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Take an Artistic Journey down Historic Route 66 and Highway 41

CARTERSVILLE, Ga. – The Booth Western Art Museum is inviting visitors to take an artistic journey down two of America’s most historic highways. The Museum will open “Route 66 Meets Highway 41: Roadside Impressions by Chuck Middlekauff,” on August 18. The exhibition includes depictions of historic signs and landmarks along Route 66 and Highway 41. Guests are invited to meet the artist at a reception on September 17 from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. and attend a lecture by the artist at 7:00 p.m. in the Booth Theatre.

Known for his paintings of historic neon signs, Coke machines, roadside diners, and nostalgic motels, as well as close-ups of cowboys, Middlekauff first experienced the Western culture of cowboys, truckers, and diners during cross-country car trips with his family. The Texas artist relishes the challenge of painting those fading roadside attractions and billboards that show textures induced by weathering and years in the hot sun. He first captures old signs or buildings on film and then, stroke by stroke, recreates them in all their tarnished detail on canvas. The artist has traveled along Route 66, which runs between Chicago and Los Angeles, many times, seeking out remnants of the past. “America’s Main Street,” as this legendary road is called, has provided consistent subject matter for Middlekauff for many years.

In 2008, Middlekauff accepted an invitation from the Booth Museum to explore the Tennessee and Georgia sections of Highway 41, which runs from Copper Harbor, Michigan to Miami, and create a series of paintings contrasting Highway 41 and Route 66. Starting from their home in Austin, Texas, Middlekauff and his wife Carol have traveled east to Highway 41 on two recent occasions, searching for old signs and other icons. However, finding the older images for the Highway 41 portion of the exhibition proved challenging for Middlekauff. “Sadly, it seems that Chili’s, Chick-fil-A, and Wal-Mart have bulldozed most of those old motels and diners, and the glorious old signs advertising them went away in the process,” said Middlekauff. “During one trip we actually saw some men on a ladder, in the act of covering over one old sign with sheet metal.”

Highlights of Middlekauff’s search for Southern icons included the Big Chicken in Marietta, Georgia, and the world’s first outdoor advertisement for Coca-Cola on a brick wall in downtown Cartersville, Georgia. He also found the Nu-Way Weiner Stand in Macon, the Bartow Motel in Cartersville, and the Marietta Diner. The bright red Four Way Lunch and the new yellow paint on old bricks at Coconuts Ice Cream in Cartersville also appealed to Middlekauff, though he hasn’t decided which signs he will commit to canvas.

Although the artist had already spent plenty of time on Route 66, while living in Texas, Colorado, and California for almost 40 years, in April of this year, Middlekauff headed out along

“America’s Main Street” from Amarillo to Los Angeles. He and Carol cruised the old road in their white 1975 Corvette, looking for more rusty remnants of those “good ole days” to recapture on canvas, before they are all gone.

“Though the old signs on both roads have much in common,” said Middlekauff after his recent travels, “Route 66 is beautiful in its wide open spaces, and Highway 41 is beautiful in its lushness and greenery, definitely two different roads.”

Following the November 8 close of the Booth Museum’s exhibition, the paintings will move to the Legacy Contemporary Gallery in Scottsdale, Arizona, for an exhibition and sale beginning February 18, 2010 with a reception from 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. For the Scottsdale show, Middlekauff will paint new works to replace any paintings sold at the museum.

For more information on “Route 66 Meets Highway 41: Roadside Impressions by Chuck Middlekauff,” contact the Booth Western Art Museum at 770-387-1300 or visit www.boothmuseum.org.

About the Booth Western Art Museum

The Booth Western Art Museum is a 120,000 square foot museum located in Cartersville, Georgia, where guests are invited to explore the American West through contemporary Western artwork. The Museum also houses a Presidential Gallery of letters and photographs, a Civil War art gallery, and Sagebrush Ranch, a children’s hands-on learning environment. To learn more, visit www.boothmuseum.org.