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The Iconic West of R. Tom Gilleon
Light filled art brings the West to life at Booth Western Art Museum

CARTERSVILLE, Ga. – It is difficult to classify Tom Gilleon’s work into one particular style or genre. Visitors to Booth Western Art Museum from January 28 through May 27, 2012, will see the historic and mythic West come to life in *The Iconic West of R. Tom Gilleon*. The exhibition, organized in cooperation with Alta Mira Fine Art, will feature more than 30 major works of art by Gilleon, considered by many as one of the West’s leading contemporary artists.

“Gilleon’s early career as an illustrator helped him hone his skill in creating masterful works of art, while his grandmother’s stories of his Native American ancestry aroused in him the desire to portray what life was like in the West long ago,” said Booth Museum Executive Director Seth Hopkins. “His work is more stylized than much of traditional Western art, and is filled with ubiquitous themes such as teepees, landscapes, Native Americans, and the symbols of Native culture.”

Hopkins has wanted to mount an exhibition of Gilleon’s work ever since Booth Museum acquired his major painting *Northern Plains* in 2008. At the time of the acquisition Hopkins noted, “Gilleon represents a new chapter in the time honored Western tradition of former illustrators becoming known as fine artists. However, Gilleon rejects portions of this tradition. Rather than create illustrative and detailed works that provide a narrative story, he works to reduce detail and create hauntingly vacant compositions focusing on monumental Western shapes, like teepees and grain elevators. The goal is not to tell a particular story necessarily; rather the emphasis is on evoking an emotion.”

Born in Florida in 1942, Gilleon was raised by his grandparents – one a Scottish immigrant – the other a full-blooded Cherokee. His yard, covered with sand as opposed to grass, was where he first began sketching and drawing. Attending the University of Florida, Gilleon took courses in architecture, and later served as an illustrator for NASA’s Apollo Space Program. While this was not a glamorous job in Gilleon’s eyes, it did help him to refine his discipline and focus. He eventually became a solo freelance artist and worked for The Walt Disney Corporation sketching and drawing designs for the Disney World theme park.

In the 1980s, Gilleon and his wife visited Montana for an outdoor painting workshop and fell in love. They now reside on a 2,000 acre spread near Great Falls, where Gilleon uses teepee rings left long ago as inspiration to fuel his visions of what life might have been like on this land centuries before.

In addition to recognizing a variety of familiar subjects in *The Iconic West of R. Tom Gilleon*, visitors to the exhibition will also see a similarity to pop artist Andy Warhol in Gilleon’s nine panel grid paintings. However, rather than repeating the same image over and over, Gilleon

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introduces a variety of portraits, objects and animals in his work. This creates interesting juxtapositions that engage the viewer. Hopkins says, “This exhibition will have something for everyone to relate to.”

As Featured Artist for the Booth Museum’s 9th Annual Southeastern Cowboy Gathering, the public is invited to a Meet the Artist Reception and Evening Lecture on Thursday, March 8. Refreshments will be available in the Ballroom beginning at 5:00 p.m., and at 7:00 p.m., Gilleon will present a lecture in the Booth Theatre followed by a poster signing in the museum store. On March 9, the artist will conduct a painting workshop.

For more information about *The Iconic West of R. Tom Gilleon* exhibition, call 770-387-1300 or visit www.boothmuseum.org.

About the Booth Western Art Museum

Booth Western Art Museum, an Affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, is a 120,000 square foot museum located in Cartersville, Georgia. Guests are invited to See America’s Story through contemporary Western artwork, Presidential letters and portraits, Civil War art, Western movie posters, more than 200 Native American artifacts, and Sagebrush Ranch children’s gallery. Visitors to Booth Museum also enjoy the intimate downtown setting with unique specialty and antique shops, boutiques and nationally featured restaurants all within walking distance of the Museum. Open since August 2003, Booth Museum is the second largest art museum in the state of Georgia, and houses the largest exhibition space for Western art in the country. To learn more about Booth Western Art Museum, visit www.boothmuseum.org.

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