



Posted on Wed, Jan. 01, 2014

American Indian exhibits will dominate 2014 at KC museums

By ALICE THORSON
 The Kansas City Star

American Indian art will dominate the coming year, as well as portrayals of Native American peoples, beginning with the Spencer Museum of Art's just-opened "Conversation XVII: Photographic Memory," which pairs 19th-century photographs and contemporary works of art.

On Jan. 31, the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art will open a big exhibition of contemporary American Indian art, which it has been assiduously collecting for the past decade.

The most anticipated show of 2014 is the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art's "The Plains Indians: Artists of Earth and Sky," which some are characterizing as the successor to Ted Coe's landmark "Sacred Circles" exhibit of 1977. The Plains exhibit, featuring 140 paintings, drawings, embroideries, feather works, clothing and ceremonial objects, opens in Paris in April before coming to Kansas City in September.

Curated by Gaylord Torrence, the Nelson's senior curator of American Indian art, the show was organized by the Musée du quai Branly in Paris in collaboration with the Nelson-Atkins and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Before that the Nelson will open, "Roads of Arabia: Archaeology and History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," an exhibit organized by the Smithsonian's Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities. It will feature 200 objects, including jewelry, glassware, and monumental statues excavated from ancient trade routes on the Arabian Peninsula.

"Most of the works were only discovered in the last 40 years," said Kimberly Masteller, the museum's curator of South and Southeast Asian Art, "some within the last 10 years. The show and these works have absolutely changed how historians and the public think about the history of Arabia and its relationship to the rest of the world."

Masteller, who spoke from Houston where she was attending the show's opening at the Museum of Fine Arts, is most excited about a trio of neolithic steles (stone slabs).

"They're unlike anything you've ever seen," she said. "There's nothing like them anywhere. Now that they're out, they're going to be in all the survey art history texts and take their place with the world's great and completely innovative works of art. To me the stelae are worth the price of the whole show."

The exhibit also examines the impact of Islam, through objects including inscribed tombstones and a set of gilded doors. They're from the Kaaba, Masteller said, which is "the black cubic structure in Mecca which is the sacred heart of Islam and focus of all Islamic prayer and pilgrimage."

Other topics include the creation of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932.

A member of the Saudi royal family will open the show in Kansas City, Masteller said. "We want to be sure we give the prince a royal welcome."

The Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art will celebrate its 20th anniversary in 2014 with two big exhibitions. The first is a permanent collection exhibit, "Conversations — Marking 20 Years," organized by the museum's director, Barbara O'Brien.

Some of the works, O'Brien said, will be arranged in "conversation pairings" that "present the bridge between the 20th and 21st century that the Kemper has become."

One pairing will feature paintings by Keltie Ferris and Helen Frankenthaler, to illustrate how "both artists look at notions of materiality, but their concepts are from two different centuries," O'Brien said.

The exhibit will also feature conversation groupings that explore themes such as icons and mediated imagery.

The celebration continues in the fall with "Hung Liu: Summoning Ghosts," an exhibit organized by the Oakland

Museum of California.

Two of the most important paintings in the exhibition, “Mu Nu (Mother and Daughter)” (1997) and “Interregnum” (2002), are owned by the Kemper, O’Brien said. Hung Liu “is a well-known and well-loved artist and dear friend to the museum,” she added.

The museum also has new plans for its Kemper Crossroads space, where curator Erin Dziedzic will organize three exhibits exploring the idea of regionalism, including an inaugural exhibit opening in April featuring works by artists within a 20-mile radius of the museum.

“The 20th anniversary is such a great moment,” O’Brien said, “to examine who we’ve been, our relationship to Kansas City and the region, and who we want to become.”

The Nerman’s “Contemporary American Indian Art — Works from the Nerman MoCA Collection” will feature 50 works, including Jeffrey Gibson’s “American Girl,” a beaded punching bag inspired by Plains Indian dresses.

“It references the song ‘American Girl’ by Tom Petty, a song of a girl dreaming big and leaving someplace small and heading out into the big world to get away from smallness,” Gibson relates in his artist statement. “That’s the character that I imagined for this bag, but also I like that the character I’ve created challenges the cultural, racial notion of the popular ‘American Girl.’”

In March the museum will present the first U.S. one-person show of Jamaican-born Ebony Patterson, who will create an elaborate figural installation incorporating “aspects of the feminine, fashion, pattern, decoration and pastiche,” according to the museum’s executive director, Bruce Hartman.

The Spencer Museum of Art in Lawrence will open an exhibit of Albert Bloch prints and drawings in January and an exhibit of contemporary quilts by Yoshiko Jinzenji and Virginia Jean Cox Mitchell in February. Bloch showed with Der Blaue Reiter group in Germany a century ago, before joining KU’s department of painting and drawing in 1923 as a full professor, a post he held for 24 years.

The museum’s big show of the season is “William Burroughs: 100 Years of Expanding Consciousness,” opening Feb. 4 just in time for the Feb. 5 centenary of the artist’s birth. The exhibit will feature works by Burroughs as well as pieces he made in collaboration with other artists, including Keith Haring and Roger Holden.

Moody photographs of the artist, taken during his time in Lawrence, will round out the show.

At Block Artspace, Kansas City will get to see the latest from the ever-imaginative Nina Katchadourian in the coming year.

The Brooklyn-based artist has mended torn spiderwebs with red thread, sported a mustache of live caterpillars and translated the sound of popping popcorn into Morse Code.

Artspace director Raechell Smith will feature Katchadourian’s new “Lavatory Self-Portraits in the Flemish Style,” in a yet to be titled exhibit that “will look at contemporary artists who are quoting and referencing it art history,” Smith said.

The Katchadourian portraits are “hilarious,” she added. “They’re all portraits of Nina in a lavatory using napkins or her sweater, something readily available. It’s a real DIY low-art aesthetic.”

As the artist explains on her website, “While in the lavatory on a domestic flight in March 2010, I spontaneously put a tissue paper toilet cover seat cover over my head and took a picture in the mirror using my cellphone. The image evoked 15th-century Flemish portraiture. I decided to add more images made in this mode.”

Other artists in the show include Kansas City Art Institute alums Mark Newport and Jaimie Warren.

“I’m looking at points where art history and pop culture converge. It’s not just a contemporary artist restaging or re-creating a piece, it’s really putting it through some lens of contemporary culture,” Smith said.

“Jaimie, for example, is coming to the art historical works through the pop culture phenomenon of amateur photo shoppers inserting themselves in these art historical images; Mark Newport did a body of work based on Frederic Remington’s painting, “The Scout” in the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute (Williamstown, Mass.) In one of them, he’s in a superhero costume on horseback in same pose as the Native American in Remington’s image. A lot of his work is humorous.”

Plan your visit

- Spencer Museum of Art

1301 Mississippi St.

Lawrence

- Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art

4420 Warwick Blvd.

- Kemper Crossroads

33 W. 19th St.

- Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

4525 Oak St.

- Block Artspace

16 East 43rd St.

To reach Alice Thorson, call [816-234-4783](tel:816-234-4783) or send email to athorson@kcstar.com.

© 2014 Kansas City Star and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. <http://www.kansascity.com>