

Sculptor gets call to Hall of Great Westerners

BY KAREN KLINKA
For The Oklahoman

Call Oklahoma sculptor Harold Holden a "cowboy" or a "Westerner," and you're likely to be rewarded with a shy but proud grin.

Tack on the label "Great Westerner," and the modest, self-effacing Enid native is pretty much at a loss for words. But Holden, whom friends call simply "H," will need to get used to the label.

At the upcoming Western Heritage Awards on Saturday, Holden is being inducted into the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum's Hall of Great Westerners. "I can't figure out how they chose me," Holden, 77, said in a recent telephone interview from his home and studio in Kremlin. "It's such a honor! I guess I'll accept it before they realize they made a mistake."

Holden will be the first Oklahoma artist to be inducted and only the 10th artist ever inducted since the award's inception in 1955. The Hall of Great Westerners comprises an illustrious group, including presidents Dwight Eisenhower, Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln.

Also on the roster of more than 200 names are a bevy of noted artists, authors, historical figures and statesmen, such as Frederic Remington, Zane Grey, Jesse Chisholm, Buffalo Bill Cody, Gene Autry, Barry Goldwater, Will Rogers and Sandra Day O'Connor.

To be inducted, a person must have made outstanding contributions in one or more of the following criteria: advanced or promoted Western heritage and traditions, achieved national significance or historic relevance

Western ideals over a lifetime.

By that yardstick, Holden covers nearly all the bases. His life and art career have been built around the cowboy way of life and Western values of hard work, honesty, integrity and self-sufficiency.

After graduating from Enid High School, Holden attended Oklahoma State University and graduated from the Texas Academy of Art in Houston. After a stint in the Navy aboard the USS Rainier during the Vietnam War, Holden began his career in the commercial art field, ultimately becoming art director at "Horseman Magazine."

While his day job involved creating art for other folks, Holden pursued his secret passion at night, painting and sculpting the Western subjects he loved the most. Finally, in 1973, Holden quit his magazine job to pursue a fine art career full time.

"What sparked me to become a Western artist was the subject matter, the life style, the cowboy way," Holden said. "I knew everything about being a cowboy. I love all of it."

Memorable monuments

While Holden's paintings can be seen nationwide, one of his most notable is a nearly six-foot-tall oil painting of western Oklahoma that hangs in the Oklahoma State Capitol.

However, Holden is best known for his sculptures, from shelf- and table-size bronzes up to huge, larger-than-life monuments.

Among the Holden monuments that many in Oklahoma see daily: a larger-than-life bronze sculpture of native son Will Rogers on horseback, swinging a rope, greets travelers at Will Rogers World Airport.



Harold Holden during the Prix de West Brunch hosted by JRB Art at the Elms in 2016. (PHOTO BY DOUG HOKE, THE OKLAHOMAN ARCHIVES)

a bronze showing a cowboy on horseback herding a steer, stands outside the historic Oklahoma City stockyards at the corner of Agnew and Exchange.

Also familiar to many are "Boomer," which depicts the Cherokee Strip land run and graces a city park in Enid; "Broncho," a rearing rendition of the University of Central Oklahoma mascot that stands near the stadium complex in Edmond; and "Thank You, Lord," a six-foot bronze of a cowboy pausing to pray, located outside the emergency room at Integris Baptist Medical Center in Oklahoma City.

One of Holden's most eye-catching small sculptures is the "Wrangler," a bronze cowboy on horseback, which will be awarded to each honoree at the Western Heritage Awards.

Western Heritage Awards

Established in 1961, the awards salute works in lit-

and film that best portray the history and culture of the American West. This year, Wranglers will be presented to creators of Western-genre works in 13 categories and to inductees into the Hall of Great Westerners and the Hall of Great Western Performers. Serving as the evening's emcee will be actor-writer Bruce Boxleitner, himself an inductee into the great western performers hall a few years back. Also being inducted with Holden into the Hall of Great Westerners this year is the late Kansas rancher and cattleman Raymond E. Adams Jr.

This year's inductees into the Hall of Great Western Performers are actor Patrick Wayne, son of legendary screen icon John Wayne, and the late actor Alan Ladd, star of the Western classic film, "Shane." To be inducted, actors must have made significant contributions to the perpetuation of the Western film, radio or theater.



A statue of Oklahoma's favorite son and humorist Will Rogers is shown June 9 at Will Rogers World Airport in southwest Oklahoma City. (PHOTO BY JIM BECKEL, THE OKLAHOMAN ARCHIVES)

IF YOU GO

2017 Western Heritage Awards

When: 5-9 p.m., Saturday

Where: National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 1700 NE 63.

Information: 478-2250, ext. 219 or nationalcowboymuseum.org

Award is Texas business owner, cattleman and philanthropist Johnny Trotter. The Reynolds award, which is named in honor of the museum's founder, is presented to an individual who embodies the Western lifestyle and exhibits an unwavering commitment to the future of the American West.

In addition to being inducted into the Hall of Great Westerners at the cowboy museum, Holden will have an exhibition of his artwork at the Oklahoma Hall of Fame at the Gaylord-Pickens Museum, 1400 Classen Drive in Oklahoma City.

The temporary exhibit, titled "Cowboys and Indians," will showcase drawings, paintings and sculptures by Holden and Chickasaw artist Mike Larsen, both prolific Oklahoma artists. The exhibit is scheduled to open Thursday and will remain on display through Aug. 26.

In a statement regarding the exhibit, Holden said, "I

of my career to capture the historic and contemporary West and tell a story through my paintings and sculptures. Mike has done the same and although our styles are different, our goal has been the same."

This year's Western Heritage Awards involve two days of activities, including a new workshop, featuring Amy Shepherd, vice president of John Wayne Enterprises, and photography dealer and appraiser Laurie Kratochvil, which will be at 10 a.m. Friday. A panel discussion by some of this year's honorees is scheduled at 11 a.m. Saturday. Both events are free to the public with museum admission.

For more about the workshop, panel discussion and a full list of award winners and inductees, plus information about tickets to Friday evening events and the Saturday cocktail reception, black-tie dinner and awards ceremony, go to nationalcowboymuseum.org.