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Artists to Create Large-Scale Public Art at First Americans Museum

OKLAHOMA CITY (September 1, 2020) – As the First Americans Museum near downtown Oklahoma City moves closer to its spring 2021 opening, two artists have been selected to create large scale works of public art for its interior. Joseph Erb and Jeri Redcorn will create projects for the museum as part of the Oklahoma Art in Public Places program, administered by the Oklahoma Arts Council, in partnership with Native American Cultural and Educational Authority (NACEA).

Erb, an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation and professor at the University of Missouri School of Visual Studies, will create “Indigenous Brilliance,” an illustration to be presented on a double-heightened copper wall on the interior of the museum. The design depicts the relationship between the land and the people of Oklahoma, reflecting historical events such as removal, land runs, and the Dust Bowl, while incorporating positive imagery symbolizing Native knowledge, strength, resilience, and affirmation of a promising future.

Erb described his selection as a tremendous honor.

“This museum is one of the most important places for Native American representation I have seen in the world,” Erb said. “Most museums show our cultures as a past tense understanding, which limits the full understanding of who we are as Indigenous people, cultures, and nations. ‘Indigenous Brilliance’ reflects how Indigenous people are a part of the past, present, and future of this world. It highlights knowledge that is passed down from generation to generation.”

Redcorn, known internationally for reviving traditional Caddo pottery, will create an enhancement to the exterior walls of the museum’s Origins Theater. Titled “Ayo Wahdut Kuku (Sky Earth Water)”, the work will represent a Caddo ceramic pot and will acknowledge the Caddo as one of the original inhabitants of the land now recognized as Oklahoma. Redcorn’s body of work is inspired by her research of styles and designs of the Caddo people dating back 500 years. Former President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama displayed artwork by Redcorn in the Oval Office during President Obama’s term in office.

Redcorn described her design as connecting the past with the present.

“What a great honor to be a part of celebrating the First Americans Museum, a magnificent tribute to tribal history, culture, and art,” Redcorn said. “My contribution, ceramic art of the Caddo pre-colonization, is a tribute to Enah wah-dut, mother earth. I use the simple gifts from Ah-ah hiyo, father above, the clay, water, and fire to create beautiful vessels in the tradition of my ancestral Caddo people. To honor the Caddo, original inhabitants of Oklahoma, gives me a sense of bringing the past forward.”

Oklahoma Arts Council executive director Amber Sharples said, “We are honored to facilitate the public art process at the First Americans Museum. These two works of art will broaden discourse and

understanding of Indigenous cosmologies and values. Jeri and Joseph's artwork speak not only to the role art plays in the transmission of cultural knowledge but also as a vessel of communication, connecting diverse people in public spaces. Likewise, they stand as markers of memory and the continued presence and resilience of Indigenous peoples in Oklahoma."

J. Blake Wade, executive director for the NACEA said, "We are so excited for visitors to walk into the museum on opening day and see these two new monumental works of art. We are proud they were created by two First American artists living in Oklahoma specifically for the museum. Now we have public art outside the museum greeting visitors upon arrival and inside the museum welcoming all in the exhibit galleries."

Administered by the Oklahoma Arts Council, the two Oklahoma Art in Public Places projects are enabled by the funding authorized by the 2015 Legislature for the museum. The museum originated as a project of the State of Oklahoma and is now being completed through a partnership between the State of Oklahoma and The City of Oklahoma City, with help of a Chickasaw Nation subsidiary, the American Indian Cultural Center Foundation, and numerous donors. The American Indian Cultural Center Foundation will operate the museum on behalf of the City, and AICCM Land Development, LLC will develop the surrounding property.

First Americans Museum (previously The American Indian Cultural Center and Museum) will open September 2021, celebrating a shared history of America through the lens and collective stories of the 39 distinct Tribal Nations present in Oklahoma today. Located at the intersection of three major interstate highways, the museum will attract travelers from across the globe. It will serve as a place where all people can gather for the study, reflection, and celebration of Native American culture.

The public art projects are scheduled to be completed before the opening of the museum and will be seen by the public for the first time on opening day.

About Oklahoma Art in Public Places

Signed into law in 2004, the Oklahoma Art in Public Places Act reserves 1.5 percent of eligible state capital improvement project budgets for investment in public art that represents the history and values of Oklahoma. Administered by the Oklahoma Arts Council, the program advances state economic development goals and enhances public spaces for Oklahoma residents. In managing the program, the Oklahoma Arts Council brings together state government entities, artists, and local citizens in the commissioning or acquisition of artwork reflecting individual communities. Artists for OAPP projects are selected by committees that include representation from the community.

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About the Oklahoma Arts Council

The Oklahoma Arts Council is the official state agency for the support and development of the arts. The agency's mission is to lead in the advancement of Oklahoma's thriving arts industry. The Oklahoma Arts Council provides approximately 350 grants to nearly 200 organizations in communities statewide each year, organizes professional development opportunities for the state's arts and cultural industry, and manages the art collections at the Oklahoma state Capitol. Additional information is available at arts.ok.gov.

About First Americans Museum

The First Americans Museum will serve as a dynamic center promoting awareness and educating the broader public about the unique cultures, diversity, history, contributions and resilience of the First American Nations in Oklahoma today.