



Contact: Martha Donelan
805.884.6430
mdonelan@sbma.net

Santa Barbara Museum of Art
Presents
Heartland: Paintings by Bo Bartlett, 1978-2002
June 5 – August 22, 2004

May 27, 2004 - The *Art of the Americas* Celebration at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art continues in the summer of 2004 with the special exhibition *Heartland: Paintings by Bo Bartlett, 1978-2002*, on view June 5 - August 22. Organized by the Columbus Museum in Georgia, where the artist was born and raised, this mid-career retrospective offers a contemporary reinterpretation of realism, an important and recurring theme in United States art.

Like his distinguished predecessors Thomas Eakins and Andrew Wyeth, Bartlett draws inspiration from what is most familiar to him. His powerful and engaging paintings treat the people, places, and events that make up the fabric of his life. For Bartlett, though, the familiar is the foil for epic narratives about life, death, love, family, memory, and conflict. He pushes the boundaries of the realist tradition with surreal ambiguities and classic motifs drawn from history, religion, and literature. Bartlett's dramatic works capture on canvas emotionally charged, larger-than-life moments.

The scope of the exhibition tells the story of Bartlett's early interest in figure painting and how he studied the genre first in Florence in 1974 and then in Philadelphia beginning in 1975. Following the example of realist painter Thomas Eakins, Bartlett augmented his arts education at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts by studying human anatomy at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine (1977-78). His subsequent training as a filmmaker at New York University in 1986 accounts, in part, for the cinematic, contemporary quality of Bartlett's painting.

Bartlett first considered becoming a preacher and admits that his early attempts at drawing took place while in church. As a mature painter, Bartlett draws from these childhood experiences, which inspired a deep religious symbolism in many of his paintings. Bartlett contends that spirituality is a layer to which he tries to add art historical and cultural symbolism. The result is a metaphorical form of contemporary painting that is rooted in Bartlett's personal experience. For example, *Homecoming*, 1995, an eerie rendition of a bonfire with a surround of football players and their elegantly dressed dates, is said to be a tribute to his wife Melonie, who was his high school

sweetheart. The painting *Bone*, 2000, depicts Bartlett's oldest son, Will, carrying the mandible of a whale, which he discovered on a beach in Maine where the Bartlett family spends their summers.

The exhibition's main title, *Heartland*, derives from a painting acquired by the SBMA in 1994. *Heartland* depicts Bartlett's other young son, Eliot, pulling a red wagon laden with sticks. Suggested by its title, the setting for this painting is the rolling fields of the United States' "heartland," the symbolic center of the nation's traditional values. The poignant image of a young boy, standing alone with his Radio Flyer wagon at his side, calls forth the innocence of childhood, while the desolate landscape evokes the larger idea of the United States in the "age of experience."

Bartlett's work is represented in various public collections in addition to the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, including the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; the Denver Art Museum; The Franklin Institute, Philadelphia; the La Salle University Museum of Art, Philadelphia; the Greenville County Museum of Art, South Carolina; and the Columbus Museum of Art, Georgia.

The 2004 *Art of the Americas* Celebration at the SBMA began in February with *In the American Grain: Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz* (February 14- May 9), an exhibition organized by The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. which presented a fascinating view of American modernism through groundbreaking works by artists of the Stieglitz Circle. Building on the foundation of *In the American Grain*, the celebration of American art at the SBMA showcases *Art of the Americas: Latin America and the United States, 1800 to Now!*, a major reinstallation of the Museum's permanent collection which opened in March and runs through November 21. *Art of the Americas* explores a broader concept of "America" by integrating works by artists from the United States and Latin America. In September, *Agustín Víctor Casasola: Mirada y memoria* (Glance and Memory) features one of the most outstanding and legendary documentary photographers in all Latin America. In October, *Matta On Paper: The John Todd Figi Collection* will highlight one collector's passion for the drawings, watercolors, and related paintings of the 1930s and 1940s by Matta, the world-renowned Chilean-born artist who many consider to be one of the greatest draftsmen of the twentieth century. The *Art of the Americas* Celebration culminates in December with the major retrospective *The Art of David Ireland: The Way Things Are*. In contrast to the monumental realism of Bartlett, the vibrant Surrealist works of Matta, and the dramatic photojournalism of Casasola, Ireland's remarkable architectural transformations, installations, objects, and drawings challenge viewers' everyday distinctions between art and non-art.

The *Art of the Americas* Celebration is generously supported, in part, by Jill and John C. Bishop, Jr., The Charles and Mildred Bloom Fund, The Challenge Fund, The Cheeryble Foundation, Christine Garvey, Larry and Astrid Hammett, Lillian and Jon Lovelace, Santa Barbara Bank & Trust, Santa Barbara Museum of Art Visionaries, Santa Barbara Museum of Art Women's Board, Mr. and Mrs. C. William Schlosser, The Tighe Family Charitable Lead Trust and anonymous donors.

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Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA. Open Tuesday - Sunday 11 am to 5 pm. Closed Monday. Free every Sunday. 805.963.4364 www.sbma.net