



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **“Stranger in a Familiar Land” presents the Fantastical Vision of Don Bonham**

**Fredericton, NB, June 7, 2012** – The Beaverbrook Art Gallery announces the opening of an exciting new exhibition – **Don Bonham: Stranger in a Familiar Land** – on Thursday, June 28.

This major retrospective exhibition offers an extensive survey of the fantastical vision of American artist and Canadian national treasure Don Bonham – “the Evel Knievel of the art world.”

Bonham first came to prominence in London, Ontario, in the late 1960s, and quickly gained notoriety for his highly original, finely crafted, figurative fiberglass sculpture based on evocative human/technology hybrids – motorcycles, cars, boats, airplanes, and helicopters fused with casts of the female body. Some of these works were used in performances, documented in film, and received international attention in *Playboy* magazine in the 1970s. Characterized by uncompromising attention to technical detail and finish, and combining elements of satiric humour and eroticism, Bonham’s cyborgian art merges fantasy with reality to explore the physical, symbolic, and psychological relationships between ourselves and machines, the pervasive influence of technology and its attendant mythologies on human consciousness.

Bonham states: “The gap between human and machine is constantly shrinking. Are we to become more like machines, or machines more like us? The creators of technology have imbued machines with human characteristics, and this tendency is creating a more hospitable environment for their acceptance by society. As an artist I am only enlarging upon this concept.”

Bonham was born in 1940 in Oklahoma City and was raised on a farm. He states that he got his start as an artist “drawing cartoons and things on bathroom walls and county jail ceilings.” After a tumultuous adolescence, local authorities determined that his behaviour required modification and encouraged him to join the service. Bonham enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps and served in an elite Recon unit in Southeast Asia. After six and a half years, he was honorably discharged to enter the University of Oklahoma as an Art History Major. He left university before graduating and worked in Detroit on a Ford assembly line before moving, in 1968, to London,

Ontario, where he discovered a dynamic arts community that reinforced his decision to pursue a career as a visual artist.

In 1969, against the backdrop of a pronounced anxiety by Canadians about the need to shelter Canada's distinctive national culture from the tidal wave of American ideas and values, and in the face of the regionalist/protectionist ethos espoused by London artists Greg Curnoe and company at the time, Bonham launched a fictitious invasion of Canada with blue prints and war machines, such as MIDPU (Military Disposable Personnel Unit). He went on to develop other elaborate legendary parody-events with his corporate artistic alter-ego The Hermen Goode Aesthetics Racing Team (A.R.T.), attempting to break the World Speed Record at the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah, and competing with Little Miss 50 at the Spirit of Detroit hydroplane race on the Detroit River to bring the prized boat racing trophy back to southwestern Ontario. In both of these staged situations, Bonham's anti-hero was naturally disqualified, but spoke poignantly about macho male culture and the blurring of art and life.

Since his early London years, Bonham has maintained studios in Montreal, Toronto, Florida, New York City, and most recently, Salisbury Mills, a small town in the Hudson Valley, near the Storm King Art Center, where he currently resides. Over the years, his work has been presented in Chicago, New York City, Florida, Montreal and Toronto, and featured in numerous group shows across Canada, the United States and Europe, including the Museum of Modern Art in Paris, France. Bonham spent twenty-three years as a professional artist in Canada, was supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, and was the first American visual artist to be appointed to the Royal Canadian Academy. In 1997, in the United States, he was awarded the Alex J. Ettl Grant from the National Sculpture Society for lifetime achievement as a sculptor.

Terry Graff, Deputy Director and Chief Curator, and curator of the exhibition states: "This is a spectacular exhibition that you won't want to miss. It encompasses three gallery spaces and features several of the artist's major flying and ground machines, select sculpted portraits, and sculptures of fallen angels, winged serpents, mythical beings, and koi fish. It also includes drawings, collages, prints, photographs, films, and assorted ephemera that serve to chronicle Bonham's colourful and extraordinary career as a visual artist."

Bernard Riordon, Director and CEO, remarks: "Along with organizing exhibitions of the work of New Brunswick, Atlantic, and Canadian artists, the Beaverbrook Art Gallery is also committed to providing public access to international developments in contemporary visual art, particularly if the work has a strong connection to Canada. We are, therefore, pleased to feature **Don Bonham: Stranger in a Familiar Land**, a large-scale exhibition that marks the first major retrospective of the fantastical art of this outstanding artist."

**Don Bonham: Stranger in a Familiar Land** is curated by Terry Graff and organized by the Beaverbrook Art Gallery with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, the Province of New Brunswick, the City of Fredericton, and the Scotiabank Artist Residency Program. It will be on view at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery from **June 28 to September 16, 2012**.

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**La Galerie d'art Beaverbrook enrichit la vie par l'art.**