

STRICKLAND AND THE FRED JONES JR. MUSEUM OF ART

*Hadley Jerman, PhD**

Rennard Strickland, an Oklahoman of Osage and Cherokee heritage, served as curator of Native American art at the University of Oklahoma's Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art (FJJMA) during the early 1990s. In 2007, he announced his desire to give his collection of Native American art to the museum in memory of his mother, Adell Tucker Strickland.

Strickland grew up in Muscogee, Oklahoma. At nine or ten years of age, he purchased *Warrior with Shield*, a watercolor, from the Creek/Pawnee painter and educator Acee Blue Eagle. From that initial purchase, Strickland expanded his collection, adding works by such notable artists as Maria Martinez, Tonita Peña, Fritz Scholder, Harry Fonseca, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, and T. C. Cannon. Today, his collection consists of more than 400 objects ranging from 1880s ledger art to paintings, basketry, pottery, textiles, and sculpture by some of the most acclaimed artists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Even before the museum's founding in 1936, Native art was central to the university's art collection. Strickland's gift, distributed over seven years, further strengthened the museum's collection of Native American art, particularly by Oklahoman and women artists. Strickland's Cherokee heritage and keen sense of humor are also well represented in the collection, perhaps most clearly in Joseph Erb's painted gourd that depicts an ancient Cherokee warrior listening to an iPod, surrounded by the technology of 2006: flip phones, iPods, and laptops.

The gourd also demonstrates Strickland's collecting practice: he sought works that affirmed Indigenous identity and demonstrated Indigenous appropriation of non-Native culture. In the catalogue accompanying *Spirit Red*, a 2009 exhibition of his collection, Strickland wrote, "I believe appropriation is most significantly responsible for five hundred years of American Indian survival, and I hope my collection reflects this idea. It is a matter of preserving who we are by taking what we can use from those who confront us."

Thus, works in Strickland's collection demonstrate Native survivance, to adopt Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor's term, and continue to inspire and awe students of art history today. Ruthe Blalock Jones' 2007 gouache

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painting *Shawnee Women Dancing* and Chief Terry Saul's 1968 watercolor, *Tree of Jesse*, appeared in the FJJMA's spring and summer 2022 exhibition, *Ascendant: Expressions of Self-Determination*. The exhibition, curated by five graduate students enrolled in a fall 2021 Andrew W. Mellon Foundation-funded seminar in Native American art, explored the innovation and legacy of Native artists who studied at OU. These artists, whose work Strickland admired and collected, were transformational figures in twentieth century American art.

Strickland's collection not only appears in the FJJMA's galleries and buildings across campus, but across the country. Three prints from Strickland's collection recently traveled to the University of Georgia as part of an exhibition of Native printmaking loaned largely from the FJJMA's collection. We believe Rennard would have been pleased to know that his collection continues to educate and inspire students not only at the University of Oklahoma, but across the country.

The FJJMA is grateful to Rennard Strickland for sharing his collection with visitors, students, and artists alike for years to come.



2008.017.009
Tommy Wayne "T.C." Cannon (U.S., Kiowa/Caddo, 1946–1978)
*Waiting for the Bus (Anadarko Princess)*¹
1977
Lithograph
Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, the University of Oklahoma, Norman
Gift of Rennard Strickland, 2008

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2008.017.071

Chief Terry Saul (U.S., Choctaw/Chickasaw, 1921–1976)

*Tree of Jesse*²

1968

Watercolor

Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, the University of Oklahoma, Norman

Gift of Rennard Strickland, 2008

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2009.007.003
Joseph Erb (U.S., Cherokee, b. 1974)
*Gourd with Warriors Addressing Modern Technology*³
2006
Gourd with pigment
Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, the University of Oklahoma, Norman
Gift of Rennard Strickland, 2009

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