WITH THE OPENING OF WESTERN SPIRIT, SCOTTSDALE’S MUSEUM OF THE WEST, STORYTELLER TRICIA LOSCHER CROSSES INTO A NEW FRONTIER.

By Riki Altman-Yee

How to define the American West? As curator for the new Western Spirit, Scottsdale’s Museum of the West, Tricia Loscher was charged with asking herself that very question, especially while considering which works of art were to make the cut in time for the museum’s opening, scheduled for Jan. 15.

Fortunately for her, some parameters were drawn decades before she came on board last May. The concept for the museum dates back to the 1980s when the founders and its board of directors decided where to place the two-story, 45,000-square-foot museum and adjacent learning center, agreeing on Scottsdale’s historic downtown, specifically the Northwest corner of Marshall Way at First Street. They also deemed 19 of the United States worthy of representation.

Loscher, currently a doctoral candidate at the University of Arizona in Tucson and the former curator of the Heard Museum, was responsible for making the founders’ vision of the American West a reality, while also ensuring it represented a holistic viewpoint that resonates with people from all walks of life. “In my opinion, Western art includes American Indian art, cowboy art and Hispanic art,” she says. “Part of my job as a curator is examining and addressing stereotypes. I don’t like to make distinctions.”

The works Loscher decided upon span centuries and include pottery, weavings, oil paintings, bronze sculptures, pen and ink drawings, photography, and creations in metal and leather, along with catalogs, rodeo pennants, Buffalo Bill memorabilia and various ephemera. One of the oldest items is a Navajo chief’s blanket dating back to the early 1800s, while Arizona artist John Coleman’s bronze sculpture, Two Ravens, was realized and obtained just last year.

“One exhibit alone has close to 1,200 objects,” Loscher recalls, referring to Spirit of the West, a group of saddles and spurs, along with gear made by prisoners. One of her favorite exhibits is a collection of 100 paintings by Charles Fritz detailing the trail of Lewis and Clark. “They’re really remarkable,” she says.

For the museum’s opening, countless collectors committed to sharing pieces from their personal treasure troves. “Part of my job is to help interpret the objects and artifacts,” she explains. To that end, she has worked with teams to create informational kiosks and will eventually train docents. Loscher’s also developing appropriate avenues for community outreach and brainstorming with educators to help define existing educational programming, all while working with collectors, artists, other staff members and, of course, the public.

“There’s such history in this region, and we have such great relationships with our neighbors all around us,” she says. “We really want to make this a Western regional institute and a center of dissemination with all the stories that can be told. The West has always been a transformative place.” Western Spirit, Scottsdale’s Museum of the West, 3830 N. Marshall Way, Scottsdale, 480.686.9539, scottsdalemuseumwest.org