



**JRB ART**  
**AT THE ELMS**  
Pasco Arts District

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## ART IS WHAT MAKES US HUMAN

By Joy Reed Belt

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Rose Smith, "Summertime in Bartlesville," Acrylic on Canvas, 35" x 36" ([Oklahoma State Art Collection](#))

In 1974, Betty Price and I started working for the Oklahoma State Arts Council on the same day. She was hired as the Director of Public Information and I as the Program Development Director. Both Betty and I were expected to assist and promote activities related to the state's Bicentennial celebration. Also, we were involved in organizing arts related programming for David Boren's inauguration as Governor for the State of Oklahoma. While I only worked at the Council for two years before leaving to complete my Ph.D., Betty spent the rest of her career there and ultimately became its Executive Director. Her accomplishments are legendary.



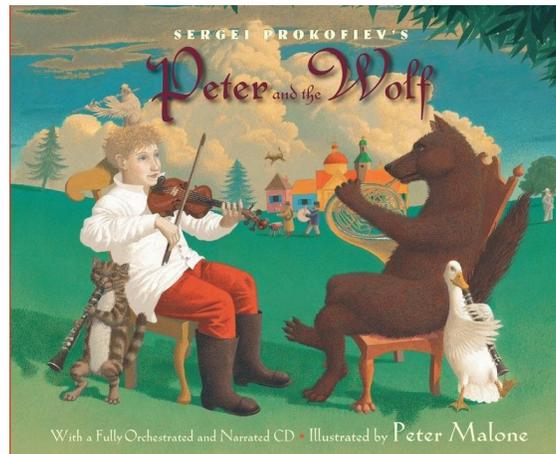
Betty Price at the Ribbon Cutting for the Gallery Opening with Lou Kerr (Right) and Gari Askins,



The Betty Price Gallery, located on the first floor of the Oklahoma State Capital, housing the Oklahoma State Art Collection ([Oklahoma State Art Collection](#))

Betty was instrumental in securing the public art for the Capital, including those wonderful Mike Larsen and Wilson Hurley murals, as well as the Alan Hauser sculpture in front of the Capital and the Kelly Haney sculpture on top of the Capital Dome. She was also responsible for developing the Oklahoma State Art Collection. In tribute to her accomplishments, a permanent gallery space to exhibit the collection inside the Capital has been created and appropriately named the Betty Price Gallery.

A few weeks ago, I read incredulously that some legislator wants to remove the Betty Price Gallery and turn that space into offices. Are you kidding me? The wonderful and important art housed in that Gallery represents who we are as Oklahomans and what we strive to become. And it's publicly and appropriately located for all to see. It must not be moved.



Peter and the Wolf by Sergei Prokofiev Album Cover, Illustrated by Peter Malone (Amazon)

Alan Atkinson, an uncommonly intelligent fellow, and a practicing artist is the current Director of the Oklahoma State Art Collection and Manager of The Betty Price Gallery. Several weeks ago, I called Alan and asked him my proverbial question “What makes an artwork great?” He responded, “To me the thing that makes any art form or artwork great is the ability to impart to anyone an experience they could not or would not have had themselves. Through art we can see more, hear more, feel more, and know more than we ever could through our own experiences.” Alan related how in his own childhood he would joyfully let himself be terrorized by repeatedly listening to Sergei Prokofiev’s [“Peter and the Wolf.”](#)



Mark Rothko, "White Center (Yellow, Pink and Lavender on Rose), 1950, Oil on Canvas, 6' 9" x 4' 8" ([Wikipedia](#))

Mark Rothko, "No. 10," 1950, Oil on Canvas, 90 1/4" x 57 5/8" ([MoMA](#))

Alan believes, "We don't have to suffer the anguish of being a teenager whose parents have forbidden us from ever seeing our beloved again, Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" can take us to that place. We don't have to experience the terror and shock of being bombed from the air, Picasso painted "Guernica" for us. If we have never experienced the sublime, we only need to visit the work of Mark Rothko. We know what sorrow, agony, and the peace of the grave feel like because Mozart wrote his "[Requiem Mass.](#)"



Pablo Picasso, "Guernica," 1937, Oil on Canvas, 11' 6" x 25 ' 6" (Getty Images)

Alan lamented that in our modern world we tend to view art as an "artifact of the marketplace where it is a thing, a commodity, something to have or enjoy." He continues by commenting, "people don't generally understand that all of the richness of everything the human spirit has ever created and experienced is already ours. Art carries the burning flame of the human experience from one generation to the next. Down through the ages, Art is what makes us human."

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2810 N Walker Ave | [jrbartgallery.com](http://jrbartgallery.com) | 405.528.6336

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