1936, OU established a museum of art. Jacobson became its first director, a job he held until his retirement 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 southwestern 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.”

The exhibition also includes selected works Jacobson acquired for the OU Museum of Art, which eventually became the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art. Additionally, a special micro-exhibition, *Aroma of the Uncorrupted*, explores the sites in which Jacobson worked through the sense of smell.

“Fragrance has the instantaneous and invisible power to

penetrate consciousness,” says Cathleen Faubert, the OU assistant professor of art, technology and culture, who assembled the companion exhibition. “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).

“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,” says Faubert.

*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 and the Kirkpatrick Foundation.