



MISSISSIPPI MUSEUM *of* ART
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Magic of Mississippian Jim Henson Celebrated in Smithsonian Traveling Exhibition

“Jim didn’t think in terms of boundaries at all the way the rest of us do. There are always these fences we build around ourselves and our ideas. Jim seemed to have no fences.”
— Jon Stone, *Sesame Street* producer and director

(Jackson, Miss.) Without “fences” to limit where his imagination could roam, Greenville, Mississippi-native Jim Henson (1936-1990)—artist, puppeteer, film director and producer—created elaborate imaginary worlds filled with unique characters, objects, environments and even languages and cultures. The early years he spent in the Mississippi Delta offered Henson the creative atmosphere from which many of his world-famous characters sprang. Henson spent many formative afternoons exploring Deer Creek around Leland and was inspired by the amphibians and the surrounding swamp. Henson’s work is now enjoyed in dozens of languages in more than 100 countries.

“Jim Henson’s Fantastic World,” a new exhibition from the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES) and The Jim Henson Legacy, offers a rare peek into the imagination and creative genius of this multitalented innovator and creator of Kermit the Frog, Big Bird and other beloved characters.

Sponsored locally by Donna and Jim Barksdale, the Jackson Convention & Visitors Bureau and Mississippi Public Broadcasting, “Jim Henson’s Fantastic World” will open at the Mississippi Museum of Art on December 19, 2009. It will remain on view through March 14, 2010, and will then continue on a 12-venue national tour through 2011.

“The Mississippi Museum of Art is always proud to host exhibitions of work by native Mississippians,” states museum director Betsy Bradley. “In April we open

exhibitions featuring photographs by Eudora Welty, along with the work of Gulf Coast artists Dusti Bongé, Richmond Barthé, Walter Anderson, and George Ohr. Later this year, we will present work by a selected number of currently-working artists in the 2009 *Mississippi Invitational*. We now add Jim Henson to the list of Mississippi luminaries featured within a year's time – quite an impressive lineup for any museum,” she added.

The exhibition features 100 original artworks, including drawings, cartoons and storyboards that illustrate Henson's talent as a storyteller and visionary. Among the variety of exhibition objects are puppets and television and movie props, photographs of Henson and his collaborators at work and original video productions, including excerpts from Henson's early career and experimental films.

“It's such a treat to get to know Jim Henson through his doodles and drawings, his puppets and his fantastic performances,” said Karen Falk, curator of the exhibition and archivist at The Jim Henson Company. “I'm delighted to be able to share this inspiring and entertaining experience with people all over the country. Seeing his original work firsthand opens a window into his visual thinking and provides both an appreciation of Jim as an artist and a reason to laugh out loud.”

From the very beginning, Henson expressed his ideas with incredible bursts of invention, through a variety of visual forms, clever dialogue, songs, comic bits and animation. All of his work reveals a highly sophisticated and nuanced thought process, evident in the decades-long metamorphosis of a small group of captivating characters from simple doodles to cartoons to puppets to films. What began as a one-man enterprise eventually grew into an international phenomenon. As time passed, the simple hand puppets Henson created for his first television show, “Sam and Friends,” evolved into increasingly more sophisticated characters—from the Muppets of “The Muppet Show,” “Sesame Street” and “Fraggle Rock” fame to the larger-than-life fantasy creatures of “The Dark Crystal” and “Labyrinth.”

“Jim Henson's Fantastic World” is organized by The Jim Henson Legacy and SITES, in cooperation with the Henson Family; The Jim Henson Company; The Muppets Studio, LLC; and Sesame Workshop. The exhibition is made possible by The Biography Channel. Additional support has been provided by The Jane Henson Foundation and Cheryl Henson.

The Biography Channel is a 24-hour digital cable network dedicated to presenting compelling stories about the world's most interesting people. One of the most sought after and fastest growing channels available today, The Biography Channel presents vibrant profiles of intriguing individuals, plus exciting new original series, short features and documentaries. For more information, visit www.biography.com.

Established in 1992, The Jim Henson Legacy was founded by Jane Henson, colleagues and friends in response to the extraordinary interest in the life and prolific body of work by Jim Henson. The non-profit 501(C3) organization is dedicated to preserving and perpetuating Jim Henson's contributions to the worlds of puppetry, television and motion pictures, special effects and media technology. By making Jim Henson's creative work available to the public through presentations and exhibits, the Legacy's mission is to share the power of his art, his imagination and his positive view of life with generations to come. Please visit our website: www.jimhensonlegacy.org.

SITES has been sharing the wealth of Smithsonian collections and research programs with millions of people outside Washington, D.C., for more than 50 years. SITES connects Americans to their shared cultural heritage through a wide range of exhibitions about art, science and history, which are shown wherever people live, work and play. For more information, including exhibition descriptions and tour schedules, visit www.sites.si.edu.

The Mississippi Museum of Art and its programs are sponsored in part by the city of Jackson and the Jackson Convention & Visitors Bureau. Support is also provided in part by funding from the Mississippi Arts Commission, a state agency, and in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

Hours: Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m., Sunday, noon to 5 p.m., closed Monday.
Admission: \$12 adults, \$10 seniors (60+), \$6 students (6 through college), free for children 5 and under, free for Museum members. Hours and admission may vary during major exhibitions. Please visit the web at www.msmuseumart.org for more information about this exhibition and other programs.

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