FJJMA Houser Centennial Drawing Exhibit Opens March 7

NORMAN, OKLA. – One of Oklahoma’s beloved artists is getting statewide appreciation during the centennial of his birth. Allan Houser Drawings: The Centennial Exhibition opens to the public Friday, March 7, at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art. The University of Oklahoma’s art museum is one of nearly a dozen organizations coordinating the celebration throughout the state.

Houser, born Allan Capron Haozous, was an award-winning Chiricahua Apache modern artist whose works have appeared across the globe. In Oklahoma, specifically, Houser may best be known for his sculpture As Long as the Waters Flow, which was dedicated at the State Capitol in 1989, and Sacred Rain Arrow, which has adorned state license plates since 2008.

“To help initiate a statewide celebration of this important anniversary, the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art has organized Allan Houser Drawings: The Centennial Exhibition,” said W. Jackson Rushing III, the Adkins Presidential Professor of Art History and Mary Lou Milner Carver Chair in Native American Art at the OU School of Art and Art History. Rushing serves as a guest curator at the museum. “This exhibition seeks to expand our knowledge and appreciation of a much beloved figure, whose art speaks across cultures and generations.”

Rushing will present a lecture at 7 p.m. Friday, March 7, followed by an opening reception at 8 p.m. Both events are complimentary and open to the public.
The new exhibition at the FJJMA features 100 drawings, the majority of which are on loan from Houser’s estate in Santa Fe and have never been exhibited or published. Subjects of the drawings range from dancers and musicians to mounted hunters and warriors, to Southwestern landscapes, portraits and genre scenes of Native life.

“In addition to his renown as a painter and sculptor, Houser was always an inveterate draftsman, and his oeuvre includes thousands of compelling drawings of a variety of subjects,” Rushing said. “Always sketching, he filled 239 notebooks with roughly 30,000 sketches, which are housed in the Allan Houser Foundation Archives in Santa Fe.

“In recent years, art historians, curators and collectors have become increasingly interested in sculptors’ drawings. Partly because of this, and because the FJJMA believes that Houser’s drawings give us a direct encounter with his creative process and thus have a remarkable emotional immediacy, the museum has chosen to mark his centennial by exploring this essential aspect of his art.”

A statewide recognition of Houser’s artwork has been assembled by the Oklahoma Museums Association and began in August with an exhibition at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City. Throughout 2014, nine other organizations will display works by Houser, including the Gilcrease and Philbrook museums in Tulsa, the Oklahoma City Museum of Art, the Will Rogers World Airport and the Oklahoma History Center. Houser’s works also are on display at the Oklahoma State Capitol.

Additional information about the Oklahoma celebration is available online at www.OKHouser.org.

Houser was born in Apache, Okla., near Fort Sill. After growing up on the Haozous family farm, he studied painting under Dorothy Dunn and Geronima Montoya at The Studio of the Santa Fe Indian School.

Rushing said Houser began his career in the 1930s as a Regionalist painter making “traditional Indian paintings” in water-based media, later adding acrylics and oils to his repertoire. As early as 1937, his paintings of historical subjects were exhibited at the Art Institute of Chicago and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

Over the next 40 years, Houser became an established sculptor, frequently winning awards and receiving significant commissions, such as from the Denver Art Museum, for his figurative and abstract sculptures in various media, including wood, stone and bronze.
From 1952 to 1962, Houser taught at the Intermountain Indian School in Brigham City, Utah, followed by the Institute of American Indian Art in Santa Fe from 1962 to 1975. Commissions continued following his retirement from teaching, including works for the United Nations in New York City and the Oklahoma State Capitol. In 1992, Houser was the first Native American to receive the National Medal of the Arts. In the last decade of his life, major exhibitions of this work were held in Berlin, Paris, Tokyo and Vienna. A posthumous exhibition featuring his work, *Native Modernism: The Art of George Morrison and Allan Houser*, helped inaugurate the new Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. in 2004.

For *Allan Houser Drawings: The Centennial Exhibition*, Rushing selected works on loan by the Allan Houser Foundation.

“Because many of the drawings are unrehearsed, they permit the audience to ‘look behind the curtain,’ allowing them to see Houser visually thinking out loud,” Rushing said. “Viewers are enabled, as such, to track and trace the evolution of his subjects and styles, noting both differences and continuities.”

According to Rushing, Houser was a complex man who could be described accurately in a number of ways: American artist, modern artist and Apache or Native American artist. But he was also a western artist, one for whom animals, land and nature were never mere props in visual stories.

“Houser was always nourished by the flora, fauna and geography of the Southwest, and he took long walks that allowed his creative spirit to imbibe the rejuvenating spirits of nature,” Rushing said. “Animals – in particular buffalo, horses and sheep – were and are an important part of the Indian way of life in Houser’s American Southwest.”

One hundred years after Houser’s birth, the artist continues to captivate audiences the world over, a point Rushing hopes is conveyed in the new exhibition.

“This centennial survey of Houser’s inimitable drawings makes clear that he was a dedicated and determined cultural and artistic warrior,” he said.

*Allan Houser Drawings: The Centennial Exhibition* is on display at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art on the University of Oklahoma Norman campus March 7 to May 18, 2014.

Public educational programs scheduled at the museum to coincide with the exhibition include a lecture by Rushing at 7 p.m. Friday, March 7, followed by a
public opening reception at 8 p.m.; a symposium from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, March 8; a screening of films by Apache filmmaker Dustinn Craig from 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday, March 29; a guest lecture by Cécile Ganteaume, curator at the National Museum of the American Indian in New York, at 6 p.m. Thursday, April 3; a gallery talk by students from the OU School of Art and Art History at 12:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 8; and a Houser birthday celebration for families from 2 to 4 p.m. Saturday, June 28.

More information about the exhibition and programs is available on the museum’s website at www.ou.edu/fjjma.

The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art is located in the OU Arts District on the corner of Elm Avenue and Boyd Street, at 555 Elm Ave., on the OU Norman campus. Admission to the museum is complimentary to all visitors, thanks to the generosity of the OU Office of the President and the OU Athletics Department. The museum is closed on Mondays. Information and accommodations on the basis of disability are available by calling (405) 325-4938 or visiting www.ou.edu/fjjma.

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**IMAGE CREDIT**

A new exhibition celebrating the legacy of award-winning Chiricahua Apache modern artist Allan Houser goes on display March 7, 2014, at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma. *Allan Houser Drawings: The Centennial Exhibition* features 100 drawings, 99 percent of which have never been exhibited or published before, including this oil stick work, *Apache Father and Son*, c. 1992.

Allan Houser (U.S., Chiricahua Apache, 1914-1994)
*Apache Father and Son*, c. 1992
Oil stick, 23 ¾ x 18 in.
Courtesy of Allan Houser, Inc.