

Prix de West®

P R E V I E W

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NATIONAL
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Native Sons

BY CAROLYN SEELEN

Gray skies accentuate the spring greens and a pastel palette of colors dots this dun-colored landscape.

The drive between Oklahoma City and Enid passes through mainly farm and ranchland. Wide-open spaces cover the distances between small towns. An ungrazed stand of hard red winter wheat at eight inches high adds shades of dark, lush green to the monochromatic scene.

This is the backdrop against which Harold T. Holden —

H to his friends — has been painting and sculpting Western art for almost 40 years.

But even before leaving Oklahoma City, visitors can begin to view the works of Holden almost as soon as they step off an airplane. Will Rogers World Airport Plaza starts the trail off with *Oklahoma's Native Son* a life-size-and-one-quarter bronze dedicated May 5, 2005.

Then saddle up and meander to Oklahoma State Fair Park to view *World Champion* a life-and-one-quarter bronze commissioned by the Oklahoma Centennial Commission and dedicated during the 2007 World Championship Show and Statehood Day.

Head'em on over to the OKC Stockyards to see *Headin' To Market*, a 12-foot bronze on a 6-foot granite base. The lifesize-and-one-quarter bronze was commissioned in 2000 to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the Stockyards and was the first centennial sculpture completed. It also is in memory of Holden's grandson.

Another life-size-and-one-quarter bronze, *Monarch At Rest*, has resided since January 4, 2005, at the

Oklahoma History Center located on 23rd and Lincoln, across from the Governor's mansion.

Since June 2006 a seven-foot likeness of Edward L. Gaylord has overseen not only the newspaper in his hand, but visitors to the front entry of the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum®. Commissioned in memory of his friend, it was a gift of Ed C. Joullian III.

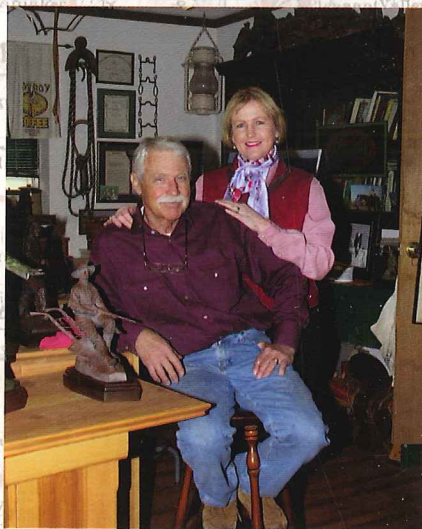
From there, take a short drive north into Edmond to the University of Central Oklahoma campus where a life-size rearing *Broncho*, the school's mascot, was commissioned by NBC Bank.

From Edmond, drive north toward Enid. Just past the small herd of Longhorns — they're wife Edna Mae's — on a road bear-

ing H's name, stands a white frame house and studio on land only a few miles from H's birthplace.

In town, six other bronzes from Holden's studio grace public buildings and grounds. His newest bronze, *The Ranger*, stands in front of the Northwestern Oklahoma State campus.

The Museum of the Cherokee Strip at the corner of Highway 412 and 4th Street is the location of *The Homesteader*, a monument whose maquette was one of H's Prix de West entries for 2007. Groundwork and renovations are currently underway at the site with the life-size-and-one-half pioneer family monument's dedication having taken



Harold T. and Edna Mae Holden



place on September 9, 2007, in time for Enid's centennial celebration.

Government Springs Park, which is one of many stops along the historic Chisholm Trail, sits down the hill from the museum and it is here the rider and his horse camp, *Holding The Claim* they have staked. In 1993, it became the life-size companion to *Boomer*, celebrating the Cherokee Strip Land Run of 1893.

The north side of Enid High School is the home of the *Vision Seeker*, sitting calmly cross-legged as he contemplates. The symbol of the Enid High Plainsmen, he was placed in 1996, but this life-and-one-quarter bronze also appears at Hightown Park in Altus, Oklahoma. Both pay homage to Native American contributions to history — past, present and future.

Further downtown, another Native American stands as a *Keeper Of The Plains* on the Garfield County Courthouse and also at Quartz Mountain Lodge in Altus. *Boomer*, the very first monument H did and one that he has repeated in a half-life-size for this year's Prix de West, is in front of the Cherokee Strip Conference Center on Main Street.

Pick up any article recently written on Holden and it will tick down an impressive list of credits. But the man who has garnered those accolades shies from the spotlight like a skittish colt.

Comfortable with things that have a long-time familiarity, he has no desire for "new-fangled." His studio is a cozy reminder of this fact. The heater which chases the chill from the converted garage on this windy, nippy day may be gas-fired, but it is an old pot belly stove. The music playing softly in the background comes from a modern, compact multi-unit player, but it wears the disguise of an antique radio.

Pictures on the walls of long-time rodeo friends, his wife and the children when they were younger, favorite animals now gone, all framed in vintage frames, cover wall and shelf space — a lifetime of special memories.

Along one wall hangs the tack H laments "doesn't get used near enough." He proudly shows off his birthday present, a split-ear headstall made for him by braider and working cowboy Jay Adcock of Sedan, Kansas.

Next, H pulls down a bridle made for him by bit and spur maker Jerry Cates of Amarillo, Texas, whose work he's collected for years. Cate's engraving on the cheekpiece, or shank, features a centennial medallion designed by H. He scoffs at the shiny newness of it, preferring instead the blackened patina worn by his other gear which have all seen years of use. He caresses each particular piece of tack, describing the who and when of it, as though history flows into his fingertips while he touches it.

When the humor of a thing causes him to smile, there is a magical moment in time where the corners of the widening smile collide with the corners of his eyes, causing them to twinkle. You can see that same sparkle when he looks at his wife of 19 years, Edna Mae. And he readily admits, "Everyone should have an Edna Mae!" She not only handles the business-end of the art business, but she nurtures H. They have been together long enough now they can begin and finish each other's sentences.



CAROLYN: You've created a trail of public works. Someone could fly into OKC and be greeted by one of your works at the airport and literally follow them as they wind their way through the state. Did you set out with that in mind?

HAROLD: No. No, the first one I did was kind of a rarity really. They weren't doing as much public works in 1985-86, you just didn't see as much of it. So that was kind of a big deal for me to do something large. Every sculptor wants to do monuments, you know, at one time or another. Back then, I didn't know very many people who had.



Sculptor Harold T. Holden wants to paint more. Here he captures his son-in-law in *Rope For Hire*, Oil, 30" x 40".

C: You've done a lot of native son, centennial and state historical pieces. Is that a genre special to you?

H: Yeah, I think so.

C: Does that come out of *your* being a native son?

H: Yeah, some of the pieces are the continuation of another piece. Pioneer family, basically the same type of guy down in Springs Park where he's holding a claim. Might not be exactly the same guy, but later, afterwards when he's working the fields. EDNA MAE: And *Boomer* was really the first of those making the run, holding the claim. He's staked his claim and here he is years later with his family.

C: Today's your birthday! Have any big plans?

H: We'll have dinner with my daughter's family tonight and she's gonna fix my favorite pie. I have several, but this one will be coconut cream. She's the best piemaker, other than my mother, whose pie I've ever tasted.

EM: For Christmas two years ago out of all the gifts he got, and he got some nice stuff, was a charter membership to the Pie-of-the-Month Club. So every month she makes him a pie. He threw all of our other stuff aside — gear, great art books — and sat looking at the brochure from the Pie-of-the-Month Club!

H: Yeah!

C: Do the kids help work the pie off?

H: Yeah, besides the daughter, we've a son. He's a painter out of Waco.

EM: We had a show in our gallery "Like Father, Like Son."

C: Does he dabble in bronze?

H: No, no, he never did. Did some

claywork helping me on a big monument years ago. He likes to paint. Matter of fact, Tom Browning – he took a workshop from him a few years ago.

EM: And Morgan Weistling also.

H: He's a real good painter.

C: How old is he?

H: He'll be 40 on August 19th.

C: What was your favorite moment or memory of that father/son show?

H: I guess being able to show him off. (Laughter)

C: For Small Works, Great Wonders you did a piece Edna Mae termed a "BROIL" – a bronze easel with oil paintings. Where did the idea for that come from?

H: Stemmed from other ideas, but it was her idea to do it. In the miniature show you can have bronzes in the show – you can have two extras on hand, but paintings you just get three pieces. Well, see, I put the bronze in with a different painting so I got more pieces in!

EM: That wasn't your ulterior motive, was it?

H: Well, it worked though!

EM: I just thought it was a cute thing. There were a lot of people who were interested in it. He decided he needs more oil paintings for the other castings. And I guess if you didn't like his paintings you could put your own in! (Laughter)

C: With the studio out back of the house like this, there's probably not as fine a line between home and work. So what does one of H's days consist of?

H: Get up, go feed and *supposedly* go to work!

C: Does it feel much like work?

H: Sometimes. The big ones do.

C: Because of the length of time?

H: The creative part is in the small ones. All big ones start small and the creative part is actually in the small ones.

C: If you have a good solid idea in your head for a piece, what is the timeframe from start until the foundry has cast?

H: They vary, of course, due to size. I usually start out with a little pinch model and go to something this size (sliding one of the three bronze

maquettes closer to him) and then measure up from there. So, time-wise, I dunno, what do you think? (Looking at EM standing in the doorway)

EM: On a monument, six or eight months, then the foundry would have it six or eight months.

C: Does it feel lonesome, like kids leaving the nest when a piece goes off to the foundry?

H: Glad it's gone!

C.: Are you ready to jump into the next project or do you like to take some down time?

H: I'm usually workin' on some-



A collection of pinch models fill the shelves of an old book case. Miniature clays of the many pieces Holden has cast present a collective view of his work.

thing else in between the big one. Depends on the time. If I'm behind, I try to burn the oil on the big one to get it finished. And then you have pieces for shows you have to burn some oil on those too.

C: Is "quittin' time" 5:00 p.m.?

H: Sometimes. Sometimes it's 11. Right? (Looks at EM.) I used to quit in the summer at five and saddle the horses then we rode. We haven't even been horseback for several months. The weather's been bad, but I haven't had time to do it. I'm gonna do some of it this summer, for sure! She's gonna sell some of her cows, and we'll keep a few calves to play with.

C: How did H and Edna Mae meet?

H: I was working on the first piece I

ever did and somebody brought her out to look at it.

EM: Actually, I'd come out with friends and a couple of years later we re-connected and it went from there. In truth, they were trying to fix me up with another artist who was visiting, but I wasn't all that interested. I'd seen H's art, his sister had a restaurant downtown. Every time I went in the restaurant I'd see the painting and think "this is really something" before I knew anything about him. It was Katie's Pantry...

H: ...Down in the old Youngblood. She was raised on a ranch down by Waurika. She's good on horseback so we had a lot in common. So our interests were...except being an attorney, which she doesn't like anyway! (Laughter from both)

EM: No, no, no, I do stuff for him.

H: Well, she's gonna win a Wrangler award in a couple of weeks!

C: That's got to be exciting. How do you both feel about that?

H: Oh, I told her if she ever got famous I'd carry her suitcase for her. Although I carry 'em anyway!

EM: I just can't believe it, still. R.W. (Hampton) and I kept calling each other "Have you heard anything?"

Then on Valentine's Day R.W. called me and said, "I got the call!" I just think it's...I can't imagine ever doing anything in my life creatively that's going to mean as much as that does. Just can't even imagine.

C: Have your feet come back down to earth yet?

EM: No, I don't think so, I keep thinking they're going to realize they made a mistake. (Laughter). People grow up thinking they're going to be Miss Oklahoma or Miss America or win an Academy Award. Ever since I went to the first one of those I thought "how cool would it be to do something creatively that you'd get this award for." And so it just – it's just incredible as far as I'm concerned.

C: Is it scary doing a big sculpture?

H: It used to be when I first started out. It was the measuring system I had to get taught.

C: Mistakes get really big when you begin to scale.

Photography by Carolyn Seelen

H: Right! Now days, they even have computer Styrofoam where they can take your maquette and rough it up big, whatever size you want and the proportions are all there — you don't have to do any of that measuring. You might have to do some caliper work, but far as measuring...

C: Sounds like algebra! (Laughter)

H: Yeah, it is. What I used years ago, I'd have an upright going along here (referencing a string grid framed on the ceiling overhead) and then a horizontal with a measurement out that way, so I could measure so many inches this way and over so many inches that way and put a nail in the armature, build the clay out to the nail and pull the nail out. So you might have 100s of nails you put the clay out to.

C: Probably scary looking at first!

H: Yeah, it's ugly!

EM: It's really time-consuming, because you had to take all those little tiny measurements.

H: It's the way they've all done it for hundreds of years. Now you can take a piece and have it reproduced roughly in Styrofoam, put clay on it and you've got all your proportions. You don't have to worry about it. That's the main thing the measurements were for anyway, because you can't just start sculpting something big — you have no idea of the proportions when you look at a deer far away... I've seen pieces that shouldn't be cast out there!



Photography by Carolyn Seelen

H sculpts clay applied to a Styrofoam form on his current project for the Air Force.

EM: You see it enough times you can see there's something wrong and I might not identify exactly what's wrong, but you see there's something not right.

H: I did a class there at the Museum a few years ago on sculpture and that's what I kept trying to stress to everyone. Check yourself with measurements, even on the smallest... people that don't sculpt a lot can't see that head might be way too big, or the man's too big for the horse. You can take that head measurement and measure all parts of the horse and be able to have it in proportion. Same with a man. You can check yourself...you'd be surprised somebody that's just starting sculpting, they're trying — they can't see it! So I'll go over there and say, "Look at all those drawings I gave you there, just check those measurements." You just have to drill it. That's one of the most critical parts — getting proportions.

C: What's your favorite movie?

H: "Monte Walsh" probably — the original one. Best bucking horse scene ever photographed. Or the "Blues Brothers," the first "Blues Brothers."

EM: In fact, Steve Crawford that plays with the Blues Brothers is a friend of ours. But if I hear H cackling in the other room, I know it's Chevy Chase's "Vacation." He's really shy 'til he gets to know you, so most people don't realize what a great sense of humor he has.

C: Grandkids — are they a huge part of your life?

H: Majorly — yes. Grandson's already horseback helping his dad take care of cattle.

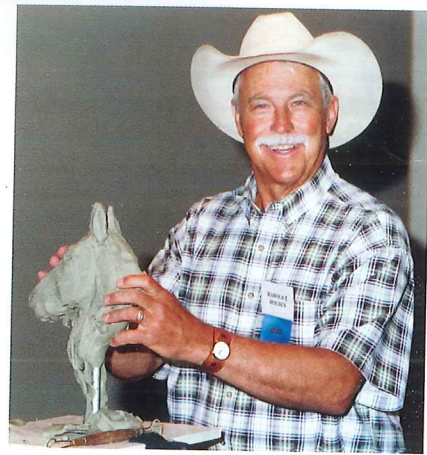
EM: He'll be seven and granddaughter just turned four.

H: She's on horseback, too.

EM: They live out of town (Enid) the other direction about 5 miles so they're close. We see'em at the gallery a lot and they're cooking dinner tonight for his birthday. We see'em a lot and it's great.

C: Do they model occasionally, or are they still too young to sit still?

H: I'm planning on doing something with Pate and Morgan. My



Photography courtesy of Dickinson Research Center

Holden sculpting during a 2004 Prix de West seminar.

son did a painting of my grandson dressed cowboy, got his rope. We couldn't afford the original (laughter) but he made a canvas print for us. So I gotta figure out something I'm going to get done of them.

C: Some artists have background noise when they work...

H: I listen to a lot of cowboy music. Edna Mae's got several albums so I listen to her a lot, Don Edwards, Rush Limbaugh once in a while.

C: Edna Mae is a huge inspiration and support in what you do.

H: Oh, she does everything! I just show up out here! She comes out and critiques my work. She knows what a horse looks like and sometimes when you're close at it you might get a little off and you can't see it yourself without getting away. She'll come in "Well, this neck's a little too long" or "You've got too short of a back." I'll stand back and start looking at it and dang she's right!

EM: I'm not always right, but I always tell him...

H: ...Most of the time!

EM: He doesn't want anything going out that isn't his best work.

H: I painted her two years ago for Prix de West. Talk about having to get critiqued! (Laughter)

EM: I wanted to be younger, thinner — you needed to take some artistic liberties. (Laughter)

H: What was it Carrie Ballantyne said? You should paint her on horseback and put her hair in a po-



Carrie Ballantyne's portrait of Harold

nytail. (chuckling) How you gonna do that? She said, "You just put one on there!" She thought every cowgirl should have a ponytail.

C: She did a portrait of you and it's a wonderful likeness.

H: She did! Thanks! She came up to me at a Prix de West show and said, "You've got a good face. I'd love to draw it. If you want it, I'll trade you your sculpture, or I'll sell it." And it's true, she doesn't have any trouble selling, so we traded! She wanted it. (pointing to EM)

EM: Yeah, I wasn't gonna let anybody else have the original of that!

H: I don't know how she does it. She took I-don't-know-how-many photographs. We took pictures, she took some more pictures.

C: So she did that completely from photographs?

EM: Lots and lots of photographs! And she'd crop bits and decide what to use.

H: I don't know how she does it. It's much better than any photograph. And then they had it in a national art magazine on drawing — I opened it up and there was that picture of me! (chuckle)

C: How do you prepare for a show like Prix de West?

H: I usually start yielding to pressure...(throws a sidelong glance at EM who begins to giggle from across the studio) "...you better

get something up there, get some ideas..."

EM: It tickled me because in an interview I read with Gerald Balcia, he's talking about how driving home from Prix de West he's thinking about next year and so I mentioned that... I said, "It wouldn't hurt you to start." Like last year with centennial, he had four monuments, so hopefully it's getting now to where he can have more time to think about it.

H: Yeah, I'd like to do some bigger cowboy horseback pieces than I would normally do. The one I have in this year is big. It's a historical horseback piece, but I meant bigger cowboy stuff.

C: What does the Prix de West mean to you personally?

H: Oh, gosh. Opportunity — to be in that show — I used to go down there for years. We're not very far; I admired all the artists, never thought that I'd be in that ballpark.

C: So when the first call came saying "You're in," what was your reaction?

H: Probably didn't believe it... (chuckling) and then what was it I said? (looking at EM) the cattle market was bad...

EM:...the wheat market was bad...

H:...oil was down and the wheat market flat...

EM...as we were driving to the show I remember him saying all those things, course H is kinda Mr. Doom and Gloom, but all the way into town "the cattle market...I won't sell anything...if I could just sell one or two things I'd be..." well, he sold 15 or 18 things that first night...

H: ...it was like a freak deal. I did my best work probably...

EM: He's said that ever since then, he thinks he did the best work that first show.

H: Well, it seems like I had time to think about the art. Did a little more research.

C: Does it ever reach a point where you think "I'm done, I'm tired of doing this, I want to do something different?"

H: Hmmmm...No.

C: Do you think it ever will?

H: Naw, I might slack up a little, but no. What would I do? I'm not good enough horseback to make a living at it now. (Laughter) Too old! No, I think every artist does it until they keel over. I don't know of any that retire, maybe a commercial artist retires, or sells the business.

C: Creativity seems to be an actual living force and if you don't release it regularly, it still finds a way out.

H: Yeah, it's something you have to do. You...when you're away from it, things start coming into your head, to try this, or do that. I wanna paint more, 'cause I don't paint as much, so I don't get any better at it.

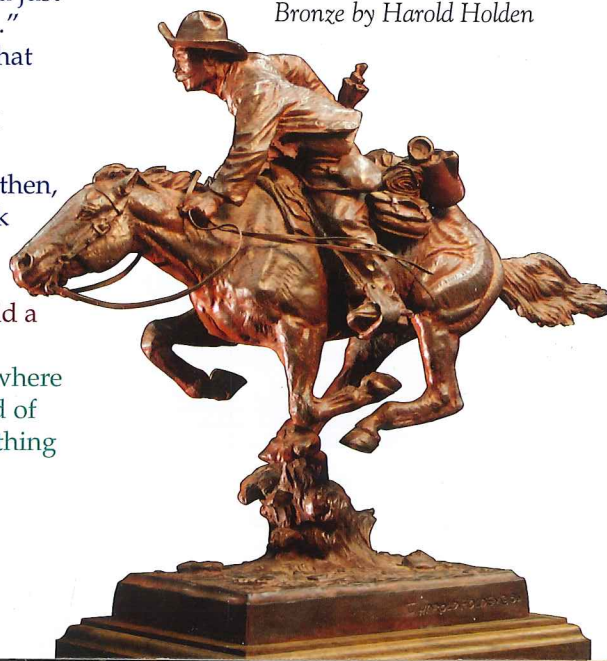
C: If you painted more, would you find you'd miss the sculpting?

H: Probably, a little bit. But I haven't had the opportunity to find out.

EM: He's getting swamped. He's ready to start on a monument for Fort Smith, Arkansas, for Bass Reeves the U.S. Deputy Marshall, so that'll be his next. And he's finishing the Air Force piece in the other room. I'm hoping he'll have time to do some painting. There's still some other stuff out there, but you know this gets talked about a lot, they're wanting to know what it's gonna cost. You spend a lot of time before you have a contract to actually do something.

C: Ballpark a time frame for nego-

Available for the 2008 Prix de West:
Boomer, 45" H x 17" W x 53" L,
Bronze by Harold Holden



tiation prior to a contract signing. EM: Well, like this piece that he's doing for the Air Force that's going to be dedicated in June. My earliest notes with that start in 1994, but the contract was signed a year and a half ago. And that's really unusual, normally within six months.

H: Fort Smith had a competition for Reeves and we had to go over there, take the work and meet with the people. I did the sketch and they ended up liking it.

C: Have your large public monuments come as a straight commission or are most of them screened?

H: I'd say mostly commissions.

EM: But the Will Rogers at the airport was a national competition. And the way he got picked to even submit for the Bass Reeves was one of the guys had been to the dedication of the Will Rogers and we kept in contact all these years. He was interested in H's art so when they decided they were ready to do something he wanted H to submit.

H: That happens a lot.

EM: Those are the only two I'm thinking of, but it was...well *The Ranger* was a competition for the Western Heritage Center, so maybe 25% of his 20 monuments have been competitive. The others have been people coming to him saying, "This is what we want."

H: A lot of them, if they entail a horse or something, they know I know horses.

C: When it's all said and done, what does H want said about what he's done?

H: That he was authentic. *P*



Photography by Carolyn Seelen

Edna Mae's Longhorns stand a watchful guard on the Holden spread.

Brodkin Project Provides Glimpse into Artists' Lives



Photography by Carolyn Seelen

The Brodkin exhibit can pull from digital video interviews of 34 artists. Dozens of selected artists have donated articles, books, videos and personal papers for study in the Research Center.

BY LESLIE SOWDER BAKER

There is a new art-related exhibition at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum® that offers a personal glimpse into the lives and careers of contemporary Western artists. Located in the William S. and Ann Atherton Art of the American West Gallery, the display makes accessible artist interviews captured by the Museum's Donald C. and Elizabeth M. Dickinson Research Center. These are interviews that before the exhibition was developed would more likely be seen by researchers than casual Museumgoers.

Housed in the Atherton Alcove — or the Brodkin Nook — the exhibit is the new public home for the A. Keith Brodkin Contemporary Western Artists Project. Brodkin was an avid Western art collector who passed away in 1998. The Brodkin project named in his honor was conceived by his wife, Judith A. Brodkin. It is a near-perfect vehicle for achieving the Dickinson Research Center's goal to preserve, expand, enhance and make available its collections. This specific effort provides artists, art historians, educators and

researchers with materials that document contemporary Western art.

The exhibit space is simple, featuring only short profiles about featured artists and video clips from interviews. However, Museum visitors who stop in the Brodkin Nook and pause long enough to read, listen and absorb will begin to learn more about the education, careers, inspiration, upbringing, influences and struggles of highly regarded artists. All have been participants in the Museum's prestigious Prix de West® Invitational Art Exhibition and Sale, or its forerunner, the National Academy of Western Art.

Currently, the Brodkin video showcases a dozen artists responding to a question related to drawing. The video content will change from time-to-time according to Chuck Rand, the Director of the Dickinson Research Center, and the artist profiles also will rotate.

Perhaps one of the greatest aspects of the new Brodkin display is the opportunity to learn more about the artists and then explore the surrounding gallery where most have works on display. It is likely the Brodkin project will inspire artists and collectors.