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Artist Ken Freeman... A Jewish Cowboy from Chicago



For artist Kenneth M. Freeman, the cowboy hat and boots were not a gimmick or shtick.

SCOTTSDALE, AZ.- Artist Ken Freeman always called himself a "Jewish Cowboy." The world premiere of the Kenneth M. Freeman Legacy Exhibition opens at the Booth Western Art Museum in January 2010. The display consists of fifty (50) oil paintings and sculptures that feature working cowboys and cowgirls, rodeo heroes, Native American elders and children, mountain men, Western landscapes, and Buffalo Soldiers.

For artist Kenneth M. Freeman, the cowboy hat and boots were not a gimmick or shtick. Neither was his Arizona attitude. Ken Freeman may have grown up in a traditional Jewish home in Chicago, Illinois but make no mistake ... he was a cowboy. His early career as an artist included illustrations for books by Louis L'Amour and Will James and culminated with compelling portraits of cowboys, Native American elders and children, mountain men, Buffalo Soldiers, western landscapes and rodeo heroes. The Booth Western Art Museum, an Affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, hosts the world premiere of the Kenneth M. Freeman Legacy Exhibition – Artist at Work opening on January 16, 2010. The exhibit continues through May 2, 2010 in the newly created Special Exhibition Gallery.

Kenneth M. Freeman was a graduate of the American Academy of Art in Chicago. At the age of 15, he began taking classes at the Academy in the summer of 1950. He studied with renowned artist Haddon Sundblom. Freeman passed away in June of 2008 leaving a rich body of work unrivaled by many artists. His paintings hang today in museums, galleries and private collections around the world including The Library of Congress American Legacy Collection, The Booth Western Art Museum and the family of President Herbert Hoover.

"He was a man you could never forget. His enthusiasm for life and art was contagious. Of all the artists from the Academy I've met over the years, Ken really stood out as one of a kind," said Aron Gagliardo, historian and archivist of the American Academy of Art.

According to Bonnie Adams, curator for the Kenneth M. Freeman Legacy exhibition, his subject matter was unique for a Jewish painter.

"Most Jewish artists are not figurative in their subject matter," Adams points out. "They paint abstracts and symbolism, but not usually realistic figures and portraits. Ken was a rare breed ... a special man and a special artist. He had chutzpah and the courage to live his dream."

"The Kenneth Freeman Legacy Exhibition represents a true working artist," said Seth Hopkins, executive director of the Booth Western Art Museum. "The exhibition shows the artist at work ... as an illustrator, sculptor, and painter. The Booth Museum has two of Ken's paintings in our permanent collection."

"This will also be the first temporary exhibition at the Booth Museum since the opening of our new 40,000 sq. ft. expansion completed in October, 2009," added Hopkins. "We now house the largest permanent exhibition space for Western art in the country. We say: You don't have to leave the South to visit the West."

Consisting of fifty (50) oil paintings and sculptures that feature working cowboys and cowgirls, rodeo heroes, Native American elders and children, mountain men, Western landscapes, and Buffalo Soldiers the exhibit also includes an area focusing on Ken's artistic technique.

"Ken sketched on the canvas or board with pencil and then did a full value, burnt umber painting where he worked out all the details of the work. When the burnt umber was dry, then he laid down the color," explained Bonnie Adams, curator of the Kenneth M. Freeman Legacy exhibit. "This is the style of the old masters and for his use of the technique and his subjects, several members of the press dubbed Ken as The Rembrandt of the Rodeo."

The exhibition also highlights a number of educational exhibits that include a re-creation of Ken Freeman's studio complete with easel and artifacts, a section on Ken Freeman, the illustrator, showcasing a display of book covers and posters including 'Fallon' by Louis L'Amour, and a special section on the Buffalo Soldiers (<http://www.9thcavalry.com>).

Kenneth M. Freeman

Accolades include winning the Salmagundi Show in New York City , the Union League Club of Chicago, being chosen five times as artist for the Parada Del Sol Rodeo in Scottsdale , AZ and having a painting selected for the 1988 Prescott Centennial Rodeo. That particular painting was also used as the inside cover of Arizona Highways Magazine. Ken was also famous for painting original art for the Hashknife Pony Express ride three years running from which posters have been made and sold in the post offices. Senator Jon Kyl of Arizona chose two of these posters for display in the Library of Congress in the American Legacy Project.

Booth Western Art Museum | Jewish Cowboy | Kenneth M. Freeman |