DeLoss McGraw: Oklahoma Gothic Opens Fall Season at Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art

Maintaining a commitment to show works by Oklahoma’s most gifted artists, the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, 410 West Boyd at the University of Oklahoma, welcomes native son DeLoss McGraw. The exhibition, which also includes the museum association’s annual membership party, opens Friday, September 26, with a reception from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. At 6:00 p.m., prior to the opening, the artist will talk about his paintings, his collaboration with writers, and his unusual techniques. He will also 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 O.U. 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 uninspired by the facts and remained moved by the sense of truth he found in the original story. Wyler, however, used the facts in her intensely vivid poetry so that one cannot help but visualize her words. McGraw’s paintings are animated, brilliantly colored works which unveil depth through study. As art critic Robert Pincus has stated, “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.”

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McGraw was born in Sulphur in 1945 and raised in Okemah. At the age of three he accompanied his mother to the OU campus while 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. Lafon 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 will also 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. *DeLoss McGraw: Oklahoma Gothic* runs through November 16, 1997. A book about the exhibition is available at the Museum Store.

In conjunction with the September 26 opening, the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art Association will holds its annual membership party. New and renewing members for the 1998 year are eligible to win dinners, services, and a $500 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, 10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.; Thursdays from 10:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.; and Saturdays and Sundays, noon until 4:30 p.m., and 10:00 a.m. until kickoff on home football game Saturdays. There is no charge for admission. For more information or to find out about joining the museum association, call 325-3272 or visit our website, www.ou.edu/fjjma.