

THE KIOWA SIX



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Native American artists originally known as the “Kiowa Five” were James Auchiah (1906–1974), Spencer Asah (1905/1910–1954), Jack Hokeah (1902–1969), Stephen Mopope (1898–1974), and Monroe Tsatoke (1904–1937). Swedish-American artist Oscar Jacobson is pictured, at center. Lois (Bougetah) Smoky (1907–1981) (not pictured) became the sixth member of the group. ©JACOBSONHOUSE.COM

The Kiowa Six is a group of six Kiowa artists from Oklahoma in the 20th century. They were Spencer Asah, James Auchiah, Jack Hokeah, Stephen Mopope, Lois Smoky, and Monroe Tsatoke.

Stephen Mopope, the oldest in the group, was born in 1898 on the Kiowa Reservation in Oklahoma Territory. His relatives, including his great-uncles Silver Horn and Fort Marion ledger artist Ohettoint, recognized his artistic talent at an early age and taught him traditional Kiowa painting techniques

Jack Hokeah was born around 1900 and was orphaned at a young age and raised by his grandmother. Later in life, San Ildefonso Pueblo potter Maria Martinez adopted him as a son and he lived with her family for a

decade in New Mexico.

Monroe Tsatoke was born in 1904 near Saddle Mountain, Oklahoma. His father, Tsatokee “Hunting Horse,” was his first artistic influence.

James Auchiah was born in 1906 near present-day Medicine Park, Oklahoma. One of his grandfathers was Red Tipi, a ledger artist, medicine man, and bundle keeper; the other was Satanta.

Spencer Asah was born around 1905 in Carnegie, Oklahoma. His father, a buffalo medicine man, provided Asah with the traditional cultural background to inspire his art.

Lois Smoky was born in 1907 near Anadarko; she was the youngest of the group and the only woman.

Five of the artists attended the St. Patrick’s Mission School in Anadarko, serving Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache children. Operating from 1872 to 1996, the school — also known as the Anadarko Boarding School — was the longest lived of the seven schools for Native American children in Oklahoma operated by St. Patrick’s Mission. There the Kiowa Six received formal art instruction from a Choctaw nun, Sister Mary Olivia Taylor.

Monroe Tsatoke did not attend St. Patrick’s and did not

receive formal art training until the Kiowa agency field matron, Susan Peters, took an interest in the young Kiowa artists and formed an art club. Ms. Peters arranged for Mrs. Willie Blaze Lane of Chickasha, Oklahoma, to give them painting lessons.

Susie Peters encouraged Swedish-American artist Oscar Jacobson, the director of the University of Oklahoma's art department, to create a special program for the Kiowa artists. In 1926, Asah, Hookah, Tsatoke, and Mopope moved to Norman. They were soon joined by Lois Smoky, in 1927, and lived together in a house rented by Lois Smoky's parents.

Jacobson provided studio space for the group but felt that he did not want to interfere with the direction their painting was taking. Dr. Edith Mahler, an art professor at OU, also helped provide technical instruction. In the fall of 1927, James Auchiah joined the program.

Lois Smoky returned home in 1927, leaving the program. She married and was devoted to her family. Although she did not continue painting, she became a beadwork artist. Since her paintings are the most rare, they have become the most collectible of the group.

While Jacobson did not wish to dictate subject matter to the remaining five artists, he did actively promote their work. He arranged for their work to be shown at the Denver Art Museum. In 1928, Jacobson entered their watercolor paintings in the First International Art Exposition in Prague, Czechoslovakia, where they received international acclaim. Their work continued to be exhibited throughout Europe. In 1929, Jacobson collaborated with a French printer to produce *Kiowa Art*, a portfolio of 24 prints of their paintings of intertribal dancers, ceremonies, musicians, and Kiowa daily life.

The Kiowa Six are considered significant in the development of Native American painting, bridging the era of Ledger Art to flat-style Southern Plains painting. While not the first Native Americans to be successful in the international fine art world, their career proved inspirational to many Native American artists in the 20th century.

Inspired by the narrative, representational qualities of Plains hide painting and Ledger Art, the Kiowa Six created a new style of painting that portrayed ceremonial and social scenes of Kiowa life — stories from oral history that is characterized by solid color fields, minimal backgrounds and a flat perspective, and emphasis on details of dance regalia.