

***Hopituy: Hopi Art from the Permanent Collections.* Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma. Special Exhibition. June 28-September 15, 2013.**

***Hopituy: Hopi Art from the Permanent Collections.* Heather Ahtone, Neil David Sr., Delbridge Honanie and Miland Lomakema. Norman: Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma, 2013. 96 pp.\***

Reviewed by Daniel C. Swan

The exhibition *Hopituy: Hopi Art from the Permanent Collections* was curated by Heather Ahtone with guidance and assistance from her Hopi mentors Neil David, Sr., Delbridge Honanie, and Miland Lomakema. These men are members of *Hopitoid*, an organization dedicated to the use of traditional arts to educate a broad public on the traditional values of the Hopi people. Ahtone serves as the James T. Bialac Assistant Curator of Native American and Nonwestern Art at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma. The exhibition was primarily focused on *Katsinam tuhi*, the carved and painted figures commonly referred to as Kachina dolls, and also incorporated works in diverse media by Hopi artists. The exhibition (Figure 1) was on view from June 28 to September 15, 2013, at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma. The museum has experienced impressive expansion of its facilities, collections, and curatorial resources over the past decade through the efforts of University of Oklahoma President David Boren and the generosity of a broad range of patrons and donors. Significant additions to the collection include the Eugene B. Atkins (stewarded jointly with the Philbrook Museum), James T. Bialac, and Rennard Strickland collections.

From the onset of the Hopi art initiative, Ahtone embraced a collaborative methodology, acknowledging the need for great sensitivity in contextualizing the objects in the exhibition. Ahtone was innovative in her decision to focus on a limited number of *Katsina* drawn from the voluminous range of deities represented in Hopi cosmology. In doing so Ahtone selected six *Katsinam*—*Angwusnasomtaqa* (Corn Mother), *Soyokokatsina* (Ogres), *Koyemsi* (Mudheads), *Palhikmana* (Dew Drinking Woman), *Angaktsina* (Longhair), and *Hemiskatsina* (Home *Katsina*). Her decision was based on the sound reasoning that the *Katsina* each have a different role in Hopi religion and they appear at different points and in various combinations over the course of the ceremonial cycle. This approach counters typical exhibitions in which dozens of *Katsina* figures bombard the senses of the viewer, creating an environment in which the individual identities and characteristics of the *Katsinam* become jumbled and lost.

Ahtone adopted this organizational principle to encourage the audience to delve deeper into the place of *Katsinam* imagery in Hopi life. A central objective of the exhibition was to explore an aesthetic that was explained to Ahtone by her Hopi mentors as *Hopituy*, or those things that are distinctly Hopi. To this end the interpretive content of the exhibition explored the subtle details of the *Katsinam* figures, including face paint designs, orientations of feathers and hair and the styles and decorative treatments of clothing items. Paintings, baskets, and textiles are used to

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demonstrate the manners in which *Katsinam* iconography influences Hopi artists working in diverse media. In an essay presented in an accompanying catalogue produced in support of the exhibition, the collaborators close their essay with a thoughtful discussion of the role of traditional Hopi aesthetics in the creation of contemporary works in diverse media.



Figure 1. Entrance to the exhibition *Hopituy: Hopi Art from the Permanent Collection*. Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma, Norman. June 28-September 15, 2013.

The exhibition was installed in adjoining galleries that provided a discrete and intimate setting within the expanded footprint of the museum. Hopi songs played very softly in the background and lyrics from Hopi songs were installed on gallery walls, enhancing the exhibition environment. The *Katsinam* figures in the exhibition were presented in a very approachable manner and the incorporation of paintings and works in other media provided visual diversity. The intended visitor flow was well designed with dramatic presentations of works of scale used to maintain visual anticipation throughout the exhibition. A prime example was the spectacular installation of an interpretation of *Palhiktaqa* by Ray Lomaheptewa (Figure 2). My only criticism of the exhibition was the format employed to present its narrative content. Except for a large interpretive text label opening the exhibition, interpretative text was relegated to heavily annotated object labels, presented in too small a font to provide for comfortable reading. This was quite unfortunate given the original and informative content found in many labels. A full range of educational programs and public events were developed to support the interpretive objectives of the exhibition, including gallery talks by artists Neil David Sr., Hopi (Tewa) and James Lambertus, Hopi (Tewa)/Mohave.

A catalogue (Figure 3) of the same title was produced in conjunction with the exhibition to provide expanded treatment of interpretive themes and as an enduring resource for scholarly and public audiences. The catalog begins with a preface by Ghislain d' Humières, Wylodean and Bill Saxon Director of the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art. His comments acknowledge the importance of recent donations of private collections in the emergence of the Museum and its associated

University programs as a major center for Native American art scholarship and education. Mary Jo Watson, Regents Professor and Director of the School of Art and Art History, introduces the central themes and topics addressed in the exhibition and catalogue. She makes particular mention of the collaboration between Ahtone and current members of *Hopitoid* in the development exhibition and catalogue. Watson's comments underscore the importance of the museum and its collections in the formal and public education initiatives at the University of Oklahoma. The central essay by Ahtone and her Hopi co-authors provides an expanded discussion of the interpretive themes presented in the exhibition, underscoring the concept of *Hopituy* and its importance in defining and maintaining a Hopi aesthetic. The design and photography of the catalog is spectacular with tightly framed details juxtaposed with full figure images of *Katsinam* carvings and other works featured in the exhibition. The catalogue concludes with an essay by Mark T. Bahti, the proprietor of Native arts galleries in Tucson, Arizona and Santa Fe, New Mexico, on the evolution of the commercial trade in *Katsinam tuhi*. Building on an effective overview of this history Bahti examines issues associated with the contemporary production and circulation of *Katsina* figures, including carvings produced by non-Hopi, deviations from traditional standards and preferences, and a decreasing supply of cottonwood root—the traditional medium for Hopi *Katsinam tuhi*.



Figure 2

*Palhiktaqa*, ca. 1970s-80s

Ray Lomaheptewa (U.S., Hopi, n.d.)

Cottonwood root, paint, feathers, cloth, felt, fur, hair, leather, glass beads, shell, string, yarn

James T. Bialac Native American Art Collection, 2010

Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art; The University of Oklahoma, Norman

*Hopituy: Hopi Art from the Permanent Collections* contributed to the evolving intersection of museum collecting and contemporary Native American religious practice. The approach employed by Ahtone in the development of the exhibition and catalogue provides an important model for future endeavors and projects at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art. The catalogue delivers a fresh approach, bringing original scholarship and fantastic works of Hopi arts to public

attention. This volume will be of interest to a broad audience including scholars in diverse disciplines, collectors of Native American arts, and students of Hopi culture and art.



Figure 3. Cover for the catalogue *Hopituy: Hopi Art from the Permanent Collections*.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.14434/mar.v8i1.5549>