Museum to host DeLoss McGraw exhibit

Maintaining a commitment to show works by Oklahoma’s most gifted artists, the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, 410 W. Boyd, welcomes native son DeLoss McGraw.

The exhibition, which also includes the museum association’s annual membership party, will open Friday, Sept. 26, with a reception from 7 to 9 p.m. At 6 p.m., prior to the opening, the artist will talk about his paintings, his collaborations with writers and his unusual techniques. He also will discuss the way his Oklahoma upbringing shaped the content and style of his work.

“DeLoss McGraw: Oklahoma Gothic” centers around “The Castle” series of paintings which interpret a folk tale of love and loss in the eastern Oklahoma town of Bristow. The title of the exhibition derives from the Gothic romance nature of the castle story and the Gothic-style architecture on the OU campus, where McGraw spent much time as a youth.

For the last 15 years, McGraw has used poems, music and narratives as a starting point for his paintings and collages. He does not illustrate text; rather, he uses what he calls “layered metaphors” derived from a number of various sources.

“The Castle” series is based on the story of a woman who agreed to marry a man when he promised to build her a castle in Bristow. That original story charmed McGraw, who asked Susan Melissa Wyler, a poet from California, to collaborate with him on the project. They made a pilgrimage to the site of the castle and gathered more information by talking to people in the town. McGraw was inspired by the facts and remained moved by the sense of truth he found in the original story.

Wyler, however, used the facts in her poetry. McGraw’s paintings are described as animated, brilliantly colored works which reveal depth through study. According to art critic Robert Pincus, “The longer you scrutinize McGraw’s pictures ... the more you are likely to see how the naive quality in his work is simply part of a highly sophisticated vision of art, mixing comedy and tragedy, using fantastical effects that shed light on important themes.”

McGraw was born in Sulphur in 1945 and grew up in Okemah. At the age of 3 he accompanied his mother to the OU campus where she continued her education. He remembers vividly the details of the library’s reading room, particularly the angels on the capital of each column. He recalls stories read to him, especially The Canterbury Tales, and believes that these childhood experiences have shaped his artistic vision.

He studied with artist D.J. Laffon at East Central State College, then received degrees from California State University at Long Beach and Cranbrook Academy of Art in San Diego. His illustration and design on children’s books won the Oklahoma Book Award in 1993, for Fish Story, and the 1995 award from the Please Touch Museum in Philadelphia for Hippity Hop, Frog on Top. His work has entered the collections of Stanford University, the Whitney Museum of American Art, Harvard University and the Library of Congress.

In addition to “The Castle” series, the exhibition also will include select works from three other series by McGraw: “View from My Mother’s Kitchen Window,” “Homage to Joseph Cornell” and “Requiem.” Also on exhibit are selections from the museum’s 6,000-piece permanent collection, including works from the newly acquired Richard H. and Adeline J. Fleischaker Collection.


In conjunction with the Sept. 26 opening, the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art Association will hold its annual membership party. New and renewing members for the 1998 year are eligible to win dinners, services and a $50 gift certificate from Harold’s. Members of the museum association receive personal invitations to openings, museum store discounts, advance notice and discounts on travel programs to other museums, and a subscription to the museum newsletter. The museum association sponsors opening receptions, art student awards, and acquisitions.

The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art is open Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; and Saturdays and Sundays from noon to 4:30 p.m. On home football game Saturdays the museum is open from 10 a.m. until kickoff time. There is no charge for admission. For more information or to find out about joining the museum association, call 325-3272 or visit the website, www.ou.edu/jjma.