

House of Art

by Nancy C. Hermann

We have no Remingtons at the PAC, and not a Bouguereau to call our own, but the Tulsa Performing Arts Center, like Gilcrease Museum and Philbrook, boasts an art collection with a special niche that sets it apart from any house of art in town.

Thanks to the perseverance of Kathleen P. Westby — and Charles Norman, who was instrumental in the cause — there is an ordinance in Tulsa mandating that one percent of all building costs for public buildings be dedicated to the purchase of art for that building. One percent of the approximate \$18 million allocated for the PAC in the mid-1970s was enough to buy an exceptional assortment of art.

Much of the collection is derived from the 1970s and complements the PAC architecture. The Center itself is the design of the prestigious architect Minoru Yamasaki. He also designed the World Trade Center and the BOK building on Second Street (which is a small-scale replica of a WTC tower).

The PAC's permanent collection of 72 artworks may be viewed outdoors on the south and west side of the PAC, in all the lobbies and entrances on both sides of the building, around the dress circle (above the Third Street lobby), lining the Promenade and in Westby Pavilion.

A few pieces in the collection have stories attached to them. However, it is not true

that the Stanley Landsman chrome-and-smoked glass sculpture that floats over the Third Street lobby was derived from the artist's bad dream of falling through windows! In considering his design for the space, Landsman imagined his airborne glass extending beyond its 20' x 30' dimension to encompass the entire lobby. He was captivated by the Soviet/American push into space and by the triumph of the moon landing in '69. The PAC's unnamed Landsman sculpture (1977) is a mental landscape that lauds possibility and the limitlessness of imagination — such a fitting set piece for the arts.

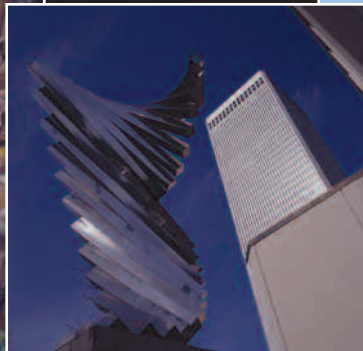
The many landscapes in the PAC's collection are varied and evocative. Consider Wolf Kahn's gorgeous oil painting. Found in the dress circle (outside the left entrance to Chapman Music Hall's orchestra level), *Evening Descends* (1975) is a symphony of blues. Most notable is the artist's use of color to set a mood. A twilight sky signals the coming of night, and restful shadows overtake land made luminous by late sun. One experiences the few moments just before darkness through quiet drama.

Down the steps and around the corner, located on the Promenade, another drama unfolds, but this one is rife with tension. Edward Corbett's *Washington D. C. #8, 1964* is a suspended moment — the instant before something happens. "I hope to do works which give the viewer the emotion of waiting, not the experience of possessing an

event, but a mystery in his mind about what might happen," Corbett once said. The painting was given to the PAC by the children of original PAC Trust member Benedict I. Lubell in honor of Ben and his wife, Norma. Lubell's sister, Grace Borgenicht, was one of New York's leading contemporary art dealers and advised the PAC on many of its purchases. Corbett was among the painters she represented. The donated painting once hung in the Reagan International Airport in Washington, D.C.

Across from the Corbett is Joseph Raffael's *Dusk at Kodai* (2000). It was the piece the PAC purchased with the "one percent for art" money generated by the construction of the PAC's new wing in 2000. For Raffael, nature is sacred and painting is a sacred act. A self-styled mystic who dropped the "e" from Raffaele, his original name, based on advice from a numerologist, Raffael informs his work with the teachings of Carl Jung, Krishnamurti, Tibetan Buddhism, and the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke and Wallace Stevens. *Dusk at Kodai* is a watercolor painting of mood and mystery, much different from Monet's waterlilies. Raffael generates abstraction through recognizable shapes rather than dissolving subject matter into color and light, as does Monet.

Continuing an exploration of the art on the Promenade, consider the freaky landscape that comments on the mechanization of the natural world in



Ernest Trova's *Shadows, Planes and Targets* (1971). The PAC also is proud to own landscapes by Tulsan Daniel Lang and the Hungarian artist Gabor Peterdi. The Peterdi was a gift to the PAC from Benedict Lubell's friends. Otto Duecker's *Violinist* (1990), encased in Plexiglass, is another highlight on the Promenade, as well as the piece from the original collection that is strongly identified with the PAC: Dutch artist Karel Appel's tapestry, *Colorful World* (1975).

The undisputed star of the collection is Barbara Hepworth's exceedingly valuable *Seaform* (1964). This graceful and serene bronze sculpture, measuring 81 inches high, contrasts monumental height with the sweeping elegance of its shape. British-born Hepworth, who lived by the sea, created it near the end of her career. A close friend of sculptor Henry Moore, she was often eclipsed by Moore's fame, and they often quarreled over who was imitating whom.

The focal point at the far north end of the Promenade is *Images* (1974 silkscreen) by Jack Youngerman. This celebrated '70s abstract artist, a close friend of artists Ellsworth Kelly and Robert Indiana, was most interested in portraying the geometry of nature, its energy and tensions.

Alexandre Hogue's landscape, *Hondo Canyon Cliffs* (1941), located in the dress circle, is one of the PAC's most prized works. Hogue chose its frame, which complements the angular shapes of the composition. "The painting once had another name, but someone didn't like it,"

he told this writer in a 1988 interview. "My title was 'Pray For Us, St. Peter' because of the two fishermen [depicted fishing in the painting]. "Of course it was a facetious title, but there were not enough people with a sense of humor that got it. I decided that it would be better to use the place name.

... The fishermen will just have to be there all alone. No St. Peter to help them."

Other notable works on the dress circle include a large P.S. Gordon watercolor, *Andante's Inferno* (1989), depicting the arts; a Louise Nevelson lithograph (1964); *Still Life* (1974) by Grace Borgenicht's husband, Warren Brandt; and an "in reverse" acrylic painting (1975) by longtime University of Oklahoma art instructor Eugene Bavinger.

To take in more of the PAC's art, visit the mezzanine level of Chapman Music Hall, where one can find the art of well-known Native Americans such as Joan Hill, Ruthe Blalock Jones, Solomon McCombs, Doc Tate Nevaquaya, Woody Crumbo and Wolf Robe Hunt. There is more art, mostly from Oklahoma artists, on the balcony level.

If you are attending events on the Second Street side of the PAC, pause to look at Tulsan Ruth Armstrong's ceramic work *The Muses* (1993). Its deco motif was inspired by the Expo Pavilion at the Fairgrounds.

Down the steps in the Williams Lobby, visit P.S. Gordon's *A River Runs Through It, Too* (1997), painted to honor Tulsa's centennial. *Red/Black Tangency* (1975), by O.S.U. veteran art instructor J. Jay McVicker, is located there, as well as Leo

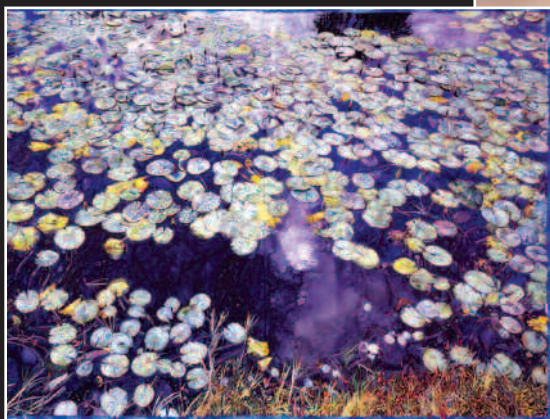
Darrell Chandler's *Color of Our Time* (1974). Chandler was imprisoned for robbing a Safeway store, but his good conduct and artistic talent helped spring him from McAlester. This painting shows a rainbow of stripes superimposed over sky.

Step outside on Third Street and view from different angles David Lee Brown's spiraling stainless steel sculpture. "What I am really interested in is light and the result of its geometry as driven by the light experience it portrays," Brown said in an earlier interview with INTERMISSION. His untitled work (1977) is the inspiration for the PAC's wings-like logo. Also located outside, Jay O'Meilia's *Oklahoma Ballerina* (1982) holds court over the Williams Green.

You won't see more 1970s contemporary art of this caliber anywhere in Tulsa, or in Oklahoma. The PAC's mix of visual and performance art creates an all-encompassing arts experience that is a hallmark of the Tulsa Performing Arts Center.

The PAC's Gallery, which hosts visiting exhibits, is closed during *The Lion King* due to show requirements, but the building's permanent art collection is available for viewing during events and for group tours by appointment. Call 596-7122.

PAC Marketing Director/INTERMISSION Editor-in-Chief Nancy Hermann first documented the PAC's art collection in 1987 through research and interviews with the artists. She is a *summa cum laude* Art History graduate from The University of Tulsa.



***Hondo Canyon Cliffs*, Alexandre Hogue, 1941**
Oil on canvas, 36" x 44"

Untitled sculpture, David Lee Brown, 1977
Stainless steel, 10'

***Washington, D.C. #8*, 1964, Edward Corbett, 1964**
Oil on canvas, 60" x 50"

***Dusk at Kodai*, Joseph Raffael, 2000**
Watercolor, 70" x 96"

***Seaform*, Barbara Hepworth, 1964**
Bronze, 81"