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New *outLAW*man Exhibition Explores the Often Thin-Line Between the Lawmen and the Lawless in the American West

The upcoming exhibition at The Cowboy uses the Osage murder trials transcripts, a purse alleged to have belonged to Bonnie Parker and other materials to investigate the true nature of outlaws and lawmen.

OKLAHOMA CITY, OK – Opening November 19 at The National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, the *outLAW*man exhibition will use the Museum’s material culture collection, works of art, Glenn Shirley Collection in the Dickinson Research Center (DRC) and strategic loans to examine the often-thin line separating the outlaw from the lawman in the American West.

“There’s a fascination with Old West outlaws and lawmen, but many don’t know how often the line between the two was blurred, with outlaws becoming lawmen and vice versa,” said Michael Grauer, curator of the exhibition and McCasland Chair of Cowboy Culture & Curator of Cowboy Collections and Western Art.

Firearms, badges, bank and railroad ephemera, incarceration tools, photographs, and archives will be used, including Martin E. Trejo’s Texas Ranger badges, Bill Tilghman’s Marlin rifle and Virgil Earp’s Smith & Wesson revolver. Transcripts from the Osage murder trials used by author David Graham for his book, *Killers of the Flower Moon*, and by Martin Scorsese for his forthcoming film by the same title, are also available to view in the DRC. Grauer and DRC staff consulted with Scorsese’s team on the making of the film.

Also featured in the exhibit will be a purse purported to have been owned by one of the most recognizable outlaws, Bonnie Parker, of the Bonnie and Clyde duo who committed dozens of robberies, burglaries and murders while running from law enforcement between 1932 and 1934. The tooled leather purse came as a gift in 2021 from Bob and Peggy Crutcher and their family, who had the item in their possession for decades.

“It’s alleged the purse was removed from the bullet-riddled Ford at the scene of her and Clyde’s infamous death at the hands of Texas Rangers,” said Grauer. “At some point, someone crudely carved the name ‘Bonnie Parker’ into the outside flap, and there’s what appears to be a bullet hole in the body of the purse.”

The Museum worked with the Forensic Science Institute at the University of Central Oklahoma in 2021 to conduct DNA tests and fingerprint scans on the purse in hopes of finding indisputable evidence of its connection to Parker.

“Unfortunately, UCO was unable to confirm its connection to her,” said Grauer. “But the mystery is what is so fascinating. Is it hers, or is it not hers? It all plays into the obsession with outlaws and lawmen in the Old West.”

The exhibition will show how lines have been further blurred by popular culture, which mutated the cowboy, a man on horseback doing cow-work, into a pistol-packing outlaw or lawman.

“Men (and women) with firearms doing good or bad in the American West, is greatly exaggerated—and heroicized and mythologized—in popular culture,” said Grauer. “This exhibition will examine how this confusion evolved—or didn’t—in the Western states and especially in popular culture.”

outLAWman will be on exhibit through May 7, 2023. For photos associated with this release, contact Hannah Stewart at hstewart@nationalcowboymuseum.org.

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About the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum

The National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City is America’s premier institution of Western history, art and culture. Founded in 1955, the Museum collects, preserves and exhibits an internationally renowned collection of Western art and artifacts while sponsoring dynamic educational programs to stimulate interest in the enduring legacy of the American West. The Museum is located only six miles northeast of downtown Oklahoma City at 1700 Northeast 63rd Street. Annual family memberships are available beginning at just \$40. For more information, visit nationalcowboymuseum.org.