

# NEWS RELEASE

January 19, 2011

FRED JONES JR. MUSEUM OF ART  
UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA - NORMAN  
CONTACT MICHAEL BENDURE, Director of Communication, 405-325-3178, mbendure@ou.edu  
FAX: 405-325-7696  
www.ou.edu/fjjma

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WITH PHOTO

### **FJJMA Debuts Santa Fe Artist Susan Contreras Works**

NORMAN, OKLA. – While some may scoff at the idea of living behind a mask, Susan Contreras takes a different approach. With hundreds of Mexican festival masks in her private collection, the Santa Fe artist not only embraces the idea of masks, she incorporates them into her large, playful paintings.



*Susan Contreras: On the Loose* opens with a free reception at 7 p.m. Friday, Jan. 28, at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma. A special guest lecture by Contreras and catalog contributor Lois Katz will accompany the exhibition's opening reception at 6 p.m. Association members and the public are invited.

The new exhibition of Contreras' whimsical and colorful paintings is filled with animal subjects from cats and dogs to mice, birds, rabbits and mysterious mask-wearing characters.

"Donning a mask is one of the most primal acts of human beings," Contreras said. "We tap into basic animal instincts within ourselves, metaphysically, symbolically and spiritually. In a real sense, masks bring out the animal in us, and I mean that in the best sense."

Contreras is the fourth guest artist in the university's Jerome M. & Wanda Otey Westheimer Distinguished Visiting Artist Chair program.

FJJMA director Ghislain d’Humières said Contreras’ Norman visit, which includes a week of classroom time with OU art students and a family event for the community, reflects the mission of the museum and the endowment’s namesake.

“Mrs. Westheimer is a very generous benefactor of art and education at the University of Oklahoma,” he said. “Her endowment is the perfect realization of the mission of the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, which is to bring education and art together. The OU School of Art and Art History will benefit from Contreras’s experience and teaching, and the students will especially enjoy the opportunity to engage with the artist.”

The opening reception will be followed by a Family Day from 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 30. The museum will offer free admission and hands-on activities inspired by the new exhibition. Contreras will be available as well, helping families with mask making and monotypes. Visitors can have their photos taken with their masks on in front of Contreras’s work, *While the Cat’s Away, the Mice Will Play*. Family Days are made possible by generous support from the Kirkpatrick Family Fund.

Contreras was born in Mexico and attributes her Latin heritage to the subjects contained in her large paintings.

“The culture, color and the art [of Mexico] have always been an inspirational source and, of course, that is where my love of masks began,” she said. “I love painting on a large scale, where you can actually walk into a painting.”

Masks have had a lifelong influence on the artist. On childhood trips, Contreras was fascinated with such festivals as the Day of the Dead, where she says she began collecting masks. Growing up watching *Bozo The Clown* on the television and visiting the Ringling Brothers Circus, her first paintings were of clowns. Early in her career as an artist, she even traveled with small-tented circuses for a few years photographing clowns with and without makeup.

Today, she looks a little closer to home for inspiration – to family pets, for example, and how they interact with people. In fact, her pets often find their way into paintings, such as her dog, Omarr, who appears on the master’s side of the table in *The Scent of Pasta*. Five dejected dogs look gloomily across the table in hopes of grabbing some morsels from the master’s meal.

Marwin Begaye, assistant professor of painting and printmaking at the OU School of Art and Art History, expects visitors will enter Contreras’ world of whimsy and fun.

“Susan Contreras is a great storyteller,” Begaye said. “Her work is bold, colorful, emotional and thought provoking. Her figures animate the surface and draw in the viewer to an imaginative world where playful chaos reigns.”

Contreras’s animal-filled paintings reveal not only the effects of wearing masks, but also the freedoms they bring.

“They free us from inhibitions, everydayness and reconnect us with the joy, spontaneity, mystery, and, yes, wildness, that is our primeval selves,” she said.

*On the Loose: Susan Contreras* remains on display through Feb. 20.

The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art is located in the OU Arts District on the corner of Elm Avenue and Boyd Street, at 555 Elm Ave., on the OU Norman campus.

Admission to the museum is free to all OU students with a current student ID and all museum association members, \$5 for adults, \$4 for seniors, \$3 for children 6 to 17 years of age, \$2 for OU faculty/staff and free for military veterans with proof and children 5 and under. The museum is closed on Mondays and admission is free on Tuesdays. The museum’s website is [www.ou.edu/fjjma](http://www.ou.edu/fjjma). Information and accommodations on the basis of disability are available by calling (405) 325-4938.

Construction on a new wing is under way, but the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art is open and fully functional with exhibitions and programming throughout the entire construction process.

###

## PHOTO CUTLINE

Santa Fe-based artist Susan Contreras displays her large, colorful paintings in a new exhibition at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art. *On the Loose: Susan Contreras* opens at 7 p.m. Friday, Jan. 28, and reveals the artist’s love of festival masks, the animal kingdom and humor. Photo by Robert Walch.