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Contemporary Perspective on the American West Debuts at the DAM

Watercolor master William Matthews depicts today’s West

(DENVER) – Dec. 15, 2014 – The Denver Art Museum (DAM) is celebrating the American West with a presentation of Western art and film at the museum. The DAM is featuring William Matthews: Trespassing in January and screening a documentary about Colorado-based artist William Matthews’ journey as he prepared for his solo exhibition. William Matthews: Trespassing is on view now through May 17, 2015.

The exhibition features 27 selected works from Matthews’ early career through recent paintings that exemplify his expertise in watercolor and western American subjects. His main focus has been subjects found in the American West: working cowboys, ranches, rural architecture, and the landscape. Organized by the DAM, Trespassing is included in general museum admission.

“What sets William Matthews’ work apart is that he paints the contemporary American West rather than the Old West,” said Thomas Brent Smith, curator of Western American Art and Director of the Petrie Institute of Western American Art at the DAM. “The exhibition shows the arc of the artist’s four decade career, as well as recent works. Matthews is an artist with a great body of work that also continues to challenge himself with new subjects and techniques.”

While primarily known for his cowboy paintings, William Matthews is not himself a cowboy. Instead, he is an interloper—a trespasser—viewing their world from the outside. However, he is no stranger to the West. Matthews is a westerner who lives and works in Denver. Matthews began working as a graphic designer, but dedicated himself to watercolor painting in 1990.

“My mother was an oil painter. She took me to a museum art show when I was a young boy. I saw the watercolors of Winslow Homer, John Singer Sargent and Andrew Wyeth,” said Matthews. “And I said to myself, like a true contrarian, I want to learn how to do that!”

The DAM will feature additional programming to highlight the art of the American West during the National Western Stock Show. The ninth annual Petrie Institute of Western American Art Symposium will take place on Jan. 7, 2015, during WinterWest, Denver’s premier western art celebration. This year’s event, titled Western Character: Expressions of Identity and Place in Portraiture, will take a closer look at the subjects, settings and symbolism of significant western American portraits. Speakers include William Truettner, Curator Emeritus, Smithsonian American Art Museum; Frank Goodyear III, Co-Director, Bowdoin College Museum of Art; Shirley Reese-Hughes, Assistant Curator of Paintings and Sculpture, Amon Carter Museum...
of American Art; and Joseph Traugott, retired curator of 20th Century Art, Museum of Fine Arts, New Mexico. Tickets are $25 for students, $55 for DAM members and $65 for nonmembers. Registration is required and tickets can be purchased on the DAM website at denverartmuseum.org or by calling 720-913-0130 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily.

The museum will screen a new, feature-length documentary on the artist, William Matthews: Drawn to Paint, on Jan. 23, 2015, from 6:30–7:30 p.m. The documentary follows Matthews as he prepares for his solo exhibition at the DAM, revisits some of his favorite subjects and reflects on the world of Western art and the general fascination with the West. Drawn to Paint was produced by Amie Knox and co-directed by Amie Knox and Chad Herschberger. Watch a trailer here: William Matthews: Drawn to Paint. Tickets are $10 for members and $13 for nonmembers and can be purchased on the DAM website.

William Matthews: Trespassing is on view until May 17, 2015, in the Gates Family Gallery on level 2 of the Frederic C. Hamilton Building; the exhibition is included in general admission.

William Matthews: Trespassing is presented by Wells Fargo. This exhibition is organized by the Petrie Institute of Western American Art, Denver Art Museum. It is supported by donors to the Petrie Institute of Western American Art Endowment, the generous donors to the Annual Fund Leadership Campaign, and the citizens who support the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD). Promotional support is provided by 5280 Magazine, CBS4, Comcast Spotlight and The Denver Post.

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The Denver Art Museum is an educational, nonprofit resource that sparks creative thinking and expression through transformative experiences with art. Its holdings reflect the city and region—and provide invaluable ways for the community to learn about cultures from around the world. Metro citizens support the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD), a unique funding source serving hundreds of metro Denver arts, culture and scientific organizations. For museum information, call 720-865-5000 or visit www.denverartmuseum.org.

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