

Media only: Jennifer Schommer (202) 633-3121

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Public only: (202) 633-1000

Magic of Jim Henson's Imagination 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

Without "fences" to limit where his imagination could roam, 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. His work is 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.

"Jim Henson's Fantastic World" will premiere at the Arkansas Art Center in Little Rock Sept. 7. It will remain on view through Nov. 25 and will then continue on a 10-venue national tour through 2010.

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 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 1993, The Jim Henson Legacy was created by family and friends in response to the extraordinary interest in the life and work of Jim Henson. The organization is dedicated to preserving and perpetuating Henson’s contributions to the worlds of puppetry, television, motion pictures, special effects and media technology. By making Henson’s creative body of work available to the public through presentations and exhibits, the Legacy will share the power of Henson’s art and imagination and his positive view of life with generations to come.

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 Jim Henson Company has remained an established leader in family entertainment for over 50 years and is recognized worldwide as an innovator in puppetry, animatronics and digital animation. Best known as creators of the world famous Muppets, Henson has received over 50 Emmy Awards and nine Grammy Awards. Recent credits include the Emmy® nominated "Sid the Science Kid," "Dinosaur Train," "Wilson & Ditch: Digging America" and "Pajanimals." Features include "The Dark Crystal," "Labyrinth," "MirrorMask," and "Unstable Fables" and television productions include "Fraggle Rock" and the sci-fi cult series "Farscape."

With additional locations in New York and London, The Jim Henson Company is headquartered in Los Angeles on the historic Charlie Chaplin lot, complete with soundstage and postproduction facilities. Independently owned and operated by the five adult children of founder Jim Henson, the Company is also home to Jim Henson's Creature Shop™, a pre-eminent character-building and visual effects group with international film, television and advertising clients, as well as Henson Recording Studios, one of the music industry's top recording facilities known for its world-class blend of state-of-the-art and vintage equipment. The Company's Henson Alternative brand has recently announced the national tour of "Stuffed and Unstrung," a live puppet improvisational show named one of the top 10 "Best Stage Shows of 2010" by *Entertainment Weekly*.

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