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Rarely Seen Christenberry Drawings on Exhibit at University of Virginia Art Museum

Beginning October 19, visitors to the University of Virginia Art Museum will have an extraordinary chance to see the drawings that artist William Christenberry calls the basis and inspiration for all his other work. Christenberry is frequently the subject of national acclaim for his renowned photographs of rural Alabama, but this exhibit of *William Christenberry: Site/Possession* offers the opportunity to experience a more complete representation of Christenberry's life and work.

In addition to approximately 50 drawings the University-curated exhibition features paintings, photographs, constructions, dream buildings and the Klan Room Tableau. Throughout his work, Christenberry's imagery focuses on the area where he spent his summers growing up: Hale County, Alabama. The site's relationship to the Klan is historically and personally significant to him. The Klan Room Tableau evokes the terror and bewilderment Christenberry feels towards the Klan. In this work, he viscerally forces the viewer to deal with humanity's moments of evil and violence.

Christenberry has said, "I've been criticized for even undertaking this but my feeling and my argument is how can I turn a blind eye to racial prejudice and injustice?...It's a tough piece. It's meant to be. You're not meant to be comfortable in there." (from Studio 360 interview, 2006)

The work included in this exhibit shows the many sides of rural Alabama, both positive and negative, including many drawings from the artist's collection that have never been exhibited.

Christenberry said: "Some people think what I do with my camera and my other sculpture and drawing is [always] being critical of Alabama. That's not true. A large portion of my work is celebratory." (from Studio 360 interview, 2006)

The drawings offer a personal glimpse into Christenberry's artistic process. The earliest drawing is from 1959 when Christenberry was in Memphis teaching for the first time and honing his own skills. The latest drawing is from 2006 and is reflective of the myriad of techniques and stylizations that he has brought to all of his work. Their subjects include Southern gourd trees, tenant houses, and eerie dream buildings.

Christenberry currently has an exhibition of his photographs touring under the auspices of Aperture and the major exhibition at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C., will begin a national tour next year. Christenberry is also an educator: he has been a member of the art faculty at the Corcoran College of Art and Design since 1968.

The Christenberry show is part of an exhibition schedule for the year that explores what makes us particularly American. Other exhibits will be the *Dresser Trunk Project* and *The Plantation in American Art*. These exhibits mark two important anniversaries: the 200th anniversary of the Act Prohibiting Importation of Slaves and the 50th anniversary of massive resistance.

The exhibit runs from October 19 – December 23, 2007. The University of Virginia Art Museum is located at 155 Rugby Road in Charlottesville. Information is available by visiting www.virginia.edu/artmuseum or by calling 434-924-3592. It is open Tuesday – Sunday from 1-5 p.m. This exhibition is made possible with the generous support of the FUND, the Oakwood Foundation, the Glenstone Foundation, the Council for the Arts, the Arts Enhancement Fund, Barbara and Richard S. Lane, Irwin and Linda Berman, the Virginia Commission for the Arts, Dr. Robert L and Lucinda W. Bunnell, Betsy and Frank Karel, Soul of Virginia Magazine, Yvette Kraft and another anonymous support.