

Hay exhibit makes home in Bentonville

Otterness sculptures give taste of farm life at museum

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BENTONVILLE — Sculptor Tom Otterness' exhibition of whimsical, larger-than-life "hay people" near the entrance to Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art resonates with residents while providing visitors a taste of the bucolic life found in pockets all around the city.

The three hay-and-steel sculpture figures in Otterness' installation, *Makin' Hay* (2002), include a woman cutting hay with a scythe, a man hand-rolling hay into round bales and another woman carrying bales. The tallest of the sculptures, made of hay fashioned on steel armatures, is 18 feet tall. The setting is a hay field on property owned by CR Investments LLC.

"It's exactly what it's supposed to be, where it's supposed to be," said Rod Bigelow, Crystal Bridges' executive director.

With fall foliage all but bursting in colors around it, the timing is right, too.

Otterness created the trio more than a decade ago for the What the Hay! contest, a popular aspect of the Montana Bale Trail. The 22-mile trail from Hobson to Uticato Windham in Montana often includes 50 or more cleverly crafted hay sculptures, each of which must use the word "hay" in its quirky title. Otterness' wife's family owns property in Montana, and the couple has a home there.

Bigelow said the hay sculptures should change slightly in appearance as the seasons change and ice and snow accumulate on them. During a visit to Crystal Bridges in mid-October, Otterness tutored preparators and others in how to restuff the sculptures with hay, as deer and some birds are expected to feed off the artwork. *Makin' Hay* will be on display in Bentonville for 18 months.

Otterness' family is of Norwegian descent, and he remembers the harvest season from time spent visiting his grandparents' home where they settled in South Dakota. Otterness grew up in Wichita, Kan.

"It's sort of a personal attachment to that whole scene of harvesting," Otterness said Monday from his Brooklyn studio in New York.

He said he's a big fan of outdoor artwork in general.

"I like to reach a big public," he said. "When your work is outdoors like that, especially where it is now - near the road - you get people who aren't on their way to a museum."

"They're not going out of their way to see art, but they see it anyway," Otterness said. "They're curious to get out and look at it. You reach more people that way."

In 2003, *Makin' Hay* was bought by Candace and Michael Humphries and the Alturas Foundation, a family foundation based in San Antonio that's committed to the visual arts and American culture. Before Otterness' family of hay-makers went to Crystal Bridges, the foundation sponsored displays of it in Texas, Idaho, California and Washington state. Two more editions of *Makin' Hay* have been commissioned but not yet created, Bigelow said.

While the foundation focuses on American culture, Otterness' reputation is global. He's best known for his

whimsical, often playful public sculptures, which are installed in cities around the world, including New York; Toronto, Canada; Seoul, South Korea; Scheveningen, the Netherlands; and Munster, Germany.

The majority of his works are done in bronze, including a \$750,000 commission in 2001 to create Life Underground - which featured 59 bronze sculptures placed on railings, beams and columns throughout the 14th Street/ Eighth Avenue subway station in New York.

Otterness said he mostly enjoys crafting pieces for children and families, such as his many playground figures.

"He talks about his primary demographic being between the ages of 5 and 12 years old," Bigelow said of Otterness.

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