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Artist Ruthe Blalock Jones to join Circle of Honor

By [David Page](#)
 The Journal Record Special Projects Editor
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(Ruthe Blalock Jones)

TULSA - At age 13, Ruthe Blalock Jones entered the annual Philbrook Indian art show in Tulsa.

Jones said the artist Charles Banks Wilson and his wife encouraged her to enter the art show. Wilson, who died this year, has portraits of Woody Guthrie, Will Rogers and Jim Thorpe on display at the state Capitol in Oklahoma City.

Jones earned an honorable mention.

"It did not dawn on me until later that it was an adult competition."

From that early success, Jones went on to have a long career as a professional artist and educator. Her art has been exhibited internationally, including recent showings in Japan and Uganda. She spent 30 years at Bacone College in Muskogee as a professor of art and director of art.

Jones, of Shawnee-Delaware-Peoria descent, will be honored for her accomplishments and long career when the Tulsa City-County Library's American Resource Center inducts her into the Circle of Honor. The induction ceremony is scheduled at 10:30 a.m. March 1 at the Hardesty Regional Library's Connor's Cove.

Her induction will mark the beginning of the library's monthlong American Indian Festival of Words celebration honoring the achievements and accomplishments of Native Americans.

The Circle of Honor ceremony recognizes an American Indian for achievements that have enriched others' lives and commitment to the preservation of American Indian culture and legacy for future generations.

"Speaking for most Indian artists that I know, I believe we are all interested in honoring and preserving the culture and traditions of our families and tribes," Jones said.

The award, sponsored by the Maxine and Jack Zarrow Family Foundation, Cherokee Builders Inc., American Indian Resource Center and the Tulsa Library Trust, includes a \$5,000 honorarium and a medallion featuring the American Indian Resource Center's turtle logo.

The Circle of Honor alternates annually with the American Indian Festival of Words Author Award. Past Circle of Honor recipients include Charles Chibitty, Wilma Mankiller, Neal McCaleb, Bill Mills and Kirke Kickingbird.

Jones, who was born in Claremore, said she had early aspirations of becoming a professional artist.

"I have always drawn," she said in a telephone interview from her home in Okmulgee. "I became aware as a child that art was something that people did professionally and apparently I was good at it because people noticed by work."

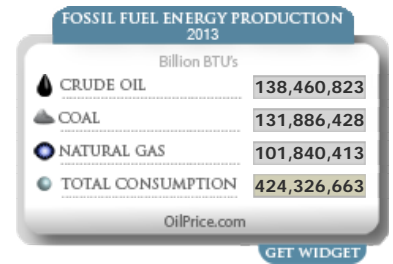
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As a family friend, Charles Banks Wilson took an early interest in her artwork.

“He took an interest and give me art supplies,” Jones said. “He was also involved with the library, and I was an avid reader. I began exploring art magazines at the library.”

During junior high school and high school, she entered local art shows.

“I got to know some of the artists,” she said.

“My mother was encouraged to send me to Bacone College, which at that time had a high school,” she said.

She attended Bacone College and earned a bachelor’s degree in fine arts from the University of Tulsa in 1972.

After working as a social worker, Jones was hired by Bacone College. She started in 1979 and retired two years ago. Along the way she also raised four children and now has two grandchildren.

As a professional artist, her paintings, drawings and prints focus on Native Americans.

“I think I am telling a story,” she said. “I hope I have left a mark historically and that I have recorded something that people will learn from in the future.

Her art has been published by the Gilcrease Museum, the University of Oklahoma Press, the Museum of Natural History, Time-Life Books and the U.S. Department of Justice Annual Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect.

In 2011, Jones was appointed as a commissioner on the U.S. Department of Interior Indian Arts and Crafts Board by Interior Secretary Kenneth Salazar. She is one of five commissioners. Harvey Pratt, a forensic artist for the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation in Oklahoma City, is chairperson of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board.

Her art is displayed at the Heard Museum, Phoenix, Ariz.; Museum of the American Indian, New York; Hampton University, Hampton, Va.; the National Museum of Natural History, Washington D.C.; and Avery Collection, Arizona State University.

Past advisory positions have been with the Chicago Art Institute, Oklahoma Historical Society and Advisory Committee to the director of the Sam Noble Museum, University of Oklahoma. Recently, she served as a panelist at the British Museum, London, England.



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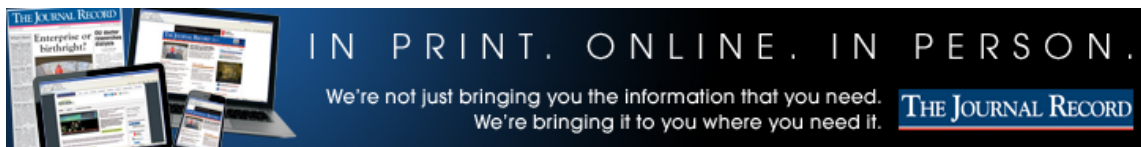
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