



COURTESY FRED JONES JR., MUSEUM OF ART

*Kiowa Warrior and Wife*  
by Stephen Mopope.

# the Artists' Home Returns



Kiowa Six artist Stephen Mopope in regalia during his time studying at OU.

COURTESY OU WESTERN HISTORY COLLECTIONS

Native community, culture and history meet once again as Jacobson House reopens to the public.

BY TAMI ALTHOFF

**TRACEY SATEPAUHOODLE-MIKKANEN** remembers sitting inside the Jacobson House Native Art Center, walking across the creaky floors and wondering if she might fall into the basement below or if the ceiling above her might cave in.

The small stucco house turned nonprofit art center at 609 Chautauqua Ave. is something of a sacred place to Satepauhoodle-Mikkanen. It serves to preserve and promote the history of Native American art, a groundbreaking group of 20th-century artists known as the Kiowa Six, and the home's namesake, Oscar Brousse Jacobson.

Not only does she hold familial ties to a couple of the Kiowa Six artists who communed and honed their art there decades ago under Jacobson's tutelage, but her own art is influenced by the path forged by Spencer Asah, James Auchiah, Jack Hokeah, Stephen Mopope, Lois Smoky and Monroe Tsatoke.

"I have known who they were all my life," says the emeritus

executive director and outgoing chair of the Oscar Jacobson Foundation Board of Trustees. "Kiowa history has been a part of my life, and the Kiowa Six have always motivated me to try harder."

Over the years, Satepauhoodle-Mikkanen, who is Kiowa and Caddo, watched the home slowly fall into disrepair to the point of being deemed uninhabitable. She didn't think the museum would be around much longer, and certainly not long enough for great-grandchildren to enjoy it.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced an extended closure of Jacobson House. Ironically, Satepauhoodle-Mikkanen says, the closure provided the perfect opportunity for the museum's resurrection.

The University of Oklahoma undertook a multi-year structural renovation of Jacobson House in 2020; the museum formally reopened this spring with events attended by students and elders alike.

Satepauhoodle-Mikkanen says just thinking about the univer-



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Then-OU student and Kiowa Six artist Jack Hokeah in regalia.

sity's choice to ensure the center's future brings her to tears. "We were literally caving in on ourselves trying to keep that little museum alive," she says. "OU secured our mission. They really did."

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Jacobson House was designed and built in 1916 by Jacobson and his wife, Sophie. Jacobson was the first director of the OU School of Art, a position he held from 1915 to 1954, and curator of the OU Museum of Art, now the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art.

The six students came to OU at the encouragement of Kiowa Agency field matron and art teacher Susie Peters, who recognized their individual talents. Jacobson created a program for the artists, who became known as the Kiowa Six. The students frequently congregated at Jacobson's home, refining skills as Jacobson sought venues to share their work with the rest of the world.

Satepauhoodle-Mikkanen has made it somewhat of a mission to preserve the home, its history and Jacobson's legacy.

"There's no place like it in the world because it's so unique, and the art is so powerful," she says. "We've had world-famous artists come through those doors. Students come to Jacobson House and feel at home. There is a sense of belonging and being able to express who you are. In my mind, it solidifies OU understands how important that is for Native American students."

Chickasaw artist Brent Greenwood, current Oscar Jacobson Foundation Board of Trustees chair, shares Satepauhoodle-Mikkanen's sentiment.

A lifelong artist and graduate of the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, N.M., Greenwood spent 13 years selling his art from Santa Fe's former Kiva Fine Art gallery. All the while, he searched for other markets to exhibit his work.

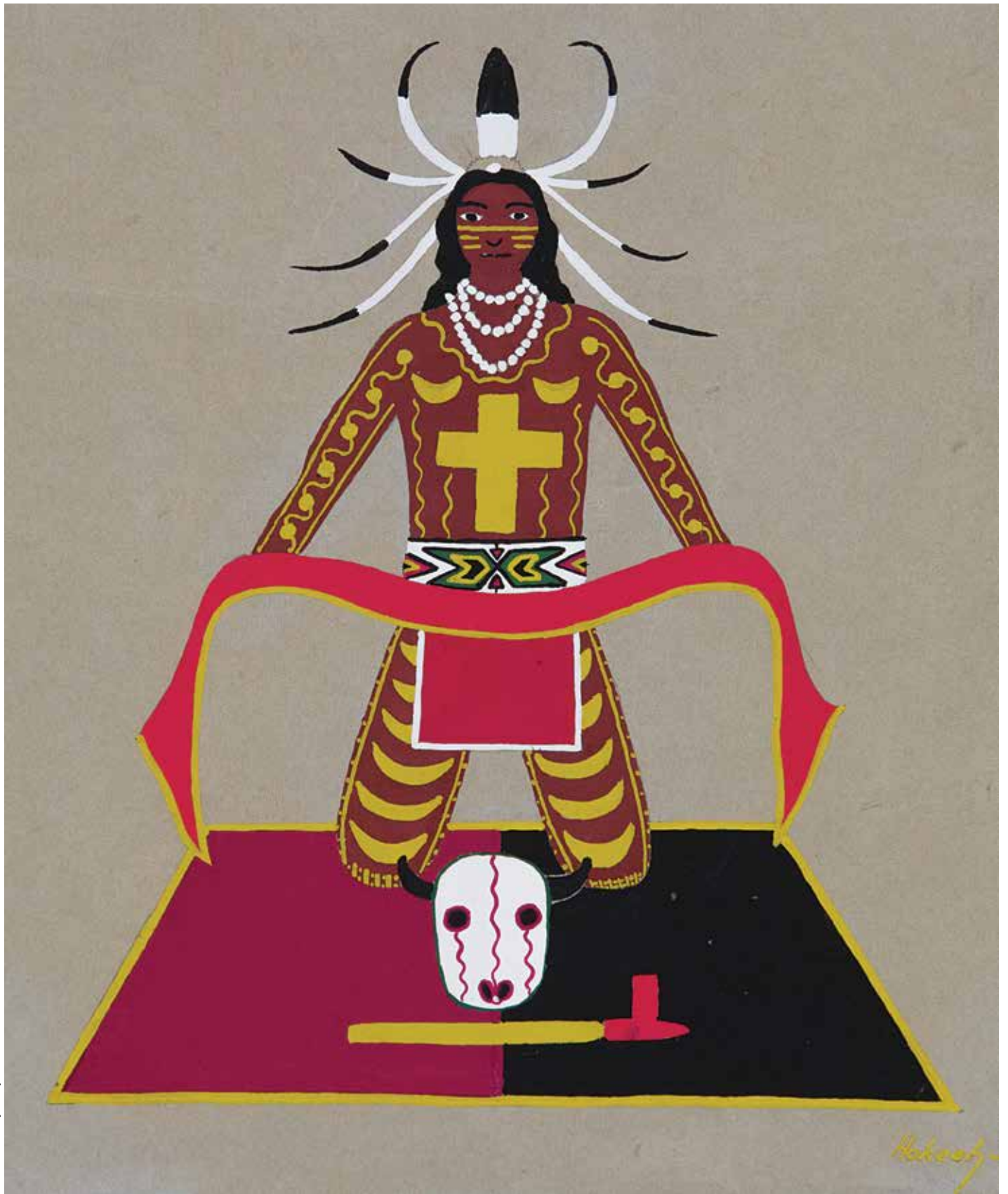
He finally got a break when invited to show his art at Jacobson House.

"A good friend of mine, John Parrish, executive director of Jacobson House at the time, invited me to exhibit at an open outdoor art market during the May Fair Arts Festival," Greenwood says. "I didn't know much about Oscar Jacobson or the Kiowa Six, but I knew the style of art that the Kiowa Six created. It was very similar to what I was producing in Santa Fe."

The Kiowa Six were known for their "flatstyle" or Southern Plains genre, which established Native American art as a contemporary art form.

"Jacobson and fellow OU art professor Edith Mahler recognized the significance of their aesthetic approach," says Andrew Phelan, emeritus director of the OU School of Art and an art scholar who has researched Jacobson. "They didn't try to change their approach. Jacobson and Mahler encouraged them to continue and





*Medicine Man With Buffalo Skull*  
by Jack Hokeah.

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COURTESY ARTHUR & SHIFRA SILBERMAN NATIVE AMERICAN ART COLLECTION, DICKINSON RESEARCH CENTER, NATIONAL COWBOY & WESTERN HERITAGE MUSEUM



*To my first  
teacher  
Mrs. Lane.  
From  
Louise Bou-ge-tah  
Smoky.*

Louise Bou-ge-tah Smoky,  
known as Lois Smoky.



BESSIE JAMES

Josh Shepherd, left, Amber DuBoise-Shepherd, Tracey Satepauhoodle-Mikkanen and Arvo Mikkanen stand before Oscar Jacobson's palette and easel in the renovated Jacobson House Native Art Center.



BESSIE JAMES

Jacobson House celebrates its renovation with a reopening event featuring traditional dance and welcoming OU students and tribal elders alike.



BESSIE JAMES

promoted what they were doing.”

In fact, Jacobson created a Kiowa Six exhibition that traveled across the United States and Europe, bringing the artists international acclaim.

Greenwood says the Kiowa Six’s work resonated with him because they were creating more than art; it was a cultural narrative of their history and experiences.

“That’s what stuck with me—the narratives, the stories they were telling. They were capturing a glimpse in time, and that’s my inspiration as an artist today. The Kiowa Six, that Oklahoma style of art, it’s my foundation.”

Greenwood hopes the renovation and reopening of Jacobson House will spark renewed interest in its mission and mark a renaissance that will strengthen its place in the community. He also hopes Jacobson House’s partnership with OU will continue to flourish following the university’s investment in recent improvements.

“The structural integrity of the building was reestablished, and it will be here forever. There’s always more we can do, but where we are right now is amazing,” Greenwood says. “I tell people I feel like we’ve finally stepped foot into the 21st century.”

Greenwood says with structural problems taken care of and a

facelift that gives the art center a refreshed look, Jacobson House’s doors will be open more often for exhibits and other activities celebrating Native American art and culture. It will also continue to be a place where students feel at home when they are away from home.

“We are going to support the up-and-comers, the artists who have been around awhile, and be all-inclusive while spreading our mission through outreach and programming,” he says. “We will continue to be here for our young people and the OU student body, keeping them connected and giving them a sense of place. We want Jacobson House to be open and available as much as we can.”

Greenwood says he and his fellow board members hope to launch a capital campaign soon to secure funding for an executive director and further ensure that they continue sharing Jacobson’s legacy.

“We’re proud to showcase the Jacobson House Native Art Center, host events and have people come through and see the renovations,” he says. “We’re excited for what’s to come in this next chapter.”

*Tami Althoff works for the OU College of Professional and Continuing Studies.*