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Renowned Artist William Stout Creates Largest Prehistoric Mural Project in 40 Years for the San Diego Natural History Museum

San Diego, October 2007—The San Diego Natural History Museum has unveiled the most extensive prehistoric mural project to be created for an American museum in 40 years. Consisting of 12 exquisitely detailed murals by the internationally renowned artist and top Hollywood conceptual designer, William Stout, the suite features two of the largest murals of its kind ever created, providing a colorful and scientifically accurate account of the prehistoric eras presented in the *Fossil Mysteries* exhibition.

The *Fossil Mysteries* exhibition first opened to wide acclaim in July 2006, thanks in part to the murals by Stout that were already in place and the full-size enlargements of preliminary sketches for future murals. The largest permanent exhibition ever undertaken by the San Diego Natural History Museum, it showcases 75 million years of rich fossil records unearthed in the southern California and Baja California bioregion. Working closely with the exhibition’s designers and museum paleontologists, Stout has executed a visually striking suite of 12 large-scale murals in California plein-air style to bring to life and give context to the interactive exhibits and three-dimensional models that explore seven different epochs of fossil history.

“I could not have imagined a better conceived or more appropriate complement to our museum’s most important permanent exhibition,” says the museum’s president, Michael Hager. “I am deeply impressed with the quality of Bill’s work, which can truly stand on its own in terms of its artistic merit. Bill’s professionalism and dedication to the project are equally worthy of high-praise and admiration.”

One of the most skilled paleo-artists working today, William Stout traces his artistic lineage to the work of the great Charles R. Knight, whose murals in natural history museums in Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago have inspired generations of paleontologists and artists. Stout’s own paleo-art can be seen at the Houston Museum of Natural Science, Walt Disney’s Animal Kingdom, and the North Carolina Museum of Natural Science, as well as in a number of illustrated books, including *The New Dinosaurs*, which he published in 2000. His original art has also been seen in a number of solo and group exhibitions worldwide, including the major internationally touring exhibition *Dinosaurs Past and Present* (1986–1991), which was attended by millions of visitors.

In addition, his 1989 journey to Antarctica led to a one-man exhibition of 45 oil paintings that toured the world for seven years.

Stout is also a much in-demand conceptualist and designer for major Hollywood films. His screen credits include last year's *Pan's Labyrinth* (for which his set and character designs contributed to the film's Academy Awards for Art Direction and Special Makeup Effects), *The Prestige*, Walt Disney's *Dinosaur* (main character designs), *Men in Black*, *First Blood*, *Predator*, the *Conan* films, and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Michael Crichton acknowledged Stout's work as a key inspiration for his novel *Jurassic Park*. Stout has also developed a loyal international following through his comic book art, poster designs, and CD and album covers, and is a regular exhibitor at the Comic-Con International convention in San Diego.

“When I was offered the murals, I was also offered two other dream jobs: designing a feature film production of Edgar Rice Burroughs' *John Carter of Mars*, and designing the pilot for a children's TV series. I dearly wanted to do all three!” explains Stout. “It was a very, very tough decision to make, but I had to do the SDNHM murals! They would be my artistic legacy. My hope is that they serve to inspire many others the way that muralists like Charles Knight have inspired me and my work.” He adds, “I am very grateful to the staff at SDNHM who made this project a dream job for me. Their enthusiasm and support—especially when I was stricken with cancer—buoyed my spirits all through this project.”

Working on the SDNHM project over a two and a half-year period, Stout created the two largest prehistoric murals ever created in this country, including the 14 x 35 foot Pliocene Bay mural and the 10 x 28 foot Late Cretaceous mural, which depict the rich variety of marine creatures and dinosaurs that inhabited the region. To complete the project, he relied on both his own expertise as well as that of museum staff members to ensure that even the smallest detail was scientifically accurate. His attention to detail encompassed everything from the texture of the skin, fur, and feathers of the larger creatures to the tiniest of insects, as well as the geography, geology, and botany of the surrounding environments.

A major artistic achievement in their own right, Stout's murals provide an enduring visual record of the region's rich biodiversity, enabling generations of visitors to gain a deeper understanding of the processes of evolution, extinction, and ecology.

Major funding for the *Fossil Mysteries* mural project was provided by the California Cultural and Historic Endowment.

Celebrating its 133rd year, the San Diego Natural History Museum is the second oldest scientific institution in California; third west of the Mississippi. A binational Museum, its mission is to interpret the natural world through research, education, and exhibits; to promote understanding of the evolution and diversity of southern California and the peninsula of Baja California and to inspire in all a respect for nature and the environment. Located in Balboa Park at the intersection of Village Place and Park Blvd., the Museum is open daily except for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Phone: 619.232.3821. Website: www.sdnhm.org.

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