

OKLAHOMA FARM & RANCH

OKER

December 2016 | www.oker.com

Volume 1 Issue 12

ART OF
SECOND
CHANCES

Harold T. Holden

FREE

PRSRT STD
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
BOWE, TX
PERMIT NO. 3

ART OF SECOND CHANCES

Harold T. Holden

An artist is critical of his own work, or so they say. Western artist Harold Holden walked around his studio located in Enid, Okla., where he occasionally analyzed one of his completed pieces. Holden's creative process is a roller coaster, according to Holden's wife, Edna Mae.

"He will come in at night and say, 'I like how this is going,'" Edna Mae said. "Then, he will come in the next night and say, 'I just hate this.'"

The western artist comes from a long line of inventors and engineers. His great-grandfather, George Failing, invented the bottle capping machine in 1915 that is still used today. His grandfather, George E. Failing, was an oil pioneer, inventing the first portable drilling rig as well as numerous drilling bits.

Tragically, Holden's father was killed when he was six years old, leaving his mother Betty a widow at 31 years old. Harold's grandparents helped raise him and his siblings, Tim and Katy. Holden was raised north of town where he and his brother played "cowboys and Indians."

The 76-year-old artist was raised around horses, a love he continued throughout his life. He drew cowboys and Indians when he was young, and he had "a knack" for drawing. Other former students of Enid Public Schools have textbooks where the young artist drew buffalos and horses in the margins.

Holden was a natural athlete, playing football and running track in high school. He attended summer school at Culver Military

Academy in Culver, Ind.

"[Attending Culver Military Academy] was kind of a tradition," Holden explained. "My brother, Tim, went and all three of the Failing brothers went."

Like Tim, Holden won the lightweight boxing championship while at the academy. Holden considered himself a natural at boxing because he had to protect himself from his brother. Tim taught his younger brother new wrestling holds, and Holden honed his skill as a boxer from the instructors at the academy.

After graduating from Enid High School in 1958, Holden

art field in Wichita, Kans.

Holden worked on everything from feed bags for Bemis Bag Company to painting for a poster company. He even hand cut Pizza Hut's former mascot, Pete, from silk screens. In 1967, Holden picked up a copy of "Horseman Magazine" containing illustrations for training articles.

"I didn't think too much of it," Holden chuckled. "I thought I could just go in there and take over the job."

When he walked into the office, the editor of "Horseman Magazine" said they had an artist on payroll, but they left the oppor-

Eventually, he started making more money on his art than working for the magazine and decided to focus on his art. Holden befriended fellow sculptor, John Free, from Pawhuska, Okla. Free opened a foundry in Pawhuska called "Bronze Horse" to provide a facility to cast metals.

Free helped Holden with the foundry as well as his sculptures. The sculptor continued to work on his art, but the young artist, who was about to be drafted into the military, joined the Navy in 1964. Holden completed a two-year tour with the Navy aboard the U.S.S. Rainier, but he continued to draw when he had extra time.

While away, Holden's friend and horse trainer, Les Williams died. In honor of his friend, Holden drew a picture of him from memory and mailed it to Williams' family.

"I used a sharpened piece of wood and dipped it in ink," Holden explained. "It gave it a different effect than just straight pencil or pen."

While it was a sketch of Williams, Holden said it looked like him. Williams' wife entered the drawing into the local fair where it won a first-place blue ribbon.

When he returned from his tour, Holden focused on his fine art and showed in several galleries. The National Cattlemen's Association commissioned Holden from 1982 to 1986. His work for the National Cattlemen's Association got the attention of other collectors. After, Holden started creating larger monuments. In 1987, Holden was contracted to sculpt a series of commemorative bronzes to depict

Continued on page 30

"Proportions is one of the big things a sculptor needs to make sure is right before enlarging. Enlarging makes everything big, including the mistakes."

Harold T. Holden

attended Oklahoma State University for a year, where he was enrolled in ROTC. However, a trip to Houston, Texas, resulted in meeting an instructor at the Texas Academy of Art.

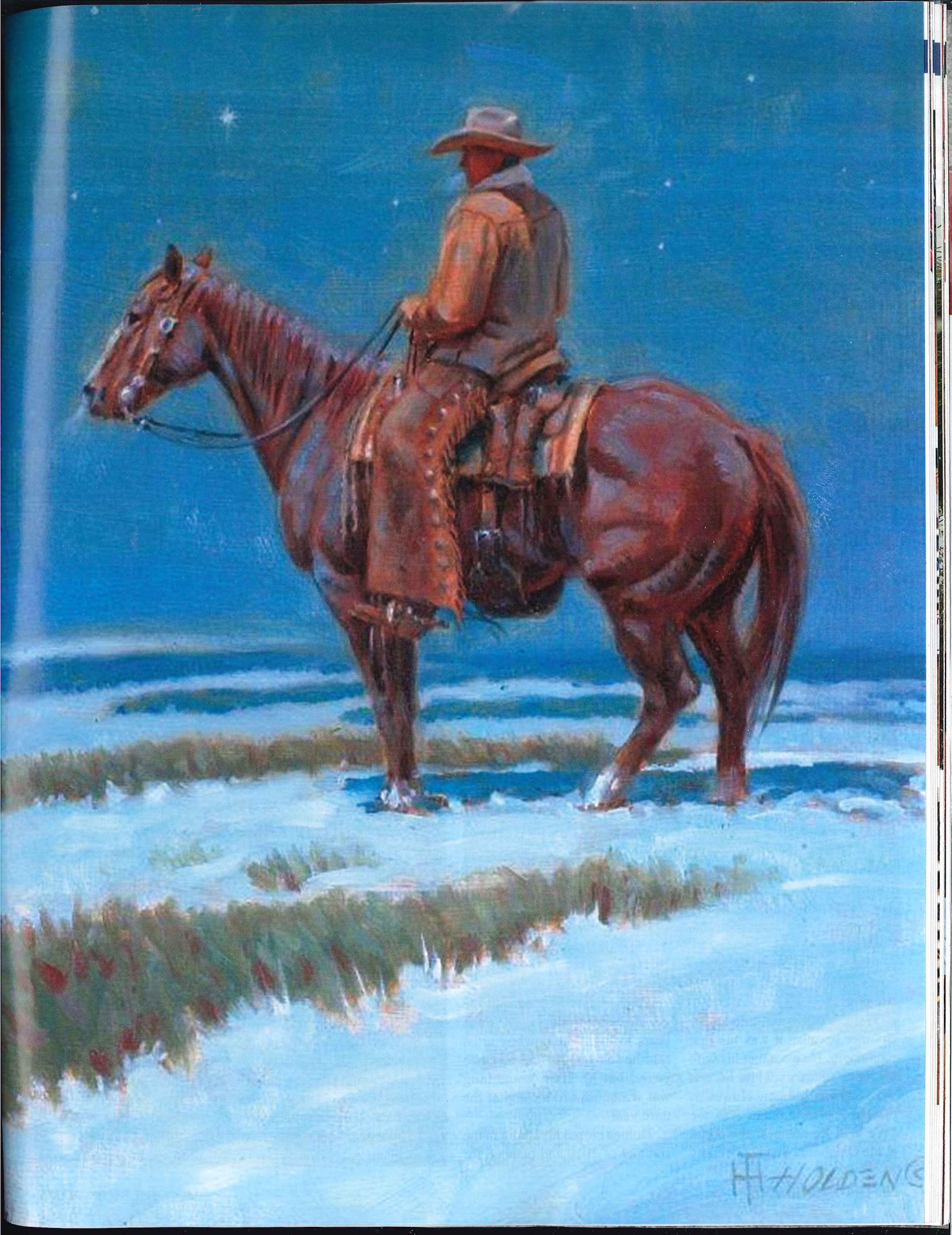
"They taught me how to stay alive in commercial art," Holden explained. "Commercial art is completely different now."

Everything artistic was completed by hand without the help from computers and other technology. Holden subsequently graduated with an art degree, and then pursued a career in the commercial

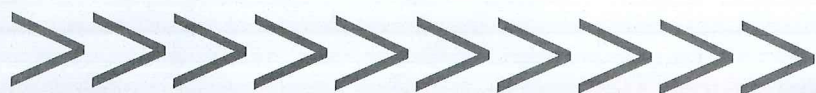
tunity open. Six or seven months later, the magazine hired Holden as their art director.

Holden drew illustrations for the magazine during the day, but he painted and sculpted at night. The artist got his start in sculpting by carving Indian heads out of an eraser while at work.

He learned about plasteline clay and oil-based clay and he taught himself how to sculpt. The artist gradually started making little figures and horses, and his paintings and sculptures launched his career in fine art.



ART OF SECOND CHANCES



Harold T. Holden

Continued from page 28

the 165-year history of the Cherokee Strip. He completed his first monument entitled "Boomer," which is located in Enid, Okla. The image of Boomer was used on a U.S. postage stamp as the symbol of the Cherokee Strip in Kansas and Oklahoma.

"He had some issues with Boomer because he had never done anything big," Edna Mae explained. "He had some people helping him—artists who knew how to make the sculpture from the model to the larger size."

The artists helped him, but the proportions were wrong. Now occasionally teaching a course on sculpting, the artist said one of the biggest mistakes made by sculptors is not accounting for proportions.

"Proportions is one of the big things a sculptor needs to make sure is right before enlarging," Holden explained. "Enlarging makes everything big, including the mistakes."

A sculpture, no matter the size, will be correct if the proportions of the model are correct, Edna Mae added. If the model is slightly unproportioned, the larger size will be off in that degree. Holden developed his measuring system to help ensure the proportions are accurate.

"He's come a long way in 50 years of sculpting," Edna Mae explained.

Holden's favorite sculpture is Boomer because it was his first monument. He even met his wife of nearly 28 years while he was working on Boomer. However, his hardest monument was the "We Will Remember" memorial at the Oklahoma State University

campus in Stillwater, Okla. The memorial features a bronze monument with a cowboy with a sad expression, kneeling with his hat in his hands.

His inspiration for the piece came from his grandson, Patrick Martin Meyer, who was born with a heart defect and died at four-and-a-half days old. The following January, 10 men associated with Oklahoma State University died in a plane crash near Strasburg, Colo. Friends and family members of Nate Fleming, who died in the crash, suggested Holden for the creation of the memorial.

"I used what I felt like when my grandson died," Holden recalled. "I fell down on my knees."

"I hated that he had to do it—we all did," Edna Mae explained, "but he put the grief he was having for Patrick and funneled it into the monument in a shared way with the families of the 10 men from OSU who were killed."

Holden continued to work until he was diagnosed in 2007 with Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis, a fatal lung disease with no known cause or cure.

"Evel Knievel made this statement, 'I've broken practically every bone in my body, and here is a disease I never even heard of that's killing me,'" Holden said. "It was."

While transplants are more common today, Holden said the prognosis for this disease is three years to live. The cowboy artist said he felt fine for the first two years, but he knew something was wrong toward the end of the third year.

Holden closed his studio in the summer of 2010 and planned for



A casting of Holden's monument "Thank you Lord" is located at Emmanuel Baptist Church in Enid, Okla., and outside the Emergency Room of the Nazih Zuhdi Transplant Center in Oklahoma City. (Courtesy of Edna Mae Holden)

his unfinished pieces.

"I just went down really fast," he recalled. "I went twice to the hospital as a backup for a lung transplant."

After returning home without a lung transplant, Holden decided to not go back to the hospital unless he was positive he would receive a transplant. After many prayers,

the Holdens received the phone call they were waiting for.

"I went to the hospital, they hooked me up and I didn't have to worry that someone else was getting the lung," he recalled.

Holden received a single lung transplant at the Nazih Zuhdi Transplant Center at Integris

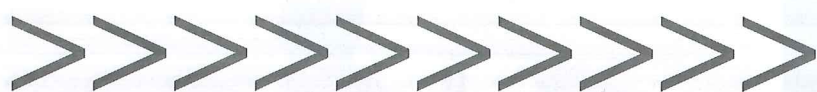
Continued on page 32



PHOTO DETAILS

(Clockwise) Holden's inspiration for the "We Will Remember" memorial stemmed from his grandson. Holden stands in front of the Will Rogers Monument, which currently sits at the Will Rogers World Airport in Oklahoma City. Pictured is Holden's painting entitled "School Days." (Courtesy of Edna Mae Holden) Holden makes final touches on a model. (Photo by Laci Jones)

ART OF SECOND CHANCES



Harold T. Holden

Continued from page 30

Hospital in Oklahoma City in July 2010, just after he turned 70. Three weeks after his transplant, the artist was already working on small projects.

Holden is thankful for his second chance at life. A casting of his six-feet-tall monument "Thank you Lord" graces the garden at Emmanuel Baptist Church in Enid, Okla. A second casting of "Thank you Lord" stands outside the Emergency Room of the Nazih Zuhdi Transplant Center in Oklahoma City.

When asked if he preferred drawing, painting, or sculpting, Holden could not decide. However, he does not draw or paint as much as he used to.

"I would get behind on my learning curve," he explained. "I once read, 'If you're going to be a painter, you paint all the time. You don't stop and sculpt half the time, but you work in painting all the time.'"

Holden said most painters do exactly that. It is not common to see many big sculptors who also paint. However, he spends so much time focusing on the details in the sculpture or painting.

"[His] work, though, is so detailed that it takes him a long time to put every brush stroke in," Edna Mae explained.

The artist said he is a "looser" painter than, for example, contemporary western artist, Tim Cox. However, he is more detailed than cowboy artist, Bruce Greene.

The time spent on a piece of art depends on the piece, he added. More subjects in a piece requires more of Holden's time than a singular subject. The hardest part is figuring out what he wants to do,

Holden said.

"Sometimes he still has the drive when he gets an idea of something," she said. "He just has that desire to do it and gets it done."

For his several decades of work, Holden received the Lifetime Achievement award from the Oklahoma Sculpture Society in 2010. In 2004 the sculptor was elected into Professional Membership in the National Sculpture Society.

The artist was invited into membership in the prestigious Cowboy Artists of America organization in 2013. A year later, the Enid native was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame.

Holden will also be inducted into the "Hall of Great Westerners" at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum during the 2017 Western Heritage Awards in April. He will be the first Oklahoma Artist to be inducted into this group, and he is the tenth artist to receive this recognition.

Throughout his career, Holden has completed more than 20 monuments. Among these include "Oklahoma's Native Son" located at Will Rogers World Airport, "Headin' to Market" at Stockyards City in Oklahoma City and "Monarch at Rest" at the Oklahoma History Center.

He has also helped universities with their endowments through the sale of maquettes including "Broncho" at the University of Central Oklahoma, "Crossing the Red" for the Altus Public School Foundation and "Bison Spirit" for Oklahoma Baptist University.

Holden's "U.S. Deputy Mar-



"U.S. Deputy Marshal Bass Reeves" monument was the first equestrian sculpture to be dedicated in Arkansas. (Courtesy of Edna Mae Holden)

shal Bass Reeves" monument located in Fort Smith, Ark., was the first equestrian sculpture to be dedicated in Arkansas. One of the challenges of working on historical sculptures is the historical accuracy.

"If you've got the wrong clothing, the wrong hat or they're riding a horse they would've never ridden, it's there forever," Edna Mae explained.

Holden studied pictures and did his research before starting many of his pieces, including "U.S. Deputy Marshal Bass Reeves."

As for the future, Holden hopes to complete a monument of Frank "Pistol Pete" Eaton.

In his non-historical pieces, the artist draws inspiration from the western lifestyle. Holden and his cousin, Jeff Holden, raised and ran quarter horses in Oklahoma as well as other states for many years. Throughout his life, the cowboy owned ranch horses for both pleasure and team roping.

"Everything he sculpts, if it's in clay, it looks dead," Edna Mae explained. "When it is in bronze, it comes to life." ❧