THE LEGACY OF ARTHUR AND SHIFRA SILBERMAN: AN UNPARALLELED COLLECTION OF AMERICAN INDIAN PAINTING AND SCHOLARSHIP

by

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THESIS APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

Arthur Silberman (1924-95) and his wife, Shifra Silberman (1932-90), spent the majority of their lives collecting, preserving, and promoting the unique beauty of American Indian art. From the early establishment of American Indian works on paper to the more modern and disciplined adaptation of Indian artistic traditions, this collection, now in the possession of the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum (NCWHM), encompasses an important evolution not only in Native American painting, but in American painting in general. The Silbermans labored to inspire an appreciation for Indian art in others by increasing public awareness through lectures, publications, and exhibits. Their dedication to collecting and studying American Indian art and culture in addition to their gathering of research materials, including oral history interviews with Traditional artists and those that knew them, enabled a flood of knowledge on the subject and influenced the world of art including the scope of the collections at the NCWHM. Listening to the voices of Native Americans in the interviews conducted by the Silbermans, one begins to understand not only the ancestral traditions which served as the foundation for Native art, but also the artists' need to conform and mold their creative visions to early twentieth-century political and monopolistic demands in order to sustain the American Indian economy and maintain their cultural customs.

In 1975, Arthur and Shifra founded the Native American Painting Reference Library, which operated out of their home and contained a number of books, catalogues, brochures, auction records, and interview tapes and played an integral role in community, state, and national projects designed to increase the appreciation of American Indian painting. Prior to Silberman's death on 6 January 1995, the collector signed an agreement

allowing the NCWHM to purchase the holdings of the Native American Painting Reference Library. The archival materials and artworks were acquired in several sections—a large portion was given as a gift from the Arthur Silberman Trust in 1996, and another group was acquired as a purchase the same year from the Arthur Silberman Trust. In 1997, a smaller group of materials were purchased from the Shifra Silberman Trust. Today all of these individual collections have been combined as the Arthur and Shifra Silberman Native American Art Collection.[1] The painting collection includes works on paper by American Indian artists numbering more than 2,300 by nearly 200 artists. Two thirds are by Oklahoma artists and one fifth are Navajo and Pueblo. More than 500 works are paintings, over 1,300 are drawings and sketches, and approximately 300 are prints. [2] Also fundamental to this assemblage are the 173 archival boxes located in the Dickinson Research Center at the NCWHM containing the research, resources and correspondence of the Silbermans and their Native American Painting Reference Library. Particularly important and discussed in this project are nearly 200 oral history interviews conducted by the Silbermans with artists pertinent to the collection and the history of American Indian painting. The Silberman Collection is a legacy that continues to enrich scholars and the general public and well represents the heritage of Native art collecting in Oklahoma. This thesis calls to attention the Silbermans' foresight as collectors through their substantial research of American Indian painting and their preservation of pertinent

[1] Acquisition File, Silberman Collection, NCWHM. Email from Anne Morand, Curator of Art at NCWHM, 1 March 2013.

[2] Stephen Grafe, *A Western Legacy. The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 64.

Native stories, resulting in possibly the most extensive collection of primary histories pertaining to American Indian art in the country.

Historians, art historians, anthropologists, and Native art connoisseurs have addressed the significance of the materialization of American Indian painting in early twentieth-century America and assessed its role within American art and culture. One of the first interpretations was *Indian Art of the United States*, published in 1941 by Frederic Douglas and René d'Harnoncourt.[3] In 1971, J. J. Brody published the groundbreaking study, *Indian Painters and White Patrons*, which addressed the development of modern Native American painting as a response to white paternalism and changed the way scholars discussed the twentieth-century Native American Art Movement.[4] Jennifer McLerran wrote in *A New Deal for Native Art. Indian Arts and Federal Policy, 1933-1943* (2009) about the New Deal period and how its policies shaped federal Indian policy and the Native American art market.[5] Another important and unique valuation of this artistic movement is *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde: A History of Cultural Primitivism*, published in 1995 by art historian Jackson Rushing, linking American Indian art to the emergence of modernism in America.[6]

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[3] Frederic Douglas and René d'Harnoncourt, *Indian Art of the United States* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1941).

[4] J. J. Brody, *Indian Painters and White Patrons* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971), xv.

[5] Jennifer McLerran *A New Deal for Native Art: Indian Arts and Federal Policy, 1933-1943* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009), 2.

[6] Jackson Rushing, *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde: A History of Cultural Primitivism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), xii.

There are also a handful of influential monographs and biographies pertaining to individuals as collectors and their influences on the American art market and illustrative styles. One such work applicable to this project is Aline Saarinen's *The Proud Possessors: the Lives, Times, and Tastes of Some Adventurous American Art Collectors* (1958). Relevant biographies include *Thomas Gilcrease* by David Randolph Milsten (1969), *Thomas Gilcrease*, by Carole Klein, Randy Ramer, and Kimberly Roblin (2010), *Beyond the Hills: The Journey of Waite Phillips* (1995) by Michael Wallis and *Oil Man: the Story of Frank Phillips and the birth of Phillips Petroleum* (1988), also by Wallis.[7]

The heritage of American art collecting bestowed to the country by Oklahomans is admirable and provides today's travelers seeking curiosities of visual history and taste with invaluable museum experiences. Those fascinated by such interests are likely familiar with key collectors Frank Phillips, his younger brother Waite Phillips, and Thomas Gilcrease—all wealthy oil men who acquired capital and a conviction for collecting in Oklahoma. While Arthur and Shifra Silberman began amassing their artistic treasures a generation later, their ambition and legacy are deserving of comparable recognition. In order to ascertain the gravity of the Silbermans' contributions to the general public and museum communities, this thesis will examine the complexities of the Silberman Collection at the NCWHM to discern their role in Oklahoma's collecting heritage. The collection is primarily a retrospective illustration of the Native American Art Movement of the twentieth century and provides documentation of the pertinence of

[7] Aline Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors: The Lives, Times and Tastes of Some Adventurous American Art Collectors* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1958). David Randolph Milsten, *Thomas Gilcrease* (San Antonio: Naylor Co., 1969). Carole Klein, Randy Ramer, and Kimberly Roblin, *Thomas Gilcrease* (Tulsa: Gilcrease Museum, 2010). Michael Wallis, *Beyond the Hills: The Journey of Waite Phillips* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Heritage Association, 1995). Michael Wallis, *Oil Man: The Story of Frank Phillips and the Birth of Phillips Petroleum* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin), 1995.

Oklahoma Indian artists within this creative evolution. What drew the Silbermans to collect American Indian art? How do Arthur and Shifra compare to other wealthy Oklahoma oil men as collectors in the preceding generation and were the Silbermans inspired by any of them in their own collecting? How does the Silberman Collection compare to other collections of Native American art through the couple's dedication to education and their gathering of oral histories of Traditional Indian painters? Arthur and Shifra's passion for collecting and preserving American Indian art through the artworks themselves, supportive research materials and, specifically, oral history interviews of Native artists provides a one-of-a-kind analysis of this artistic tradition and not only parallels other internationally acclaimed collectors, but challenges them by providing a unique perspective, the voice of the American Indian.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The past three years I have spent working on the Arthur and Shifra Silberman Native American Art Collection located at the National Cowboy and Western Hall of Fame has been an exciting and unbelievably insightful journey. Without the help and support of countless individuals, this work would not have come to fruition. It is through friends, family, professors, and staff members at museums and research institutions across Oklahoma that have instilled in me the confidence and knowledge to see this project through and continue the quest.

First of all I would like thank the late Dr. Carolyn Pool, who introduced me to the potential of the Silberman Collection as a topic. Working with her as a teaching assistant during my first semester as a graduate student allowed me to spend valuable time under her wing and reap the benefits of her expertise and honest outlook. I will never forget her guidance, refreshing candor and witty spirit. I miss her dearly.

To Dr. Rennard Strickland I give my utmost appreciation for his important scholarship on American Indian painting and giving so generously of his time to meet with me to discuss the subject and my work on the Silberman Collection. As we both hail from Muskogee, Oklahoma, I believe we are intrinsically connected to its Native artistic heritage in one way or another. Dr. Strickland's work has inspired me throughout this project and to continue my pursuit of interest in the state's art collecting heritage.

I have spent countless hours pouring through the Silberman archival documents in the Dickinson Research Center at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. With each box and folder I open I gain greater appreciation for the significance of collection and praise the research center staff for their care and preservation of the

Silbermans' work. Gerrianne Schaad, Laura Heller, Karen Spilman, and Kera Newby continue to assist, encourage and advise me on my task and I am so grateful for each of them. Special thanks also go to Gerri for allowing me to intern in the research center and allowing me the opportunity to learn how to process such interesting and important collections.

Also through my time spent at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, I had the wonderful chance to work with the curator of art, Anne Morand, as her intern for a semester. This was an invaluable experience that inspired an appreciation for the artist Charles Schreyvogel and exposed me to my interests in the museum profession. I am truly grateful for her instrumental guidance and expertise on this thesis, for motivating my present and future work and serving as a member of my thesis committee.

There are no words to express my gratitude to the professors at the University of Central Oklahoma who have given so liberally of their time, knowledge and understanding during my time as a student in the history department. They all have shaped not only this thesis, but me as an individual. I would like to thank Dr. Jessica Sheetz-Nguyen for the passion she exudes for her work and always helping me make sound and beneficial decisions. I also would like to thank Dr. Mark Janzen for allowing me the opportunity to experience priceless museum internships and for bringing to the table his knowledge of the museum field as a member of my thesis committee. I am deeply and sincerely thankful to Dr. Kenny Brown for his patience and tireless efforts to improve my writing and research abilities. He is always willing to listen and has provided me time and time again with his valued perception and direction on this project and a

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I would like to thank my grandparents, Ann and Bill Boies, for instilling in me an awareness of American Indian art through their exquisite taste as collectors and a love of the Southwest. One of my fondest memories is of my grandmother's sweet voice reading to me Acee Blue Eagle's *Echogee* as a little girl. I appreciate my mother, Rebecca Garrett, and sister, Megan Foreman, for their assistance in editing and helping me to prioritize and maintain sanity. Also, I want to acknowledge my father, Mike Carter, whose enthusiastic love of history no doubt formed my passion for the subject and propelled me towards a career in the field.

And last, but of course not least, I want to thank my husband, Jordan, and our three children, Lola, Oliver and Belle. Without my family this project and the desire to pursue it simply would not exist. Jordan has supported me every step of the way and has been a fantastic father, particularly when I have been out of the house long hours working, writing and spending far too much on soy lattés. Lola, Oliver and Belle—I hope you have as much fun as I do visiting museums and learning about history—maybe one day you will come to appreciate it as I do.

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INTRODUCTION

American Indian art is a vibrant illustration of the individuality of Oklahoma history and a pivotal aspect of its modern identity. The Native American Art Movement of the twentieth century produced influential artists across the Southwest and emerged from sacred traditions practiced by indigenous tribes for centuries. Offering an essential and unique perspective of this artistic movement and the role of Traditional Indian art in Oklahoma is the Arthur and Shifra Silberman Native American Art Collection located at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum (NCWHM). Arthur and Shifra Silberman exhausted all resources to gather evidence in support of the factual story behind the evolution of Native American painting. Together they conducted extensive research—illustrated and enhanced by the works of art they acquired—to provide a thorough and comprehensive study of Traditional Native painting and the individuality of Oklahoma Indian artists within the movement. The couple aspired and succeeded in going beyond the superficiality of the standing literature to obtain a Native-centric interpretation of American Indian art. The Arthur and Shifra Silberman Native American Art Collection establishes an accurate foundation for Traditional American Indian painting through its primary Native American sources and research materials. The Silbermans' legacy continues to influence Oklahoma's art collecting and define its cultural heritage.

The NCWHM acquired the Arthur and Shifra Silberman Native American Art Collection in multiple groups, the most significant arriving at the museum in 1996.[1] The

[1] Acquisition File, Arthur and Shifra Silberman Native American Art Collection, Donald C. and Elizabeth M. Dickerson Research Center, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma [hereafter cited as Silberman Collection, NCWHM]. Email from Anne Morand, Curator of Art at NCWHM, 1 March 2013.

collection changed the future of the institution, taking it to an esteemed level in the museum community, and placed the Silbermans among the most recognized contributors to Oklahoma's heritage of Native art collecting. It contains an impressive group of American Indian paintings, primarily by Traditional artists and is accompanied by an unrivaled body of supporting research materials. The painting collection includes works on paper numbering more than 2,300 by nearly 200 Indian artists. Two-thirds of the artworks are by Oklahoma artists and one-fifth are Navajo and Pueblo. Over 500 works are paintings, over 1,300 are drawings and sketches, and approximately 300 are prints. [2] Considered particularly unique and valuable to the collection are ledger drawings created by Kiowa prisoners during their confinement at Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida, in the late nineteenth century.[3] These works are important because they translate an aspect of the overall message of the Silberman Collection—Arthur and Shifra believed the ancestral Kiowa artist tradition crucial in the development of twentieth-century Native art in Oklahoma.[4] The archival materials, located at the museum in the Dickinson Research Center, consume approximately 173 document boxes in addition to row upon row of cassette and video tapes, many of which are critical, original oral history interviews with Traditional Native American artists. Strongly represented in the Silberman Collection are

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[2] Silberman Finding Aid, http://www.nationalcowboymuseum.org/research/cms/FindingAids/SILBERMAN/tabid/359/Default.aspx, Silberman Collection, NCWHM. Personal assessment of Silberman archival materials.

[3] Conversation during a meeting with Dr. Rennard Strickland in Norman, fall 2012.

[4] Kuttalyop – And the Renaissance of Indian Art, Lectures – Kiowa 5, n.d., Box 062, Folder 012, Silberman Collection, NCWHM, 10-1.

artworks and research materials pertaining to the Kiowa Six and Oklahoma Indian artists such as Fred Beaver, Acee Blue Eagle, Woody Crumbo, and Jerome Tiger.[5]

Arthur Silberman, born on 8 January 1929, in Antwerp, Belgium, immigrated with his family to the United States in 1941, settling in New York City. After moving to Oklahoma City, he established A & M Silberman Oil Company with his brother, Marcel, in 1955. In April 1960, Arthur married Shifra Kahn, born on 1 August 1932 to Barton and Ida Rosalie Kahn. Shortly after, the couple began to actively collect American Indian painting and to build an impressive and relevant collection of fine art.[6] In 1975, Arthur and Shifra founded the Native American Painting Reference Library, which operated out of their home at 8912 Sheringham Drive in Oklahoma City. The library research materials complemented the couple's art collection and today constitutes one of the most important body of work pertaining to American Indian art and culture. Arthur served as director while Shifra worked as the research consultant and assistant on projects pertaining to the business.[7] Throughout the 1970s and 1980s Arthur wore many hats, and the couple consistently worked to promote the appreciation of and facilitate projects relevant to American Indian art. Arthur gave public lectures, curated exhibits and facilitated projects for various Oklahoma and national museums, and served as a faculty member for the art department at Oklahoma City University from 1988 to 1994.[8] In 1981,

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[5] Stephen Grafe, *A Western Legacy: The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 64.

[6] Biography, Silberman Finding Aid, http://www.nationalcowboymuseum.org/research/cms/FindingAids/SILBERMAN/tabid/359/Default.aspx, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Vita, Arthur Silberman, 1994, Box 060, Folder 019, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Oklahoma City University recognized Arthur with the Distinguished Native American Arts Award, and both he and Shifra received the Governor's Special Recognition Award for their work in 1988.[9]

Within the body of American Indian art scholarship is a narrow scope of literature pertaining to the Native American Art Movement specifically in Oklahoma. The state retains a singular story of indigenous art and culture as is demonstrated in numerous museum collections throughout its cities and small towns. These institutions and their exhibits are pertinent to comprehending the development of Native American art and understanding the distinct connection between patronage and Oklahoma's art collecting heritage. What is often overlooked is the shared link between the creator, the collector and the general public. How have individual collectors, such as the Silbermans, positively shaped the meaning of American Indian art? It is the perspective of the Native artist that has too often been disregarded in the existing body of literature related to the twentieth-century Native American Art Movement—it is this point of view that is offered by the Silberman Collection.

In Chapter One, a review of literature is provided to establish a context for the position of the Silberman Collection within the existing body of literature. Chapter Two, "The Legacy of Arthur and Shifra Silberman: A Collection of American Indian Painting," gives a biographical sketch of the couple and outlines important elements of the collection, while Chapter Three delves further into Oklahoma's influential schools of Indian art—the Kiowa Six and Bacone School of Art—as represented by the collection. Chapter Four, "Voices and Visions: Oral Histories from the Silberman Collection,"

[9] Ibid.

utilizes a selection of interviews preserved by the collectors to illustrate the unique and intrinsic value of the Silbermans' work to the scholarship of American Indian painting. In conclusion, Chapter Five addresses an earlier generation of Oklahoma oil men as Native art collectors and places the Silberman Collection within the state's notable collecting heritage.

CHAPTER ONE

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Arthur and Shifra Silberman Native American Art Collection at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum offers an unparalleled supplement to the current historiography of American Indian art and its Oklahoma collectors through influential Traditional Native artworks accompanied by an extensive manuscript collection relating to the twentieth-century Native American Art Movement. As valuable private collections of Indian art, such as the Silbermans', make their way into national institutions of culture and history, the depth of knowledge pertaining to American Indian fine art and its relationship to American history and identity is exponentially increased. It is imperative that the documentation and exploration of such advancements continues. The Arthur and Shifra Silberman Native American Art Collection establishes an accurate foundation for Traditional American Indian painting through its primary Native American sources and research materials. The Silbermans' legacy continues to influence Oklahoma's art collecting and define its cultural heritage.

The existing literature on the topic of American Indian art in Oklahoma remains limited, and even more meager are writings based on the history of collecting within the state. With institutions such as the Philbrook Museum of Art, the Gilcrease Museum, The University of Oklahoma, and Bacone College that served as benefactors to the twentieth-century Native American Art Movement, extensive documentation should be available. Additional work needs to be done, but are the resources there? Despite the wanting for a more complete underpinning, certain academics have put this history to paper. Rennard Strickland, a specialist in Indian law, a historian, an art collector, and a prolific author,

has added extensively to the analysis and interpretation of Native art and its procurers in the state. Ruthe Blalock Jones is another contributing artist and scholar. As a Shawnee-Delaware-Peoria painter and the Director Emeritus of Art at Bacone College, Jones experienced first-hand the development of indigenous art in Oklahoma. Through her interaction within this artistic movement she is able to provide a rare primary feminine chronicle of American Indian art. Also pertinent are a select number of biographies recounting art collectors in the state, but are insufficient in communicating this legacy to the diverse history of Oklahoma. The best examples offered are *Thomas Gilcrease*, published by David Randolph Milsten in 1969, and another by the same title written by the staff of the Gilcrease Museum in 2009. Of the few varying interpretations on American Indian art in Oklahoma, it is Rennard Strickland who taps into the role of collecting in relation to the American Indian Art Movement. I admire and support Strickland's method of highlighting the heritage of collecting in Oklahoma and how it has enhanced the success of Indian art—telling a unique and vital history of the state. Another perspective I agree with is that of Native artist, Ruthe Blalock Jones. Her personal experience with the evolution of Indian art in the state, and particularly Bacone College, adds to our knowledge from not only a Native point of view, but gives an Indian woman's perception as well.

Whereas works on Native American art and collecting in Oklahoma are scarce, a broad spectrum of literature exists relating to the comprehensive topic of the twentieth-century American Indian Art Movement. With the emergence of modern Native American art in the first quarter of the 1900s, anthropologists set forth documenting their interpretations of indigenous crafts and served as patrons to enrich their ethnographic

discoveries and encourage the success of individual artists. From the dusty pueblos of the Southwest to the Oklahoma prairie, Indian art experienced a rapid transformation from primitive to modern. Enduring the Great Depression, America in the 1930s looked inward to gain its sense of identity. Nationalism took hold and American Indians found themselves symbols of what is truly American, promoted by non-Natives as a living, breathing culture rather than one faced with extinction. Most works published on Native art are primarily museum exhibition catalogues designed to facilitate an appreciation of the visual culture on display. A number of these publications offer interdisciplinary interpretations by more than one scholar. In 1931, Oliver LaFarge, an anthropologist and Native rights activist, and John Sloan, a well-known American artist, published *Indian Arts of the United States* to accompany the Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts in New York. Another pivotal exhibit and catalogue, *Indian Art of the United States*, published in 1941, distinguished Native art as aesthetic rather than ethnographic objects. Thus a new discourse on Native American art materialized.[10]

Critical reviews of American Indian art by trained art historians are a fairly young discipline. Not until the 1970s did this field of study emerge, capable of ascertaining the development of this complex artistic movement and offered a new narrative—the relationship between patron and artist. In 1971, J. J. Brody published a ground-breaking study, *Indian Painters and White Painters*, which changed the way scholars and purveyors discussed and observed Native American art.[11] In this decade and those

[10] Oliver LaFarge and John Sloan, *Introduction to American Indian Art*, 3rd ed. (Glorieta: The Rio Grande Press, Inc., 1979). Frederic Douglas and René d'Harnoncourt, *Indian Art of the United States* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1941).

[11] J. J. Brody, *Indian Painters & White Patrons* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971).

following, the relevance of social history produced works attempting to provide a Native perspective. Scholars began to utilize personal stories from the artists themselves to offer a new approach, one that recognized more than the typical Anglo interpretation. In recent years, art historians began employing "new art history," born from the revisionist movement of the 1970s, and combining Marxist, feminist, and psychoanalytic theories, which results in multiple histories. Publications by Jackson Rushing and Ruth Phillips are examples of this fresh approach to Indian art.[12] I agree with the argument of art historian Susan Croteau who is attuned to Brody's theory on the complexity of the artist-patron relationship, but recognized the duality of this connection, revealing Native incentives to develop culturally.[13] I also support the consensus among a number of art historians such as Bill Anthes, Janet Catherine Berlo, and Ruth Phillips who view Native modernists as maintaining a connection to their traditional sense of identity while engaging in and responding to contemporary society. In conceptualizing the advancement of indigenous art, one must recognize the complexity of the patron-artist relationship and that multiple histories and perspectives exist. Despite the manipulation of Native arts and crafts by colonial entities, American Indians have recognized the motivations to adapt and develop culturally despite intense polemics in the past.[14]

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[12] W. Jackson Rushing, "Marketing the Affinity of the Primitive and the Modern: René d'Harnoncourt and 'Indian Art of the United States,'" in *The Early Years of Native American Art History: the Politics of Scholarship and Collecting*, ed. Janet Catherine Berlo, 191-225 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992). Ruth B. Phillips, "Art History and the Native-made Object," in *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century*, ed. W. Jackson Rushing, 97-110 (New York: Rutledge, 1999).

[13] Susan Ann Croteau, '"But It Doesn't Look Indian:" Objects, Archetypes and Objectified Others in Native American Art, Culture and Identity" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2008).

[14] Bill Anthes, *Native Moderns: American Indian Painting, 1940-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). Janet Catherine Berlo, *The Early Years of Native American Art History: the Politics of Scholarship and Collecting* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992).

The issues of identity, expression, and patronage in the American Indian Art Movement are evident in collections across Oklahoma. The Arthur and Shifra Silberman Native American Art Collection and others of its kind allow a glimpse into the materialization of this movement through the twentieth century. Arthur said of Native painting that "Museum quality Indian paintings are a part of our National art treasures. Indian painting should be enjoyed for what it is—a reflection of an American culture and a magnificent art form."[15] The collector of Native American art curated the exhibit *100 Years of Native American Painting* in 1978 at the Oklahoma Museum of Art. This show encompassed the development of Indian art in the twentieth century and gave a visual account of its history. Commencing with Kiowa ledger art produced between the years of 1874 and 1878 by a group of Native Americans while imprisoned at Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida, this unpolished artistic style reflected the threatened Indian way of life. Detailed costumes, the hunt, feasts, funerals, and other cultural ceremonies demonstrated a sense of nostalgia and became an integral part of Native painting with the desire to hold on to an endangered culture.[16] This style put in motion a surge of interest in the value of indigenous artistic expression.

The Kiowa artistic style initiated by the prisoners of Fort Marion disseminated to the younger generation of tribesmen. Around 1916, in Anadarko, Oklahoma, Bureau of Indian Affairs field matron, Suzie Peters, discovered a group of young, artistic Kiowas who ushered in the next phase of Native American painting. Many of them decedents of

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[15] Arthur Silberman, "100 Years of Native American Painting," *Oklahoma Today* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1977-8), 5.

[16] Arthur Silberman, *100 Years of Painting. March 5 – April 16, 1978* (Oklahoma City: The Oklahoma Museum of Art, 1978), 15.

famous chiefs and medicine men and well versed in their ancestral traditions through oral histories from family members, the talented artists found themselves under the tutelage of Oscar Brousse Jacobson at the University of Oklahoma School of Art in 1927. With the guidance of Jacobson the Kiowa Six quickly achieved national and international acclaim.[17]

Shortly following this institutionalization of Native art in Oklahoma, The Studio in Santa Fe commenced, led by Dorothy Dunn. Important artists from this school included Pop Chalee, Harrison Begay, and Alan Houser. The pendulum of this artistic movement initiated the development of additional regional Native American schools of art such as the department at Bacone College in Muskogee, Oklahoma, in 1935. Acee Blue Eagle served as its first director, and the school produced a profusion of innovative artists—Woody Crumbo, Fred Beaver, and Ruthe Blalock Jones, just naming a few. Indian art moved away from promoting a longing for the past and began to exemplify the individuality of the artist and the relevance of modern Native culture. In 1962, the United States Congress chartered the Institute for American Indian Arts in Santa Fe and with its inception developed the concept of contemporary Native American art, launching yet another era in American Indian painting.[18] Through contemporary artistic style, artists utilized a vehicle by which they could further evolve and represent their own identity.

Meanwhile, the conduit of Native American art criticism gained momentum elsewhere. In 1931, the Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts in New York had introduced indigenous art as purely aesthetic and modern rather than kitschy or strictly ethnological.

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[17] Ibid., 16-17.

[18] Joy L. Gritton, *The Institute of American Indian Arts: Modernism and U.S. Indian Policy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 10.

To accompany this show Oliver LaFarge and John Sloan published *Introduction to American Indian Art* with a chapter written by poet, Alice Corbin Henderson. All three contributing authors spent their energies supporting the rights of Native Americans throughout the New Deal era and revisions to federal American Indian policy. In the essay, "Modern Indian Painting," Henderson wrote about the spirit of Indian art. She projected a nostalgic mood by illustrating Native art as an unspoiled vision and continuance of age-old traditions. She reiterated the underlying theme of the 1931 exhibit, which promoted this artistic expression as a living tradition, one relevant to the nation and intended for an important role in contemporary American society. This nationalistic approach continued to surface through the decades following World Wars I and II and did not experience much altercation until the dialogue of the seventies. A vast divide is felt between the Native artists, Henderson, and her non-Native community as she endearingly spoke of the artists' primitive point of view in regards to art and life perception. She differentiates these less complex Native American views from those of "our world."[19]

The nationalistic rhetoric exposed in LaFarge and Sloan's work continued with the pivotal catalogue *Indian Art of the United States*, published by Frederick Douglas and René d'Harnoncourt in 1941. This and a partner exhibit offered an early interpretation of the modern American Indian Art Movement. It anticipated the importance of watercolor and mural painting by Native Americans from Oklahoma and New Mexico as artistic trends transitioning away from functional value and initiating a new phase of American Indian art. The forward, penned by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, enlightened the reader

[19] Ibid., 105.

of non-Native aims to incorporate Indian heritage into the embodiment of American identity.[20] Douglas, Curator of Indian Art at the Denver Museum of Art from 1929-46, and d'Harnoncourt, general manager of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board and future director of the Museum of Modern Art, stressed the need to recognize the value of indigenous achievement, not due to sentimentality, but by true appreciation. The two key authors also supported the natural function for Native creativity to adapt and grow based on opportunity, strength, and identity. Indian artists used the assets of their tribal traditions to utilize the resources of the present and offered value central to building the future of America.[21] The contributions made to the museum profession by Douglas and d'Harnoncourt shaped the dialogue and interpretation of American Indian art through the mid-twentieth century.

Following the theories posed by Douglas and d'Harnoncourt, sentiments on the artistic movement remained static while Native artists continued to etch out their niche within American fine art. Not until 1971 did the status quo in indigenous art criticism take a dynamic shift. Art historian and anthropologist from the University of New Mexico, J. J. Brody, published *Indian Painters and White Patrons* with the argument that modern Indian painting did not emerge until the 1960s as a result of manipulation by Anglo patronage in previous years. Brody analyzed the diverging interpretations of modern Native American painting and the dynamics of the relationship between Indian artists and white patrons throughout history. "One such opinion is that American Indian

[20] Frederick Douglas and René d'Harnoncourt, *Indian Art of the United States* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1941), 8.

[21] Ibid., 9-10.

painting is a pure indigenous expression with little influence from white patrons, while another views Native art as a commercial art form produced by Indians for Whites, a sort of Indian version of the Negro minstrel show, played by Uncle Tomahawks."[22] Brody used museum collections throughout the United States, primarily Indian paintings from the Museum of Northern Arizona, to evaluate the social, historical, and formal components of Native art and answer the questions justifying these contradictory interpretations.

The conflicting beliefs regarding the artist-patron relationship in Native art, as enlightened by Brody, remains a fundamental debate in analyses of the American Indian Art Movement. A catalogue accompanying an art exhibit held at the Philbrook Museum of Art from 2 August to 6 September 1981, attempted to appraise this divide. In *Magic Images*, by Ed Wade and Rennard Strickland, classifications are made between the artistic expressions of "Historic Expressionism," "Traditionalist," "Modernist," and "Individualism." As emphasized since LaFarge's 1931 publication for the Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts, the term "alive" is used to describe Native American art. Wade and Strickland addressed the progression of Indian art and the contrasting themes of conventional and contemporary styles. They explained "the natural process of growth…a historic evolution consistent with the evolving world of the American Indian."[23] The scholars denied the ability to define a legitimate Native American artistic style due to the lack of interpretation of the divergent personal perceptions among various Indian tribes.

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[22] J. J. Brody, *Indian Painters and White Patrons* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971), xv.

[23] Edwin L. Wade and Rennard Strickland, *Magic Images: Contemporary Native American Art* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981), 5.

Wade and Strickland stated that "The future of American Indian art lies not in restrictive thematic or stylistic images but in the individual visions of artists attuned to native values and sensitivities."[24]

Resonating Wade and Strickland's credence that the future of American Indian art rested upon the values of the artists themselves is *When the Rainbow Touches Down*. In 1988, Tryntje Van Ness Seymour used Native artists as a source for an in-depth study of the Denman Collection located at the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona. As the great-great niece of Leslie Van Ness Denman, an important twentieth-century collector of American Indian art, the author discovered a curiosity for the stories behind the paintings her influential relative acquired. The book broke down the development of art in the Southwest and provided an uncharacteristic approach by contributing an intimate Native American context. Seymour indirectly refuted the theory offered in J. J. Brody's *Indian Painters and White Patrons* through her statement that "Although they were making paintings in response to a market demand, they were not just making pictures. They were recording the things they knew by heart, the things they cherished, the things by which they were inspired."[25] In this analysis, Seymour acknowledged the influence of the Anglo market on indigenous art, but emphasized the depth of Native content and individual expression in Indian art. She offered a more complex understanding of the artist-patron relationship and pointed out the superficiality of Brody's assessment. Seymour conducted eighty-eight interviews—fifty-two with the artists and other native people, thirty-six with

[24] Ibid., 6.

[25] Tryntje Van Ness Seymour, *When the Rainbow Touches Down* (Seattle: The University of Washington Press, 1988), 1.

non-Natives between 1980 and 1986. The author rendered a soft and insightful narrative of the correlation between artist and patron in twentieth-century Native American art.

Seymour's inclusion of a Native perspective into the study of American Indian art expanded as a prevalent model into the 1990s. However, the rhetoric associated with the majority of museum exhibitions remained much the same. *Shared Visions,* an exhibition catalogue published to accompany a show by the Heard Museum in 1991 and due in part to the generous contribution of Rennard Strickland's collection of Native American art, focused on individual painters and sculptors who shaped the Native American Art Movement and exemplified the changing world of the American Indian. Margaret Archuleta and Strickland wrote of Westward expansion, the "go getter" spirit of the United States after the Civil War, and federal law intended to wipe out Indian culture. They described indigenous art as the survival of the spirit, bucking against federal attempts to quash Native traditions. The historians noted influential patrons and events through the 1900s, such as the early New York exhibitions and the federal arts projects of the 1930s.[26] Archuleta and Strickland appeared in sync with fellow art historians who upheld Native artistic expression as the survival of tradition and an adaptation to the modern world. Remaining true to the foundational interpretations of the 1930s, this exhibit and catalogue featured Native American art as a living and modern expression of fine art and culture. *Shared Visions* argued for the rightful place of American Indian art within the history of Primitivism, Traditionalism, and Modernism and supported its

[26] Margaret Archuleta, Rennard Strickland, Jackson Rushing, and Joy L. Gritton. *Shared Visions: Native American Painters and Sculptors of the Twentieth Century* (Phoenix: Heard Museum, 1991), 5-11.

relevance in evolving American culture and modern society, exceeding mere historic and anthropological value.[27]

Museum exhibits and catalogues continued to project twentieth-century Indian art as alive—the survival of Native culture, adapting to modern society rather than being snuffed out. Breaking away from this discourse is an innovative art historian, Jackson Rushing. Focusing on the duality of Native-inspired modernist and indigenous primitivism in the United States, the author narrowed in on the "aestheticization" of Indian art and introduced new angles in the approach to modern artistic expression. *The Early Years of Native American Art History* is a historiographical group of essays analyzing early anthropologists, museum curators, dealers, and collectors who, from the late nineteenth century to 1941, sought to interpret and acquire objects of Native American art. A chapter written by Rushing, "Marketing the Affinity of the Primitive and the Modern: René d'Harnoncourt and 'Indian Art of the United States,'" addressed the aesthetic appropriation of American Indian art and expressed his belief that the "aestheticization" of Native visual culture, at a climax for the twenty-five years prior to 1941, was a separate event. The art historian claimed that the 1941 exhibit facilitated by d'Harnoncourt and supported by John Collier, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, and the New Deal initiative, was unquestionably the most popular exhibition of Native art in American history.[28]

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Jackson Rushing, "Marketing the Affinity of the Primitive and the Modern: René d'Harnoncourt and 'Indian Art of the United States,'" in *The Early Years of Native American Art History: the Politics of Scholarship and Collecting*, ed. Janet Catherine Berlo (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992), 191.

Rushing recognized that the pivotal New York exhibits, The Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts in 1931 and Indian Art of the United States in 1941, set forth artistic and intellectual waves in 1940s New York and enhanced his theory on the American Modernist Art Movement. In his 1995 publication, *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde*, Rushing culminated a cutting-edge study on the influence of Native American art on the American Modernist Art Movement in the mid-twentieth century. The author followed the interdisciplinary approach of the new art history, which utilized the interaction of Marxist, feminist, and psychoanalytic theories, to "Examine institutional policies and exhibition history, patronage patterns, and theoretical and critical texts…to be examples in themselves of modern nationalist appropriations of the cultural forms of Native America."[29] Rushing intended this work to "Show how such art (modern) and theory, as well as exhibitions, essentialized indigenous peoples as 'children of nature,' even as it ignored the racism and colonial violence of Euro-Americans—the 'adults of culture.'"[30] In this valuation, the art historian discussed how 1940s American modern art aestheticized Indian cultural elements, incorporating primitive aspects of Native artistic style into a national identity.

In the 1990s, scholars similar to Rushing continued to flesh out the complexity of Native American art while offering new dimensions, separating from the traditional discourse. Rennard Strickland again set a precedent with *Tonto's Revenge* in 1997. This series of published lectures is a consolidation of Strickland's thoughts on various topics

[29] Jackson Rushing, *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde: A History of Cultural Primitivism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), xi.

[30] Ibid., xii.

pertaining to American Indian culture and identity. His chapter, "Beyond the Ethnic Umbrella and the Blue Deer," addressed the evolution of Indian painting and sculpture and discussed the ongoing debate over artistic images. Strickland illuminated the variations of ethnicity in Native art from the nineteenth century to present day and asked how one can define what makes the art "Indian." He posed questions such as this from the perspective of a collector seeking knowledge and appreciation for Native American art. He also spelled out the controversies pertaining to iconography in Indian painting. For example, the little blue deer and the difficulties posed to Native artists for generations regarding its meaning. Strickland claimed that even in the most simplistic of Native paintings complexity remained. He promoted to the connoisseur the challenge and obligation to discover—as quoted by artist Oscar Howe—the "Power and strength and individualism [and] emotional and intellectual insight" in American Indian art.[31]

The analysis of the complexity of American Indian painting, as encouraged by Strickland, finally matured in late twentieth-century academic conversation. In 1999, Rushing's *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century* offered a much needed introduction to discussions relating to indigenous art in twentieth-century America and recognized the multiple perspectives and histories on the subject. In one of the essays, "Art History and the Native-made Object," Ruth Phillips addressed the radical transformations in current-day art history and the improving relationship between the disciplines of art history and anthropology. The art historian rejected an object-oriented history of fine art and recommended turning instead to the concept of visual culture, "Which allows us to discover and appreciate the linkage between contemporary Native

[31] Rennard Strickland, *Tonto's Revenge* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 75.

artists and earlier generations working in very different formats and media."[32] Phillips discussed the influence of the revisionist movement in the 1970s and subsequent development of new art history that applies poststructuralist modes of textual analysis to visual objects. She stated that "The general raising of consciousness about such issues promoted by new (and especially feminist) art history promised to encourage the more integrated and holistic study of the object demanded by Native American and many other art forms."[33]

A more comprehensive approach to the study of Native American art, as clarified by Phillips, is presently the new elocution on this multifaceted history of indigenous artistic expression. Elizabeth Newsome took a unique stance on analyzing Native American painting in her 2001 article "Reflexivity and Subjectivity in Early American Painting: a Critique of Perspectives on the Traditional Style." Newsome recognized the lack of scholarship offering a Native-centric perspective and clearly stated her objective to use "The paintings of the early Traditionalists as narrative sources that provide original insights into the perspectives of the artists and their engagement with concepts that belong within a culturally and artistically reflexive realm."[34] She believed that fellow art historian J. J. Brody unfortunately omitted first personal narratives from his central 1971 work. Newsome disagreed with Brody and derided him for his description of Traditional Native art stating, "Brody viewed Traditional painting, along with earlier experimental

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[32] Jackson Rushing, *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Rutledge, 1999), 78.

[33] Ruth B. Phillips, "Art History and the Native-made Object," in *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century*, ed. W. Jackson Rushing (New York: Rutledge, 1999), 99.

[34] Elizabeth Newsome, "Reflexivity and Subjectivity in Early American Painting: a Critique of Perspectives on the Traditional Style," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 25 (2001):107.

works on paper, as aberrations that reflect little more than Native American dependence on the manipulations and rewards of an external market."[35] Newsome believed we can move beyond the typical scholarly inquiries of how European stereotypes have affected American Indian art and focus on the impact of the medium itself and how it influenced Native thought.

Adding to this dimension of Native perception, Bill Anthes also considered Native thought and identity, but within the context of modern American Indian art and contemporary American society. He argued in *Native Moderns: American Indian Painting, 1940-1960* (2006) that Native American modernism remained pivotal to understanding American modernism in general. "Shifting notions of identity—citizenship, cultural property, and sovereignty—are fundamental to an understanding of American culture in the postwar period." He, as others before, explored the differences and ambiguity in the common descriptive terms "Native," "Traditional," "Primitivism," and "Modernism." Anthes agreed with the interpretations of art historians Janet Catherine Berlo and Ruth Phillips who claimed "Native modernists…desired to make artworks that would 'function as autonomous entities…experienced independently of community and ceremonial contexts.'"[36] The art historian maintained Native American modernism as "An expression of transformed consciousness," which "is unique to Native American artists in the twentieth century…Maintaining connections to traditional ideas about place

[35] Ibid., 110.

[36] Anthes, *Native Moderns*, xviii-xix.

and identity while also resolutely modern because it represents an engaged response to a changed world."[37]

Juxtaposed with continuing interpretations of modern Native American identity are a small number of historiographical studies on the Native American Art Movement. Janet Catherine Berlo's group of essays, *The Early Years of Native American Art History*, published in 1992, contributed to a digital history project initiated by the University of Cincinnati to make available the rare and pertinent C. Szwedzicki North American Indian Works Collection. The art historian wrote about the romantic views of Native American art in the first decades of the twentieth century and how the public perceived it as an un-tainted expression of indigenous identity. At the same time, the national art market began to fervently promote Indian art as truly modern and American. Berlo expounded upon the place of Native American art within the colonial revival of the 1920s and its embodiment of "Americanness." She agreed with J. J. Brody's interpretation of the 1920s as a decade of complex relationships between artists, intellectuals, and anthropologists with competing interests and a modernist art camp that often warred with the ethnological camp. Berlo neither supported nor dispelled Brody's controversial stance that Traditional Native painting is a deviation from what is truly Native American.[38]

J. J. Brody's *Indian Painters and White Patrons* stands strong among assessments of the Native American Art Movement. Even today, few scholars blatantly disagree, a number reverently do so, and some praise Brody's theory. A varying approach to his argument is taken in Susan Croteau's 2008 dissertation, '"But It Doesn't Look Indian:"

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[37] Ibid., xxi.

[38] Berlo, *The Early Years of Native American Art History*, 14.

Objects, Archetypes and Objectified Others in Native American Art, Culture and Identity." Croteau endorsed the significance of the relationship between Native American artists and Anglo patrons beginning in the 1930s to the present day and offered a co-dependent analysis that "Despite the contradictory motivations that cause people to work with and against each other, Native peoples and their non-Native others together have forged ideals for the retention of a culture that has remained vital even while engaged in fierce contention over what shape and direction the culture should take."[39] The art historian's argument is likened to that of Brody's, however, Croteau recognized the duality within the artist and patron connection and revealed the Native American incentives to develop culturally, which is typically muted by the negative assumptions of patronage and production prominent in literary discussions of Indian art as prompted by Brody.[40]

Where scholarship on the broad subject of American Indian painting is extensive and readily available, literature relating to the art movement specifically in Oklahoma wanes. Not until the 1970s do publications emerge and look at Native art as an Oklahoma story. Scholar and collector Arthur Silberman began this pro-active course with his 1973 publication, "Early Kiowa Art," in *Oklahoma Today*. This article addressed the emergence of Kiowa art in the first quarter of the twentieth century and depicted young Kiowa artists as heirs to a rich artistic tradition. Silberman noted the young artists as organically aware of ceremonial design through oral histories passed down from their

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[39] Croteau, '"But It Doesn't Look Indian:" Objects, Archetypes and Objectified Others in Native American Art, Culture and Identity," 4.

[40] Ibid., 5.

fathers, grandfathers, and tribal elders. He acknowledged non-Native individuals such as Suzie Peters and Oscar Jacobson for fostering the artists' creative talents and eventually leading to a number of local, national, and international exhibits, thus intensifying their acclaim. Silberman lauded the success of the Kiowa painters, marking the 1930s as the culmination of national interest in the group from the production of a number of works, primarily murals, patronized by the Works Progress Administration and New Deal initiative.[41]

Silberman continued his praise of the Kiowa artistic tradition in the 1978 catalogue and exhibit, *100 Years of Native American Painting*. In this work he relayed the shift in Indian painting from a strictly sacred and ceremonial tradition to one combined with individual creative expression. "By removing the art from an ethnological category and simply presenting it as Art," Silberman claimed, "a remarkable brilliant aspect of American culture is revealed."[42] Silberman offered a more specific point of view with his opinion that individuality in Native artistic expression began in the late nineteenth century with Kiowa ledger drawings. He illustrated his accord with the concept that modern Indian painting evolved, and perhaps even benefitted, from white patronage and seemed to dismiss the more cynical view introduced by Brody just a few years prior.

Silberman's support of American Indian art in Oklahoma influenced scholarship in the 1980s and encouraged his contemporary and friend, self-proclaimed Native American and journalist, Jamake Highwater. The increasing acceptance of social history throughout the 1970s and 1980s allowed for the recognition and even promotion of more

[41] Silberman, "Early Kiowa Art," 4-9.

[42] Silberman, *100 Years of Native American Painting*, 5.

diverse authorship on the subject. Highwater encompassed an indigenous view point and differentiated between Native American and Anglo perceptions of life and art. *Song from the Earth. American Indian Painting* offered a Native-centric argument that claimed indigenous painting as a facet of community ritual and a vital connection to nature, where the European style utilized art as a function of craftsmanship. Highwater focused on the "otherness" of Native Americans as depicted in Indian painting, but also respectfully included historical influencers and polemic views of the artistic movement. Highwater innovatively offered artists' biographies juxtaposed with personal interviews—a method that eventually became a common practice in publications and exhibits relating to American Indian art.[43]

Highwater again contributed to the base of literature on twentieth-century Kiowa Indian art with his 1979 introduction for the reprint of Oscar Jacobson's *Kiowa Indian Art* (1950). Highwater rejected any notions of objectivity in artistic expression and postulated that art was a way of seeing into the vision and culture of an artist. He stressed the unique way Native Americans view the world and that their distinct perspective is what makes Indian art vital to ones understanding of history. Highwater is nostalgic and almost Turnarian in his approach to American Indian art as a "rediscovery of America," but revealed that through Indian painting a new and different certainty is unearthed. He stated that "In Indian painting we find a different kind of 'truth' that makes the world far larger than we ever dreamed it might be—for the greatest distance between people is…culture. The paintings of…the famous 'Kiowa Five,' help us bridge the great chasm

[43] Jamake Highwater, *Song from the Earth. American Indian Painting* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976), 3-9.

that separates our 'separate realities.'"[44] This statement by Highwater reiterates the intent of the Silberman Collection through an encouragement of a Native American perspective to fully comprehend the complexity and relevance of American Indian art and a more authentic conceptualization of American identity and culture.

Highwater's theories diverge from the preceding theoretical debate introduced by Brody in the seventies. In *Indian Painters and White Patrons* Brody viewed the early twentieth-century Oklahoma painters in relation to Midwestern American Regionalism and believed patron Oscar Jacobson's artistic associations as the cause for this. He stated in an almost demeaning manor of the Kiowa Six art that "Although only a few Kiowas were trained at the University of Oklahoma in the short-lived segregated art classes for Indians, these painters had an influence far out of proportion to either their number or the quality of their work."[45]

Very few critics speak out directly against these expostulations but most, while acknowledging Brody's argument, express the survival of indigenous tradition and culture in the onset of modern Native American painting in the dawning years of the twentieth century. Despite the lack of scholarship on Indian art in Oklahoma penned in the seventies and eighties, what did exist laid the groundwork for refreshed scholarship in the 1990s and 2000s. Critical questions arose pertaining to Native identity as expressed in art, while maintaining the common debate over what is truly indigenous art. In 1995, Joan Frederick and fellow Traditional Native artists and historians received a fellowship

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[44] Jamake Highwater, "Rediscovering America Through Indian Art Part 1: The Kiowa Renaissance," in *Kiowa Indian Art: Watercolor Paintings in Color by the Indians of Oklahoma*, ed. Oscar Brousse Jacobson (Santa Fe: Bell Editions, Inc., 1979), 17.

[45] Ibid.,125.

from the National Endowment for the Humanities to produce an oral history of Native American painting in Oklahoma. Frederick's accompanying article relayed the essence of the oral history project and provided a Native-centric history of Traditional American Indian painting in the state. She wrote of endangered Traditional Indian art and that very few contemporary Native artists made reference to this foundation and heritage of indigenous expression. The author reminisced on the importance of Oklahoma in the development of Indian painting and is nostalgic in her recollections of the inspirations behind the Traditional style. Scolding contemporary Indian artists for forgetting the movement's innovators who now live in the spirit world, Frederick stressed the need to cling to and preserve the methodologies of the Traditional visual culture.[46] It is clear through her article and the project itself that the importance and utilization of Traditional Native art continued amongst the ongoing struggle of contemporary Indian artists seeking to create a new sense of self—a modern Native American identity.

Traditional Native American intellectualism as modeled by writers and artists such as Highwater and Frederick continued to infuse the narrative and stand as testimony to American Indians' unique participation in the twentieth-century art movement. Ruthe Blalock Jones, a Shawnee-Delaware-Peoria contemporary artist and the Director Emeritus of Art at Bacone College in Muskogee, Oklahoma, acknowledged the fundamental relationship between the art department at Bacone, the Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the progression of the Native American Art Movement. In 1996, Jones contributed to the publication *Visions and Voices* in collaboration with an exhibition at the Philbrook Museum of Art to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of

[46] Joan Frederick, "Traditional Painting in Oklahoma," *Native Peoples Magazine*, Summer 1995, 46-51.

the museum's renowned Indian Annual painting competition. This event was a national competition held at Philbrook from 1946 to 1979 and this particular catalogue provided the history of the competition and its influence on Native art in Oklahoma.[47] Jones communicated the history of the Bacone School of Art, seen in the 1930s as a progressive move in American Indian education, and praised the school's first art director, Creek-Pawnee artist, Acee Blue Eagle. She thanked Blue Eagle for opening the doors for Native artists through his talent and showmanship. She purported the 1940s to the 1960s as the "golden age of Indian art."[48] Jones endorsed the Bacone School of Art as strongly and positively connected to Philbrook and in the following statement revealed her stance on indigenous expression in Traditional and contemporary Indian art:

> The journey of Indian art is as ancient as the tribes themselves and, like the American Indian people, it continues. Whether through kinship or a philosophical relationship, there is a connection between the Bacone artists and the Philbrook Museum, as well as between them and the Kiowa artists of the Jacobson era at the University of Oklahoma and the Santa Fe Studio artists…It is important that they know about them and about Bacone's art community. It is a vital part of the past and the art which continues today.[49]

Jones eloquently relayed the strong connection between the various schools of Traditional Native American art and illustrated the vitality of Indian ancestral traditions as a necessity for understanding the past, present and future for Native communities. The Silberman Collection embodies this statement by Jones through its exhaustive research materials relating to all aspects of Traditional Native American art. The paintings

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[47] Lydia Wyckoff, *Visions and Voices: Native American Painting from the Philbrook Museum of Art* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 11-3.

[48] Ibid., 55.

[49] Ibid., 58.

acquired by the couple and now exhibited by the NCWHM visually reveal the adaptation of Native traditions binding the past to the present.

The Philbrook Annual played a specific and essential role in the development of American Indian art. Once again J. J. Brody's *Indian Painters and White Patrons* is called upon for its initiation of criticism over the competition's possible hindrance on Native individualism. Susan Croteau also analyzed the role of the Philbrook Native American art competitions in her 2008 dissertation and, in a more optimistic light, re-assessed the significance of the contest's role in defining Native American identity and art in Oklahoma. Croteau utilized changing historical and social contexts to demonstrate the positive contributions made by the Philbrook contests to American Indian painting.[50]

Patronage of Native American art by individuals and institutions such as the Philbrook Museum of Art subsidized the twentieth-century artistic movement in a special way. Although debated by critical scholars, patrons of Indian arts and crafts positively shaped the progress of American Indian fine art. Individual benefactors initiated collections of indigenous artistic and cultural expressions that are now housed in a number of national and international museums. The tradition of collecting in Oklahoma is robust, but scholarship pertaining to this particular history in the state is lacking. Those who ventured to document the heritage of collecting in America provided important insight into this facet of Indian painting and allowed a comparison of past, present, and future art collectors.

One of the first individuals to look at the practice of art collecting in the United States did so by giving a snapshot of varying personalities and neuroses behind

[50] Croteau, '"But It Doesn't Look Indian:" Objects, Archetypes and Objectified Others in Native American Art, Culture and Identity," 195-6.

collecting—what some call a "disease." In 1958, New York art editor and critic Aline Saarinen published *The Proud Possessors: The Lives, Times and Tastes of Some Adventurous American Art Collectors*, which brought together biographies of a select group of collectors and represented the progression of taste, connoisseurship, and collecting in art from the mid-nineteenth century to the author's present decade. Saarinen sought out these individual stories to determine the motives driving these men and women to procure fine art. She believed that each individual collection "illuminates his own necessities, means and pleasures, and, I believe, adds a fragment to truth."[51] Saarinen delivered insight into one of Oklahoma's best known philanthropists and collectors, Thomas Gilcrease. She used this successful oil man as a primary source to relay his incentives for gathering artifacts and visual compositions of the American Indian and Southwest. Gilcrease set out to develop the narrative of America and to stimulate others to ask the question "Why," despite the artistic merit of a piece. Saarinen appreciated Gilcrease's direct connection to the Native past through his one-sixteenth Creek ancestry. She noted his obvious pride and that he often disregarded misrepresentations claiming he was of a greater fraction of Indian.[52]

As one of the first to possess and exhibit Indian painting in the state, Gilcrease and his legacy remains a vital asset to Oklahoma. The importance and scope of his collection inspired a notable amount of study compared to the small number of treatises on collectors of fine art in the United States. Following Saarinen's biographic sketch is David Randolph Milsten's biography, *Thomas Gilcrease*, published in 1969. Through

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[51] Aline Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors* (New York: Random House, 1958), xxiv.

[52] Ibid., 307-25.

Milsten one is able to gain a very personal glimpse into the life of the celebrated oil man. The author gave an honest portrayal of the personality and life philosophy of a man who sought to "leave a track" and maintained the mission to acquire and promote the history of the American Indian and West. Milsten, a romanticist in his approach, echoed Turnarian ideals in his description of Gilcrease as a "pioneer of the West."[53] Whereas a flattering narrative of Gilcrease is fair, Milsten revealed the obsessive nature of a man who could not satisfy his curiosity and ambition for virtue, nobility, and the betterment of mankind.

More than forty years following Milsten's biography, The Gilcrease Museum published *Thomas Gilcrease*. In one of the ten essays, "Patron, Friend, and Collector," Carole Klein introduced the relationship between the oil man and the Native artists who represented his collection. In the mid-twentieth century, when the popularity of Indian artists such as Acee Blue Eagle, Woody Crumbo and Willard Stone intensified, Gilcrease helped propel artists' success by commissioning, exhibiting and inspiring indigenous creative expression. Klein used words from the artists themselves to guide a comprehension of Gilcrease's nature as a collector and his influence as a patron on Native American art nationally and in Oklahoma. Quotes by some of the most important American Indian artists of the twentieth century divulge more than the philanthropist's monetary support, but as stated by Acee Blue in a letter to the Gilcrease, "You have a spiritual quality about you that is carried over to people of a creative talent!"[54] Through

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[53] David Randolph Milsten, *Thomas Gilcrease* (San Antonio: Naylor Co., 1969), xxi.

[54] Carole Klein, "Paton, Friend, and Collector," in *Thomas Gilcrease*, ed. Carol Harelson (Tulsa: Gilcrease Museum, 2010), 101.

the production of these stories by Indian artists represented in the Gilcrease collection, a Native-centric story is told—an interpretation that must be an expectation in current day publications.[55]

Thomas Gilcrease set a standard for Native American art collecting in Oklahoma and his legacy stands as one of the most important of its kind. Other devotees of Indian art followed in his footsteps and found opportunity through acquiring works of art. Rennard Strickland, a collector from Oklahoma, provides some of the best analyses of the twentieth-century Native American Art Movement as it occurred in the state, issues of Native iconography and identity in art, and the heritage of collecting in the state. In 1994, Strickland published an exhibition catalogue titled *Sharing the Heritage: American Indian Art from Oklahoma* to accompany an exhibit at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art that showcased more than two hundred works of Native American art owned by ten Oklahoma collectors. This work offered an important angle in the way museums display Indian art and how the public understands it. While showing gratitude to the individual artists, the exhibit emphasized the collector and their personal relationship to the artist. Strickland stated, "This show is also a tribute to an Oklahoma private collector tradition which dates back even before statehood and which is reflected in the magnificent private Indian art collections which have now become a part of the state's heritage through display in public museums."[56] As a Native American and collector, Strickland offered an appreciation of the artist-collector relationship in addition to providing a foundation for

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[55] Ibid.

[56] Rennard Strickland, *Sharing the Heritage: American Indian Art from Oklahoma* (Norman: Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, 1994), 6.

understanding the role of the Silberman Collection at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum alongside fellow institutions in the circle of fine art collecting in Oklahoma.

The beneficial influence of collectors on American museums also enabled the success of individual Indian artists throughout the twentieth century and drove the Native American Art Movement. Tryntje Van Ness Seymour illustrated the effects of collecting in Native art, particularly its role in Oklahoma, in *When the Rainbow Touches Down* (1988). As the great-great niece of Leslie Van Ness Denman, one of the earliest collectors of American Indian art in the Southwest, Seymour described the intensity and motivation behind Mrs. Denman's collecting, her championing for the Indian people, and progression of Native art. The author provided insight into what drives a collector and the gravity of such a role in indigenous art. As written by Suzie Peters, BIA field matron and sponsor of the Kiowa Six, to Denman:

> Mrs. Denman you have been here, you have a vision of the real Indian, his every day life and his crushed spirit. You are doing and have done so much for them. You did it every time when we brought the remaining glory of them to Gallup. We all know and appreciate this…We can never express to you how we appreciate what you have done. Your purchases of their work has lent an encouragement that cannot be estimated in money; it has kept alive the fine things they can accomplish.…The Indians keep asking if Mrs. Denman is to help them start on this new backward trail. I always tell them you are helping all you can.[57]

Peter's gratitude towards Denman reflects the positive aspects of Anglo patronage on Native art and how collecting promotes and motivates the success of individual artists and aesthetic styles.

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[57] Seymour, *When the Rainbow Touches Down*, 337.

Founding collectors of American Indian art such as Denman continue to receive attention for their activism in Native artistic expression. Best-selling author and historian, Michael Wallis, scripted biographies pertaining to two of Oklahoma's most illustrious oil men and art collectors. In *Beyond the Hills: The Journey of Waite Phillips*, Wallis relayed the grand scope of Waite Phillips' life using recollections from the oil tycoon's son, Elliott Phillips, and Waite Phillips' personal diary. Asked to write this biography by the Oklahoma Heritage Association as part of its 1995 Oklahoma Trackmaker Series, the author provided a straight-forward and sanitized narrative that focused more on business activities rather than the motivations or philosophies behind amassing an important assemblage of Indian art. Although Wallis omitted the intricacies of Waite and Genevieve Phillips as procurers of fine art—possibly due to a lack of availability—he eluded to crucial elements in his discussion of the Phillips' endowment of Villa Philbrook to the city of Tulsa. The historian offered a nip with the most remembered words of Waite Phillips: "The only things we keep permanently are those we give away."[58]

The same year Wallis released his vivid biography of Waite Phillips, the author published *Oil Man: The Story of Frank Phillips and the Birth of Phillips Petroleum*. This work delved into the life and times of Waite's older brother, Frank Phillips—a successful oil man and founder of Oklahoma's Phillips Petroleum Corporation. Wallis revealed intimate stories of Frank Phillips and promoted this wildcatter as the embodiment of the American pioneering spirit. The forward, written by Phillip's grandson, John Gibson Phillips, Jr., fortified this image. John Jr. described his grandfather as a giant in oil and

[58] Michael Wallis, *Beyond the Hills: The Journey of Waite Phillips* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Heritage Association, 1995), 284.

industry, who looked to the future and took full opportunity of the free-enterprise system during a period of popular and romantic perceptions of the early twentieth-century oil boom.[59] Frank Phillips—harsh yet sentimental, a rugged individualist, an indomitable pioneer spirit—Frederick Jackson Turner himself could not have selected a more promising muse. As in the previous Phillips biography by Wallis, the author left a gap in the collector's motives to gather Native American art, but more significantly and perhaps enlightening, the historian conveyed the oil man's love for the American frontier, his impetus for clinging to the romantic image of the West, and the intention for Woolaroc, his Osage ranch, as a mechanism of preservation.

Documentation of the histories of Frank and Waite Phillips and Thomas Gilcrease express Oklahoma's gratitude for the collectors' generous legacy of knowledge and culture to the state. A generation after these great oil men and collectors came Arthur and Shifra Silberman, who established a diverse collection of American Indian art, which following their deaths, they donated to the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Two years following his publication for the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, *Sharing the Heritage*, Rennard Strickland wrote "The Silberman Collection: A Legacy of Love and Understanding," for *Persimmon Hill*, a magazine produced by the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. This article offered a testament to the validity and significance of Arthur and Shifra Silberman as collectors of Indian art and purveyors of Native American culture and tradition. Strickland claimed the Arthur and Shifra Silberman Native American Painting Collection as "a rich testimonial to the universal

[59] Michael Wallis, *Oil Man: The Story of Frank Phillips and the Birth of Phillips Petroleum* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1995), xi.

need and power to create an art that speaks to survival of the human spirit."[60] The article endorsed the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum with its acquisition of the collection as joining the ranks of the Heard Museum, Philbrook Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma, Gilcrease Museum, and the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian as a world class center of Native American paintings, drawings, and graphics. Although the motivations or methods of collecting for the Silbermans do not appear in this promotional work for the museum, Strickland revealed how collectors and their legacy can profoundly alter the reputation and purpose of a museum.

The Silberman Collection helped to establish the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum as an internationally renowned institution dedicated to the American Indian and West. In 2005, art historian Stephen Grafe published a history and review of collections for the museum and praised the Silbermans' contribution to the nationally acclaimed institution. Serving as the curator of Indian art at the museum while writing this book, Grafe offered a brief summation of Arthur and Shifra Silberman and their activities as collectors and proponents of Native American painting. Succeeding a biographical sketch, he demonstrated the development of indigenous painting through the twentieth century as represented by the Silberman collection. This common format used to define this progression of artistic expression combined with a thin summation of scholarly contributions by Arthur Silberman leaves a broad fissure in understanding the impact of this collection on the museum community and the history of collecting in Oklahoma. Grafe quoted Rennard Strickland's 1996 *Persimmon Hill* article, providing Strickland's attitude towards the collection's value to the institution. Grafe then set forth

[60] Rennard Strickland, "The Silberman Collection: A Legacy of Love and Understanding," *Persimmon Hill* 24 (Winter 1996), 32.

his personal estimation including the highlights of the Silbermans' legacy as "The more than ninety ledger art-style works done by Fort Marion artists during their 1875-1878 imprisonment" and that "Significant collections of mid-twentieth-century Oklahoma Indian artists include works by Fred Beaver, Acee Blue Eagle, Woody Crumbo, and Jerome Tiger."[61]

Following the formative years of the twentieth-century Native American Art Movement, scholarly interpretations attempted to address its significance to American and Native identity. Beginning in New York in 1931, exhibits acknowledged the transition of Indian art from an object of function to one of purely aesthetic value. For several decades indigenous art served as a nationalist mascot for the true American spirit—a living culture rather than one facing extinction. Not until 1971 with J. J. Brody's *American Painters and White Patrons* did trained art historians produce studies offering new approaches to the customary dialogue. Brody required the understanding of the complex relationship between Native artists and Anglo patrons and changed the way scholars assessed American Indian art. With this shift in analysis, publications began to incorporate a Native perspective through documented Indian experiences and even the emergence of a small number of Native American authors. In recent years, art historians began utilizing "new art history," which takes an interdisciplinary and holistic approach resulting in multiple histories.

Whereas an abundance of literature exists on the broad topic of American Indian art, works focused on this discipline in Oklahoma are lacking, and even more so are

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[61] Stephen Grafe, *A Western Legacy: The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 64.

interpretations of the tradition of fine art collecting. Important work offered by Rennard Strickland highlights the valuable role of collecting on the progress of Indian art in the state and will be used in my analysis of the Silbermans as procurers of Indian art. Another theory I will translate into my work on the Silberman Collection is that posed by art historian Susan Croteau. She addressed the duality of the Native artist and white patron relationship and stood by the idea that indigenous artists found incentives in developing culturally with sponsorship from the Anglo market. This study examines the Arthur and Shifra Silberman Native American Art Collection at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum within the larger field of American Indian art and Oklahoma collectors. The Silberman Collection contains an unrivaled body of research materials, including rare oral history interviews, pertaining to Traditional Native American art and provides a unique interpretation of this twentieth-century art movement. The legacy of Arthur and Shifra Silberman is not only this exceptional manuscript collection, but also a breathtaking and thorough treasure trove of American Indian painting.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LEGACY OF ARTHUR AND SHIFRA SILBERMAN: A COLLECTION OF AMERICAN INDIAN PAINTING

In the late 1970s, Arthur Silberman, American Indian art collector and expert wrote, "Museum quality Indian paintings are a part of our National art treasures. Indian painting should be enjoyed for what it is—a reflection of an American culture and a magnificent art form."[1] In this quote, Silberman expressed his support for Indian art as a credible art form and authentic representation of American history and culture. He encouraged a simple appreciation of the beauty and relevance of Native art. The work of Arthur and Shifra Silberman sought to authenticate this testimonial and relay a complete understanding of American Indian art. The collectors' intensity for collecting and studying Indian art enabled a flood of knowledge on the subject and influenced the world of art including the scope of the collections at the NCWHM. The museum's primary acquisition of the Arthur and Shifra Silberman Native American Art Collection in 1996 changed the future of the institution, bringing to the museum community a one of a kind, retrospective body of Indian painting, and placed the Silbermans among the most recognized contributors to Oklahoma's heritage of American Indian art collecting.

The Silberman Collection at the NCWHM contains an impressive number of American Indian paintings, primarily by Traditional artists and is accompanied by an unrivaled body of supporting research materials. The painting collection includes works on paper numbering more than 2,300 by nearly 200 Native American artists, two-thirds

[1] Arthur Silberman, "100 Hundred Years of Native American Painting," *Oklahoma Today* 28, no.1 (Winter 1977-8), 5.

of whom are Oklahoma Indian artists and one-fifth are Navajo and Pueblo. Over 500 works are paintings, over 1,300 are drawings and sketches, and approximately 300 are prints. The accompanying collection of archival materials consume approximately 173 document boxes in addition to row upon row of cassette and video tapes, many of which are critical, original oral history interviews with Traditional Native American artists.[2]

The biographical information for Arthur and Shifra Silberman is incomplete, but the existing knowledge gives clues to their motivations for collecting Native American art. Combining what is known of their lives with the biographical documents preserved in the Silberman manuscript collection at the Dickinson Research Center in the NCWHM allows for a more complete understanding of their legacy to Oklahoma collecting. Museums often do not relay to the public how and why a collection on exhibit came to be—the individuals who acquired and grouped the objects, which adds further value and meaning. An exhibit often only illustrates the simple interpretation of the object on display and provides a brief biography of its creator. All too often unrecognized is the pertinence of the relationship between the creator, the collector and the public, thus offering an even deeper conceptualization of the materials. Collections in museums and public institutions around the world have a personal connection not only to the public, but to those who sought them out and possessed them, revealing a collector's expression of emotion and something of a self-portrait.

In *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America*, Leah Dilworth provides a sense of the link between a collector and their collection. "Individuals make collections for all

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[2] Silberman Finding Aid, http://www.nationalcowboymuseum.org/research/cms/FindingAids/SILBERMAN/tabid/359/Default.aspx, Silberman Collection, NCWHM. Personal assessment of Silberman archival materials.

kinds of reasons," Dilworth argues, "but they are often didactic; by material examples, collections instruct us about the nature of the world. In addition, the idea of loss, or nostalgia, inhabits many of the collections....often representing lost worlds or worlds distant in time and signification—for example, childhood, the past, nature."[3] Dilworth's theory brings a realization to the meaning placed on objects when they are collected and possessed by an individual. As with the Silberman Collection, Arthur and Shifra created a deeper connection to the paintings and research materials they accumulated by shaping the collection to their personal tastes and sensitivities towards Native American culture and history.

A sketch of Arthur and Shifra's past lives and accomplishments gives an underpinning for the Silberman Collection and encourages further understanding of how and why the collection came to be. Born in Antwerp, Belgium, on 8 January 1929, Arthur experienced a war-torn country from which, fortunately, his family had the means to flee in 1941. The seemingly wealthy family settled in New York City where Arthur's father established a successful diamond business. The young Jewish boy from Europe attended City College of New York from September 1946 to September 1949, receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree in History and Economics. He also attended the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York City from 1946 to 1949 and completed his Bachelor of Arts in Hebrew Letters.[4]

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[3] Leah Dilworth, *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 6-7.

[4] Biographical, 1942-94, College of Liberal Studies, University of Oklahoma, Box 132, Folder 005, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Although Arthur planned to follow in his father's footsteps and pursue a career in the family diamond business, a vacation to Oklahoma in 1949 altered his plotted path. The true reason for his interest in the state remains unknown, but it is likely Oklahoma's history of independent and entrepreneurial mindset and the romance and promise of black gold prompted Arthur to settle in Oklahoma City. Rather than remaining with his family in New York, Arthur established an independent oil business and asked his younger brother, Marcel, to join him. Together they began A & M Silberman Oil Company in 1955, which remains in operation today under the direction of Ms. Marcel Silberman.[5] Much like Oklahoma's oil pioneers who discovered wealth on the cusp of the twentieth century, Arthur's good fortune appeared the result of his innovative spirit. At the age of twenty-three, he was considered one of the youngest oil operators in the state.[6] The Silberman brothers continued to build their business, all the while maintaining close ties to their family in New York. Arthur, in particular, kept frequent correspondence with his mother throughout her later years regarding matters pertaining to the day-to-day operations of A & M Silberman Oil.

The brief biographical information on Arthur is beneficial to an understanding of his character, but severely lacking are facts pertaining to the life of his wife, Shifra, who was born on 1 August 1932 to Barton and Ida Rosalie Kahn. Her father came to the United States from Nes Ziona, Israel, and her mother from Stephen, Russia. Shifra's parents settled in Oklahoma City and attended Emanuel Synagogue, which began serving

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[5] Stephen Grafe, *A Western Legacy: The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 63.

[6] Biographical, 1942-94, Box 061, Folder 002, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

the city's Jewish community in 1890 and is now located on 42nd Street in Oklahoma City. Shifra had a brother, Zev, and sister, Joy, and completed her Bachelor of Arts from the University of Chicago followed by a Master of Arts in Guidance and Counseling from the University of Oklahoma.[7] The circumstances surrounding Shifra's primary education or upbringing are unknown. On 10 April 1960, Arthur and Shifra married in Oklahoma City and had two children, Ami Abraham and Gil Gabriel. The family of four remained active members of Emanuel Synagogue, along with Shifra's parents. Shifra passed away five years before Arthur on 29 July 1990. She worked alongside her husband, devoting her time to collecting and preserving Native American art and aspiring to increase its recognition as American fine art. Shirfa maintained the couple's Native American Painting Reference Library, keeping meticulous order and documentation of the materials. She also conducted extensive research, kept a catalogue of museum archives, libraries and American Indian collections throughout the country and organized the records of their personal collection. Shifra participated with Arthur in nearly every aspect of building the collection, and there is no doubt they labored as equals to promote the importance of American Indian art to the country.[8]

Beginning in the 1960s, the couple began actively to collect American Indian painting and to build an impressive and relevant collection of fine art.[9] They did not

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[7] Biography, Silberman Finding Aid, http://www.nationalcowboymuseum.org/research/cms/FindingAids/SILBERMAN/tabid/359/Default.aspx, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[8] General assessment of various archival research materials, Series 12: Archives, 1901-1989, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[9] Biography, Silberman Finding Aid, http://www.nationalcowboymuseum.org/research/cms/FindingAids/SILBERMAN/tabid/359/Default.aspx, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

collect as an investment, although this plays a part in almost any collection, but followed what interested them—two dimensional works on paper and canvas. Arthur proved intensely interested in Native American culture and philosophy through his frequent attendance at public powwows.[10] When the couple's sons Ami and Gabriel were teenagers, their father decided to pursue a Master of Arts degree in Liberal Studies at the University of Oklahoma. As indicated on his application to graduate school, Arthur wanted the satisfaction of having a graduate degree and an increased appreciation for Native art. In his words, "I felt it would enhance my ability to view my field from an appropriate humanistic perspective."[11] During his time in the graduate college at the University of Oklahoma, Arthur described in one of his graduate essays, "The Aims of Education: Alfred North Whitehead," how he came to pursue his curiosity in American Indian art. In this paper, he relayed crucial information that provides scholars and the general public with a more complete understanding of the Silberman Collection. Arthur described his collecting as a process in which he let his interests lead him to the excitement of discovering a wealth of what he recognized to be good art. He tells how he began to seek information by vigorously searching the libraries and museums of Oklahoma and New Mexico and attended as many Indian art exhibits as possible.[12] This is evident in the numerous collection catalogs, research notes, contacts, and indices of museums and scholarly institutions across the country.

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[10] Joyce M. Szabo, *The Art from Fort Marion: The Silberman Collection* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 3-4.

[11] Application for Admissions, College of Liberal Studies, University of Oklahoma, Box 132, Folder 005, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[12] The Aims of Education: Alfred North Whitehead, College of Liberal Studies, University of Oklahoma, Box 132, Folder 005, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

In 1975, Arthur and Shifra founded the Native American Painting Reference Library, which operated out of their home at 8912 Sheringham Drive in Oklahoma City. The library research materials complemented the couple's growing art collection and today constitutes perhaps the most important body of work pertaining to American Indian art and culture. The painting research library serves as confirmation of Arthur and Shifra's intent to promote the value of Native contributions to fine art. Arthur served as director while Shifra worked as the research consultant and assistant on projects pertaining to the business. In a 1996 *Persimmon Hill* article, Rennard Strickland commented, "Shifra was equally passionate and thoughtful as she carefully recorded and indexed the variations in the anatomical drawings and preliminary sketches in an artist's archive."[13] Together the Silbermans' goal was to increase the appreciation of Native American painting by making reference materials available to educators, writers, publishers, and other institutions. They also wanted to increase public awareness through lectures, publications, and exhibits.[14] A 1994 brochure for the Native American Painting Reference Library indicated, "It is a privately funded institution committed to the premise that Native American painting is a valuable part of the American cultural heritage and as such deserving of a continuing effort to collect and preserve all material having a bearing on its history and development."[15] The Silbermans claimed that the library "Contained archival collections putting Indian Art in an art historical context free from the

[13] Rennard Strickland, "The Silberman Collection. A Legacy of Love and Understanding," *Persimmon Hill* 24, no. 4 (Winter 1996), 29.

[14] Stephen Grafe, *A Western Legacy*, 63.

[15] Biography – Vita, Native American Painting Reference Library Publication, 30 November 1993, Box 060, Folder 019, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

patronizing white ethnocentric perceptions and expectations."[16] This statement regarding the nature of the reference library reveals the intent of the couple to provide a thorough and accurate Native perspective rather than the typical Anglo interpretation of American Indian art and indigenous culture. The Silbermans believed that the present accounts provided only a superficial representation of the art movement.[17] This educational function of the library and the couple's active public promotion of Native American art in the community is a unique facet in the American tradition of art collecting. Although art collectors of previous generations, or perhaps even those contemporary to the Silbermans, may have kept personal research libraries, none have surfaced to rival the Native American Painting Reference Library in content as a corresponding collection to original artwork.[18] The Silbermans seemed "pure" collectors with an incentive to preserve, share and encourage unbiased scholarship rather than acquire art to possess and remain competitive in the market of Native fine art. The library, now held by the NCWHM, contains a wealth of books, catalogues, brochures, auction records and, in particular, oral history interviews that continue to play an integral role in community, state, and national projects designed to increase the appreciation of Indian painting. The Silbermans not only acquired an important body of art and research materials, but went beyond the scope of most collectors through their proactive mission to educate the public

[16] Publication for the Native American Painting Reference Library, Box 060, Folder 020, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[17] The Early Kiowa School of Painting, Lectures - Kiowa 5, n.d., 1, Box 062, Folder 019, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[18] This is a personal assessment based on a superficial analysis of Oklahoma museums exhibiting American Indian art such as the Woolaroc Museum and Wildlife Preserve, the Gilcrease Museum of Art and the Philbrook Museum of Art, discussions with their research library staff and a discussion with the curator of art at the NCWHM.

on American Indian culture. The reference library operated as a business, but unfortunately, few financial records are available to reveal the profitability of specific projects. In 1978, for example, the Oklahoma Department of Libraries made a request to the couple for a presentation suitable for elementary students to use in Oklahoma's public libraries. Arthur and Shifra created "Animals in Indian Art," a slide show presentation that could be rented and used by libraries as well as by public schools.[19]

In addition to receiving funds from rentals such as the "Animals in Indian Art" presentation, the privately run institution earned the majority of its income through event ticket sales and contract fees. Costs for the research library generally included artist fees, production costs, and travel. A 1989 document pertaining to the reference library operations reflected earnings of approximately $4,200 and expenditures close to the same amount. It reflects that the institution did not receive any donations, grants or agency support that year. In 1990, Arthur applied for a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to receive funding for travel and research. There are also grant applications pertaining to various Native art exhibitions and seminars[20] Arthur and Shifra not only wanted to acquire the best examples of Native American art, but invested in sharing their treasures for the betterment of the public and the Native community by revealing an accurate American Indian perspective. The library served as a vital resource by supplying materials and expertise to various institutions and individuals across the nation such as the Museum of the American Indian in New York City, Smithsonian Institution Press in

[19] Native American Painting Reference Library, 1973-1991, Vitae, Box 060, Folder 020, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[20] Ibid.

Washington, D.C., the Jacobson House in Norman, and the Pensacola Museum of Art in Pensacola, Florida.[21] The Silberman manuscript collection in the Dickinson Research Center at the NCWHM contains numerous items of correspondence sharing the couple's expertise with the public. Institutions and individuals such as the Oklahoma Historical Society, Sotheby's in New York, Texas attorney and collector, James Bialac, and author of *When the Rainbow Touches Down*, Tryntje Van Ness Seymour, traded thoughts with Arthur.[22]

The Silbermans also encouraged the relevance and availability of their collection through Arthur's capacity as a spokesman on behalf of Native American art and his facilitation of various public projects. He frequently presented to groups regarding the aspects of Indian painting and offered his expertise on indigenous art. One of his preferred subjects addressed Kiowa ledger drawings created by Southern Plains men incarcerated at Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida, from 1875-1878. Other lectures included "Animals in Indian Art," "Southwest Indian Paintings," and "Rock Art." In the research materials for his lectures he reveals copious study and references and his curiosity for all aspects of Native culture. Arthur also contributed to the preparation of school textbooks by authoring the text and illustrations for the Title III ESEA program for Carnegie Public Schools in 1972. Titled "A Descriptive Guide to the Photographic Slides Prepared for the Indian History Project of Carnegie Public Schools," the project

[21] Native American Painting Reference Library Publication, Vitae, 30 November 1993, Box 060, Folder 019, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[22] Correspondence, Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1982-1993, Box 042, Folder 019, Silberman Collection, NCWHM. Correspondence, Bialac, James, 1971-1977, Box 014, Folder 011, Silberman Collection, NCWHM. Correspondence with author Tryntje Van Ness Seymour regarding the Denman Collection, Denman Collection, 1967-1988, Box 018, Folder 021, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

contributed a wealth of photographic slides and research materials encompassing subjects of American Indian culture such as “Southwest,” “Bison on Plains,” “Caddoan Archaeology,” “Reservation Schools,” and “Plains Art.”[23] An additional state textbook project included the *Oklahoma Indian American School Guide* for the University of Oklahoma in 1979.[24]

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s Silberman wore many hats and consistently worked to promote the appreciation of and facilitate projects relevant to American Indian art. The collector curated numerous exhibits including “From Pictographs to Jerome Tiger” from 1972-1973. One of his most recognized projects took place in 1978 when he provided his knowledge as guest curator for “100 Years of Native American Painting” at the Oklahoma City Museum of Art.[25] In 1981, he consulted for a catalog project for to the Museum of the American Indian in New York City and in 1984, assisted the Philbrook Museum of Art on an exhibition and publication project. In addition to acting as director of the Native American Painting Reference Library, Arthur served as a faculty member in the Art Department at Oklahoma City University from 1988 to 1994, guest curator at the University of Oklahoma Museum of Art on more than one occasion, and project director from 1992 to 1993 for the exhibit “Beyond the Prison Gate” at the NCWHM. He also served on the advisory board for the Jacobson House Foundation in Norman, from 1987

[23] Carnegie Public Schools, "A Descriptive Guide to Photographic Slides Prepared for Indian History Project of Carnegie Public Schools, 1971, Proposals and Guides, 1971-80, Box 123, Folder 005, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[24] Native American Painting Reference Library Publication, Vitae, Box 060, Folder 019, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[25] Grafe, *A Western Legacy*, 63.

until his death in 1995.[26] Another exhibit he gave extensive time and resources to was "Butterflies…Butterflies…Butterflies" for the Red Earth Cultural Center in 1994. In 1993 and 1994, the Indian art enthusiast curated the touring exhibit "Beyond the Prison Gates: The Fort Marion Experience and Its Artistic Legacy." This program premiered at the NCWHM in March 1993.[27]

Arthur and Shifra became nationally recognized for their contributions to the preservation and promotion of American Indian art and culture and an awareness of the value of their collection came to fruition. Arthur is listed in *Who's Who in American Art, Who's Who in the South and Southwest, Who's Who in the Humanities*, and the *International Biographical Dictionary.* In 1981, Oklahoma City University recognized him with the Distinguished Native American Arts Award and both Arthur and Shifra received the Governor's Special Recognition Award in 1988 (figure II.1).[28] Following Shifra's death in 1990, Arthur continued to carry their charge pursuing possible acquisitions and the future security and care of their collection. As early as the 1980s, the NCWHM formed a relationship with the Silbermans and began discussing the dispensation of their estate. In 1984, the couple gave some sketches and other artworks to the museum. Prior to his death on the morning of 6 January 1995, Arthur signed an agreement allowing the NCWHM to purchase the holdings of the Native American Painting Reference Library. The archives and artworks were acquired in several sections, a large portion was given as a gift from the Arthur Silberman Trust in 1996, and another

[26] Vita, Arthur Silberman, 1994, Box 060, Folder 019, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[27] Grafe, *A Western Legacy*, 64.

[28] Vita, Arthur Silberman, 1994, Box 060, Folder 019, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

large group was acquired as a purchase the same year from the Arthur Silberman Trust. In 1997, a smaller portion of materials were purchased from the Shifra Silberman Trust. Today all of these individual collections have been combined as the Arthur and Shifra Silberman Native American Art Collection.[29] The Silberman Collection is supported by several small donations and the institution draws from the fundamental paintings to illustrate to the public various stories significant to American Indian art, culture, and history. The Silberman Collection encompasses a number of outstanding pieces that reflect the refined and informed artistic tastes of Arthur and Shifra.[30]

The Silbermans mapped out a deliberate collecting plan to guide their acquisitions and it is their adherence to this strategy that resulted in a valued collection to the NCWHM and the community. Through Arthur and Shifra's outline, an understanding of their methods and interests in accumulating Indian art can be ascertained. In an undated interview, Arthur offered advice on how to acquire a collection in Native American art:

> To begin a collection or to purchase Native American art, one needs to be thoroughly acquainted with the history and development of the art. It is necessary to read exhibition catalogues and major books on the subject. You must have a strategy and a plan. This is important in the event you would ever want to sell your collection. One must attend exhibits and go to as many galleries. Collecting is a mind-set. Not decorating with a few pieces. It is an attitude. What differentiates a collector from a casual buyer of paintings is an open-ended commitment to be open and keep acquiring. Go to several dealers before buying and look over the stock and make notes. Indian paintings are distinctive because its ideological content reflects an Indian world view. Indian painting is generally an artistic expression using a universal vocabulary of art. I do not believe it is

[29] Acquisition File, Silberman Collection, NCWHM. Email from Anne Morand, Curator of Art at NCWHM, 1 March 2013.

[30] Silberman Finding Aid, http://www.nationalcowboymuseum.org/research/cms/FindingAids/SILBERMAN/tabid/359/Default.aspx Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

> possible to have a good collection of Indian art without having good taste in general art.[31]

As he recommended in the model, Arthur ardently scoured auction catalogues, galleries and collections of Native American art throughout the United States and kept apprised on the location of important pieces.[32] Also witnessed in this collecting plan is his support of Indian art as a credible expression of American art and Arthur's commitment to the dynamics of building an exceptional painting collection.

The Silbermans' collecting plan reflects their standards as collectors and are also exemplified in the archival documents in the care of the Dickinson Research Center. The collection contains numerous books, articles, exhibit catalogues, and auction records and receipts from companies such as Sotheby's and Christie's in New York, and Skinner, Inc. in Boston, which also reveals the provenance of large portions of the collection. A gallery the couple used frequently and with whom Arthur maintained extensive correspondence—often to confirm or reject the authenticity of Native paintings for sale—is Henry Bernard Balink – Fine Art in Santa Fe. The Silbermans constantly scoured the market for potential sales and also hired Scott Fulton with Artex, Inc. in Oklahoma City to inquire about possible sales, serve as a mediator for transactions and ensure conservation. Arthur's expertise on the subject of American Indian painting is obvious through requests for his validation on paintings by individuals and auction houses such as Sotheby's.[33]

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[31] Interview with Arthur Silberman, date and author unknown, Box 060, Folder 020, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[32] Balink, Henry Bernard, 1970-1988, Box 015, File 005, Silberman Collection, NCWHM. Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1982-1983, Box 042, File 019, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[33] Ibid.

Strongly represented in the Silberman Collection are artworks and research materials pertaining to the Kiowa Six, who served as catalysts for the modern Native American Art Movement of the twentieth century. Paintings by the Kiowa Six, which number more than 150, and a significant collection of mid-twentieth century pieces by Oklahoma Indian artists such as Fred Beaver, Acee Blue Eagle, Woody Crumbo, and Jerome Tiger represent the Silbermans' taste in Traditional Native art produced in Oklahoma.[34] In a 1996 article for *Persimmon Hill*, Rennard Strickland stated that "With this collection, the Hall joins the ranks of the Heard Museum, the Museum of Northern Arizona, Philbrook Museum of Art, the University of Oklahoma, Gilcrease Museum, the School of American Research, and the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian as a world class center where one can view and study the very best Native American paintings, drawings and graphics."[35]

Reflecting the scope of the Silberman Collection and illustrating the development of Traditional American Indian art in Oklahoma and across the Southwest is "100 Hundred Years of Native American Painting," an exhibit curated by the Silbermans in 1978. An assessment of a small selection of critical works from the Silberman Collection, following the timeline and format of this pivotal exhibit, helps to comprehend the Silbermans work and interests. "100 Years of Native American Painting," presented from 5 March to 16 April 1978 at the Oklahoma City Museum of Art, received local and national acclaim as the first successful retrospective exhibit of Native painting.[36] The

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[34] Grafe, *A Western* Legacy, 64.

[35] Strickland, "The Silberman Collection. A Legacy of Love and Understanding," 32.

[36] Pamphlet for *100 Years of Native American Painting*, Miscellaneous Exhibits, "One Hundred Years of Native American Painting, 1977-1985, Box 019, Folder 017, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

show displayed over eighty paintings from several public and private collections across the United States including the Museum of Modern Art, the Museum of the American Indian, the Denver Art Museum, the Heard Museum, and the Philbrook Museum of Art.[37] To accompany the exhibit, Silberman published a 122-page catalog providing information and black and white illustrations for each painting in the exhibit. Major funding for the show came from the Oklahoma City Museum's Volunteer Association and sponsors for the event included Liberty National Bank, the Oklahoma Arts and Humanities Council, and the National Endowment for the Arts.[38] *ARTnews* described "100 Hundred Years of Native American Painting" as "Ambitiously conceived and stunningly displayed….The show was not only broad in historical scope but maintained as a principal theme the idea that American Indian painting, quite apart from its ethnological significance, is an art that can be measured by universal standards of excellence."[39] Silberman's goal for this exhibit and his impetus to collect was to facilitate the acceptance and understanding of American Indian art as a relevant and creative art form. This retrospective exhibit and the Silberman Collection demonstrate that, over time, Native artists transformed painting into an expressive and vital art form and absorbed from the surrounding dominant culture many of the aesthetic elements of world

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[37] Ibid., 2.

[38] March 1978 Calendar for the Oklahoma Museum of Art, Miscellaneous Exhibits, "One Hundred Years of Native American Painting, 1977-1985, Box 019, Folder 017, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[39] "Getting Rid of Bambi," *ARTnews* Special Prints Issue (September 1978): 151-2, Miscellaneous Exhibits, "One Hundred Years of Native American Painting, 1977-1985, Box 019, Folder 017, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

art.[40] Chronologically, the Silberman Collection, the exhibit "100 Years of Native American Painting," and the categorization of Indian art as modern art begins with "The Art of the Ledger Drawings."

Considered some of the most significant pieces in the Silberman Collection are more than ninety ledger-style works done by Fort Marion artists during their 1875-1878 imprisonment in St. Augustine, Florida. Pertinent to the interpretation of Plains ledger art and a turning point in American Indian painting are events that occurred in the late years of the nineteenth century to a number of Native American tribes. In the 1860s, American Plains Indians endured immense hardships and faced the threat of extinction to their culture and very existence. Emerging from this was a movement of art represented through drawings sketched out in ruled ledger books—one of the few possessions a Native American could save when fighting for the rights of his native land against Euro-American powers. The most significant of these ledger drawings, due to their impact on the progression of Native American painting, were those produced in a prison at Fort Marion in the Castillo de San Marco of St. Augustine, Florida.[41] In 1875, seventy-two Cheyenne, Arapahoe, Kiowa, Comanche, and Caddo Indians were chained and taken from Fort Sill, Oklahoma, to Fort Marion (figure II.2). While imprisoned, military commander Captain Pratt supplied the Indians with paper, pencils, watercolors, and ink and encouraged them to put their time to use. With this small bit of support the men began to transform the artistic tradition of the Plains into a new means of personal

[40] Arthur Silberman, *100 Years of Native American Painting* (Oklahoma City: The Oklahoma Museum of Art, 1978), i.

[41] Ibid., 14.

expression. Their style revealed the threatened Native American way of life and offered subject matter illustrated a detailed glimpse into indigenous culture. The artists drew their Native costumes, a treasured horse, the hunt, games, feasts, weddings, funerals, and other ceremonies. Nostalgia became an integral part of Indian painting with the desire to hold on to what is Indian.[42] In a letter to Sotheby's in 1993, Arthur relayed his views on a pivotal change in Native art as a response to the non-Native market: "At Fort Marion the artists expressed their new concerns and interests to a non-Indian audience willing to purchase their work. They became individualistic, self-conscious artists making accommodations between the need for self-expression, creative ability and response from the market place."[43] Silberman reveals in this letter his theory that Native artistic individualism began with Kiowa ledger drawings in the nineteenth century and the duality of the Indian art market. He also represented himself as an expert on the topic whose insight on the subject was sought out by important galleries such as Sotheby's.

The artistic expression of the Fort Marion prisoners helped guide the transformation and interpretation of American Indian art and is a central facet of the Silberman Collection. Artists held at St. Augustine and represented by the Silberman Collection include Paul Zotom, Oheltoint, also known as Charley Buffalo, and Bear's Heart. The Silbermans acquired the Kiowa ledger drawings as they became available on the market. For example, a series of twenty-two of the sketches came to the couple from Sotheby's for the price of $22,000. The Kiowa artist, Zotom, served as a bugler at Fort

[42] Ibid., 15.

[43] Letter from Arthur Silberman to Ellen Napiura Taubman, 22 September 1993, Box 042, Folder 019, Silberman Collection.

Marion and later returned to the reservation after becoming ordained as a minister. He produced thirty-four drawings that detail the events leading to the Red River War, the journey to Fort Marion, and life at St. Augustine. The inside front cover of one of his drawing books says that these are "A History of Indian Prison Life by Zotom (Bitter) Kiowa (figure II.3)."[44] An example of Zotom's depiction of life at Fort Marion is *The Chapel Sunday Evening Service* (figure II.4). In the drawing *Captain Pratt and Mr. Fox Going to Inspection*, (figure II.5) the viewer is able to get an idea of the men within their pictorial space.[45] The daily routine of the captain and his interpreter, Mr. Fox, going to drill is captured in this piece.

Another prominent Fort Marion artist found in the Silberman Collection is Bear's Heart. A Cheyenne Indian warrior, Bear's Heart, after his release from prison, attended the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Virginia. Upon completing his education, he worked as a carpenter at the Cheyenne Arapaho Indian reservation in Oklahoma and, sadly, died of tuberculosis in 1882.[46] Bear's Heart is known for his elaborate renderings of hunting scenes and social and religious gatherings. In one of his *Hunting Scenes* the observer can see how he experiments with his sense of space (figure II.6). The figures twist and turn, moving around their prey, a doomed buffalo. The wounded animal is found in the center of four hunters, one at the ready with his bow drawn.[47] Another of Bear Heart's drawings depicts a large gathering of people in a

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[44] Szabo, *Art from Fort Marion*, 67.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Book of Sketches Made at Fort Marion, St. Augustine, Fla., Biographical Sketches http://www.masshist.org/2012/object-of-the-month/objects/indian-ledger-art-2001-10-01 accessed April 2011.

[47] Szabo, *Art from Fort Marion*, 101.

village (figure II.7). The scene is of a number of colorful lodges and individuals placed among rolling hills lined with green trees. The narrative tells about the Medicine Lodge Treaty of 1867 when the federal government promised Native Americans an annuity of goods. Supplies that the federal government failed to make available and resulted in greater tension between the government and the Southern Plains people.[48]

As the Silbermans represented in their collection and the exhibit, "100 Years of Native American Painting," the Kiowa ledger art directly influenced a later generation of Native artists who ignited the twentieth century Native American Art Movement—the "Early Kiowa School." Around 1918 in Anadarko, Oklahoma, a Bureau of Indian Affairs field worker, Suzie Peters, discovered a group of young and artistic Kiowa Indians at St. Patrick's Mission, a federal Indian School. Peters supported and encouraged these painters with gifts of crayons, paints, and art lessons, and quickly ushered in the success of the group through connecting them to the art market. Decedents of honored Native American families such as famous chiefs and medicine men, the Kiowa students were familiar with the artistic traditions instilled in them as well as the sacred customs associated with painting in their tribe. They learned of their ancestry and culture through oral histories from family members and actively sought out the wisdom of older Kiowas in order to preserve their Indian heritage.[49]

The inheritance of these ancestral Kiowa traditions became transferred to paint and paper by the young artists and gave their pieces what is often considered a pure

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[48] Ibid., 103.

[49] Silberman, *100 Years of Native American Painting*, 16.

indigenous quality that, due to the patronage of others, became labeled as Traditional Indian art and initiated the development of a successful market for their work. A few years following their discovery by Peters, the Kiowa Six came to study under Oscar Brousse Jacobson, director of the art department at the University of Oklahoma. Jacobson became interested in Indian art before it was nationally recognized and identified as American and the instructor appreciated it as a valuable contribution to the world of art.[50] In 1927, he asked Spencer Asah, Jack Hokeah, Monroe Tsatoke, Stephen Mopope, Lois Smoky, and James Auchiah to move to Norman, Oklahoma, to live and paint under his direction (figure II.8).

Here, the Kiowa painters were subjected to the notion that their work was not simply an ethnological account, but played an important role in American fine art. Jacobson sought to protect and preserve the Kiowa artistic traditions and worked to promote the artists in any way possible. He commented that "Except for a few untrained Pueblo, these few Kiowas are the only hope we know…their development depends on the patronage of the American people."[51] Within just a few months of their time with Jacobson, the artists received national recognition when their work displayed at the convention of the American Federation of Arts in Denver, Colorado. The following year, they received international acclaim from an exhibit that toured to Prague, Czechoslovakia, followed by a publication of Kiowa paintings by a company in Nice, France, now referred to as part of the Szwedzicki Portfolios.[52] In 1939, the Kiowa school

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[50] Arthur Silberman, "Early Kiowa Art," *Oklahoma Today* 23, no. 1 (1973): 8.

[51] Anne Allbright, "Oscar Brousse Jacobson: A Swedish Immigrant Who Dramatically Changed Art Perception in Oklahoma" (master's thesis, University of Central Oklahoma, 2006), 63-4.

[52] Silberman, *100 Years of Native American Painting*, 16-17.

reached another benchmark with the commissions of James Auchiah and Stephen Mopope by the United States Government to paint murals in Washington, D. C., in the Department of the Interior Building (figure II.9).[53] These wall paintings illustrate an aspect of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1930s New Deal programs initiated during the Great Depression.

Silberman's 1973 publication, "Early Kiowa Art" in *Oklahoma Today,* described his rationale for the evident passion and success of the Kiowa artists during this time period: "In Indian society art has always, traditionally, been a part of the way of life of the Indian, touching every aspect of life from birth to death. Also, it has always been an activity open to everyone. Perhaps that is why the young Kiowa painters took their art so seriously, were so eager to perfect themselves, and to learn more about their culture. As they matured, art became for them a way of expressing their Indian heritage."[54] In this statement, Silberman makes a connection between the intrinsic traditions of the artists and the individuality expressed in their pieces. Examples of the Kiowa Six artists' fervent attention to detail and demonstration of their culture can be seen throughout the Silberman Collection. Mopope's *Scalp Dancers* from 1928 (figure II.10), and James Auchiah's *Peyote Ceremony*, also dating to 1928 (figure II.11), are prime examples. These and other paintings from the Kiowa school are unique and easily recognizable through the use of bold colors and single figures or small groups, which create an

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[53] Arthur Silberman, "Early Kiowa Art," *Oklahoma Today* 23, no. 1 (1973), 9.

[54] Ibid., 6.

individualistic effect rather that ceremonial. A wide range of subject matter is used in this style of painting such as dances, portraiture, humor, lyricism and mysticism.[55]

Juxtaposed with the characteristic styles of the Kiowa School of Art in Oklahoma is the development of Native American painting in the Southwest. Indian art in the Southwest has a rich history of creative expression and is also well represented in the Arthur and Shifra Silberman Native American Art Collection. From rock art and kiva paintings, to pottery and Kachinas, this region has remained influential to American Indian art and material culture for hundreds of years. In the early 1900s, San Ildefonso Pueblo in New Mexico emerged as a Native art community recognized for its characteristic artists, followed by the development of the renowned painting style of the Santa Fe Indian School. Founded by Dorothy Dunn in the 1920s, "The Studio" materialized shortly after the Kiowa school in Oklahoma and together constitutes the formative period of the Native American Art Movement. The Santa Fe School of Art produced an impressive number of highly skilled Indian artists such as Harrison Begay, Pop Chalee, and Pablita Velarde of which the Silbermans recognize in their collection. In Begay's *Navajo Maidens* (figure II.12), painted in 1970, the artist's rendering of space and perspective add a touch of refinement, while the subject matter harks back to the style of the Pueblo kiva murals. The use of flute players, rainbows, deer, and corn plants were typically found in the early ceremonial kiva paintings.[56]

The success of the Kiowa Six and Santa Fe Studio led to the establishment of other American Indian art departments in the country and the validation of Native art as

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[55] Silberman, *100 Years of Native American Painting*, 17.

[56] Ibid., 18.

fine art. In 1935, Bacone College in Muskogee, Oklahoma, began its art department with Creek-Pawnee artist Acee Blue Eagle as its first director. Blue Eagle became a major influence in the artistic style often referred to as the "Baconian School." The institution gained national recognition for producing talented and successful Native artists such as Blue Eagle, Fred Beaver, Dick West, and Ruthe Blalock Jones—all part of the Silberman Collection.[57] The Creek painter spent time studying and selling his work in New Mexico alongside contemporary Pueblo artists, the Kiowa Six, and other self-taught artists. A strong, dependent relationship between the major Native art schools—the Kiowa Six, Bacone School and The Studio—created a shared artistic tradition. Silberman described the Oklahoma and Southwest art movements as follows:

> Mutual support, competition, and exchange characterized the relationship between artists and teachers at The Studio, University of Oklahoma, and Bacone College. Opportunities for Native American artists to contribute to the art world in general developed where they had never existed before. These opportunities continue today. Modern artistic influences are sure to be incorporated into Native American painting creating works that stand on their own in the art world and yet reflect and retain their distinctive Indian quality.[58]

This assessment by Silberman describes how the development of regional schools of Native American art and the corresponding market allowed for an exchange of style, technique and culture resulting in more complex and innovative works. The Silberman Collection highlights the emergence of this network and how it inspired a dynamic evolution of modern artistic expression. This convergence of artistic styles and individual Indian quality is experienced through the work of Blue Eagle—specifically, two out of

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[57] Tamara Liegerot Elder, *Lumhee Holot – Tee. The Art and Life of Acee Blue Eagle* (Edmond, OK, Medicine Wheel Press, 2006), 65.

[58] Ibid., 21.

the nearly 200 of his works in the Silberman Collection. *Woman and Fawn* (figure II.13), from 1945, and *Mother, Child and Deer* (figure II.14), painted in 1950. Both of these pieces reveal the artist's use of geometric shapes and a natural composition to highlight a soft and intimate scene.

When observing the development of American Indian art in the twentieth century and the Silbermans' exhibit "100 Years of Native American Painting," one recognizes the artists' retention of the Traditional characteristics of the early Native painters despite their interest in creating a modern and individualistic identity. What distinguishes Native American painters from mainstream American art is the ideological content within. Indian painters, each in their own way and according to their own particular background, have sketched their world on paper.[59] Muscogee-Creek artist Jerome Tiger left a strong impression on Arthur (figure II.15). The collector frequently lectured on Tiger's work and, in a 1971 article in *Oklahoma Today*, he paid homage to the important painter who passed away far too early. Tiger died at the age of twenty-six in Eufaula, Oklahoma. At the time of his death he proved a fully developed artist at the height of his skill.[60] Arthur described Tiger and his work to writer, Jamake Highwater, as "The Indian artist expresses himself by projecting mind images. Salient features are captured but much else may be left out as irrelevant—foreground, perspective, and shading. Always there is in his work an absolutely overwhelming presentation of mood—not specific emotion, but generalized mood."[61] An example of this in Arthur and Shifra's collection is seen in

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[59] Silberman, *100 Years of Native American Painting*, 20.

[60] Arthur Silberman, "Tiger," *Oklahoma Today* 21, no. 3 (1971): 28.

[61] Jamake Highwater, *Song from the Earth. American Indian Painting* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976), 109.

Tiger's *My People Await* (figure II.16), painted in 1966. This painting illustrates the apprehension and anxiety of a threatened people, much like the setting depicted by Kiowa prisoner, Zotom, one hundred years prior.[62]

Arthur and Shifra Silbermans' commitment to collect and study Native American art increased the current of knowledge on the subject and influenced the world of art as well as the scope of collections at the NCWHM. The museum's acquisition of the Arthur and Shifra Silberman Native American Art Collection changed the future of the institution, placing it in a reverent category alongside the nation's important art institutions. The Silbermans' efforts succeeded in bringing about an appreciation of American Indian culture to the public and continues to serve as an excellent resource educating and preserving an important aspect of American culture. The collection mirrors Arthur and Shifra's 1970s exhibit "100 Years of Native American Painting" by providing a chronological illustration of Native art and culture. The Silberman Collection is a legacy that will continue to enrich the lives of all and offers a primary source for a more balanced representation of Indian art.

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[62] Silberman, *100 Years of Native American Painting*, 74.

Figure II.1
The Silbermans at the Governor's Arts Awards at the Oklahoma State Capitol, 1988
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure II.2
Prisoners at Fort Marion, ca. 1875
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure II.3
Zotom, Cover of Ledger Book "A History of Indian Prison Life by Zotom (Bitter) Kiowa," ca. 1875
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure II.4
Zotom, *The Chapel Sunday Evening Service*, ca. 1875
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure II.5
Zotom, *Captain Pratt and Mr. Fox Going to Inspection*, ca. 1875
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure II.6
Bear's Heart, *Hunting Scene*, ca. 1875
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

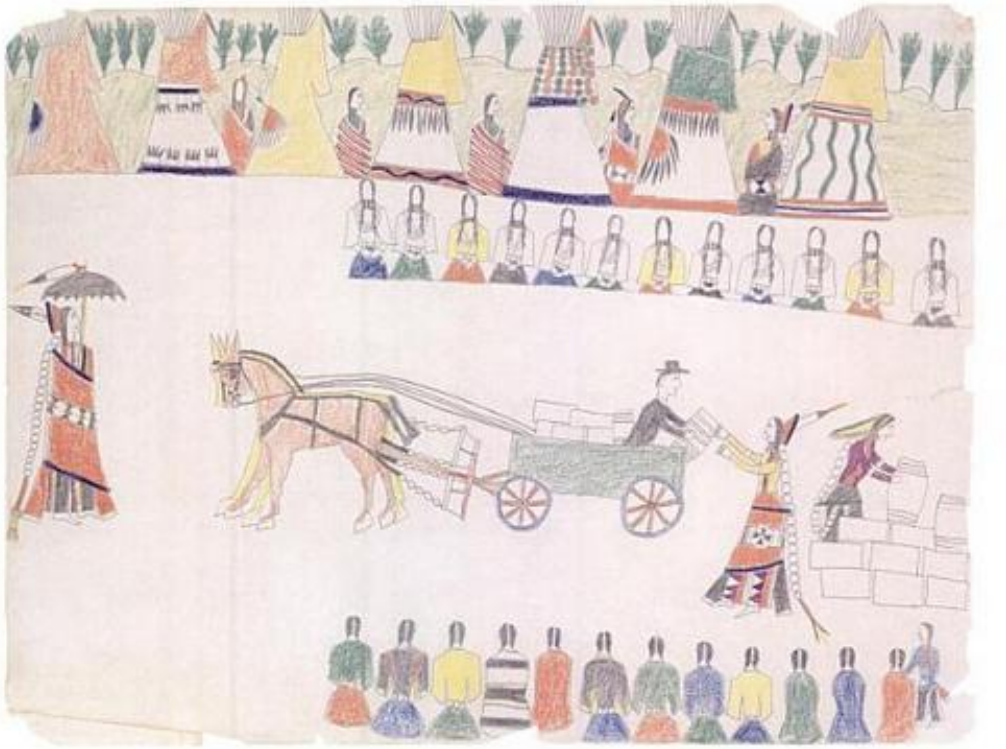

Figure II.7
Bear's Heart, *Village Scene*, 1875-78
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure II.8
The Kiowa Five with Oscar Jacobson, ca. 1928
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure II.9
Mopope, Mural Detail from the Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C., 1939
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

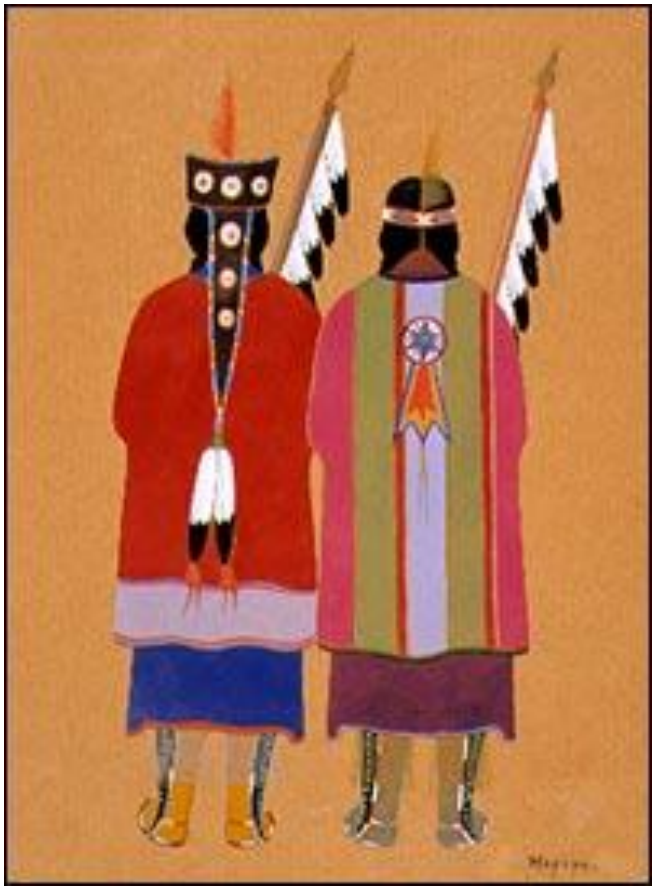

Figure II.10
Mopope, *Scalp Dancers*, ca. 1928
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure II.11
Auchiah, *Peyote Ceremony*, ca. 1928
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure II.12
Begay, *Navajo Maidens*, ca. 1970
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

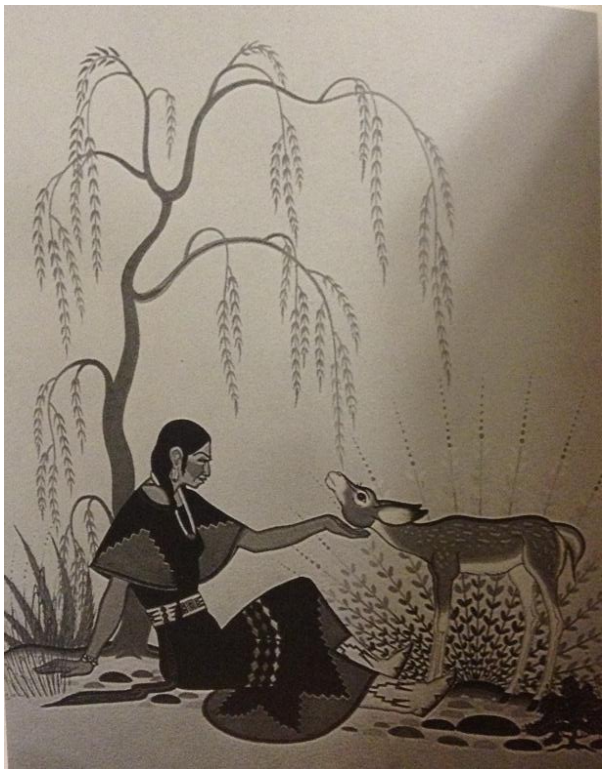

Figure II.13
Blue Eagle, *Woman and Fawn*, ca. 1945
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure II.14
Blue Eagle, *Mother, Child and Deer*, 1950
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure II.15
Jerome Tiger and Arthur Silberman, ca. 1965
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure II.16
Tiger, *My People Awaits*, 1966
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

CHAPTER THREE

OKLAHOMA'S TRADITIONAL PAINTING HERITAGE: THE KIOWA SIX AND BACONE SCHOOL OF ART

The Arthur and Shifra Silberman Native American Art Collection at the NCWHM provides a distinct interpretation of Traditional indigenous art with its emphasis on the emergence of Kiowa artistic individuality with the Kiowa ledger drawings of the late nineteenth century. From 1875 to 1878, a group of Southern Plains prisoners, held at Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida, produced a number of distinctive works on paper. Provided with the most basic art supplies and idle hours, the men began to transform their ancestral artistic traditions into a new means of personal expression. The Kiowa ledger art reflected the threatened indigenous way of life and exemplified details of Native American culture and society. A prized horse, the hunt, and social ceremonies were sketched out on lined paper with pencil and watercolors. Nostalgia became an integral part of the Kiowa artistic style with the desire to hold on to Native identity.[1]

The ledger art produced in the nineteenth century at Fort Marion brought to the surface intimate Kiowa ceremonies and traditions and revealed an artistic heritage that evolved into an internationally recognized expression of American fine art. A predominant member of the prisoners held in St. Augustine, and a direct link to twentieth-century Kiowa painting in Oklahoma, is the artist Oheltoint. This Kiowa tribesman received his artistic talent from his father, a keeper of the tribe's pictorial calendars, and also shared this creative skill with his brother, Silver Horn, who is often recognized for his work with anthropologist, James L. Mooney, at the turn of the

[1] Arthur Silberman, *100 Hundred Years of Painting* (Oklahoma City: The Oklahoma Museum of Art, 1978), 15.

twentieth century. Both Oheltoint and Silver Horn created, through various mediums, elements of Kiowa culture and some of the first known depictions of Plains mythology. Silver Horn is credited for teaching a number of his fellow tribesmen, including Kiowa Six members, Stephen Mopope—his great nephew—James Auchiah, Spencer Asah, and Jack Hokeah.[2] The Kiowa ledger drawings from Fort Marion comprise some of the Silberman Collection's most important pieces. Arthur and Shifra acquired over seventy-five drawings by Silver Horn that reflect the Kiowa artistic lineage.

Thus, from under the creative and influential wings of Silver Horn and the Kiowa ledger art produced at Fort Marion soared a young generation of talented artists that initiated the rapid success and development of the American Indian Art Movement of the twentieth century. This exposure began in 1918, in Anadarko, Oklahoma, Bureau of Indian Affairs field matron, Suzie Peters, discovered a group of five young Kiowa boys who demonstrated a knack for painting. She encouraged them to express and preserve their cultural heritage with a Christmas gift of crayons and watercolors.[3] Peters saw to their admission to St. Patrick's Mission School, where the boys began art instruction under the guidance of Willie Baze Lane, Sister Olivia, and Father Aloysius Hitto. The original Kiowa Five—Monroe Tsatoke, Stephen Mopope, Spencer Asah, James Auchiah, and Jack Hokeah are credited for setting forth a dominant artistic style during these private lessons patronized by Peters.[4] According to Silberman, the Kiowa community

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[2] Stephen Grafe, *A Western Legacy: The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 68.

[3] The Early Kiowa School of Painting, Lectures - Kiowa 5, n.d., 3, Box 062, Folder 012, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[4] Jamake Highwater, *Song from the Earth*. *American Indian Painting* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976), 60-1.

referred to the young artists as the *Kuttalyop*, meaning school boys.[5] Eventually, fellow student and the only female, Lois Smoky, joined the group comprising what is now more accurately and inclusively called the Kiowa Six. In 1923, Peters introduced the painters to Oscar Jacobson, head of the school of art at the University of Oklahoma. The artist and professor developed a keen interest in the group's work and encouraged them to continue their unique style; however, he lacked funds to bring them to the university for training. Not until three years later, with the financial assistance available, did the young art students arrive in Norman to begin rigorous instruction under Jacobson and his assistant Edith Mahier. Jacobson believed that Kiowa painting "Should not be judged by the 'white' yard stick [for it is] created from a different racial point of view."[6]

Silberman supported Jacobson for his prevention of the stagnation of the Indian art movement in Oklahoma, but also points out his deficiency in upholding the true context of the Native artists. In undated lecture notes by Silberman, the expert and collector claims that the only standing literature pertaining to the early Traditional Kiowa artists relied on Jacobson's Introduction in *Kiowa Indian Art*. He explained,

> Jacobson did not write an essay about the Kiowa painters and the circumstances surrounding the birth of the new Indian art movement. He wrote what he thought was appropriate to obtaining acceptance and gaining enough momentum to insure the continued success and development of Indian art in Oklahoma. He did not engage in meaningful discussion about the nature and style of the new art nor did he reveal anything about the legendary workshop where amateurish painters whose works had up to then been sold as curios and entered in county fairs were

[5] The Early Kiowa School of Painting, Lectures - Kiowa 5, n.d., 1, Box 062, Folder 012, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[6] Lydia Wyckoff, *Visions and Voices: Native American Painting from the Philbrook Museum of Art* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 24.

> transformed into artists bursting on the national and international art scene.[7]

In these comments on Jacobson, Silberman revealed his intent of depicting the Kiowa Six from an accurate Native American view—the artists' stories of how this pivotal art movement came about. It also places Jacobson's work in a historiographical context and provides a new approach to understanding Native representation within this artistic movement.

The Silbermans also contributed a unique viewpoint on the evolution of Indian art through primary documentation of the lone female Kiowa artist, Lois Smoky. By 1927, Smoky joined the training in Norman and, within the year, the first travelling exhibit of paintings by the Kiowa Six appeared. Still, too frequently today, a gender-skewed perspective is typical when describing the Kiowa students and their influence on the American Indian Art Movement. Typically donned the Kiowa Five, it is important to include Smoky's role within this development and appropriately represent the group of painters as the Kiowa Six. This is something Arthur and Shifra also recognized as shown through their gathering of oral histories conducted with Kiowa Six members. Their interviews with Smoky provide a rare and often ignored perspective—Smoky's experience as a female artist. The oral histories also offer validation of the Silberman Collection's incomparable importance to a new understanding of Native American fine art and collecting.

Under the direction of Jacobson, the Kiowa Six artists received instruction and patronage that brought them an income in addition to international recognition as key innovators of a fine art movement. The Kiowa artists also became representatives of an

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[7] The Early Kiowa School of Painting, Lectures - Kiowa 5, n.d., 2, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

American national identity—a combination of tradition and modernity. At the University of Oklahoma, Jacobson and Mahier created a space for the artists, separate from the Anglo art students, to flourish and produce. The instructors encouraged the painters to draw from their ancestral traditions, disregarding the formal European style. Jacobson required a quota of at least five paintings per week and met with his protégés regularly to address weaknesses in their work and identify areas in need of improvement. Although he encouraged individuality, Jacobson also wanted profitable results and expedited the duplication of popular pieces through the use of architectural tracing paper. This allowed him to quickly yield a profit at market.[8] Jacobson did not want any outside sources influencing the Kiowa painters during their time at the University of Oklahoma. He insisted that he and Mahier be the only individuals allowed to evaluate the group's art.[9] By 1929, an exhibition of Kiowa Six paintings travelled across the nation and overseas to Prague, Czechoslovakia, accompanied also by the rare portfolio, *Kiowa Indian Art*, published in Nice, France. The portfolio sold for approximately thirty-two dollars and the 750 copies sold in cities throughout the United States, in Europe and South America.[10] Jacobson's *Kiowa Indian Art* serves as documentation of the artists' rapid and influential success.

The Traditional style depicted by the Kiowa Six and encouraged by Jacobson at the University of Oklahoma comprised the foundation of modern Indian art and

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[8] Interview with James Auchiah by Arthur Silberman, 5 June 1971, 6, Box 137, File 001, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[9] Anne Allbright, "Oscar Brousse Jacobson: A Swedish Immigrant Who Dramatically Changed Art Perception in Oklahoma" (master's thesis, University of Central Oklahoma, 2006), 65.

[10] Ibid., 69.

influenced following generations of Native American artists. Despite Jacobson's tutelage of the Kiowa Six, Silberman attributes the groups' artistic style to inspiration. He proposed that their painting was appropriate to representations of Southern Plains costumes and design. Silberman explained, "The content behind the forms are honest and faithful reflections of a significant aspect of Southern Plains culture of the 1920s and 1930s."[11] This is an atypical tribute given to Traditional Native art through a delineation from the Kiowa style as a singular, modern mode of artistic expression focusing on influences from both ancestral practices and contemporary cultural factors. Common characteristics of the Kiowa Six style consist of singular figures on a simple white background with the employment of a stencil-like design involving subject matter such as tribal dances and ceremonies.[12] Through these visual depictions of ritual, the personal connection between artist and ancestor is observed. Colors, symbols, and stories have been passed down from generation to generation, and artistic aptitudes inherited through gifts from spiritual lineage. What is needed is further consideration of the influential factors from twentieth-century Native American communities on Native artistic representations.

The distinguishing features characterizing twentieth-century Kiowa artistic style became nationally popularized and solidified the talent of Native artists through a number of federal arts projects commissioned around the United States. In 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt responded to the Great Depression by initiating the New Deal and its various

[11] The Early Kiowa School of Painting, Lectures - Kiowa 5, n.d., 11, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[12] Wyckoff, *Visions and Voices*, 25.

economic programs to bring work to poverty stricken America.[13] One such program, The Public Works Administration, facilitated the production of mural paintings in public buildings throughout Oklahoma and the country. The boom of interest in these wall paintings completed by local Indian artists permeated into a new artistic medium and created a renewed sense of national identity. To train the young artists in the process of creating these murals, the American Civil Liberties Union recommended Swedish artist, Olaf Nordmark. The *Kuttalyop* and fellow Indian artists respected and befriended Nordmark, who became a prevalent name in the Indian Arts and Crafts movement.[14] Although several of these murals have since deteriorated or been covered by layers of industrial paint, a handful are preserved today on walls throughout the country confirming the central role played by American Indian artists in the collective history of the nation and of Oklahoma.

Arthur and Shifra Silberman dedicated their resources to gaining an understanding of and documenting Native artists' contributions to New Deal mural production. Their manuscript collection in the Dickinson Research Center contains a wealth of research on the subject and the oral histories they conducted provide a primary source of the artists' experiences.[15] The federal patronage of Native American painting in the 1930s is just one example of the complicated Native artist and white patron relationship directing the market of indigenous art in the past century. A more transparent and benign connection

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[13] David A. Taylor, *Soul of America: The WPA Writer's Project Uncovers Depression America* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2009), 14.

[14] Susan L. Meyn, *More than Curiosities: A Grass Roots History of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board and Its Precursors, 1920-1942* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), 194.

[15] General assessment of various files relating to Native American Murals, Series 11: Subject Files (A-W), 1874-1994, Indian Murals, Boxes 24, 26-7, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

between artist and patron is seen in the spectrum of Kiowa artistic expression assembled by Arthur and Shifra. The Kiowa Six and their position within American Indian art in the country are well represented in the Silberman Collection.[16] The couple maintained file upon file of original research pertaining to each member of the Kiowa Six and the emergence of Traditional Native art. Paintings by the Kiowa artists number more than 150 in addition to essential oral history interviews from surviving members of the group. Conducted throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the collecting couple transcribed these interviews offering to the public a rare, Native perspective that will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

Among the Kiowa Six artists represented in the Silberman Collection, Stephen Mopope is perhaps one of the most prolific within the collection. Born on 27 August 1898, on the Kiowa Reservation in Indian Territory, Mopope received his artistic aptitude from his great uncles, Silver Horn and Oheltoint. In addition to painting, he played the flute, was an avid dancer, and a farmer. The majority of Mopope's works depict various cultural aspects of Kiowa life.[17] He is recognized for being expressive through an "Uneven style that emphasized emotion…The color, in particular, and the formal structure depart entirely from illustration. The impact is not unlike the combined qualities of theme, color, and form that are balanced in the pseudo-primitivism of Gauguin."[18] Some of his most notable commissions include murals commissioned in the 1930s for the

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[16] General assessment of various research materials pertaining to the Kiowa Six, Series 10: Kiowa 5, 1901-1992, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[17] Mary Jo Watson, *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 2005), http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/M/MO017.html assessed 11 December 2012.

[18] Highwater, *Song from the Earth*, 63-4.

Works Progress Administration at the University of Oklahoma, the Federal Building in Muskogee, Oklahoma, and the US Post Office in Anadarko, Oklahoma.[19] Examples of Mopope's artistic expression are exemplified in over one hundred paintings and sketches in the Silberman Collection. An example is *Apache Ben*, completed in 1928 (figure III.1). This portrait of a distinguished leader uses bold colors and traditional decorative elements to bring about a formal and static composition.[20] In Mopope's *Eagle Dancer*, painted in 1930, the artist conveyed an elegant and stirring sense of emotion along with his personal knowledge of this sacred dance (figure III.2).[21] The Silbermans unfortunately were unable to interview Mopope due to his death in 1974, but did record his story through discussions with the artist's daughter, La Quinta Mopope Santos, in 1982.

Fellow Kiowa Six member and friend to Mopope is James Auchiah, who is also well represented in the Arthur and Shifra Silberman Collection by thirty-four pieces. Born on 17 November 1906, in Medicine Park, near Lawton, Oklahoma, Auchiah discovered his artistic talent through inspiration from his grandfather, Red Tipi, his father, famous Kiowa chief Satanta, and most importantly, his grandmother. In an interview conducted by Arthur in 1972, Auchiah relayed the significance of painting to his family. Auchiah, meaning medicine people, acted as a member of the Buffalo Clan of the Kiowa tribe, which controlled the sacred purpose of art and medicine. This circle became well known for color mixing and the use of earth paints, juices, and stains.[22]

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[19] The Jacobson House Native Art Center, "The Kiowa Five," https://www.jacobsonhouse.com/kiowa-five/ assessed 11 December 2012.

[20] Silberman, *100 Years of Native American Painting*, 56.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Interview with James Auchiah, 12 June 1972, at the home of Georgia DuPoint, 2, Box 137, File 001, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Through the oral history given by Auchiah, an expressive and vital story of the importance of art to the painter is documented. The rich ancestry of creative talent in the Auchiah family is clearly noted when observing the tempera on paper, *The Drummers*, painted in 1931 (figure III.3). In this piece, two figures illustrated with brilliant colors are centered on a blank background playing the drums. It is a prime example of Traditional Kiowa work. Another work in the collection at the NCWHM is *Peyote Ceremony*, dating 1938, which shows a seated Native American man participating in a sacred ritual of the Native American Church—a tradition also practiced by Auchiah (figure III.4).

Accompanying the art and documentation of Mopope and Auchiah in the Silberman Collection is the craftsmanship of Jack Hokeah. Another of the Kiowa Six artists discovered by Suzie Peters in Anadarko, Hokeah was born in western Oklahoma in 1902. He became an orphan at a young age and was raised by his grandmother. A successful dancer as well, the painter's style is recognized for the implementation of bold lines and a simplicity in detail that is sometimes compared to Mexican codices. Silberman's friend and writer, Jamake Highwater, described Hokeah's work with the statement, "The rigidity of this style verges on stenciled monotony, which is startlingly ornate at its best, and brashly decorative at its worst."[23] In 1930, Hokeah travelled and worked throughout New Mexico alongside Mopope and Spencer Asah and spent a number of years with renowned San Ildefonso potter, Maria Martinez, and her family. Eventually Martinez adopted Hokeah as her own son.[24] Within the Silberman Collection,

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[23] Highwater, *Song from the Earth*, 64.

[24] The Jacobson Native Art Center, https://www.jacobsonhouse.com/kiowa-five/ assessed 11 December 2012.

Hokeah's style is characterized by one of his best paintings, *Drummer*, n.d., where the observer sees the back of an intricately dressed man seated and in between beats on his drum (figure III.5). The artist passed away in 1969 and recording a piece of his story are interviews conducted by the Silbermans with witnesses to Hokeah's work and his influence on the early development of American Indian art in the country.

Another fellow Kiowa Six member pertinent to the twentieth-century American Indian Art Movement and the Silberman Collection is Spencer Asah. Born near Carnegie, Oklahoma, around 1905, Asah was the grandson of a buffalo medicine man and grew up in western Oklahoma surrounded by ancestral Kiowa traditions similar to other members of the Kiowa Six. The artist typically used themes and images to present the nature of Kiowa dances and aspects of Kiowa life.[25] Asah divided his time between painting and farming, and also proved to be an expert dancer, which is reflected in his artwork. In *Rider with Cape*, painted around 1939, Asah utilized strong lines to portray an idealized Plains warrior with implied energy and grace (figure III.6).[26] Provided by the Silbermans are narratives detailing the painter's life and work as perceived by others, particularly in interviews with James Auchiah and Lois Smoky.

Monroe Tsatoke also offers a visual testament to the importance of the Kiowa Six to the development of Indian art in Oklahoma and the Silberman Collection at the NCWHM. Born near Saddle Mountain, Oklahoma, on 29 September 1904, Tsatoke was the son of Hunting Horse, a Kiowa scout for General George Armstrong Custer. The

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[25] Watson, Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/A/AS002.html assessed 11 December 2012.

[26] Silberman, *100 Years of Native American Painting*, 40.

artist grew up, as did his contemporaries, immersed in his Native culture.[27] Tsatoke proved a tremendously talented artist, but sadly, developed tuberculosis just as his career seemed at its peak and passed away in 1937. With the diagnosis of his illness, the Kiowa artist joined the Native American Church and expressed his peyote faith through his paintings.[28] Jamake Highwater viewed Tsatoke's 1933 *Kiowa and Comanche* (figure III.7) as a "masterful composition of color and line," and thought the artist was the most refined and masterful of all Traditional Indian artists.[29] Two other prime examples found in the Silberman Collection are *Belo Cozad*, n.d., the portrait of a well-known Kiowa flute player (figure III.8) and an untitled work dating 1929, which depicts sacred symbols of the peyote religion (figure III.9).

The Kiowa Six style as demonstrated in the artists discussed above is also evident in the small body of artworks completed by Lois Smoky. Frequently overlooked and omitted when addressing the influential group of Kiowa artists trained at the University of Oklahoma, is this lone female painter. Born near Anadarko, Oklahoma, in 1907, Smoky's work under the direction of Jacobson marked the first time in Oklahoma Indian history that a female studied painting and composed the human figure. She served as a model for future female Indian artists because of her pro-active move outside the boundaries of the accepted female role in artistic expression.[30] Smoky confronted

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[27] Watson, Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/T/TS001.html assessed 11 December 2012.

[28] The Jacobson Native Art Center, https://www.jacobsonhouse.com/kiowa-five/ assessed 11 December 2012.

[29] Highwater, *Song from the Earth*, 67.

[30] Watson, Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/S/SM009.html assessed 5 December 2012.

resentment during her time with the Kiowa group in Norman and, after a few short years painting, returned to the reservation to marry and start a family. Ironically, her art is now the most sought after of all the Kiowa artists because of its rarity—Arthur and Shifra acquired only one of her pieces.[31] The Silbermans conducted oral history interviews with Smoky in which she relayed her experiences and training at St. Patrick's Mission School and the University of Oklahoma. In the Silberman Collection lies Smoky's story—one that remains relatively untold. Arthur and Shifra proved forward thinkers and tactical collectors in their preservation of her history. Smoky's 1933 *Ghost Dancer* portrays a woman wearing a traditional Native dress with a Catholic cross around her neck and participating in the Ghost Dance (figure III.10). With the acquisition of this painting the collection is able to provide a valuable female perspective in Traditional Native art and increases the relevance of the Silberman collection to the progression of Indian art.

The 1920s success of the Kiowa Six, and a similar program at the Santa Fe Indian School, led to the establishment of additional American Indian art departments throughout the Southwest. Also, developing in the 1930s, were progressive initiatives in Indian education resulting in programs to support America's indigenous art. As a result of this enterprise, a program crucial to Oklahoma's contribution to Native American art developed. Inspired by Ataloa McClendon, a talented Chickasaw teacher at Bacone College in Muskogee, Oklahoma, was the opening of an art department in 1935. Creek-Pawnee artist, Acee Blue Eagle, came on board as the school's first art director and became a chief influencer in the emergence of the "Baconian School." Bacone rapidly

[31] The Jacobson Native Art Center, https://www.jacobsonhouse.com/kiowa-five/ assessed 5 December 2012.

received national recognition for producing talented and successful Indian artists and joined fellow Kiowa Six painters as prime motivators in the American Indian Painting Movement.[32]

The Silberman Collection holds a significant body of work pertaining to impact of the Bacone School on Native American art. Whereas extensive literature exists pertaining to the development of Indian art in the Southwest, particularly New Mexico, and a fair amount on the Kiowa Six, publications relaying the evolution of style within the Bacone School are lean. Native American artist and Director Emeritus of the Bacone Art Department, Ruthe Blalock Jones, stands as a testament to the success and influence of this style. Also, a wonderful Native-centric source is provided by Lydia Wyckoff in a 1996 publication by the Philbrook Museum of Art, *Visions and Voices.* Wyckoff used interviews from those involved with Bacone to illustrate the school's impact in American Indian art. Arthur and Shifra's scholarship and collecting during the seventies, eighties and early nineties allow for a deeper understanding of the Bacone style. Through their acquisition of works produced by Bacone artists and the culmination of oral histories relaying the artists' stories, a more complete and accurate history is possible.

The heritage and underpinning of Bacone College combined with an analysis of the Silberman Collection reveals how the institution shaped Native American art and education in Oklahoma. In 1880, Almon C. Bacone and Christian missionaries founded the college in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, to serve as an institution of higher learning for American Indians and to instill in them a Christian way of life, thus assimilating Natives

[32] Tamara Liegerot Elder, *Lumhee Holot-tee: The Art and Life of Acee Blue Eagle* (Edmond: Medicine Wheel Press, 2006), 65.

into white society. The following year, plans developed to move the school near Muskogee and fundraising for the new location began. Bacone Indian School differed from others across the nation in that students came voluntarily rather than by force. With the leadership of Reverend Benjamin Weeks and others, the institution became recognized for its emphasis on and a sincere commitment to Native American education and heritage.[33] It continues successfully today with this undertaking.

Bacone College is truly distinct through its dedication to American Indian culture, particularly as seen in the establishment of the school of art—the vision of an innovative Chickasaw woman, Ataloa McClendon. An effective way to gain an understanding of Bacone's role within the twentieth-century Native American Art Movement is to look at the prominent department directors represented in the Silberman Collection and the pivotal art market created by the relationship between the school and the Philbrook Indian Annual, initiated by the Philbrook Museum in Tulsa. As Bacone's first art director, Acee Blue Eagle used his spirited talents and showmanship to encourage students and promoted the department as "Educational! Historical! Romantic!"[34] Born near Anadarko, Oklahoma, in 1909, the artist received guidance from Jacobson at the University of Oklahoma and acquired panache for marketing his work and obtaining recognition for his talents. According to Lydia Wyckoff, Blue Eagle "Displayed his paintings, played the flute, and danced. If that was what the white world wanted, he would give it to them as it served his own purposes."[35] The Creek-Pawnee artist

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[33] Ruthe Blalock Jones, "Bacone College and the Philbrook Indian Annual," in *Visions and Voices*, ed. Lydia Wyckoff (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 52.

[34] Ibid., 52.

[35] Wyckoff, *Voices and Visions*, 35.

displayed a similar style to that of the Kiowa, but adapted it through his focus on geometric shapes and a balance of color. Ruthe Blalock Jones praised Blue Eagle for opening many doors to Indian artists.[36]

A reason for the similarity in style among the Kiowa and early Bacone artists is the strong tie formed between the Native painters during the seminal years in Indian art. Blue Eagle studied on his own, with Jacobson at the University of Oklahoma, and in New Mexico alongside his contemporaries. The Kiowa Six members also travelled from Norman to the pueblos to share their experiences and brought about a relationship and shared artistic tradition between the major Indian schools of art. Arthur and Shifra recognized this commonality and how it translated into a distinct yet cumulative style signifying the value of its unique Indian quality. Examples of this and Blue Eagle's influence are found in the Silberman Collection through paintings, research materials, and oral history interviews. The flat, animated harmony created by Blue Eagle is exemplified with *War Dancer with Fan* (figure III.11), from 1934, and *Flute Player* (figure III.12), completed in 1955.

Blue Eagle endeavored to promote the valuable contributions of Native Americans across the country and abroad. Providing an authentic Native voice on behalf of the role of American Indian art in the twentieth century is not only the work of the artists, but documentation of stories and events surrounding their work. Blue Eagle produced paintings and murals valuable within the spectrum of American art and also found other unique ways to preserve Native traditions. In the 1950s, KTVX, then located in Muskogee, produced a children's television program that aired from 4:30 to 6:00 pm

[36] Ibid.

called "Chief Blue Eagle" where the artist appeared in traditional costume and introduced kids to American Indian language, music, and culture.[37] The program, along with teaching in Okmulgee, kept him extremely busy and required that he drive to Muskogee every day. In the 1950s Blue Eagle's art did not sell for much more than gas money and the artist began to become depressed, feeling unappreciated and often in need of a few dollars.[38] After Blue Eagle's death in 1959, his friend Mae Abbott published two of the artist's books, *Indian Painting and Poetry*, and *Echogee, The Little Blue Deer* (figure III.13).[39] "A story for little Indians of all nationalities," *Echogee* emerged from the pen of Blue Eagle in the 1930s, but remained unpublished until 1971. Governor David Hall handed out the original first edition copies on an international tour to the Soviet Union and to Princess Grace of Monaco.[40] Blue Eagle's dedication and passion for the continuance of his ancestral beliefs and traditions is evident in his creative contributions to Oklahoma history and American art. As best described by his friend, Angie Debo: "His art was the total expression of his spirit; and in spite of the discipline of the white man's schools and his tolerant understanding of the white man's ways, his spirit was all Indian."[41]

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[37] Interview with Mary Moran, 1983, 5, Box 127, File 020, Silberman Collection, NCWHM. According to the interview, no copies of this television program remain.

[38] Ibid, 7.

[39] Elder, *The Art and Life of Acee Blue Eagle*, vii.

[40] Southwest Airlines Magazine, *Echogee*, Box 128, File 013, Interview with James Neill North, 28 July 1975, 11, Box 128, File 002, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[41] Billie Morris, "Book of Late Artist-Author Released on His Birthday," *Tulsa Tribune*, 17 August 1960.

Blue Eagle's influence on the shared artistic tradition and significance of the Bacone School of Art inspired several Native artists such Woody Crumbo. Succeeding Blue Eagle, Crumbo began as director of the Bacone School of Art in 1938. Born in Lexington, Oklahoma, to an Indian mother and French father, the artist refined his creative aptitudes while studying under Jacobson at the University of Oklahoma. At the young age of twenty-one, Bacone hired him as the director of the art department. Crumbo said of his own style:

> I have always painted with the desire of developing Indian art so that it may be judged on art standards rather on its value as a curio—I am attempting to record Indian customs and legends now, while they are alive, to make them a part of the great American culture before these, too, become lost, only to be fragmentally pieced together by fact and supposition.[42]

Although Crumbo's style resembled that of Blue Eagle's, this Pottawatomie artist preferred the Studio style of New Mexico to that of Jacobson's Kiowa school. Apparently, Crumbo lacked trust in Jacobson and while under his tutelage, intentionally left paintings unfinished for concern that they would be kept by the professor. Crumbo directed his own marketing for his work and took his paintings home to finish and sell.[43] As director of the art department at Bacone, the young artist not only organized exhibits for his students, but also lectured and gave instructions in traditional dance clothing. He frequently danced and played the flute at fundraising events for the school.[44] Both the decorative elements of the Santa Fe style and the flat Kiowa style utilized by Crumbo are

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[42] Virginia Mecklenburg, *The Public as Patron: A History of the Treasury Department Mural Program* (College Park: University of Maryland Press, n.d.), 51.

[43] Wyckoff, *Visions and Voices*, 38.

[44] Ruthe Blalock Jones, "At Bacone," in *Woody Crumbo*, ed. by Carol Haralson (Tulsa: Gilcrease Museum, 2012), 35-7.

evident through aspects of the Silberman Collection. The combination of styles that comprise the Bacone school are illustrated in *Indian in the Snow*, n.d. (figure III.14). In this painting the artist utilized a simple background, but suggests slightly more movement and emotion than the Traditional Kiowa style in his solitary figure struggling through the desolate snowy scene.

Through the 1940s, Crumbo established a successful career as an artist and instructor and diffused his success on to Bacone's subsequent art directors. In 1947, Southern Cheyenne painter, Dick West, took on the position of director, where he remained until 1970. Born in 1912, in a tipi near Darlington Agency, Oklahoma, West received his bachelor and master's degree in fine arts from the University of Oklahoma. This innovative painter adhered to extensive research in preparing for an honest and complete piece. He maintained a refined sense of color and excellent drawing ability, which produced some of the best work from the Bacone School.[45] The Traditional Oklahoma style initiated by the Bacone Art School and further propelled by its directors, Blue Eagle, Crumbo, and West influenced a number of students throughout the decades. All transferred their distinctive creativity to a younger generation of Bacone artists, such as Ruthe Blalock Jones, who followed the Chickasaw artist, Chief Terry Saul, as director of the department in 1979. West, in particular, facilitated a positive and supportive environment for the continuance of the Traditional style, but also sought the exploration of abstract art. Experimental at times, West's style often represented more complex compositions—an illustrative, nostalgic, and romantic vision of Native culture and

[45] Ibid., 39.

history.[46] A prime example of this is seen in his painting *The Cheyenne Sun Dance – The Third Day*, completed in 1949, and the only painting of West's acquired by the Silbermans (figure III.15). This work reveals an intimate scene of the sacred Sun Dance by depicting an open tent with a number of individuals immersed in this sacred ceremony. West remarked to Silberman that "Formal art training can enable the Native American artists to develop new approaches capable of retaining the essence of the past."[47]

Another critical aspect of the Bacone School of art is its partnership with the Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The two institutions together helped stimulate the success of Native American fine art and artists for decades. Beginning in 1946, The Philbrook held an annual national competition for American Indian art, putting in place a creative market for indigenous painting. From the first year, the bond between the museum and Bacone College became evident. Blue Eagle, West and other local Native Americans joined together with artists from the Southwest, such as Harrison Begay and Fred Kabotie. Woody Crumbo, Charles Banks Wilson and Suzie Peters served as the inaugural jurors of this competition. Comprised of four geographic categories—Southwest Region, Woodland Region, Plains Region, and Alaska and Canada—the Philbrook Annual brought together a variety of Indian artistic styles and provided a standard of measurement for Native art.[48]

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[46] Highwater, *Song from the Earth*, 96.

[47] Silberman, *100 Hundred Years of Native American Painting*, 92.

[48] Wyckoff, *Visions and Voices*, 38.

Ruthe Blalock Jones, a Bacone artist still influential today, vividly illustrated the anticipation and excitement surrounding the Philbrook Annual and revealed the event's centrality on the Indian art market and community. Her personal, Native perspective provides a tremendous story—one often omitted—and in support of the creative individuality found within the American Indian Art Movement of the twentieth century. Indian artists from all around submitted their work to the Indian Annual and hoped for recognition and success. Jones sought to be included in the show, to have her work accepted, and to make connections with fellow artists. She depended on sales and knew if her paintings were accepted by the panel and her peers, a profit and the recognition of her work followed.[49] On the days preceding the big event, her entire family and numerous friends from her community prepared for the big trip to Tulsa. Women dressed their best in borrowed or stitched frocks. Jones exclaimed of the day, "It meant everything. It was the most important event in most of our lives, not just that night, but all that it had meant in the past and what it might mean to our futures."[50] She paints a magnificent picture of how thrilling it was to see the art on display and how some pieces will always remain in her memory. The pride Jones felt in showing her work alongside those of the most renowned Indian artists is palpable when reading her account.[51]

The Philbrook Annual made the career of Native artists and provided money for their day-to-day living. Jones and others attribute their success as an artist to the museum's Indian Annuals and Jones gives testimony to the importance of the Bacone

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[49] Jones, "Bacone College and the Philbrook Indian Annual," in *Visions and Voices*, 56.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid., 51-8.

School of Art in relation to the competition. Perhaps the most important and revealing aspect of her narrative is the artist's perspective as a female painter. She reiterates the enduring limitations for women in both mainstream and indigenous art, as both are male dominated. She expresses the difficulties of being able to afford painting as a profession. A seemingly universal struggle for women, whether an artist or not, is the expectation that their place is at home. She exclaimed on behalf of female artists that "Some of us who 'veered off' and who dared to be different and would not 'stay in our places' have found a measure of success."[52] This is yet another aspect of what is so refreshing about the Silberman Collection. It seems that Arthur and Shifra also recognized the importance of Native women in twentieth-century American Indian art through their incorporation of a feminist perspective in painting and research materials—they conducted lengthy research on the influence of Smoky and Luiseño artist and activist, WaWa Chaw.

The Philbrook Indian Annual Competition continued to evolve until the 1970s, when challenges arose from controversy between Traditional and more contemporary artistic styles. Although the museum created new categories for "Non-Traditional Styles of Painting" to support change, certain artists conveyed opposition to the regional categories based on the "Indianness" of Traditional Native art. The quality of art submitted to the competition eventually began to decline and the event no longer exemplified a unified national community of American Indian artists. In 1979, the museum hosted its last annual Indian art competition. Despite this digression, Bacone College continued to dominate the Philbrook Indian Annual until the end. The school's adherence to romantic illustrative painting and the museum's patronage of this

[52] Ibid., 58.

Traditional style became trite when compared to the development of a highly individualistic contemporary Native style.[53] Today it seems that a balance between the traditional and contemporary styles is more acceptable and a return to Traditional tastes is palatable.

The Arthur and Shifra Silberman Native American Art Collection illustrates an important and much needed story regarding the heritage of Native American art, culture, and collecting in Oklahoma. The Kiowa Six and Bacone School of Art played a vital role in the American Indian Art Movement of the twentieth century and supported individuality and creativity in Native communities across the state and nation. The Silberman Collection emphasizes the emergence of modern indigenous art with the Kiowa ledger drawings from the late nineteenth century and follows its evolution beyond the Traditional style. The artistic expression initiated by the ledger drawings transitioned into the pivotal work of Oklahoma artists and set in motion a public appreciation and market for American Indian fine art. The Kiowa Six artists utilized their ancestral artistic aptitudes to create a sense of identity and preserve their traditions. As a direct result of the acclaim for the Kiowa Six, the Bacone School of Art materialized. The early innovative directors at this liberal Indian school trained under Jacobson at the University of Oklahoma and developed the Kiowa style into their own Traditional Oklahoma style. The Bacone School of Art also initiated a pivotal relationship with the Philbrook Museum of Art. Prompted by Bacone, the museum hosted its annual art competition, which propelled the development of Native American art throughout the country and created a unique market from which artists' careers were made. The Arthur and Shifra

[53] Wyckoff, *Visions and Voices*, 11-3.

Silberman Native American Art Collection includes both the Kiowa Six and Bacone styles and illustrates their important place within the history of art in Oklahoma. A particularly valuable aspect of the collection is the wealth of oral history interviews and research materials pertaining to the Kiowa and Bacone artists, offering a Native context and factual representation of the Native American Art Movement. These unrivaled research materials and painting collection stand alone as an authentic testimony to the evolution of American Indian art.

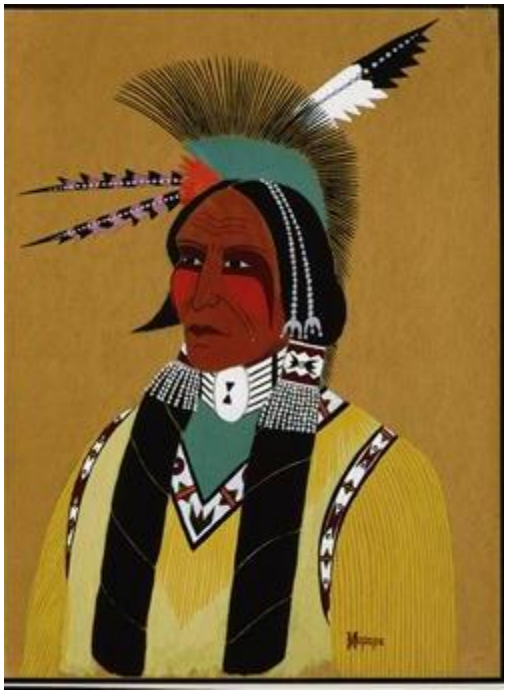

Figure III.1
Mopope, *Apache Ben*, 1928
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure III.2
Mopope, *Eagle Dancer*, 1930
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure III.3
Auchiah, *The Drummers*, 1931
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure III.4
Auchiah, *Peyote Ceremony*, 1938
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure III.5
Hokeah, *Drummer*, n.d.
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

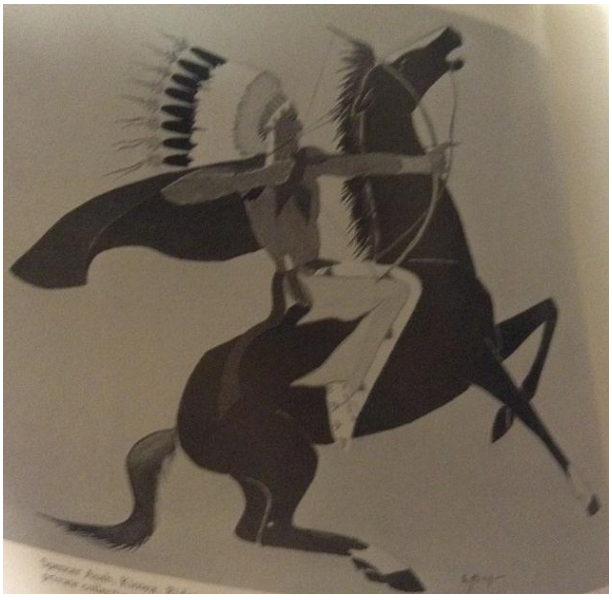

Figure III.6
Asah, *Rider with Cape*, ca. 1939
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure III.7
Tsatoke, *Kiowa and Comanche*, 1933
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure III.8
Tsatoke, *Belo Cazad*, n.d.
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure III.9
Tsatoke, *Untitled*, 1929
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure III.10
Smoky, *Ghost Dancer*, 1933
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure III.11
Blue Eagle, *The War Dancer with Fan*, 1933
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure III.12
Blue Eagle, *Flute Player*, 1955
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

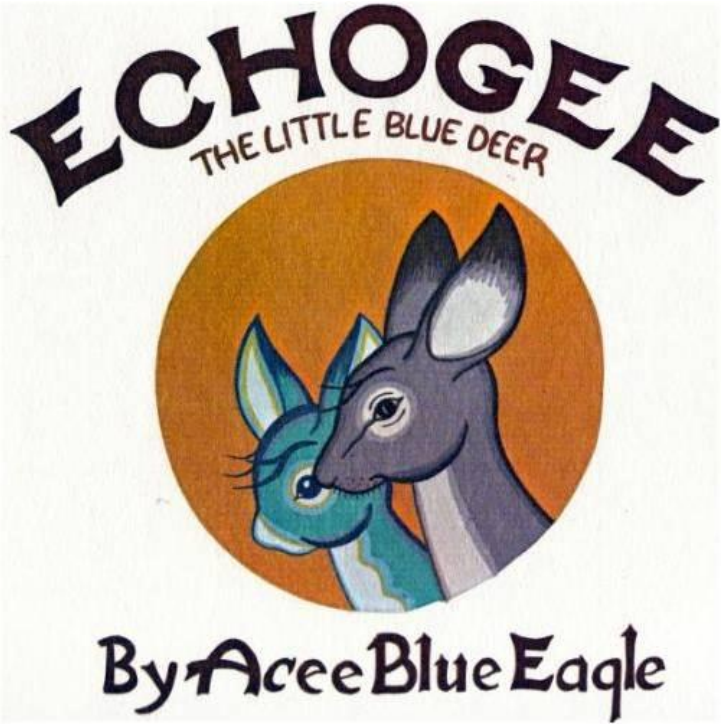

Figure III.13
Blue Eagle, *Echogee Book Cover*, 1971
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure III.14
Crumbo, *Indian in the Snow*, n.d.
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

Figure III.15
West, *The Cheyenne Sun Dan – The Third Day*, 1949
Courtesy of the Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

CHAPTER FOUR

VOICES AND VISIONS: ORAL HISTORIES FROM THE SILBERMAN COLLECTION

The Arthur and Shifra Silberman Native American Art Collection at the NCWHM is an exceptional retrospective illustration of the development of American Indian art in the twentieth century. The Silbermans' foresight in collecting and preserving oral history interviews with Native artists involved in the evolution of this artistic movement allows for a more complete understanding of the complexity of American Indian art, culture and identity. Hundreds of audio recordings conducted by the collectors provide first-hand accounts through the lens of Indian artists and supports the position that ancestral traditions served and continue as the foundation for Native American art in Oklahoma. These interviews allow for a deeper understanding of the Silbermans' as art collectors and to experience the exchange of emotion and knowledge between the artist and the collector. The utilization and preservation of these oral history interviews at the NCWHM is central to communicating new interpretations of American Indian art. The following discourse utilizes a small selection of the Native artists' voices preserved today by the Dickinson Research Center at the NCWHM to provide a primary testament of Indian artist experiences and to offer perceptions from the Native community and its direct involvement in twentieth-century American culture. A group of interviews conducted between the late 1970s and early 1980s with James Auchiah, Lois Smoky, Riley Sunrise, and those who knew Acee Blue Eagle are just a sample of and testament to the value of this collection to research and the general public.

The Silberman oral history collection at the NCWHM consists of over two hundred audio cassette tapes recorded in the 1970s and 1980s, interviewing a number of

Native artists, their family members and individuals involved in the Native American Art Movement. A portion of the oral history interviews stored in the Dickinson Research Center at the museum are those with James Auchiah. This Kiowa Six artist has a strong and credible voice providing invaluable insight from a Native American perspective. Through the conversations between Auchiah and Arthur, the artist relays how his individual style and success in painting came to be. Auchiah learned from his elders the artistic skills and traditions that made him a world renowned painter. As a young boy, he attended St. Patrick's Mission in Anadarko, Oklahoma, and, in the 1920s, began to study at the University of Oklahoma under the direction of Oscar Jacobson and Edith Mahier alongside fellow Kiowa students Stephen Mopope, Spencer Asah, Jack Hokeah, Monroe Tsatoke, and Lois Smoky. Auchiah is known primarily for his paintings related to the Native American Church (peyote) and his WPA murals at the Wiley Post Building in Oklahoma City, the Oklahoma Federal Building in Anadarko, and St. Patrick's Mission. Later in his career the artist taught painting classes in Carnegie, Oklahoma, until his death on 28 December 1974.[1] Auchiah, meaning medicine people, acted as a member of the Buffalo Clan of the Kiowa tribe, which controlled the sacred purpose of art and medicine. This clan became well known for their color mixing and use of earth paints, juices, and stains. As a young boy, he and his mother studied the buffalo near Mt. Scott, in the Wichita Mountains where Fort Sill remains today, and knew about the power of the buffalo.[2]

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[1] Mary Jo Watson, "Biography: James Auchiah," *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/A/AU001.html accessed 12 March 2012.

[2] Interview with James Auchiah, 12 June 1972, at the home of Georgia DuPoint, 2, Box 137, File 001, Silberman Collection.

Vital to understanding the progression of Auchiah's work within the artistic community of the early twentieth century is the incubation of his creative visions. Auchiah's talent and passion for painting came from his ancestors—his grandmother and grandmother's father. Early Kiowa art stemmed from the traditions of the tribal chiefs and their painted tipis. Auchiah stressed that no one copied one another's paintings and always respected the uniqueness of one's design. As a young boy he first understood the importance of painting in his tribe. In 1914, during a Ghost Dance gathering, buckskin jackets were being painted for men and women. He quietly crept into the tipi—where he was not supposed to be—but knew the men well and snuck passed an old woman serving as the doorman and chasing away any little boys trying to sneak in. Inside, Auchiah saw water paint in containers, very soft and thin. The elders were using willow sticks for paintbrushes and were not mixing, but using single colors to design crosses, suns, and moons.[3]

Auchiah's grandmother passed down to him creative inspiration which he used throughout his career. He told Arthur of a particular day when he got into his grandmother's buckskin bag and found two or three golf ball-sized color balls made of tallow, honey and brown sugar. His grandmother used these to draw pictures in a way one might use chalk. Auchiah recalled seeing her take a small bite of the color balls from time-to-time, so he also occasionally gave them a taste. One afternoon, his grandmother caught him meddling in her bag and put a curse on him, warning him to stay away from beehives or any place with bees because they would know what he had done. From that day forth, Auchiah claimed bees attacked him. It was then that the artist learned all about

[3] Interview with James Auchiah, 5 June 1971, 1, Box 137, File 001, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

art and painting; he stole a part of his grandmother's talent in order for her art to not be lost.[4] In the interview, Auchiah relayed how his grandmother received her own artistic talent. One day, while out on the Plains, she was struck by lightning. His grandmother died on the spot and saw in the heavens a spectrum of colors dripping down like fires. In her vision appeared a rainbow with five boys playing on top. One boy appeared as a red figure and had a touch of evil, but the four others were pure and good. She knew to watch out for the boy in red who had the instinct to cause trouble. A similar vision also came to the father of Auchiah's grandmother, Big Wolf. The same inspirations from the peyote church came to him. He envisioned young boys, one painted red, playing on a rainbow. Designs of water, reptiles, and colors inspired by insects and flowers were born from these visions. Big Wolf passed his talents on to his daughter and, in turn, these skills came to Auchiah.[5]

The visions experienced by Auchiah, his grandmother, and great-grandfather served as the basis for their artistic style and remained the influential component in Auchiah's success as a painter. The Kiowa artist became interested in painting peyote designs, despite conflicts with the peyote church, because this is what he knew and how he envisioned things came to be. He and Tsatoke frequently attended the sacred peyote meetings and ceremonies and eventually were allowed to paint certain elements of the religion.[6] Auchiah strongly believed that the peyote religion continued to be misinterpreted by non-Natives. He claimed that even the respected anthropologist, Alice

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

Marriott, distorted his remarks on peyote in an article in the *Chronicles of Oklahoma*.[7] Through this statement by the artist, what is made clear is the need to bring into the long promoted Anglo story the authentic record available from Native Americans. Auchiah tells Arthur in the interview the various methods of how he developed his designs. Some the elders passed down and others appeared to the artist in visions, but the size and pattern of each design contained the potential to change each time someone used it. The Kiowa artist maintained a basic reference file of accumulated designs that he used for his drawings and remembered the origins of most. His design collection included symbols for fire, flowers, leaves, water, birds, and shield designs. For example, Auchiah often employed a shield design he inherited from Big Tree, a cousin of his father Satanta. This shield remained important to Auchiah throughout his career.[8]

To fully comprehend the emotion behind and evolution of Auchiah's painting is his time spent as a young boy at Rainy Mountain Boarding School. The oral histories recorded by the Silbermans with Auchiah provide a record of Indian life in the federal schools and the artist's personal experience. In 1916, at the age of ten, Auchiah attended the Indian school, located south of Gotebo at the Kiowa-Comanche-Apache Reservation. Part of United States government policy, the education of young Native Americans sought to prevent them from "going back to the blanket."[9] As stated by Clyde Ellis in *To Change them Forever: Indian Education at the Rainy Mountain Boarding School, 1893-1920*, "As part of the nationwide system of government-sponsored reservation boarding

[7] Interview with James Auchiah, 29 August 1972, 16, Box 137, File 001, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[8] Ibid., 4.

[9] Clyde Ellis, *To Change them Forever: Indian Education at the Rainy Mountain Boarding School, 1893-1920* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), xi.

schools, Rainy Mountain functioned as a laboratory of change and transformation in which Indian youth would discover and copy forms of behavior and culture."[10] The curriculum at Rainy Mountain, lasting from six o'clock in the morning to five o'clock in the evening, five days a week, provided to Native children a basic education through the sixth grade based on academic instruction and practical skills.[11] Instructors wanted Auchiah to learn how to farm rather than express himself and his Native traditions through drawing.

While at Rainy Mountain, Auchiah used classroom watercolors, colored pencils, and colored chalk. The young artist put to work a piece of glass to scrape off blue, red, pink, or green and would then mix the colors with water and anything sticky, such as glue or syrup.[12] Auchiah frequently found himself in trouble for drawing rather than studying. Common among the practices at the boarding school, instructors punished Auchiah through humiliation and even threw chalk at him since he seemed always to have it on hand. Auchiah relayed to Arthur one particular incident that occurred near Thanksgiving, when an instructor isolated him from all the other students, sat him alone in the chapel and forced him to draw until he became too tired and could sketch no longer. The school could not keep Auchiah from painting and eventually sent him home to his father. Auchiah's experiences at Rainy Mountain remained etched on his memory, as it did for most Native American boarding school students, for the rest of his days.[13]

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[10] Ibid., xii.

[11] Ibid., 113. Clyde Ellis, "Rainy Mountain Boarding School," *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture,"* http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/R/RA005.html accessed 12 March 2012.

[12] Interview with James Auchiah, 26 June 1971, 6, Box 137, File 001, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[13] Ibid.

Unlike the difficulties faced by the Kiowa student at Rainy Mountain, Auchiah found encouragement and friendship at St. Patrick's Mission. At this government run Catholic school, during 1920s, Auchiah received his first formal training in painting and found acceptance as an artist. This instruction led by Willie Baze Lane and patroned by BIA field matron, Suzie Peters, resulted in the discovery of he and his fellow Kiowa classmates—the Kiowa Six—and is recognized as the fire starter for the recognition of Native American art on a national and international level. Suzie Peters brought together the group under the direction of Father Aloysius Hitta, the superintendent of the boarding school, and made sure they received the necessary training.[14] Together, the artists worked on numerous projects while Peters began promoting their pieces through write-ups in newspapers and magazines. With approximately ten students in the class, including Smoky, Tsatoke, Mopope, Hokeah, and Asah, Lane taught how to mix colors and to keep them clean. Although the students were already watercolor painters, at St. Patrick's Lane taught with oils. On their own, they used government issued watercolors in black cans and mixed them with poster paint to get the shades they wanted.[15] During his stint at St. Patrick's, Auchiah sold several paintings to individuals such as Judge Ross Hume, from Anadarko, and Jake Tingly, the owner of a local Indian shop.[16]

These years of training at St. Patrick's Mission, alongside the patronage of non-Native individuals, are central to the story and development of Auchiah's artistic vision and led to his tutelage under Oscar Jacobson. In 1928, after three years at St. Patrick's,

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[14] Kuttalyop - And the Renaissance of Indian Art, Lectures – Kiowa 5, n.d., 4, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[15] Interview with James Auchiah, 5 June 1971, 6, Box 137, File 001, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[16] Ibid., 3.

Jacobson with the University of Oklahoma's school of art, received word about Auchiah and the other Kiowa artists. According to the Auchiah interview in the Silberman Collection, the superintendent of the Indian office, John A. Buntin, became interested in the groups' work and began speaking to Jacobson on their behalf.[17] At the time, Jacobson did not have funds available to bring the artists to the university, but encouraged Lane and Peters to continue training them.[18] Upon finally seeing their work, Jacobson began to visit St. Patrick's weekly to supervise their training. He believed the paintings were unusual, primitive and wanted the young artists to maintain the unique, flat Indian style. He discouraged Lane's use of oils and her gravitation towards the European style of art. Jacobson insisted the European style to be too competitive and that they would not find success within that medium.

Auchiah did not study in Norman the first year because of a lack of funds, but began his tutelage under Jacobson in 1928, continuing through 1930. While at the university, the Native artists were required to maintain a quota of five to six paintings per week. Jacobson monitored their progression and called meetings with each individual artist to discuss areas of weakness. On a few occasions the ardent instructor voiced his disappointment because the Kiowas' work seemed too hasty and lacked improvement.[19] To begin each painting, the artists used architectural tracing paper and sketched, using freehand, with a pencil. They stored these tracing papers in individual collection boxes

[17] The accounts of how Jacobson discovered the Kiowa painters vary among sources. Most scholars credit field agent, Susie Peters, but the reference above regarding Mr. Buntin is taken from the interview between Silberman and Auchiah. It is possible Mr. Buntin simply introduced the two.

[18] Interview with James Auchiah, 5 June 1971, 7, Box 137, File 001, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[19] Ibid., 10.

and the drawings were then approved or rejected by Jacobson. For popular pictures, the tracing paper could be used up to three times.[20] Jacobson made sure the group followed their own distinct style, yet he reprimanded them when they tried to express themselves in a more modern style. It is curious as to what extent the sacred elements of design were executed in order to maintain quota and produce enough to sell in the increasingly attentive art market.

Although Jacobson promoted and initiated sales of the artists' work, he also became concerned at the attempts made by the BIA to commercialize their talents. As noted by Jacobson's wife, Jeanne d'Ucel, in "About Indians," professor Jacobson "Warned that attempts made to develop commercially the Indians' talents might prove too expensive for the results."[21] As far as elements of design, Auchiah himself preferred subject matter such as ceremonial peyote images, medicine men, and fire men and are the elements found primarily in his work. The Kiowa Six did not receive a commission or allowance while studying under Jacobson, but made their money based on production. The instructor purchased paintings for ten dollars or more per piece, allowing the artists earnings between seventy-five and eighty dollars on an average week. They also sold work fairly regularly to individuals such as Anita Howard, Martha Avey, Miss Shartel, and Nan Sheets.[22]

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[20] Ibid. At the time of the interview, Auchiah did not believe any of these tracing papers remained, but were more than likely destroyed.

[21] Anne Allbright, "Oscar Brousse Jacobson: A Swedish Immigrant Who Dramatically Changed Art Perception in Oklahoma" (master's thesis, Edmond: University of Central Oklahoma, 2006), 81.

[22] Interview with James Auchiah, 26 June 1971, 4, Box 137, File 001, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

As Auchiah and the Kiowa Six emerged in artistic circles of twentieth-century America, they began to make their mark independently throughout the US and abroad. In the early 1930s, Auchiah and Hokeah travelled throughout the Southwest performing, producing work, and finding their niche within the art community at large. Both spent quite a bit of time in New Mexico and became acquainted with famed potter Maria Martinez at San Ildefonso. Auchiah stayed for some time in Taos where he sang Kiowa songs and became good friends with Albert Lujan, a well-known Taos painter. Auchiah fondly remembered driving hundreds of miles in Lujan's big car into Navajo country to attend a sacred ritual at Fort Defiance.[23] While in Taos, Myers Studio, a local trading store, purchased a group of Auchiah's paintings. Years prior to this, Father Al at St. Patrick's Mission had corresponded with Myers regarding Auchiah's work. After leaving Taos, the Kiowa artist visited the Santa Fe Indian School with Hokeah and spent a period with Maria Martinez. Auchiah believed this time working in New Mexico, and primarily Hokeah's stay there, helped immensely in building a friendship between the Pueblo and Plains people.[24]

During Auchiah's training and travels in the Southwest, he and fellow artists continued to build relationships and shape the developing American Indian art market. With the work of art historian and anthropologist J. J. Brody in the 1970s, scholars began to address the degree of exploitation behind the patronage of twentieth-century Native American art. Exposing the convoluted relationships between Native artists and non-Native benefactors is the affiliation between the Kiowa Six and Suzie Peters. According

[23] Ibid., 11.

[24] Ibid., 12-5.

to the Auchiah interviews, upon Jacobson's discovery of the Kiowa group at St. Patrick's, a tense relationship emerged between the professor, Peters, and the young artists. Peters fostered the early careers of the Kiowa Six and felt she reserved the right to stake a claim in their successes. She knew Mopope and Hokeah prior to 1918 and consistently provided them with housing, food, and work. Auchiah relayed that the first rift between she and the boys occurred when in Gallup, New Mexico, for an exhibit she arranged. Peters created a contract promising to her twenty percent in commission for each painting sold. She promised the artists she would cover the expenses for lodging and meals to and from Gallup, but when on the road, she did not have the money to fulfill her commitment. She insisted the group sleep in the car and so they simply stopped on the side of the highway and the boys spent the night on the ground, "Indian style." From the exhibit, the artists received $800 in total and Peters demanded her twenty percent.[25] Auchiah claims this happened time and time again.

The BIA field matron acted as the agent and insisted all letters and bookings come directly to her. Peters even tried to demand a cut of Jacobson's project, the publication of a book about the young painters. She threatened the boys by claiming if they ceased their reliance on her, they would lose all their art. Auchiah defended his objection to her demands through the fact that he sold paintings long before his introduction to Peters. Eventually, Mopope quit working for the unsanctioned sales agent, followed shortly by Auchiah. They favored working with Jacobson who had alternate plans for the artists and provided international sponsorship for them. According to d'Ucel's manuscript, Peters wanted to tour the Kiowa artists throughout the West coast, taking the boys to Hollywood

[25] Ibid., 4.

where she previously introduced them to actor Robert Callahan and sold them to a movie outfit without their knowing. D'Ucel claimed Peters did everything she could to make sure the boys did not contact or form contracts with anyone else.[26] BIA superintendent Butkin warned Peters not to act beyond her duties to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. According to the Auchiah interview, further altercations between Peters and Jacobson resulted in the eventual transfer of the agent to Keams Canyon in Arizona.[27]

The details provided by Auchiah of the complications arising over the patronage of the young artists offer a variation to the popular story and represents his personal recollection of events. He also communicated to Arthur the development of his work in the 1930s. The artistic visions of Auchiah converged in a new medium in the thirties with Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs to improve the economy and bring work to poverty stricken America.[28] The Public Works Administration facilitated the production of mural paintings in public buildings throughout Oklahoma and the United States. The boom of interest and success for the paintings completed by local American Indian artists permeated into this new artistic medium. To train the young Indian artists in the process of painting murals, the American Civil Liberties Union hired Swedish artist, Olaf Nordmark. Nordmark became a naturalized citizen of the United States and is recognized for his contribution to the Indian Arts and Crafts movement.[29]

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[26] Interview with James Auchiah, 29 August 1972, 1-2, Box 137, File 001, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[27] Ibid., 6.

[28] David A. Taylor, *Soul of America: The WPA Writer's Project Uncovers Depression America: The WPA Writer's Project Uncovers Depression America* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2009), 14.

[29] Susan Meyn, *More Than Curiosities: A Grass Roots History of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board and Its Precursors, 1920-1942* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), 194.

Nordmark proved a beneficial influence on the Kiowa painters and helped them acquire recognition through a number of successful mural projects across the country. Auchiah respected and appreciated the Swedish artist for his interest in their work and introducing the boys to a new technique, but found it humorous that a Swede taught Indian boys how to paint Indian murals.[30] Nordmark instructed that all murals should have texture and to use the best medium, secco; this fresco technique varied immensely from what the young artists were used to. To prepare for work on murals, Auchiah and his fellow artists sketched preliminary drawings on brown paper. Nordmark supervised their work, primarily the colors, and instructed them as to whether hues appeared too heavy or if used in the wrong place. The Swedish instructor taught the Kiowa artists how to preserve their materials and to be economical, never throwing anything away.[31] Nordmark received instructions from the commissioners of the PWA and maintained complete control over the Indian painters and their mural projects. According to Auchiah, they enjoyed his company and appreciated his taking them to dinner, asking questions about Indian art, and purchasing their paintings.

Although Nordmark's influence on the Kiowa artists appears favorable, Auchiah stressed in the interview with Arthur that Nordmark's training in secco painting upset their mentor, Jacobson, who claimed it strayed too far from the traditional Indian style. Through analyzing Auchiah's personal account of events in the oral histories conducted by the Silbermans, it is obvious that despite best intentions, patrons of the Kiowa Six artists sought to control and profit personally from their work creating a struggle for

[30] Interview with James Auchiah, 26 June 1971, 5, Box 137, File 001, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[31] Ibid., 6.

artistic individuality and Native identity. Auchiah received acclaim for not only his watercolor paintings on paper, but also for the execution of his skill on numerous Oklahoma murals. Many of these murals remain today on walls throughout the country and validate the important role played by American Indian artists in the collective history of the nation.

A number of oral history interviews pertaining to Auchiah comprise the Silberman Collection at the NCWHM and divulge stories that remain undiscovered. An assortment of voices from the past come together in the Silberman Collection to provide discernment into the creative visions of one of the most highly recognized Native American painters, Acee Blue Eagle. Born on 17 August 1907, in Hitchita, Oklahoma, the Creek-Pawnee artist began painting at the age of twelve and prior to his discovery of paint, as a young boy in Anadarko, began his talent by sketching pictures in the sand with a stick. Blue Eagle eventually drew using crayons and then found his love for watercolor. In 1939, World War II was underway and the artist deployed with the Army Air Corps as a camouflage artist. Throughout his career Blue Eagle produced more than 400 canvases and published two books.[32] He is represented in the Silberman Collection by over 200 paintings and sketches. Rather than being introduced to the world as a group, such as the Kiowa Six, Blue Eagle set off in the 1920s and 1930s on an international career alone.[33] As part of this fervor for American Indian art at the turn of the twentieth century, Blue Eagle found guidance and support from Oscar Jacobson, Nan Sheets, his fellow Indian artists, and art collector Thomas Gilcrease. Interviews conducted by Arthur and Shifra

[32] TV Program, Channel 9, 13 April 1972, 1-2, Box 128, File 011, The Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[33] Elder, *The Art and Life of Acee Blue Eagle*, vii, 3.

archiving Blue Eagle's career are comprised of conversations with individuals who remember the artist in different ways—all with admiration.

Some of these individual stories captured by audio recordings tell of meeting Blue Eagle only once and how they would never forget him due to his captivating and entertaining demeanor. Others testified to the collecting couple their age-old friendship with the artist. An example of such a story is that of Scott Fulton, who recalls vital facts of the lives of the Native American artists and particularly Blue Eagle. Fulton worked for Uptown Art Gallery in Oklahoma City in the 1950s and described Blue Eagle as a loud and aggressive speaker who shook your hand hard and looked you in the eye—someone you don't forget. In 1956, the artist met with the owner of Uptown Gallery, Mr. Abbott, and sold him three paintings for one hundred dollars each. Just three or four days after Blue Eagle's death, three years later in 1959, Abbott sold one of the pieces, to an individual for $675.[34] In whatever capacity people knew Blue Eagle, all remembered him as a dynamic and compelling individual with a knack for fun and zest for life.

In addition to this insight from Fulton, the Silbermans acquired an account of the artist from Richard Goetz, an Oklahoma painter in the mid-twentieth century. Goetz shared a room on occasion with Blue Eagle while attending the University of Oklahoma in 1935 and remembered the experiences fondly. Mrs. Mobley, a wealthy Indian woman, ran a rooming house and hosted Blue Eagle when he visited the campus. Blue Eagle enjoyed the hospitality and attempted to court the proprietor's daughter, an internationally successful opera singer, Tessie Mobley.[35] Goetz described Blue Eagle as

[34] Interview with Scott Fulton, 1975, 1-3, Box 127, File 012, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[35] Interview with Dick Goetz, 4 May1975, 4-5, Box 127, File 012, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

"Show biz all the way," and felt he spoke and presented himself better than his other Native American contemporaries. He described the painter as educated and knowledgeable in the ways of selling his art.

These brief stories contribute to the popular reputation Blue Eagle acquired through his successful career as an artist, entertainer and instructor. In disseminating the collaboration of testimonies gathered by the Silbermans, one is able to envision and understand the artistic circles prevalent throughout Oklahoma and the Southwest. In an interview with James Neill Northe, the Oklahoma writer relayed his first hearing about Blue Eagle through Kathryn Woodman Leighton, an Indian portrait and landscape artist who exhibited work in the early 1900s. North explained how Leighton and Blue Eagle became acquainted when the Pawnee-Creek artist travelled to California in the 1930s. Leighton, Senator and Rita Couzzins, and Frank Tenney Johnson were pro-Indian and supported the prevalence of the Oklahoma artists in California during the 1930s.[36] Northe met Blue Eagle in Okmulgee in the early 1950s and found him very gracious, with lovely manners. Northe described to Arthur the sympathy he felt for Native artists in the thirties, forties and fifties because of their struggles against ignorance, apathy, and patronization from non-Natives. People expected Native Americans to act a certain way. Northe believed Blue Eagle played a different role to different people—a different person to his relatives, to art dealers, to the public. Native American artists, at that time, needed to build an image to sell, which made them difficult to truly get to know.[37]

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[36] Interview with James Neill Northe, 28 July 1975, 11, Box 128, File 002, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[37] Ibid., 9-10.

This recollection by Northe illustrates yet again the struggle faced by indigenous artists to achieve success while defining their own individuality and Native identity. As with the Kiowa Six, the artistic vision and style of Blue Eagle fell under the stimulus of Roosevelt's New Deal and the Public Works Administration. He is recognized for a number of murals located throughout Oklahoma. In 1934, Central State—now the University of Central Oklahoma—in Edmond, received a bid for mural paintings in Mitchell Hall. They chose Blue Eagle to complete the task and the artist chose to depict Native rituals, ceremonies, and sports.[38] Unfortunately, these murals now lie under several layers of paint and are too costly for the university to restore. Oral histories conducted by Arthur and Shifra with Nan Sheets—an important individual in the Oklahoma museum community—provide awareness of New Deal mural painting and Blue Eagle's influence on American Indian art. According to Sheets, murals provided work for the Indian artists and brought recognition to the quality of Native American painting which reached all over the United States and beyond. She referred to the murals as rich in imagery, poetry, symbolism, religious fervor, and in every emotional quality it has all the elements of great art. Sheets believed that all Indian art differed and proclaimed, "There are racial characteristics to all paintings, but each individual Indian retains his own art mannerisms…There is, as a matter of fact, no possible approximation of the extraordinary fertility of the Indian mind in matter of design."[39] She described Blue Eagle's work as "Tribal, robust, yet decorative and simple. It is motivated by action

[38] "Mitchell Hall Gets New Mural Decorations Painted by Blue Eagle," *The Vista*, 22 January 1934.

[39] Radio Broadcast with Nan Sheets, 1935, 1-3, Box 128, File 004, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

rather than rhythm."[40] Sheets strongly supported the contributions Blue Eagle and other Indian artists made to American art. She stated, "No matter what else he has adopted from the white man's civilization, the American Indian's art is his own. He refuses to work in any other manner than that of his chieftain father's—it is this that gives to his work the value with which it is regarded today." [41] With this declaration, Sheets provided credit for the value of Native art to American history and society. She stressed the unique spiritual qualities found in indigenous art and how it reflects individual creativity. This is complimentary to Silberman's assessment of American Indian art as a viable art form in general, which exceeds mere ethnological significance. The Silbermans represented Native art as one of inspiration rather than products dictated by the commercial market.[42]

Another group of oral history interviews preserved by Arthur and Shifra Silberman are those with the only female artist in the Kiowa Six group. The interviews with Lois Smoky offer a rare glimpse into her experience as woman and Native painter and her position in this crucial period of American Indian art. The artist gave details of her school days at St. Patrick's Mission in Anadarko and fondly spoke of Suzie Peter's help and encouragement for her personally as well as many in the Native community. Smoky told of the uniforms worn by the boys and girls, rules pertaining to how they could wear their hair and the repercussions for breaking such restrictions. Some of her fondest memories were of her years at St. Patrick's, despite the harsh standards imposed by the school. The young artist followed Peter's encouragement to attend classes at the

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Kuttalyop – And the Renaissance of Indian Art, Lectures – Kiowa 5, n.d., 23, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

University of Oklahoma under the direction of Jacobson and Maier, but claimed she never considered painting professionally. Smoky saw the university as an opportunity to do something fun and interesting.[43]

During the five months of schooling at the University of Oklahoma, Smoky produced approximately fifty paintings, but conveyed to Arthur in an interview that she did not know what happened to any of the pieces. Some of them were purchased by students, but most were gathered by Maier. Smoky received some money for those sold, but considered her work as lessons and did not expect an income from them.[44] In an interview on 8 February 1980, Arthur asked Smoky about her experience painting alongside the Kiowa boys. He quoted Jacobson's remarks stating there was noticeable resentment from the young men against Smoky due to their belief that it was unladylike and unacceptable for a Kiowa woman to partake in painting. Jacobson expressed that the boys showed her "small unkind annoyances" and even mutilated one of her paintings. The lone female Indian artist admitted that the boys were often jealous and acted "funny" when Jacobson praised her work in class—particularly Mopope whom she claimed wanted to be the main one.[45] Smoky also did not go on any of the trips with the Kiowa boys, such as those they frequently made to Gallup where they sold paintings. It is obvious through this discussion between Smoky and Arthur that the male artists remained

[43] Interview with Lois Smoky at St. Anthony Hospital in Oklahoma City, 5 February 1980, 1-6, Box 070, File 010, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[44] Interview with Lois Smoky at St. Anthony Hospital, Oklahoma City, 2 February 1980, 5, Box 070, File 010, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[45] Ibid.

close friends and did not include their fellow female classmate in any aspect of their activities.

Smoky did not seem to be too bothered by the lack of inclusion from the other Kiowa artists and fondly spoke of them to Arthur, providing a sketch of their personalities and accomplishments during the twenties and thirties. As encouraged by Peters, Smoky's mother, Maggie, lived with her in an apartment in Norman for the first five months. The artist expressed to Arthur that she did not want go back after that first semester.[46] It may be that perhaps her mother could not return with her to Norman and Smoky did not want to be there alone without her. Smoky married soon after and did not paint again. She claimed family life on the farm did not leave her with enough time to do so, but rather took up beadwork.[47] In an interview with Riley Sunrise, a Hopi Indian adopted as a son by Suzie Peters, Arthur and Shifra asked for his opinion of Smoky and her paintings. Sunrise responded with interesting comments that reveal the friction between Smoky and the Kiowa boys at the University of Oklahoma. The discussion also reveals the Silbermans intent to understand the discrimination faced by Smoky and to discover the accurate story of the Kiowa Six. Sunrise claimed Smoky as jealous and bossy, but he liked her family and professed that she always treated him kindly. Of her painting he believed "Her figures were not quite up to the rest of the boys." In the interview, Sunrise falls back on the fact that "The other boys said she was jealous."[48] Arthur responded by vocalizing that he thinks Smoky was treated differently and unjustly

[46] Interview with Lois Smoky in Anadarko, Oklahoma, 27 August 1979, 15, Box 070, File 010, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[47] Ibid, 19.

[48] Interview with Riley Sunrise by Arthur and Shifra Silberman, 8 and 9 December 1979, 208, Box 11, Folder 17, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

compare to the other Kiowa artists. How different her story may have been if perhaps she had received more support from her fellow artists and less discrimination even from her own community.

Arthur and Shifra Silbermans' contribution to the tradition of collecting and preserving American Indian art is apparent through their legacy of oral histories with Traditional Native painters and those who knew them. Unearthing the stories from these artists reveals their importance to Native American scholarship and the value they offer to a much needed Native perspective of the American Indian Art Movement. Through these interviews, the Silbermans initiated a pioneering approach to ascertaining the progress of American Indian art and a more balanced account of the Indian art in Oklahoma. What is made clear are the ancestral traditions serving as the foundation for Native art and also the struggles faced by Indian artists' to conform and mold their creative visions to early twentieth-century political and capitalist demands. The testimonies preserved in the Silberman Collection bring to life—from a Native point of view—Indian culture, its influence on the world of art, and the scope of collections at the NCWHM. The work of Arthur and Shifra Silberman as collectors and educators continues to serve as an admirable resource amongst past, present and future generations of Native art collectors and cultivated an important aspect of American history.

CHAPTER FIVE

WILDCATTERS AND COLLECTORS: OKLAHOMA OIL MEN AND THE HERITAGE OF COLLECTING IN OKLAHOMA

The heritage of American Indian art collecting in Oklahoma manifests in the number of museums throughout the state. When experiencing the art and artifacts lining the walls and corridors of institutions such as The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Gilcrease Museum, Philbrook Museum of Art, or Woolaroc Museum and Wildlife Preserve, what is often left untold are the personal stories of those who generously bestowed their treasures to the public and why they found it important to amass a collection of fine art. Most culture seekers remain unaware of the unique connection between the creator, the collector, and the observer of a work of art. Why do collectors, who invest money and personal sentiment into their art, choose to share it with the general public? How do their artistic tastes shape interpretations of an object by the public? In a 1994 exhibit catalog for *Sharing the Heritage*, an exhibition of Native American art hosted by the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art in Norman, Rennard Strickland commented, that the exhibit "Reflects the circles of creativity and connoisseurship at a point where they intersect—a point where the artist's gift of sharing Native heritage with the collector is brought full circle by being opened for a larger public viewing."[1] Through exhibiting Native art, Strickland maintained, the public can share with the collector "the joy of living with art and, perhaps, of sharing those treasures in a continuation of the great circle of creation and collection."[2] It is this philosophy by

[1] Rennard Strickland, *Sharing the Heritage: American Indian Art from Oklahoma* (Norman: Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, 1994), iii.

[2] Ibid., vi.

Strickland that inspires an assessment of Oklahoma's legacy of American Indian art collecting and the significance of the Arthur and Shifra Silberman Native American Art Collection within this tradition. Through the exhibition of Native American art, the general public is able to share in the experience with the creator and collector and become part of the connection between the artist, the connoisseur, culture, and history. The Silbermans recognized this and made it a priority to educate the public about Indian culture and history through their painting collection and supporting reference library.

Arthur and Shifra Silbermans' legacy to Oklahoma is part of a unique and vital story of the state's patronage and appreciation of American Indian art and culture. Today local museums draw crowds from around the world to showcase Native art and artifacts that once were the treasures of various individuals—namely wealthy oil men. The Silbermans not only continued this collecting tradition that originated prior to Oklahoma's statehood, but offered a crucial aspect of American Indian art—the perspective of the Native artist. In order to better ascertain the position of the Silberman Collection within the history of collecting, a sketch of the preceding generation of Native American art collectors in the state is beneficial. A curious and distinctive facet to this narrative is the means by which certain collectors acquired their treasures of art and how they came to rest on the walls of our public spaces. The story behind many of these valuable objects pertains to crude oil. The discovery and cultivation of Oklahoma's primary natural resource helped shape the state's reputation as a land of innovative pioneers and adventurous wildcatters and thus translates into our cultural history as well. Arthur and Shifra Silberman, with their success in the oil business and a serious interest in Native American art, followed a generation of wildcatters and collectors such as Frank

and Waite Phillips and Thomas Gilcrease, all of which demonstrate the evolution of collecting in Oklahoma and the importance of American Indian art to our community today.

The history of Oklahoma—its counties, towns, and residents—is deeply rooted to a rugged entrepreneurial spirit encouraged by the natural resources hidden beneath its ground. In the final decades of the 1800s, the promise of black gold beckoned eager treasure seekers to pick up stakes and settle throughout the Twin Territories. Risky business endeavors in the oil fields proved profitable for some and a failure for many. Bold wildcatters held to the conviction that "good luck can always turn bad" and relied on their instincts and hunches when selecting prospective claims. A true pioneer and industrialist illustrating the story of the Osage oil boom is Frank Phillips and his brother Waite. Head strong and independent, Frank anticipated his fortune in oil and settled in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, with his wife and children in 1905. Thus began the immense success of a fundamental family and corporation now representing a legacy of philanthropy and collecting in the state. Born on 28 November 1873 in Scotia, Nebraska, to homesteaders Lewis and Lucinda Phillips, Frank was the first of ten children. Proud as a direct descendent of Captain Miles Standish and other hard working and strong-willed colonial settlers, Frank was raised by his parents, Lew and Josie, "To be proud, never to turn their backs on family or friends, and, most important of all, to work hard."[3] After a short and difficult stint of frontier life in Nebraska, Frank's parents moved their young son back to their home town in Iowa where he and his siblings all worked together to

[3] Michael Wallis, *Oil Man: The Story of Frank Phillips and the Birth of Phillips Petroleum* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1995), 13.

maintain the family farm. The only formal school training the future oil man received came from Mary Ann Schwemley, the daughter of a local farmer, in the one-room Schwemley School. Frank wanted nothing more than to grow up and be a self-made American hero like his idol, Buffalo Bill Cody. As a boy, Frank became captivated by the tales of Buffalo Bill who began his Wild West Show in Nebraska in 1883. Frank saw himself as a true son of the American West.[4]

The work ethic and ideals nurtured in Frank's youth propelled him forward and solidified in his adulthood. He truly personified the American character set forth in Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 frontier thesis—Frank was shaped by his endurance of pioneer life. In the 1890s, working as a young barber, he set out to experience the romance of the West and visited major mining districts, eventually settling for a brief time in Aspen, Colorado, where he worked at the Silver Dollar Barber Shop. Phillips returned to Iowa in 1895 at the age of twenty-two and opened his own barber shop in Creston. Through the constantly revolving doors of his business he held *tête a têtes* with prominent Creston gentlemen. This is how he became acquainted with attorney John Gibson, a well-known and admired banker in town who immediately took a liking to the young man. Their friendship eventually led to an introduction to Frank's future wife, Jane Gibson, the attorney's daughter, and also helped shape his success in the oil industry. From John Gibson, Frank learned the ways of a successful entrepreneur and continued to gain financial security working under his father-in-law as a bond salesman. His first professional triumph came with his development of the Chicago Coliseum. Christened by President McKinley and hosting acts such as the Ringling Bros. Circus and Buffalo Bill

[4] Ibid., 15-6.

Cody's Wild West show, the Coliseum welcomed guests such as J. Pierpont Morgan and President Lincoln's son, Robert Todd Lincoln.[5]

Frank continued to add to his achievements and his bank book. In 1903, during a visit to the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, Missouri, the flourishing businessman spoke with fellow Creston resident, Reverend C. B. Larrabee. The Methodist preacher relayed to Frank details of the floundering oil business in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. Charmed by the reverend's stories of life as a missionary in Indian Territory, Frank could not hide his enthusiasm for the prospects held by the Osage Indian Nation and the opportunity to strike it rich.[6] The following year he began buying oil leases in Bartlesville, ensuring his involvement in the local boom. He continued investing and soon brought in on the work his brother L. E. By 1905, Frank moved Jane and his infant son to Bartlesville. He and L. E. entered into banking as well and opened Citizens Bank & Trust that winter. Frank focused on the oil leases and L. E. handled the bank books. After only a handful of months in town, on 6 September, the Anna Anderson No. 1 gushed forth and made not only Frank one of the luckiest men on earth, but an eight-year-old Delaware Indian girl, Anna Anderson, the richest Native girl in the Territory.[7]

The Anna Anderson No. 1 proved the first of many fortunate endeavors for the Phillips family. On 13 June 1917, Phillips Petroleum became a corporation and solidified the Phillips name in the pages of Oklahoma history. To keep up with social requirements for business and to relax from operations at the company headquarters, Frank decided to

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[5] Wallis, *Oil Man*, 44.

[6] Ibid., 47-8.

[7] Ibid., 73, 78-9.

indulge in his love of nature and the West. In 1925, construction began on his refuge in the Osage hills—Woolaroc. The land on which the ranch and museum stands today professes a history of Indian warriors and hideouts for notorious outlaws—a past the oil man celebrated and admired. He even hired retired bank robber, Henry Wells, to work on the ranch. Frank used these stories to appeal to his business acquaintances from New York who were awed by the romance of the West. Woolaroc served Frank as a perfect location for East meets West, lucrative business deals, and a place to gather his remnants of the frontier. In 1926, Frank took a business trip to California with a stopover at the Grand Canyon. At a nearby trading post he found himself surrounded by Native Americans selling their Navajo blankets and rugs. He bought as many as he could, pointing to the ones he liked saying "Give me this one, give me that one…" When he finished he pulled out of his pocket $1,400 for his purchases.[8] This instance is the first indication of Frank's passion for Native and Western art and artifacts. With his ranch in mind, he knew the lodge in the Osage hills would be an ideal place to house his growing list of cultural treasures.

Some of Frank's most prized possessions that continue to reveal the interesting character of Oklahoma's cultural collections and pioneer life include species of wildlife roaming free on the hills of his Osage property in addition to a showcase of Native and Western art. Three months before the official unveiling of Woolaroc in 1926, Frank received his cherished herd of buffalo. They hailed from the largest pure breed left in the nation, located in South Dakota. Part of the herd shipped to Frank's friends at the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch near Ponca City and another portion went to his brother, Waite's New

[8] Wallis, *Oil Man*, 195.

Mexico ranch, Philmont. Due to Frank's admiration for Buffalo Bill and the animal's importance to the story of the American Plains, the oil tycoon named the buffalo as the symbol of Woolaroc.[9] He intended his ranch to be "An ideal of the Midwestern life, log house, rugged place for a cabin, a wild animal and game preserve. All part of the Frank Phillips 'back to nature' plan."[10] A 1926 Kansas City headline stated "Uses Riches to Preserve the Spirit of the West" and that Frank had "A desire to build something monumental to the spirit of the West....It is more than a playground of a rich man. It typifies America's pioneer life." [11]

Frank's dedication to the "spirit of the West" became evident in the growing importance of Woolaroc as a museum and symbol of Frank as a man and a collector. Deemed "the collection of a spoiled rich man" by historian Danney Goble, Woolaroc is a rare breed in the museum community.[12] It offers an important narrative to Oklahoma's atypical relationship between art collecting and the oil industry. From the 1920s to the late 1940s, Frank began to actively acquire artifacts and art related to the story of the American West. In 1940, at the age of sixty, Frank opened Woolaroc Museum for public tours and issued the following statement:

> This museum originated as a place of safekeeping for the many mementos given me by my friends throughout the world. In the hope that paintings by great American artists might educate and inspire, I since have added many of these. They reflect the evolution of America, especially its Southwest, from prehistoric times to the present day. As the adopted White Chief of the Osage Tribe, and as an observer of the final chapter of the long conflict between Red Man and White Man, I have known the traditions and viewpoints of both these peoples. If the exhibits here can

[9] Ibid., 202.

[10] Ibid., 210.

[11] Ibid., 211.

[12] Gale Morgan Kane, *Frank's Fancy* (Oklahoma City: The Oklahoma Heritage Association, 2001), 166.

> help to convince youth and future generations that America's hard-earned traditions and ideals must be preserved, my meager efforts will be repaid.[13]

In this statement Frank made clear that he wants to share with others the ideals he holds in high regard and how his collection reflects the significance of Native and Anglo cultures in shaping American values.

The collection at Woolaroc is known to be distinctively eclectic with a hodgepodge of strange items such as shrunken heads, to objects of fine art. The 1950s author and art critic, Aline Saarinen, described the museum as "One of the most bizarre and unsettling collections in the world."[14] Today the museum prefers the acclaim from the president of Christie's New York, Mark Porter, who stated, "Woolaroc provides an unparalleled encounter with wildlife and the West. The world-class western art, Native American and Colt firearms collections offer not just a singular experience within Oklahoma or the West but one unique in America."[15] Similar to the organizing efforts of Shifra Silberman to the Silberman Collection, Frank's wife Jane kept meticulous books listing the donor, the gift, and the date received. Eventually, Frank realized in order to bring better organization to the museum he needed to hire a professional to manage his growing collection. In 1940, Pat Patterson began as the first official director of Woolaroc. Patterson held a degree in anthropology from the University of Oklahoma and shared Frank's interest in Western art and folklore. Frank wanted to make Woolaroc a quality

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[13] Wallis, *Oil Man*, 405.

[14] Aline Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors: The Lives, Times and Tastes of Some Adventurous American Art Collectors* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1958), 322.

[15] Woolaroc Museum & Wildlife Preserve, http://www.woolaroc.org/ accessed 9 February 2013.

museum and his hiring of Patterson combined with extensive investments towards operations, marked the turning point for the museum.[16]

Frank gave an immense amount of money and time to establish Woolaroc as an important symbol of Oklahoma history and culture. Part of his investment in the museum included the purchase of glass display cases and pine bark frames, patented by the collector himself. He also added significantly to the permanent collection. Sculptures and paintings from the western masters in addition to American Indian arts and crafts were acquired. Frank purchased the portion of a collection from fellow wildcatter and friend E. W. Marland. The Ponca City oil man found himself financially strapped and Frank not only wanted to add to his own personal museum, but felt a responsibility to help out his friend. Patterson travelled to Ponca City to see the Marland collection and make an offer. From Marland, Woolaroc acquired the twelve original castings of the Pioneer Woman by sculptor Bryant Baker and also purchased five other bronze sculptures by the artist.[17] World renowned journalist, Ernie Pyle, visited the ranch in 1939 and observed the collection, providing an insightful account of the original display of art and artifacts prior to Pat Patterson's work as director.

> All around the walls are great oil paintings—mostly western scenes or portraits of Indians. Every picture is hung against a rug of animal skin, with the edges protruding a few inches. It gives a softening effect that is marvelous. It sounds like a hodgepodge, but it isn't. The thousands of items are expensively mounted and classically presented. The curator is Mrs. Donald Zulke, the ranch foreman's wife. She never had any museum experience. She and Mr. Phillips just figured out together how they wanted things done."[18]

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[16] Wallis, *Oil Man*, 406-9.

[17] Ibid., 410.

[18] Ibid., 405-6.

Pyle's testament paints a picture of the early arrangement and function of the Woolaroc collection and reveals Frank's vision and creativity as a collector. In comparing Frank's interests to those demonstrated by the Silberman Collection, the depth and importance of Arthur and Shifra's work can be discovered. The Silberman Collection intentionally conveys the significance of each painting as a true representation of Native American history and culture, where the collection at Woolaroc transformed from adornments to a wealthy man's home and a symbol of status to a representation of American values.

Frank devoted himself to the museum both financially and emotionally, yet always put operations at Phillips Petroleum first. Despite being ardently focused on his business interests, he spent a lot of time at Woolaroc overseeing operations and ensuring Patterson followed Frank's intentions. Patterson once noted of the collector and his collection, "That museum was a one-man show....It was his own personal plaything and he hated anyone coming along and sticking their nose in it."[19] Patterson relayed the difficulties of working with such a head strong employer, but cared immensely for Frank despite his often firing the director up to three times in a single day. The two argued over policy, what should be placed where and what the museum should acquire. Patterson described Frank as a "tough old son of a bitch," but that "If your boss is confident and sure of himself, then everyone will feel good about themselves. That's what made the ranch and the museum succeed. That's why it was such a beautiful place to work and such a beautiful place to be."[20] Frank also had confidence in his director. He sent

[19] Ibid., 410.

[20] Ibid., 411.

Patterson on a number of "vacations" to visit museums across the country to discover how other institutions operated. Frank wanted Woolaroc to be a first-class attraction.[21]

Patterson and a number of other important individuals contributed to the success of Woolaroc and ensured that the logistics of the museum and its collection remained well-oiled and respected. In the initial years of establishing his collection at Woolaroc, Frank reached out to friends to help him attain his vision of rustic décor and works of art. In 1923, the oil tycoon joined The Lotus Club in New York. Founded in 1870 to promote American arts and letters, his time here and friendship with the manager, J. Steinfeld, initiated Frank's early artistic interests. Steinfeld saw the potential of Woolaroc and gave several gifts to Frank and also sold some paintings to Jane.[22] Gifts from the friends of Frank and Jane formed the beginning of Woolaroc's collections. To decorate his lodge, Frank aggressively searched for animal horns and trophies from 1926 to 1929. The first ranch manager, Grif Graham, had an impressive collection of animal horns that sparked the beginning of this collection.[23] In the late 1930s, Frank met Sarah White and Dr. Forrest Clements from the department of anthropology at the University of Oklahoma. Soon he found himself investing and participating in an important archaeology project with Spiro Mound. He purchased a collection of Spiro artifacts from Poteau resident John C. Pfalzfraf for $2,800 and worked closely with White to develop the prehistory exhibits, which remained until current renovations taking place today.[24]

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[21] Ibid., 413-4.

[22] Kane, *Frank's Fancy*, 18.

[23] Ibid., 113-4.

[24] Ibid., 126.

The eclectic Woolaroc collection is built also from early influences from Frank's close friends, Pawnee Bill and the Miller brothers of 101 Ranch. He and Jane also purchased pieces directly from the artists, many who they came into contact with on their many trips to Santa Fe and Taos. Painter and sculptor E. W. Lenders, a German artist who worked with Buffalo Bill's Wild West show and then the Miller Brothers 101 Ranch, guided Frank and Jane in their acquisition of western and Native American memorabilia. Lenders used his connections with the American Museum of National History and J. Pierpont Morgan to find appropriate artifacts for the couple.[25] In addition to six paintings by Lenders, the Phillips bought directly from Robert Lindneux and Henry Balink. Balink, born in Amsterdam and instructed at the Royal Academy, worked in Santa Fe and also influenced the Silberman Collection at the NCWHM. Arthur and Shifra acquired a number of American Indian paintings and maintained frequent correspondence with Balink's son, Henry Bernard, and the Balink Gallery through the 1970s and 1980s.

In addition to acquiring important paintings directly from artists, Frank and Jane used fine art galleries in New York and Kansas City and consulted frequently with fellow collectors, J. C. Nichols and Gordon Matzene, resulting in numerous important acquisitions. Matzene was recommended to Frank by his friend, Ponca City oil man, Lew Wentz, who is often recognized for financially supporting the Kiowa Six at the University of Oklahoma in the late twenties. Matzene began employment with Frank in 1939 and, despite an often tense relationship, the art advisor is credited with bringing together the hodge-podge collections into a logical, philosophical body.[26] A large portion

[25] Ibid., 137.

[26] Ibid., 145.

of the collection at Woolaroc also came from family members of Frank—also active collectors of Western and Native art. His brother, L. E., and nephew, Phil, gave the museum a number of items constituting important exhibits currently on display. From Phil Phillips Woolaroc received an extensive collection of Joe Beeler artwork, a Thomas Moran, and a collection of Colt Patterson firearms—believed to be one of the best in the nation. Other paintings given to the museum by Phil and Lee Phillips include works by Remington, Russell, and Frank Tenney Johnson.[27]

The influential individuals behind the construction of Woolaroc's collection reveal a wildcatter's aspiration to leave a legacy of visual history for those that followed. It is evident in Woolaroc's continuing mission and function that this charismatic and entrepreneurial man saw a way to translate the importance of the past into a necessity for future generations. In 1946, on Frank and Jane's fiftieth wedding anniversary, Frank drove his bride up to the front of the museum in a horse and buggy, just like the one they used on their wedding day in Creston, Iowa. Patterson, the museum director, recalled the day and the moment when he realized what the museum meant to Frank. Surrounded by thousands of roses and gladiolas the oil man "Escorted his lady so proudly through the museum followed by the guests that had come to the party…I realized for the first time that Frank Phillips loved the museum as much as I did….He couldn't hide the excitement he felt as he pointed out the many, many changes we had made."[28] In a 1944 letter to the Phillips Petroleum Foundation trustees, Frank spelled out his intentions for the museum upon his death, which occurred in 1950. He wrote, "During my lifetime, I derived a great

[27] Ibid., 129.

[28] Wallis, *Oil Man*, 447-8.

deal of pleasure in building Woolaroc Ranch and Museum....Through its medium I tried to preserve and perpetuate a part of the country I knew as a young man. In this Museum are relics of many milestones in the progress of this country and of the Company which bears my name. I hope the Ranch and Museum can be preserved and maintained as a monument to the West as I knew it in the days before Phillips Petroleum Company was organized."[29] Today Woolaroc carries forth Frank's purpose and represents much more than just the "spirit of the West"—it stands as testimony to Oklahoma's particular cultural history and heritage of collecting.

Frank's love of the American West, his pioneering aspirations and philanthropy not only remain evident in the halls and hills of Woolaroc, but left an impression on his younger brother, Waite Phillips. Born on 19 January 1883 in Conway, Iowa, just minutes after his twin brother, Wiate, this new addition to the Phillips clan promised to be another independent business man and fortunate wildcatter. Anxious to follow their big brother Frank, Waite and Wiate left the family farm to seek adventure out West. In October 1899, the twins embarked on their journey, travelling across the once unsettled frontier and landing different sorts of work at the age of sixteen. The two teens worked for Union Pacific Railroad in Wyoming, dabbled in mining in Idaho and then separated from one another for seven months while Waite busied himself in Missoula, Montana. Waite then visited Indian Territory and eventually settled for a time in Sprague, Washington. In 1902, his twin suffered from acute appendicitis. Waite wired his brother Frank, now a success in Iowa, for money for an operation. On Wednesday, 16 July at the age of 19, Waite's best friend and twin brother, Wiate, passed away with Waite by his side. The loss

[29] Ibid., 448.

of his sibling is something Waite carried with him throughout his life. The memories of their exploits out West shaped Waite's future interests in collecting.[30]

To help him recover from the loss of his companion, Waite moved back home to Iowa. In 1903, he began school at Shenandoah Commercial Institute and School of Penmanship where he studied business, commercial law, grammar, penmanship, and mathematics. His brothers Frank and L. E. paid his tuition, which Waite did not discover until after graduation. Following his completion of school, he went to work as a bookkeeper at Hawkeye Coal Co. in Knoxville, Iowa, where his brothers held stock. In this bustling town Waite seemed to find a bit of happiness and a means to pay for living expenses. He soon met his future bride, Genevieve Elliott, the daughter of the wealthiest banker in town, John Brown Elliott.[31] By 1908, Waite found himself in Bartlesville with Frank and L. E., well versed in the oil profession, happily married to Genevieve, and settled in a nice house at 711 Cherokee Avenue—gambler's numbers, "seven come eleven".[32] Following a handful of years making his mark on the oil derricks and in an office next to his brothers, Waite decided he wanted to set out on his own path in the field. Just as determined and independent as his older brother Frank, the young wildcatter could not be persuaded to stay.

Waite became bored quite easily and always seemed to move on to next best thing as soon as he checked yet another accomplishment off his list. With his mind set on making his own path, the wildcatter packed up his wife and daughter, Helen Jane, and

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[30] Michael Wallis, *Beyond the Hills: The Journey of Waite Phillips* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Heritage Association, 1995), 52-65.

[31] Ibid., 81-4.

[32] Ibid., 113.

established themselves in Okmulgee, Oklahoma. Here he served as president for Okemah Abstract & Title, all the while drilling for oil in the area. The Waite Phillips family lived and enjoyed life in this small town from 1915 to 1918. Waite continued the drilling game, finding only dusters for some time until, finally, persistence paid off. Once he discovered his pools of black gold in the local fields, the restless capitalist decided to pick up stakes again.[33]

In search of a city and home that could accommodate Waite's oil interests and the addition of another child to the family, a son Elliott, the Phillips decided on Tulsa, Oklahoma. They moved into a brand new brick home amidst a number of other families established on "new money." The large house on South Owasso suited them well, but Waite still needed a place to escape—a refuge where he could be alone and display his favorite things. In the backyard of his beautiful Tulsa home, he built a small log cabin where he kept remnants of his travels through the West.[34] Here his family knew not to disturb him. It functioned as his time machine. "It was Waite's tie to the past, to those long-ago times when he and his twin brother had roamed the West."[35] It is in this small log cabin that the initial habits of the wildcatter as a collector seemed to take root. Here and at his ranch in New Mexico, nestled in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, Waite collected Navajo rugs, animal trophies, art, and artifacts of the Southwest.

Not only did Waite develop, furnish, and collect at Philmont, his New Mexico ranch, but the oil tycoon built an exquisite mansion beside Crow Creek in Tulsa,

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[33] Ibid., 136-54.

[34] Ibid., 154-6.

[35] Ibid., 156.

christened as Philbrook. The financial enabler for the development of these properties came from a surprising business deal the previous year, 1925. Waite did not enjoy holding on to his money and always found his satisfaction in the hunt. The risky Tulsan decided to sell his oil company. Investment bankers in New York purchased the Waite Phillips Co. for twenty-five million dollars, making Waite's personal net worth, at the age of forty-three, an estimated forty million dollars.[36] Throughout this endeavor and the years following, the wildcatter dedicated his days to developing real estate and erecting impressive architecture that now stand as testament to Oklahoma's corporate and cultural history.

The investment in real estate occurred alongside his acquisitions of Native American and Western art. Although the collecting ideals and practices held by Waite remain unrecognized, insight provided by author Michael Wallis into the oil man's nature as an entrepreneur allows for a clearer understanding. Wallis described Waite as "a first-class oil man—a true wildcatter deluxe—but he also excelled at so much more, including the management of banks and herds of beef cattle. He also was especially capable in the multifaceted business of real estate. Waite liked it all. His ability to sniff out, purchase, and fully develop choice properties—whether for commercial buildings, ranches, residences, or just as investments—was uncanny."[37] Waite believed that "The really successful man is the one who has worked to develop the talents with which he has been equipped, making them contribute to the up building of his character and the service of

[36] Ibid., 206.

[37] Ibid., 200.

mankind."[38] This reflection of Waite's values are found in the objects he collected and present to the general public today a self-portrait of the oil man and a demonstration of the traditional go-getter American spirit.

Waite's philanthropic and collecting legacy impressed upon Oklahoma is found at the Philbrook Museum of Art. Certain aspects of the Philbrook in Tulsa reveal to the public the aesthetic aspirations of Waite's wife, Genevieve, who fell in love with ancient and modern Europe while on more than one family expeditions to the source. The museum balances Genevieve's interests with Waite's love for the outdoors and the Southwest. While European art, textiles, and furniture adorned the main floors of their villa, the lower level contained a suite of southwestern styled rooms that housed the Phillips' Native American art collection. In the Santa Fe Room, Waite commissioned Taos artist, Oscar Berninghaus, to paint a view of Villa Philmont. [39] The family's home and collection awed and inspired people across the nation as they do today. Will Rogers said of Philbrook "Well, I've been to Buckingham Palace, but its hasn't anything on Waite Phillips' house."[40] Despite emotional attachments to their residences in Tulsa and New Mexico, after just ten years, Waite looked to sell them both and settle in sunny California.

Waite's decision to dispose of his homes in Tulsa and New Mexico and provide them as gifts disclose his belief that real philanthropy meant "Helping others, outside our own family circle, from whom no thank you is expected or required."[41] To the Boy

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[38] Ibid., 201-2.

[39] Ibid., 222-4.

[40] Ibid., 224.

[41] Ibid., 284.

Scouts of America he gave his Philmont ranch and Philbrook went to the city of Tulsa. In 1938, Waite and Genevieve made the official announcement that Philbrook belonged to the city of Tulsa and set forth their intent to see it transformed into a museum focusing on Native American art and historical materials. An aspect of this involved the creation of the Southwestern Art Association. Waite's intended function for the museum "Placed special emphasis on the importance of Indian collections to perpetuate the culture of a people to whom Oklahomans are especially indebted."[42] He envisioned the museum as a repository for the art and artifacts of the North American Indian tribes.

Waite played a key role in the transition of his home into an art museum and, in 1938, met with board members of the Tulsa Art Association, American Indian Foundation, University of Tulsa, and Southwestern Art Association for the completion of the Philbrook Museum.[43] On 26 October 1939, the doors of Philbrook Art Center opened however, Waite and Genevieve did not attend. The family busied themselves making plans for their new home in Bel Air, California, where Waite acquired more real estate and opened a new office on Wilshire Boulevard. The wildcatter enjoyed possessing things that illustrated the history of the West and Native American culture because of his romantic notions of frontier life and sentimental connection to the past. Although he thrived on the chase, he remained married to his business ventures, much like his brother Frank. Waite's vast wealth allowed him to pursue objects of beauty and meaning, but he did not necessarily adhere to the scholarly path as did other collectors such as Arthur and

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[42] Ibid., 280, 282.

[43] Ibid., 286.

Shifra Silberman. Always looking towards the next endeavor, surprisingly, Waite spent the longest period of his life in California. There he lived out his remaining twenty years with his family until his death in 1964. While the Phillips brothers, Frank and Waite, may not have collected Western and Native American art strictly in pursuit of scholarly satisfaction, they did leave a legacy of collecting and artistic culture pivotal to Oklahoma's distinct identity.

Another forerunner in the oil industry who made his mark on the state and nation as an intellectual and serious collector of American history and Western and Native American art is Thomas Gilcrease. Gilcrease believed that "Every man must leave a track and it might as well be a good one."[44] This principle guided his collecting practices and led to the founding of the Gilcrease Museum. Located in Tulsa, this institute dedicated to the history, art, and culture of America and the American Indian is recognized as a world-class museum. Fortunately, more has been published regarding the collecting incentives of Gilcrease, unlike Frank and Waite Phillips, the Silbermans, and the majority of Oklahoma art collectors of which there is much left to discover. What and why did Gilcrease choose to acquire the things he did? Who were the artists he patronized and how did he support them? Questions such as these have been answered and allow for a thorough appreciation of the collector and his treasures.

Particularly interesting about Gilcrease and key to comprehending his collection in Tulsa is the wildcatter's American Indian ancestry. Allottee number 1505 on the Creek Rolls, Gilcrease was born in Natchitoches Parrish, Louisiana, on 8 February 1890. The first of fourteen children to William Lee Gilcrease and Mary Elizabeth Vowell, Gilcrease

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[44] David Randolph Milsten, *Thomas Gilcrease* (San Antonio: Naylor Co., 1969), xiii.

joined the rolls and his family claimed their 160 acres of land in Creek Territory shortly after the future oil man's birth.[45] As a boy, Gilcrease's Creek mother told him the stories of their journey to the Territory—tales of building log cabins, trapping food, the danger of snakes—all the trials of pioneer life. This lifestyle insisted that Gilcrease become self-reliant and hard working at quite a young age. At the age of four he took care of the livestock and at the age six learned how to hoe the corn fields. When he returned from work in the fields at the end of the day, Gilcrease helped his mother churn, wash clothes and cook. At only eight he learned to plow, plant, and harvest and at ten he worked on the milling. By twelve he began to help his father run the cotton gin, and at fourteen he helped buy cotton and merchandise for the family's general store. When he reached seventeen, Gilcrease began to take the train to school at Bacone in Muskogee, he married by eighteen, and became a farmer and rancher before his 19th birthday.[46]

While Gilcrease toiled incessantly on the family farm and in the general store, he did find time now and then to attend country school—another indicator of the motivators behind his love of history and pride in his heritage. In a one-room log cabin, Gilcrease was the first student of Creek poet, Alexander Posey. From Posey the young student learned stories of the Trail of Tears and others pertaining to his Creek ancestry. Gilcrease said of Posey, "He was intelligent, had a keen insight into people and all things around him. He was a lover of nature, a good shot with the bow and arrow and he taught me how to make them and to shoot straight....I will always hold him in my memory as a kindly

[45] Ibid., 10-5.

[46] Ibid., 21.

and helpful man and hope that I have in some measure followed in his ways."[47] The only other formal education Gilcrease received came from four months of study in 1907 at Bacone College in Muskogee. While on the train from school one weekend, he met his future wife, Belle Harlow, a young Osage girl, also in attendance at Bacone. The two married on 22 August 1908 in Harrisonville, Missouri, and settled on a farm in Tulsa County.[48] They lived there and for a brief time in California with their two sons, Thomas Jr. and Barton until, after a difficult marriage, Belle and Gilcrease divorced in 1922.[49] Gilcrease attempted marriage once more in 1926 with Norma Des Cygne Smallwood, Miss America 1924, but did not find success in this relationship either. He put forth all of his efforts for the rest of his days in the pursuit of knowledge and acquiring objects illustrating his numerous curiosities.

Many of the hardships endured during Gilcrease's marriages to Belle and Norma resulted from the young entrepreneur's fervent quest for oil and the development of his investments. At a young age he quickly found success and became engrossed, as other wildcatters and collectors, in the hunt. His fortune in oil came from his allotment, located two and one-half miles from Kiefer, Oklahoma, in the Glen Pool area.[50] Throughout the early years of the 1900s, he taught himself how to conduct business as an oil man and propagated his future. Entering into the banking industry as well, his revenues continued

[47] Ibid., 26.

[48] Ibid., 37-8.

[49] Ibid., 33-43.

[50] Ibid., 52.

to rise. On 5 January 1922, the Gilcrease Oil Co. commenced and began to obtain oil leases throughout Texas and Oklahoma.[51]

Seeking capital to support Gilcrease Oil Company, the oil man moved to Paris, France, in 1926, where he also pursued his interests in European history and art. Despite his lack of an extensive formal education, the businessman studied French and Spanish history and became prolific in both languages. He also used his wealth to hire those he could learn from. One of the most influential individual's in Gilcrease's life, whom he met while living in Paris, was his friend and business partner, Dr. Robert Lee Humber. A Rhodes Scholar with a bachelor of arts in literature from Oxford University and a master of arts from Harvard University, Humber was a well-known attorney and business executive in Paris and, due to their compatibility, became business partners with Gilcrease. The two shared a keen interest in history and art.[52] Accounts left by Humber of the many conversations and plans between the two companions provide pertinent insight into Gilcrease's collecting philosophies and intentions for the wildcatter's collection and museum. Humber once said of Gilcrease:

> Mr. Gilcrease recognized the man who could create, capture inspiration, and record it on canvas or carve it in stone. Sublime creativity was a part of his being. He liked the kind of art which has as its mission the revelation of the beautiful human experience at flood tide. Sordid realism had no appeal to him in art or in life. He believed that every act of man should be directed to the goal of elevation....He held to the proposition that all human energy should be aimed to improve the human species. Such was his philosophy of art.[53]

[51] Ibid, 66.

[52] Ibid., 115.

[53] Ibid., 123.

Through Humber's account of his close friend, it is clear what Gilcrease valued in art and in life. It allows for a keen understanding of how and why the collection and museum came to be. Much like the Silberman Collection, the Gilcrease Museum stands as a demonstration of the bearing of Native American culture on American culture and identity.

This appreciation for creativity and human elevation in art set Gilcrease on the path to establishing an institution to house his collection and display it to the public, instilling in others his vision of American history. In 1931, the oil man relayed to Humber his intent to create a museum, begin a library and build a home for orphans—all of which he accomplished. Gilcrease wanted an all-encompassing museum including both European and American art, but Humber, concerned with financial capabilities to accomplish such a grand scope, recommended his friend narrow the focus to American art. At the time, no museums existed dedicated solely to American art and Humber convinced Gilcrease of the pertinent time to highlight the lives of American Indians.[54] The collector set forth on his mission "Determined to let the world see the American Indian in all of his glory, not as a matter of retribution, but as a means of redemption and release from the persecution he felt they had endured at the hands of the white man."[55]

Plans for the Thomas Gilcrease Foundation and Museum seemed well under way by the late thirties. Gilcrease and Humber walked the streets of Paris and studied the motives and methods of the great European and American fine art collectors. They met at the Café de la Madeleine and visited about acquiring the proper funds through Gilcrease oil

[54] Ibid., 124-6.

[55] Ibid., 124.

investments to fund Humber's interests in creating a World Federation and the wildcatter's intentions to create an art collection and library.[56] On 14 March 1943, the doors of the Thomas Gilcrease Foundation opened in San Antonio, Texas, displaying American paintings that emphasized the American Indian and to support the education of Indian boys and girls. The first brochure printed stated, "The spirit of the Indian is an engrossing human document. His courage in the face of insurmountable odds, his stoicism in the face of disaster, and his willingness to help in the maintenance of our country in spite of the many wrongs that he has suffered, have made his qualities an important part of our national heritage."[57] This first exhibit reiterated the importance of Native Americans and the unique Americanness of the collection—much like other exhibits of Indian art across the country that promoted a national identity and highlighted Native Americans as a modern, living culture. In 1949, resulting from a lack of public interest in the treasures of the foundation, Gilcrease moved his collection to his property in Tulsa where it remains today.

The move of the Gilcrease Museum to Tulsa proved a success and continues to welcome visitors from around the world today. The museum perpetuates the collector's pride in his Creek ancestry and interest in preserving American Indian culture. Biographer and friend of the collector, David Milsten, claimed that Gilcrease constituted his foundation on the belief "That if the Indian could be given the same opportunities as the white man he could eventually reach the same level. The Indian needed the equipment to compete with the white man and on the same terms, especially the children

[56] Ibid., 127.

[57] Ibid., 85.

who would otherwise be denied the opportunity."[58] Gilcrease revealed his philosophies through the art he acquired and his patronage to Native artists from Oklahoma. The collector supported a number of Oklahoma artists whose talent he recognized and admired through salaried positions and the purchase of their pieces. In 1946, he met Willard Stone, a woodcarver from Locust Grove, Oklahoma, and asked him to serve as an artist in residence at the museum in Tulsa. For three years, Gilcrease paid the wood carver an annual salary of three thousand dollars with the stipulation that all the work produced would become property of the Gilcrease Museum. Stone happily accepted the arrangement and expressed his appreciation of the collector's guidance and support. In 1966, Stone dedicated a bust of Gilcrease to the museum as an homage to his mentor.[59]

Another important artist Gilcrease befriended and supported was Muscogee-Creek painter, Acee Blue Eagle. Blue Eagle is one of the most influential and collected Traditional artists from Oklahoma and is well represented not only by the Gilcrease Museum, but also by the Silberman Collection through paintings, sketches and oral history interviews. The patronage Blue Eagle received from individuals such as Gilcrease helped shape his career and elevated the value of his work through their promotion and possession of his paintings. Gilcrease and the Blue Eagle met in the 1940s during the artist's most successful years as a painter and lecturer. Blue Eagle not only had a business relationship with the oil man, but maintained a close friendship with him throughout the artists' later years. In a letter Blue Eagle wrote to Gilcrease on 26 May 1946, he relayed

[58] Ibid., 90.

[59] Ibid., 253-9.

the sentiments for his friend and reveals the influence of Gilcrease as a patron of the arts and supporter of Indian artists.

> You have been indeed a grand person to me outside of our business and beyond that connection you have touched my heart with your personal feelings and soul—I have felt closely drawn to you!—a more personal relationship—I think because you are the same tribe and because of your personal self....I do know that the last time you visited me in Muskogee, you gave me the spark of energy to paint that I have not had in four years![60]

In this text the enigmatic character of Blue Eagle is recognized as well as the importance of Gilcrease's Creek heritage to contemporary Native artists. Further evidence of this relationship between the Creek painter and his friend hangs on the walls of the Gilcrease Museum. Over fifty of Blue Eagle's paintings such as *Buffalo Hunt, Fancy Dancer,* and *Peyote Brave* represent the importance of the Gilcrease Collection to American Indian art and the role of collecting in the promotion of Oklahoma's artistic heritage.

In addition to his patronage of Stone and Blue Eagle, Gilcrease also formed an important business relationship with artist Woody Crumbo. Over a two-year period Crumbo worked for Gilcrease resulting in the production and compensation for nearly 179 paintings. While in residence at the museum, Crumbo not only painted, but served as advisor to the collector by assisting him in acquisitions of art, artifacts, and books. In return, the oil man broadened Crumbo's understanding of the business of museum collecting. The artist noted his friend's ability to bargain for a piece of art he wanted to acquire. "It was like embarking upon a hunting trip and being the only one in the party who did not know where the leader was headed." The salesman remained

[60] Ibid., 272.

unaware of the collector's tricks and the sale most often closed at Gilcrease's price.[61] Gilcrease and Crumbo established a friendship beyond that of the patron-artist and resulted in the growth and success of both men.[62] A generation later, Arthur and Shifra Silberman acquired pieces created by Crumbo and pursued an understanding of the artist and how his work had been influenced by his Native community and outside factors, such as patronage by Gilcrease and.[63]

Gilcrease's support of American Indian painters led to a number of acquisitions for the collection and further elevation of these creative individuals. In addition to the personal relationships with the artists, he also maintained contact with several galleries throughout the country and overseas. Between the 1940s and 1950s, Gilcrease purchased hundreds of paintings from various dealers revealing transactions based on opportunity rather than a systematic process.[64] These purchases made with art dealers resulted in some of the museum's most recognized pieces based on quality and value. One such deal bringing national acclaim to the museum and its collector was the purchase of the Thomas Cole Collection from the Kennedy Galleries in New York. In 1944, Gilcrease paid $250,000 for perhaps the finest collection of Western art in the world, valued near

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[61] Ibid., 282.

[62] Kimberly Roblin, "At Gilcrease," in *Woody Crumbo*, ed. Carol Haralson (Tulsa: Gilcrease Museum, 2012), 52.

[63] Crumbo, Woodrow Wilson (Woody), 1936-1992, Box 088, Folder 006, Silberman Collection, NCWHM. Crumbo, Woodrow Wilson (Woody), Larry Roviello, 1981-1982, Box 088, Folder 005, Silberman Collection, NCWHM.

[64] Anne Morand, "Masterworks of a Master Collector," in *Thomas Gilcrease*, ed. Carol Haralson (Tulsa: Gilcrease Museum, 2009), 155.

one million dollars.[65] Outbidding Frank Phillips at the Woolaroc Museum, the Gilcrease Museum joined the ranks of world-class museums with this acquisition.

The purchase of the Cole Collection and priceless works of American Indian art are only a portion of the materials that exemplify the intuition and artistic tastes of Gilcrease. The collector obtained several crucial pieces from other galleries resulting in national recognition of the collection. W. F. Davidson of M. Knoedler and Co., Inc., an important friend of the wildcatter and associate of the New York gallery, said of Gilcrease "In the area of western Americana his collection goes unchallenged and unsurpassed. He had foresight and courage which was ahead of his time, and he directed his efforts to preserve the best of the precious symbols of the past glory of the American Indian."[66] According to Anne Morand, curator of art at the NCWHM and former curator of art at the Gilcrease Museum, "In 1947, Gilcrease began a systematic, multi-year acquisition of more than a hundred works by Alfred Jacob Miller."[67] Also through this gallery, the oil man acquired important colonial American works such as paintings by John Singleton Copley, Benjamin West, Winslow Homer, and John Singer Sargent.[68] Unique to the collection is the exceptional quantity and value of rare books and manuscripts located in the Gilcrease library. From Lionel and Phillip Robinson, Ltd. in London, Gilcrease acquired, for the meager cost of $5,500, the George Catlin collection. It is represented by seventy-five oils, 137 watercolor paintings, a library of letters,

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[65] Milsten, *Thomas Gilcrease*, 178.

[66] Ibid., 211.

[67] Morand, "Masterworks of a Master Collector," in *Thomas Gilcrease*, 158.

[68] Milsten, *Thomas Gilcrease*, 212.

broadsides, and books, which is perhaps the most important of its kind in the world and now appraised in the millions.[69] At the end of his life, Gilcrease no longer had an endless flow of cash to support his now substantial and costly acquisitions. After quite a struggle to obtain financial support, the city of Tulsa passed a bond issue allowing it to keep and maintain the museum. Until his death on 6 May 1962, all of Gilcrease's money went into art and artifacts intended as a gift to the Tulsa museum. The philanthropist commented on his fervency to acquire art that "He could no more stop collecting than he could stop reading."[70] Morand provides an illustration of the significance of the Gilcrease collection in her statement that "With artworks that span 400 years, Gilcrease developed a collection that effectively serves as a survey of the history of American art. His devotion to seeking out the best that could be obtained is evident in the quality of individual pieces that continue to be recognized as masterworks."[71]

Today the prominence of the Gilcrease Museum, Philbrook Museum of Art, and Woolaroc Museum and Wildlife Preserve in the national museum community, illustrate the vital tradition of collecting in Oklahoma and its relevancy to the museum community today. These collections and those of a subsequent generation, such as the Arthur and Shifra Silberman Native American Art Collection at the NCWHM, exemplify individuals who dedicated their lives and resources to the preservation and appreciation of American history and the art and culture of the American Indian. Evolving beyond the collecting scope of Frank and Waite Phillips, the Silbermans—much like Gilcrease—used success

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[69] Ibid., 228.

[70] Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 323.

[71] Morand, "Masterworks of a Master Collector," in *Thomas Gilcrease*, 177.

in the oil field to pursue what they found the most important and rewarding—collecting Native American art. It is important that the connection between artist, collector, and public be incorporated into the message translated to contemporary witnesses of a work of art. Arthur and Shifra Silberman followed a generation of wildcatters and collectors and together their efforts illustrate the evolution of Oklahoma art collecting and the importance of American Indian art to local and national museum communities.

The Silberman Collection at the NCWHM highlights the Traditional Native American artists collected and patroned by Oklahoma oil men of preceding generations. Whereas early collections gathered by the Phillips brothers in the first half of the twentieth century seemed mostly composed to decorate and self-promote, the incentives to acquire art for Gilcrease and the Silbermans are more inquisitive and sincere. The Silberman Collection is a retrospective illustration of the twentieth-century Native American Painting Movement and offers an alternative representation of the artists who shaped this expressive style. Arthur and Shifra not only sought out exceptional artworks by influential Native artists, but wanted to demonstrate the relation of Indian art to American culture.

The personalities of collectors, such as the Silbermans, are revealed through the art they possess and the means by which they interpret their treasures. Frank and Waite Phillips both experienced a taste of pioneer life and treasured the romantic notions of the western frontier as construed by Anglo historical actors like Buffalo Bill Cody. They surrounded themselves with various aspects of life in the wild West—animal skins and trophies, weaponry, American Indian artifacts, and paintings of cowboy and Indian life. Thomas Gilcrease grew up among Native Americans learning and gaining a world view

from his Creek mother and influential Muscogee-Creek teacher, Alexander Posey. He maintained a passion for history and his collection includes a broad spectrum of Americana highlighting Indian life through fine art and artifacts. Arthur and Shifra Silberman were children of Jewish immigrants—witnesses to the oppression and discrimination of war-torn Europe. Their sensitivities towards Native American culture perhaps stems from their own understanding as minorities. In a 1987 interview with Pam Fleishaker, Arthur expressed the connection between his Jewish identity and his interest in American Indian art. He stated, "Being Jewish, I can certainly appreciate another minority that has been persecuted, but has somehow managed to cope, to survive and to flourish."[72] This comment by Arthur does add value to an understanding of the emotional underpinnings of the Silberman Collection, but likely central to the philosophy of the couples' work were the sociopolitical factors of the 1960s and 1970s. The civil rights and women's movements and an emphasis on social history must have inspired the Silbermans in their collecting.

The Silberman Collection offers an important valuation of American Indian art and sets itself apart from earlier generations of Oklahoma collectors through its unprecedented body of supporting research materials. In addition to extraordinary works of art such as the Kiowa ledger drawings and Traditional Indian painting represented by Acee Blue Eagle, the Kiowa Six and a number of others, the Silbermans studied and preserved the experiences of the artists themselves. Particularly important and unique to the collection are oral history interviews with surviving Traditional artists and those who played a key role in the Native American Art Movement of the twentieth century. Many

[72] Pam Fleishaker, "Expressions of Jewish identity as Diverse as people involved" *Oklahoma Gazette* (December 16, 1987), 53.

of these audio recordings pertain to the Kiowa Six and first-hand accounts of their involvement with Suzie Peters, art instruction and day-to-day life at St. Patrick's Mission and their time at University of Oklahoma under the direction of Oscar Jacobson. The Silbermans recognized the beneficial influences of Anglo patronage, but aspired to demonstrate the creative inspiration Native artists received from their rich ancestral heritage and contemporary Indian communities.

CONCLUSION

The Arthur and Shifra Silberman Native American Art Collection establishes an accurate foundation for Traditional American Indian painting through its primary Native American sources and research materials. The Silbermans' legacy continues to influence Oklahoma's art collecting and define its cultural heritage. Together, Arthur and Shifra sought to obtain a pure and accurate account of the Native experience within the evolution of Indian art in twentieth-century America. The couple uncovered facts from every possible basis and gathered unique primary sources relaying the story of this movement from the perspective of Native American artists. The Silbermans made a significant contribution to Oklahoma's tradition of Indian art collecting and scholarship and serve as an example for contemporary and future collectors.

The rich oral history interviews the couple preserved from Native artists and those associated with Indian art in the early twentieth century reveal the Silbermans' foresight as collectors and comprise possibly the most extensive collection of primary histories pertaining to American Indian art. Commonplace in museums across the country are unending backlogs of necessary tasks to best utilize its collections, however, lack of money and staff do not permit the majority of these responsibilities. On the shelves of the Dickinson Research Center at the NCWHM are row upon row of cassette tapes recorded by Arthur and Shifra—most, but not all even catalogued. Due to the date of the recordings, the late 1970s and early 1980s, the condition of the oral history interviews do not allow for anyone to hear these rare Native accounts. As a result of this research project and the generosity of the research center staff, five cassette tapes have been sent to a conservator in Texas for digitization. The cost of this process prevents further

preservation at this time, but perhaps a realization of their significance to scholarship will provide incentive for the digitization of additional interviews. Fortunately, state and national foundations offer grants and opportunities for such projects and present a possible avenue.

The NCWHM does an excellent job exhibiting and promoting the quality and substance in the works of art comprising the Silberman Collection, but what is less realized by the general public, is the significant amount of archival materials pertaining to American Indian art. The Dickson Research Center at the NCWHM continues to preserve these treasures allowing for further study and the enhancement of Native scholarship. Arthur and Shifra collected a wealth of corresponding documentation pertaining to Traditional Native artists through newspaper clippings, articles and original research. These manuscript files are available to the public, however, further organization, digitization and publication would allow for optimal awareness of the content and its relevance to contemporary knowledge of American Indian art and culture.

The vital works of art and archival materials in the Arthur and Shifra Silberman Native American Art Collection are the legacy of two individuals who had a vision and drive to obtain and validate a complex facet of American art. Not only were they enthralled by the spirit, ideals and beauty of Native art, but Arthur and Shifra treasured the history and perspective of the American Indian. The tradition of Indian art collecting in Oklahoma is distinctive with a deep and interesting relationship to the oil industry and entrepreneurial frontier spirit. Defined in the early years of the twentieth century as ethnological objects purchased by rich oil tycoons to adorn the walls of their homes and retreats, the meaning and value of Native art have evolved due, in part, to

conceptualizations of the collectors themselves. The development of American Indian art seemed to go hand-in-hand with the progression of connoisseur tastes. Acquisition standards and a creative vision by individuals, such as Thomas Gilcrease, introduced multifaceted meaning and more refined collections of Native art across the country. In the subsequent generation of American Indian art collectors, with the work of Arthur and Shifra Silberman, a multidimensional, Native-centric representation of Indian art and culture is discovered. The Silbermans' significant contribution to the heritage of art collecting in Oklahoma is a noble and irreplaceable cultural legacy to the state and community—one that will cultivate and be appreciated by generations to come.

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