

August 20 through October 22, 2023

# Artists' Portraits

from the  
**Art of Emprise**  
collection in Wichita, Kansas

Wichita's Emprise Bank art collection began more than 25 years ago when Mike Michaelis decided the building needed something special for the office walls and public spaces. Today the **Art of Emprise** collection numbers 3,538 paintings, prints, photographs, drawings, ceramics, and sculpture created by 878 different Kansas-connected artists. Those artists either were born or worked a significant time in Kansas--often at one of the many colleges and universities--or had some other interesting ties to the Sunflower State. New works are added every year to the collection, which includes objects dating from 1885 through present day and covering all styles of art from traditional realism to modernist abstraction and everything in between.

Employees of Emprise Bank at the main office in Wichita as well as in 40 branches around the state are able to choose which pieces hang in their office. In the early days, more traditional, pretty pieces tended to be chosen but as time went on and people wanted to know about the artists in the collection, more thought-provoking pieces have been hung in individual offices. Other art is rotated through bank conference rooms, hallways, and the common areas seen by visitors. Quite often, tours and art class field trips are arranged to view bank's art gallery spaces and storage rooms. The Art of Emprise now has a digital interface so that anyone downloading the **Smartify: Museum and Art Guide** app can use their phone to focus on an art piece and the Smartify program will identify and provide details and links to artists. The Art of Emprise website also has a good number of the collection's work available to view online.

This exhibition draws on the Art of Emprise's holdings of 2-D portraits to present a powerful variety of Kansas faces. There are 40 paintings, drawings, photographs, prints, and hand-sewn compositions by 28 artists. Many of the works are self portraits, some depict the visages of other artists, and some look at family or friends for inspiration.

Retired University of Kansas (KU) professor Roger Shimomura is represented by four works in the show. His *Kansas Samurai* (2004) is a color lithograph self portrait published by Lawrence Lithography Workshop. This view of the artist combines a background of American comics with Japan's art history of popular imagery, *ukiyo-e*, called "pictures of the floating world" that captured scenes of kabuki actors and idealized courtesans in the entertainment district outside Tokyo. Shimomura was born in Seattle, Washington, but when he was 3 years old his entire family was interned at Camp Minidoka in Idaho during World War II, imprisoned with other Japanese Americans for several years. Shimomura's work often displays his personal history



*Kansas Samurai* by Roger Shimomura,  
2004, lithograph,  
Lawrence Lithography Workshop

that connects his two cultures with irony and humor. In his acrylic on canvas *American vs American* (2010), the artist is again shown as a kabuki actor in a samurai role, but battling in a suburban yard with his blond wife who is garbed in superhero Wonder Woman costume.

Artist Shin-Hee Chin was born in South Korea but relocated to the United States to earn her MFA in fiber arts in 1998 from California State University, Long Beach. Since 2004 she has been teaching art at Tabor College in Hillsboro, Kansas, and maintaining an international presence in fiber arts exhibitions around the world. Chin's *Self Portrait* (2003) is an intriguing collage of hand-pieced patchwork "yo-yo" squares laid out in careful color shading to form an impressionistic view of the artist's own features. Another unusual medium in this exhibition are seen in Gordon Sherman's (1951-2021) two portraits done in color pencil on slate, which was recovered from old grade school chalkboards. Though born in Nebraska, Sherman came to Kansas for his art education at Wichita State University (WSU) and Fort Hays State University (FHSU), where he was printmaking professor from 1997 through 2020.

Photographs on display include an iconic snapshot of children with a doll by Ft. Scott artist/author/filmmaker Gordon Parks (1912-2006), who focused on documenting poverty, race relations, and civil rights in America the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bill Snead's (1938-2016) photography took him from study at KU to the Vietnam to run photo operations during the war, and then to Chicago and Washington DC. The lighthearted photograph of the Beatles was taken during their first US press conference in Philadelphia in 1964. Kansas photographer Larry Schwarm is best known for his sweeping panoramas of burning prairies, but his entry in this exhibition is of sculptor Tom Otterness.

Most of the Art of Emprise portraits are traditional paintings of oil or acrylics on canvas, such as Ann Piper's double self portrait. Piper taught at Emporia State University from 1998 to 2008, before moving on to Susquehanna University in Pennsylvania. Wichita artist William Dickerson's (1904-1972) oil portrait of artist Oscar Larmer was painted when Larmer was still a Dickerson student. Larmer went on to become an art professor at Kansas State University and still resides in Manhattan. There are two Skip Harwick (1931-1981) modernist portraits in this exhibition. Harwick was a well-loved mentor to many younger Kansas artists who studied with him at WSU, the Wichita Art museum, and FHSU. One of those former colleagues, David Cale (1931-2007), studied at WSU and painted Portrait of Skip, an oil that shows inspiration from Harwick's own style and color palette.

The Art of Emprise collection is a Kansas treasure, with holdings that are historically important as well as beautiful and creative. The passion that Mike Michaelis experiences in discovering new pieces continues to bring joy to his community and beyond.



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Gallery Hours: Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday, 1 to 5 p.m.