

New Mexico Museum of Art

Sole Mates: Cowboy Boots and Art

Santa Fe, NM (February 17, 2010)—*Sole Mates: Cowboy Boots and Art* celebrates the art of the West and views cowboy boots as important symbols of western life. The exhibition includes paintings, drawings, postcards, advertisements, sculptures, video imagery, and of course boots. The images define changing aspects of the West, from 1880 to the present. The exhibition includes more than 130 objects and pairs of boots that investigate freedom, loneliness, gender, fashion, allure and contemporary art. The exhibition opens at the New Mexico Museum of Art on Friday, May 14, 2010, and runs through September 5, 2010.

Joseph Traugott, Ph.D., summarized the goal of the exhibition by stating that “*Sole Mates* broadens our understanding of the West and western art, and encourages discussions between western artists and the general public.” He is curator of twentieth century art at the New Mexico Museum of Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and the organizer of *Sole Mates*.

Each section of the exhibition is titled with a line from a well known western song. The introduction— *I See by your Outfit that You Are a Cowboy*—sets the tone for the exhibition which is simultaneously stimulating, educational, and fun. Western songs will play in the background of the exhibition.

The historic section of the exhibition includes works by Frederic Remington, Charles M. Russell, and Herbert “Buck” Dunton. These artists defined and then promoted a view of cowboy life that is descriptive, inspiring, and romantic. This section also describes the construction of boots through the work of Deana McGuffin, a third generation bootmaker from Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Conceptual sections of the exhibition allude to western attitudes that are infused into boots and art. These sections incorporate popular culture images that help to expand the notion of western art beyond the restrictive stereotype of ranch workers as men on horseback riding with a herd of cattle. For example, David Politzer’s video self portrait, *Rio Macho*, shows the artist dressed as a middle-aged dude-ranch cowboy bemoaning his lost youth and his failure to become a working cowboy.

The contemporary art in the exhibition presents the West in a complex, provocative manner. The nationally known contemporary western artists in this section include James Drake, Betty Hahn, Martin Cary Horowitz, Luis Jiménez, Bruce Nauman, Patrick Oliphant, Bill Schenck, Lisa Sorrell, and Donald Woodman. The contemporary artists’ point of view can be summarized by

Horowitz's sculpture *Baby Bomb* that references Coyote and Roadrunner cartoons, but also presents a powerful antiwar commentary.

Oklahoma artist Lisa Sorrell's leather sculptures, such as *Butterflies and Bluebirds*, are included in the exhibition. In addition, this sculpture just happens to be a pair of cowboy boots. *Butterflies and Bluebirds* captures the essence and irony of the West— while the sculpture can worn, it may never hit a dance floor.

James Drake's waterless lithograph *Valley of the World* relates to his Tony Lama boots with inserts of red snake skin that are also in the exhibition. The print shows a bridge over the Rio Grande connecting Juarez, Mexico, and El Paso, Texas. A rectangle of snake skin attached to the print can be understood as both a symbol of the economic ties bridging the two countries, as well as a reference to El Paso—the cowboy boot center of the universe.

Of course, these categories often overlap. Carol Sarkisian's *Maurice's Boots, Galisteo, NM*. Sarkisian transformed tin-artist Maurice Dixon's worn out boots into jewel-like sculptures, encrusted with glass beads. This work combines sculpture, popular culture, jewelry, and western philosophy into a seductive form.

Exhibition images may be found on the media center at <http://media.museumofnewmexico.org/>. Just log in with a user name and password which you create.

The content of the exhibition is further explained in *Sole Mates: Cowboy Boots and Art*, published by the Museum of New Mexico Press: <http://www.mnmpress.org/> The publication includes 130 full-color illustrations with narratives by Traugott that further explain the concepts underpinning the exhibition. The book is designed by David Skolkin, the press's award-winning designer.

Sole Mates: Cowboy Boots and Art was organized by the New Mexico Museum of Art, Department of Cultural Affairs, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

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The New Mexico Museum of Art celebrates the diversity of the visual arts and the legacy of New Mexico as a cultural crossroads. The Museum was founded in 1917 as the Art Gallery of the Museum of New Mexico. For more than 90 years, the Museum has collected and exhibited work by leading artists from New Mexico and elsewhere. The New Mexico Museum of Art brings the art of New Mexico to the world and the art of the world to New Mexico. The New Mexico Museum of Art is a division of the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs.

Information for the Public

Location: The New Mexico Museum of Art is located on Santa Fe's Plaza at 107 W. Palace Avenue.

Information: 505-476-5072 or www.nmartmuseum.org.

Hours: Tue – Sun, 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Free Fri 5:00 – 8 :00 p.m.
Between Memorial and Labor Day the Museum is also open on Mon.