

1280 PEACHTREE STREET, N.E. • ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30309

Press Office

TEL 404-733-4437

FAX 404-733-4529

prinfo@woodruffcenter.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**TRAVELING EXHIBITION OF THE WORK OF FOLK ARTIST
BILL TRAYLOR PREMIERES AT HIGH MUSEUM OF ART**

*“Bill Traylor: Drawings from the Collections of the High Museum of Art and the
Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts”*

ATLANTA, January 4, 2012 – The High Museum of Art in partnership with the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts of Montgomery, Alabama, has organized “Bill Traylor: Drawings from the Collections of the High Museum of Art and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts.” This exhibition will feature some of the best examples of Traylor’s work, rarely seen outside of the southeastern United States, with more than 60 works drawn from both collections. Opening in Atlanta on February 4, 2012, the exhibition will remain on view through May 13, 2012, before traveling to the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville, Tennessee; the Mingei International Museum in San Diego, California; and other national venues to be announced.



“The High is deeply committed to folk and self-taught art. We are the only major museum in North America to have a curatorial department specifically devoted to the field,” said Michael E. Shapiro, Nancy and Holcombe T. Green, Jr., Director of the High Museum of Art. “We believe that Traylor’s work is sure to excite visitors with its energy, whimsy and wit.”

“Bill Traylor” features representative works from Traylor’s various genres, including human and animal figures and depictions of his memories of plantation life—complex images in which he often combines several figures with abstract constructions. Although he worked largely in anonymity during his lifetime, Traylor became one of America’s most respected self-taught artists after his exposure to a larger public in the groundbreaking 1982 exhibition “Black Folk Art in America, 1930–1980,” held at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C.

Traylor began drawing when he was eighty-five years old and, in a prolific decade of art-making, produced more than 1,200 drawings in graphite pencil, colored pencil, poster paint, charcoal and crayon. Many of his drawings were created on shirt cardboard, cast-off signs or other shaped supports. The unusual forms of these materials often influenced his designs. Unanchored by ground lines, his figures float in space. As early as 1939, the pared-down forms of Traylor’s energetic drawings struck a chord with observers accustomed to the formal reductions of modernism. This made him one of the first African American vernacular artists to attract the notice of the art establishment in the 20th century.

Image Credit: Bill Traylor (American, 1854–1949), *Untitled*, ca. 1939–1947, poster paint, pencil, colored pencil and charcoal on cardboard, 10% x 7¼ inches, High Museum of Art, T. Marshall Hahn Collection, 1997.115.

The exhibition features 33 Traylor drawings from the High and 30 from the MMFA. The two institutions hold the world's largest museum collections of Traylor's work. Both acquired their first 30 Traylor drawings in 1982 directly from the artist Charles Shannon, a member of the New South cultural center who had befriended Traylor and saved his drawings. The exhibition will also highlight Shannon's efforts to preserve and promote Traylor's legacy, displaying Shannon's preliminary sketch of Traylor for a portrait mural at the New South and an original block- or screen-printed brochure from Traylor's 1940 New South exhibition.

"As he sat under the awning near the pool hall on Monroe Avenue, Traylor took the raw material of his origins at the fertile intersection of African and European cultures and worked at shaping his life experiences into a meaningful story," says Susan Crawley, the High's curator of folk art. "And he put them in a form he could look at and hold in his hands."

Bill Traylor

William Traylor was born into slavery in Lowndes County, near Benton, Alabama, sometime between 1852 and 1856, and was freed by emancipation in 1863. For more than 50 years he worked as a field hand on the plantation where he was born. By 1928 he had moved to the nearby city of Montgomery, where he spent his nights in the back room of a funeral parlor and, later, a shoe repair shop. He spent his days sitting on the city sidewalks, where he drew scenes from both his memories of plantation life and the street life around him. In 1939, he met the painter Charles Shannon. Recognizing Traylor's talent, the younger artist and his colleagues from the New South cultural center provided Traylor with art supplies and preserved much of his work. Traylor had a one-man show at New South in 1940 and in 1941 his work was exhibited in New York City. He spent the war years living with his children in the North and returned to Montgomery in 1945, when he resumed drawing. In 1947 he moved in with his daughter in Montgomery, but a decline in health soon forced him into a nursing home, where he died in 1949. Traylor's short career was prolific: he produced more than 1,200 works in graphite, colored pencil, poster paint, charcoal and crayon. In addition to the exhibitions held during his lifetime, Traylor's work has been represented in at least 30 solo exhibitions and 85 group shows since the late 1970s.

Exhibition Organization and Support

"Bill Traylor: Drawings from the Collections of the High Museum of Art and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts" is organized by the High Museum of Art in partnership with the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, Montgomery. This exhibition is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts and by the Forward Arts Foundation Exhibition Endowment.

Folk Art at the High

The High is distinguished as the only major general museum in North America to have a curatorial department devoted to the field of folk and self-taught art. In 1996 the High's folk art collection expanded in size and scope through the gift of the T. Marshall Hahn Collection. In 2002 and 2003 the collection was further enhanced by Museum patron Judith Alexander's gift of more than 130 works by Atlanta artist Nellie Mae Rowe. With a total of 800 artworks, including in-depth holdings of the work of Thornton Dial and Ulysses Davis and monographic surveys of the art of the Reverend Howard Finster and Bill Traylor, the High's Southern folk art collection is considered to be among the top five in the nation.

Montgomery Museum of Fine Art, Montgomery, Alabama

The Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts was founded in 1930 and is the oldest fine arts museum in Alabama. Currently housed in a state-of-the-art facility located in the city's Blount Cultural Park, the museum's collection is one of the most distinguished in the Southeast, featuring

American paintings, sculpture and works on paper as well as an impressive collection of Old Master prints, Southern regional art, studio glass and decorative arts. The American paintings collection is highlighted by The Blount Collection, an assemblage of 19th- and 20th-century paintings and works on paper by John Singleton Copley, John Singer Sargent, Winslow Homer, Edward Hopper and others that illustrates the historical development of American painting over two centuries. The museum's Old Master print collection includes works on paper by such incomparable masters of European printmaking as Albrecht Dürer, Rembrandt van Rijn and James McNeill Whistler. The museum also houses an innovative, interactive learning environment known as ARTWORKS that is designed to educate and entertain visitors of all ages.

High Museum of Art

The High Museum of Art, founded in 1905 as the Atlanta Art Association, is the leading art museum in the southeastern United States. With more than 12,000 works of art in its permanent collection, the High Museum of Art has an extensive anthology of 19th- and 20th-century American and decorative art; significant holdings of European paintings; a growing collection of African American art; and burgeoning collections of modern and contemporary art, photography and African art. The High is also dedicated to supporting and collecting works by Southern artists and is distinguished as the only major museum in North America to have a curatorial department specifically devoted to the field of folk and self-taught art. The High's media arts department produces acclaimed annual film series and festivals of foreign, independent and classic cinema. In November 2005 the High opened three new buildings by architect Renzo Piano that more than doubled the Museum's size, creating a vibrant "village for the arts" at the Woodruff Arts Center in Midtown Atlanta. For more information about the High, please visit www.High.org.

The Woodruff Arts Center

The Woodruff Arts Center is the largest arts center in the Southeast as well as one of the four largest in the nation. The Woodruff is unique in that it combines five visual and performing arts divisions on one campus as one not-for-profit organization. Opened in 1968, the Woodruff Arts Center is home to the Alliance Theatre, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the High Museum of Art, Young Audiences and the 14th Street Playhouse.

#

DIGITAL IMAGES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

Media contacts:

Nicole J. Taylor

Assistant Manager of Public Relations
Tel: 404-733-4585 | Fax: 404-733-4529
E-mail: nicole.taylor@woodruffcenter.org