

'Art of Jerome Tiger' exhibit to run through July

BY JEFF KALEY
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT



PHOTO BY JEFF KALEY

Chisholm Trail Heritage Center staff member Alexia Newman studies one of the paintings by renowned Native American artist Jerome Tiger that are part of the Duncan-based museum's current exhibition, which will be on display through the end of the month.

DUNCAN — When Toni Hopper first began planning an exhibit to honor a renowned Native American painter, she envisioned a simple display of pieces that were already available.

The marketing and public relations coordinator at the Chisholm Trail Heritage Center wanted to acknowledge the work of Jerome Tiger by bringing together the three paintings that belong to the museum in Duncan. The timing seemed right, because Tiger would have been 74 years old on July 8, and Aug. 13 is the 50th anniversary of the gifted painter's death.

Hopper's original plan was to bring out two of Tiger's paintings that had been stored in a vault at the center and add them to a piece that has been on display for several years in the Garis Gallery of the American West.

“The Art of Jerome Tiger” would make for a modest display that would run through July 31.

However, the more Hopper investigated the work of Jerome Tiger, the more the exhibit took on a life of its own.

“It turned out that what’s unique about the Tiger exhibit is that five pieces from longtime members joined the display,” Hopper said. “Dwayne Brittain, who’s an art collector and also a hobby photographer, loaned us three pieces that haven’t been seen in public since 1966.”

Those three works were purchased by Brittain and his mother when Tiger came to Duncan for a small show at the now-defunct Security National Bank.

In addition, Brittain loaned the center a photograph of Tiger taken at that show.

But there was still more to come in Hopper’s search for Tiger-related works.

By the time the exhibition began, four other pieces of Tiger’s paintings had joined the collection.

“Those four pieces of art have an interesting back story,” Hopper noted. “Two of them were purchased by Betty and Jerry Whitten, and two more were purchased by Bill and Betty Rice.

“The two paintings purchased by the Rices were then purchased by Butch and Jamie Whitten. Butch and Jamie and Dwayne said they were excited to loan them to the Heritage Center.

“So, what originally started out with three pieces has now turned into a temporary exhibit with 10 paintings by Tiger, the photo from Dwayne and a copy of the book, “The Life and Art of Jerome Tiger: War to Peace, Death to Life,” by Peggy Tiger and Molly Babcock.”

The subject of this exhibit: Jerome Tiger, was a Muscogee Creek-Seminole born in Tahlequah, who dropped out of high school at age 16. He served in the Navy and Navy Reserve, then spent several years as a laborer and prize fighter.

Although he spent a year at the Cleveland Engineering Institute, Tiger was a self-taught artist, whose work has been compared to Rembrandt and Francisco Goya. He worked in several media — oil, watercolor, tempera, pencil, pen and ink — and left a legacy that continues to impact Native American art and Oklahoma history. Tiger’s works can be found at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City, the Philbrook and Gilcrease museums in Tulsa and other museums in Oklahoma and the Southwest.

Ironically, Tigers’ prolific career was shortened in 1967, when he died in a handgun accident at age 26.

“The Art of Jerome Tiger” exhibit can be viewed in the Garis Gallery of the American West from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday and from 1-5 p.m. on Sunday through the end of the month.