

Wire Act With Alice and Don Grant by Sonny King

SONNY KING COLLECTION



SOUTHERN OHIO MUSEUM

Merry Go Round by Clarence Carter

RIGHT: Circus Detour by Paul Travis



RICHARD AND RENEE ZELLNER

BIG-TOP SIDESHOW

CIRCUS IMAGES
RECALL HEYDAY OF
THREE-RING
ENTERTAINMENT

► "Sawdust & Spectacle" will run Thursday through April 21 in the Riffe Gallery, 77 S. High St. Hours: 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Wednesdays and Fridays, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Thursdays, noon to 4 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays, and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays. Sara Johnson will lead a tour at noon Feb. 24. Call 614-644-9624 or visit www.oac.state.oh.us.

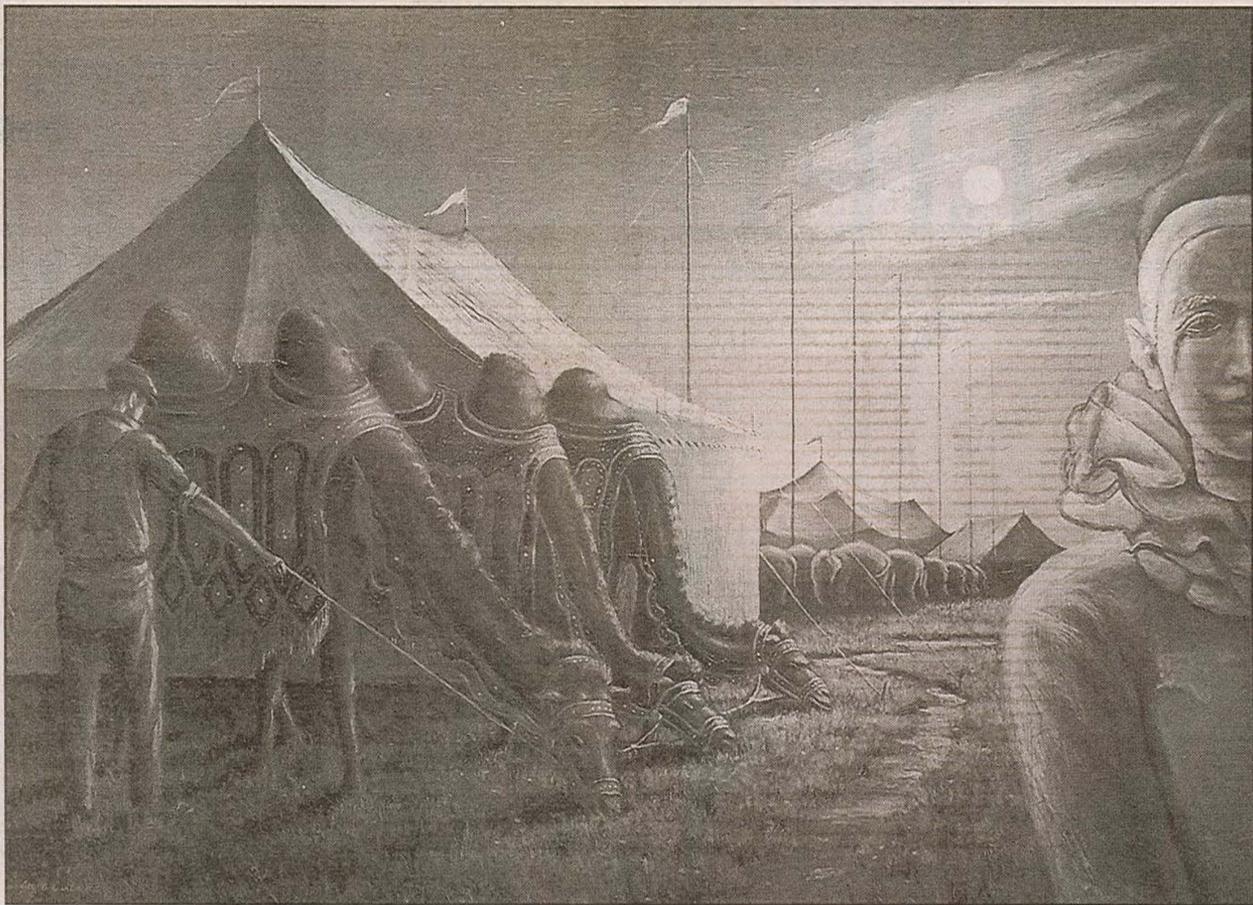


RIGHT: F.C. Roland, the Rubber Man

MASSILLON MUSEUM

Step right up and see exotic camels grazing on tender grass before the show. ¶ Or giraffes, zebras and elephants forced to travel a circuitous route on their way to the night's engagement. ¶ Or majestic white stallions and their expert trainers at rest before their stunning performance. ¶ Such images and others from early-20th-century traveling circuses are found in "Sawdust & Spectacle: Under the Big Top in Small Town America," opening Thursday in the Riffe Gallery. ¶ The 24 paintings, 43 photographs and three original prints capture performers and behind-the-scenes

See **CIRCUS** Page E2



Behind the Tents by Clarence Carter

SOUTHERN OHIO MUSEUM

CIRCUS

FROM PAGE E1

moments from circuses that reached Portsmouth, Ohio, mostly between the 1920s and the early 1940s.

“But the core of the exhibit is how the circus reflected basically a whole century of America,” curator Sarah Johnson said.

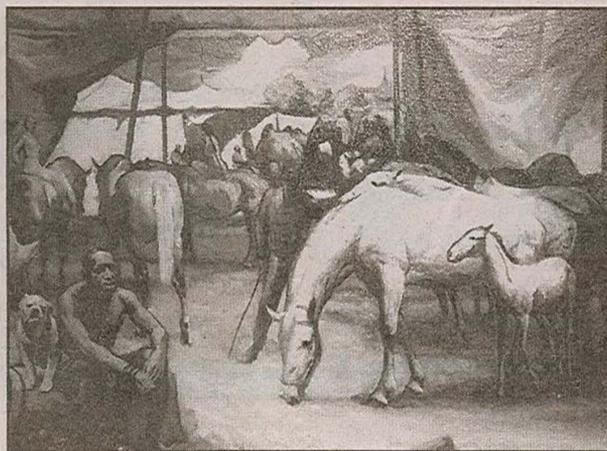
“I can hardly think of another American invention or phenomenon that lasted such a long time during so many of the industrial and social changes that were going in the country.”

“Sawdust & Spectacle” includes a number of oil paintings and photographs by Cleveland artist Clarence Carter, who traveled frequently to his native Portsmouth to capture images from circus tours.

The exhibit was first shown in October in the Southern Ohio Museum in Portsmouth, where Johnson served as director for two decades before retiring in December.

Works in the exhibit have been borrowed from private collections in Ohio. Before the Portsmouth exhibit, the photographs had not been publicly shown.

Johnson — at 65, too young to have experienced the traveling circus in Portsmouth — was inspired to put together the



COLLECTION OF WILLIAM JOSEPH

ABOVE: *Make Ready for Your Cue* by Henry Keller

like roustabouts setting up the tents.”

Carter often photographed circus people waiting to make their entrances.

“You see people who are proud of their work. They are posing for these photographs, so they adopt a star posture.”

The exhibit also includes paintings by New Yorker Walt Kuhn.

“His performers are either depressed or exhausted,” Johnson said.

“When you think of these fabulous performers, it’s not how you picture them. It kind of humanizes the spectacle of the circus.”

About 20 postcards highlight the circus sideshow.

“These are the height of political incorrectness,”

Johnson said, “showing people with a variety of deformities, from Siamese twins to a ‘lobster-handed’ boy.”

The exhibit includes 13 dioramas, miniature circus scenes created by Sonny King, an Australian who spent summers traveling the rails with his father, a lion tamer; three hand-painted canvas sideshow banners; and 11 circus toys, including an elephant, a camel and other animals on wheels.

“The point is to show how the circus impacted all ages,” Johnson said.

Circuses, which began as stationary spectacles in wooden arenas erected in cities and began touring by horse and wagon, extended their reach across the country via the railroads.

“By the 1920s, it seemed like everybody and his brother had a circus, all traveling everywhere by rail,” Johnson said.

“But when the Depression hit and the economy crashed, so did most of the circuses.”

Viewers can experience the bygone entertainment especially through the exhibit’s beautiful paintings, said Mary Gray, director of the Riffe Gallery.

“We’ve all had an opportunity to go to a circus at some point in our lifetimes and appreciate the festivity, so this is a mass-appeal exhibit.”

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MASSILLON MUSEUM

Lionel, the Dog-Faced Boy

exhibit because of Carter’s enthusiasm for the circus and his resulting images.

“Carter took almost a perverse view,” she said. “His focus was not on the spectacle going on under the lights in the big top but behind the scenes,