

Nerman celebrates 20th anniversary of Oppenheimer art collection

OVERLAND PARK, Kan. – The Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art will host a gala Sept. 29 to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Oppenheimer art collection. The event, honoring Marti and Tony Oppenheimer, will begin at 7 p.m. at the Nerman on the campus of Johnson County Community College. For information about attending, visit jccc.edu/foundation or call the JCCC Foundation at 913-469-3835. Admission will be \$125 with additional patron levels available.

More than 500 artists, art dealers and art aficionados from Chicago, Wichita, Little Rock, Ark., and other cities across the nation are expected to attend. They will include friends from Sotheby's in New York, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Also that evening, the Nerman will unveil more than 15 new gifts from the Oppenheimers. They will include another stunning painting from Dana Schutz, whose *Swimming, Smoking, Crying* graced the cover of *Art in America* in November. Other artists exhibiting new works will be Nick Cave, Kim Dorland, Asad Faulwell, Kirk Hayes, Angel Otero, Cordy Ryman, Kent Michael Smith, Stefanie Gutheil, Lonnie Powell, Ian Davis, Allison Schulnik, Leidy Churchman, Brian Calvin, Warren Inessee and Brian Tolle.

"The Oppenheimer Collection is now synonymous with the Nerman Museum," said Bruce Hartman, the museum's executive director. "It is the foundation upon which our permanent collection rests. Do-Ho Suh's sculpture *Some/One* is an icon for the museum just as Jonathan Borofsky's *Walking Man* is a signature work for the entire campus."

The Oppenheimers grew up in the Kansas City area and met Hartman in 1992. "I fell in love with him in two seconds," Marti Oppenheimer said. "People ask why we donate to JCCC and Bruce is why. We have been best friends with him for 20 years."

When Hartman and the Oppenheimers started out, Hartman traveled to Los Angeles to present a \$300,000 proposal for acquisition funds from the Jules and Doris Stein Foundation, a precursor to the Oppenheimer Brothers Foundation.

Jules Stein was a Hollywood mogul who founded MCA, which later became Universal Studios. He also was Tony Oppenheimer's grandfather. The foundation granted the request.

The Oppenheimer Collection has grown to become the core of the museum's permanent collection. It includes sculptures, paintings, photographs, ceramics, new media, textiles and American Indian art. About one-third of the collection features artists who have a connection with the Kansas City area. Twenty-one major pieces of sculpture, which include college acquisitions, now adorn the campus grounds and its buildings. One of the first sculptures acquired was *Woman with Packages*, an important bronze by Louise Bourgeois, then in her 80s. Other major pieces are *Walking Man (On the Edge)*, made of fiber and steel by Jonathan Borofsky, *Hare & Bell*, a bronze by Barry Flanagan, and *Two on Beam*, a bronze of two headless figures by Magdalena Abakanowicz.

When construction of the Nerman Museum was initially announced in 2003, the Oppenheimers immediately offered to take on the challenge of filling the museum's galleries. They also understood the importance of providing an art experience throughout the campus. One of their goals, the Oppenheimers said, was to introduce art in a unique way to students who might never step into a museum or gallery. "And now they are surrounded by art," Tony Oppenheimer said. "And so that has been wonderful."

During the last two decades, the Oppenheimers and the Oppenheimer Brothers Foundation have donated more than 150 pieces of art. The collection is valued at well over \$10 million. In 2006, JCCC was cited by Public Art Review magazine as one of the top 10 college campuses for public art in the United States.

"Marti and Tony have transformed our campus with their generosity and passion for art," JCCC President Terry Calaway said. "We all benefit from their extraordinary vision and commitment."