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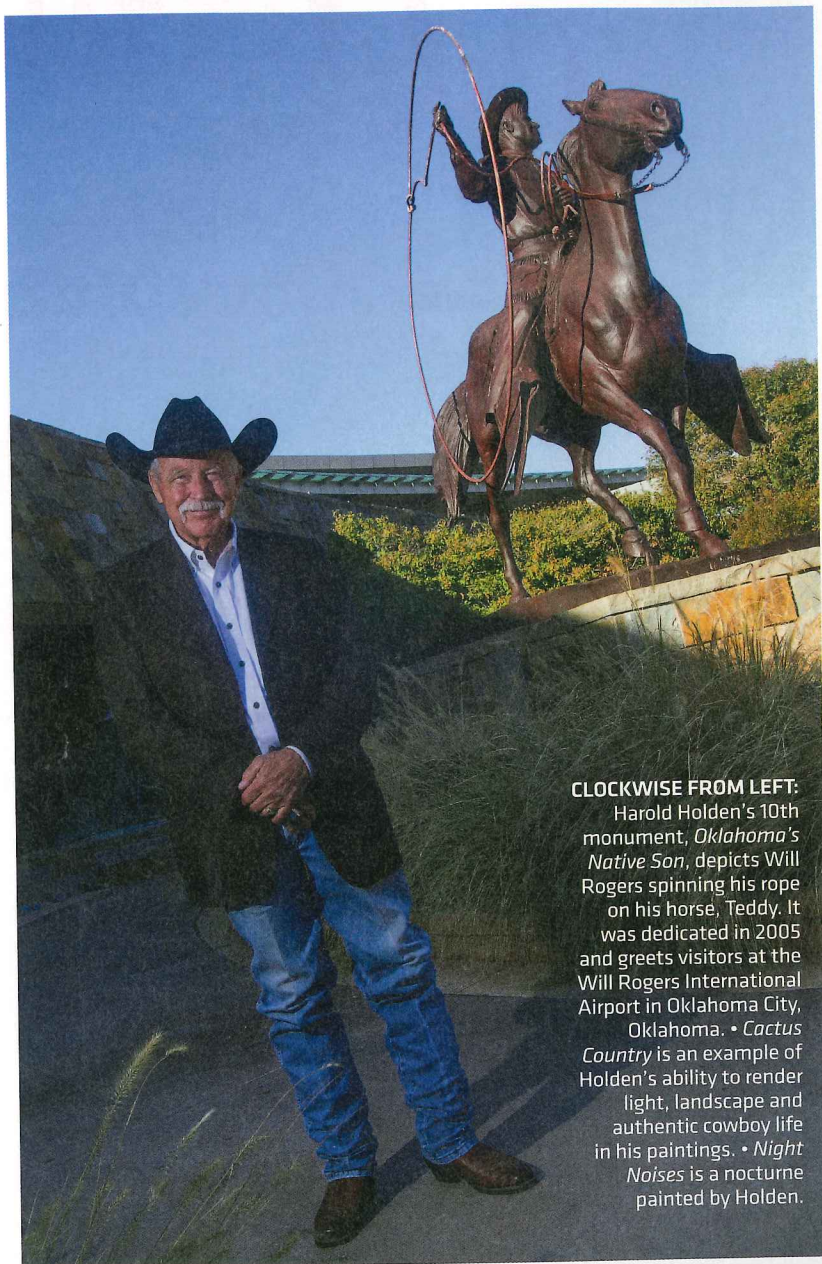


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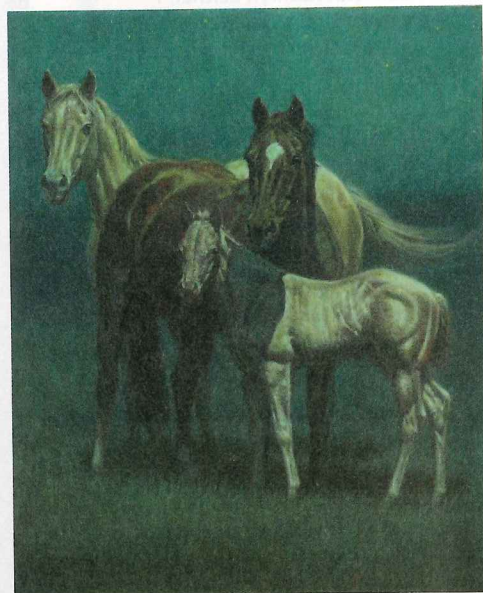
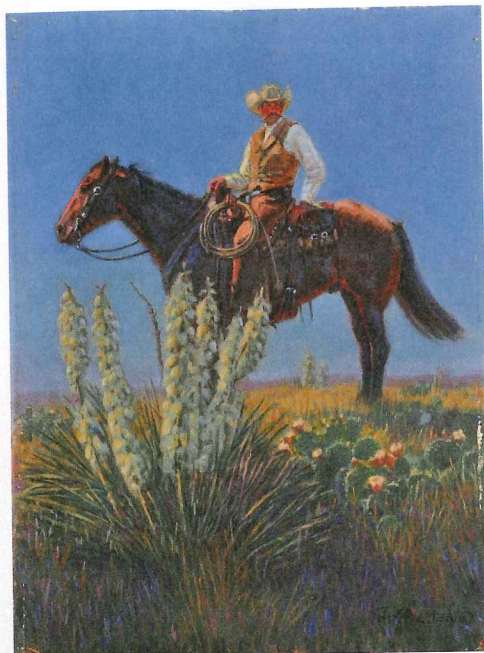
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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Harold Holden's 10th monument, *Oklahoma's Native Son*, depicts Will Rogers spinning his rope on his horse, Teddy. It was dedicated in 2005 and greets visitors at the Will Rogers International Airport in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. • *Cactus Country* is an example of Holden's ability to render light, landscape and authentic cowboy life in his paintings. • *Night Noises* is a nocturne painted by Holden.



WESTERN ART

A Monumental Moment

A special art exhibition will celebrate Oklahoma artist Harold T. Holden's induction into the Hall of Great Westerners.

By JENNIFER DENISON

THE WEST IS AN EVOLUTION of time, place, attitude and lifestyle shaped by extraordinary men and women with pride, purpose and an enduring spirit. Their legacies are perpetuated today through horsemen, artists, ranchers, businessmen and organizations in the Western industry. More than 280 leaders who exemplify the ideals of the West and have significantly contributed to the preservation of Western heritage are honored in the Hall of Great Westerners in the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

On April 22, Cowboy Artists of America member Harold T. Holden of Kremlin, Oklahoma, will be inducted into this prestigious group in ceremonies held at the museum. He will be the only Oklahoma artist ever inducted and the 10th artist since the award was established in 1955.

For Holden, who turns 77 this spring, being a cowboy, artist and Oklahoman "is all I know."

The fourth-generation Oklahoman comes from a family of artists, horsemen and inventors. His great-grandfather George E. Failing, Sr., pioneered the bottle-capping machine for sodas, while his grandfather George E. Failing, Jr., engineered the portable drilling rig.

Raised on his grandfather's farm in Enid, Oklahoma, after his father was killed in a plane crash, Holden focused on farming and roping. However, he also had his own ingenuity and enjoyed drawing. His grandfather encouraged him to pursue his artistic talents.

"My dad raised horses when I was a kid and played polo," says Holden. "Just like [Frederic] Remington and [Charles M.] Russell, I wanted to be a cowboy and an artist."

Holden attended college at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma, and graduated from the Texas Academy of Art in Houston, Texas. He began his career as a graphic artist and magazine designer for *Horseman* magazine. After serving in the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam War in the late 1960s, he returned to his hometown and pursued his career in fine art.

Holden is a talented painter who captures ranch life and the dark nocturnal glow of horses grazing by moonlight with the authenticity of a cowboy and the painterly style of an artist. He also is well known for sculpting Western monuments. During the past 30 years, the self-taught sculptor has created 22 monuments that stand in Arkansas, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas.

"It's every sculptor's goal to do a monument," says the artist. "I'm lucky I've been pretty well represented in my home state and surrounding states."

His first commissioned monument came in 1986. *Boomer* is a life-sized bronze of a frontiersman galloping on his horse, stake in hand, during Oklahoma's Cherokee Strip Land Run of 1893. Located in Enid, Oklahoma, the monument is the official symbol of the Cherokee Strip and appeared on a U. S. postage stamp.

"We did a run of 93 maquettes of the statue to raise funds for the monument," explains Holden. "I ended up making about \$3 an hour on that commission. I didn't quite realize what it entailed being my first one, but it led to the next one."

His most recent monument, *Thank You Lord*, depicts a cowboy holding his hat and looking up. It stands 6 feet high and was dedicated in 2011 in front of the Emmanuel Baptist Church in Enid, Oklahoma. The next year, Holden donated a recasting of the sculpture to Integris Nazih Zuhdi Transplant Institute in Oklahoma City. Holden, who suffered from pulmonary fibrosis, received a life-saving lung transplant at the facility in 2010.

"I was about as close as you could get to dying," he recalls. "They gave me a second chance with a new lung."

Still actively painting and sculpting, Holden says he has the ability and desire to do one more monument, and fundraising is under way for it.

"I want to do one of Pistol Pete, the mascot for the OSU Cowboys," he says.

Holden remembers when he was a child riding his pony in the parades during the celebration for the Cherokee Strip Days.



Holden, a self-taught sculptor, calls this piece *Jackpot*.

"He'd make him rear in front of the judges so he'd win," says his wife, Edna Mae. "We have copies of the check he won when he was 5 years old, and he got to sit on Pistol Pete's lap."

Holden is an honorary lifetime member of the Mountain Oyster Club, an Arizona organization that hosts a prestigious Western art show in November. He has also received several accolades in his 40-plus-year career, including the Oklahoma Governor's Art Award in 2001. His work has been exhibited at major art exhibitions such as the Cheyenne Frontier Days Western Art Show & Sale, the C.M. Russell Exhibition and Sale, Masters of the American West and the Prix de West Invitational. In 2012, he was inducted into the Cowboy Artists of America.

In celebration of Holden's induction into the Hall of Great Westerners, the Oklahoma Hall of Fame at the Gaylord-Pickens Museum will open a temporary exhibit called *Cowboys and Indians* on April 20. The exhibit will be a two-man show featuring the artwork of Holden and Mike Larsen, both members of the Oklahoma Hall of Fame, and will remain on display through August 26.

The exhibit will open with a reception from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Thursday, April 20, that is free to the public. Then, at 6 p.m. Thursday, July 27, Holden and Larsen will present an artists' discussion of the exhibit and their inspirations. For more information on the exhibit, visit oklahomahof.com.