

Artist joins in gift-giving to President Bush

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Gazzette photo by Bob Zeller

Park City sculptor Geoffrey Smith’s present was too big for Bush’s suite.

A Park City sculptor joined dozens of Billings area well-wishers in showering the president with Big Sky gifts Thursday.

But it’s not that simple to present the President with a present.

“Everything has to be screened, of course,” said Kim Fuller, working with the White House advance team based at Holiday Inn, “and it’s just not possible for everyone to personally present their gifts.”

Through the months and along the campaign trail, she says, “You wouldn’t believe the tons of stuff we get. But the President actually views everything, enjoys and appreciates it. He is very diplomatic that way.”

“His suite at the motel,” she said, “was adorned with welcome gifts when he arrived Thursday night — western memorabilia mostly, including a cowboy hat and several books on the region, which were placed on his coffee table to greet him.”

“We try to put things in his room that he can actually enjoy during the stay — books to browse through, items that reflect the spirit of the area,” Fuller said.

Park City Sculptor Geoffrey Smith’s present was far too big for the suite.

He delivered his three-foot-tall, 75-pound bronze eagle sculpture to the motel Thursday afternoon and it will be left in its packing crate and put aboard the presidential plane for return to Washington D.C.

“Eagle Study” is a dramatic pose of a bald eagle swooping down to grab a brown trout.

“I know the President is a fisherman and of course, the eagle is our symbol,” said Smith, 29 and a registered Republican.

Smith said he got the idea to give the bronze two weeks ago, “as soon as I heard

Bush was coming here.”

The limited edition work, number four of 36, was promised to a Durango, Colo. gallery, “but I just decided spur of the moment to donate it, so I started making calls,” he said, “and put Durango on hold.”

After contacting the governor’s office in Helena, Smith called the White House, and they referred him to the advance staff in Billings at the Holiday Inn.

Smith also bought a ticket for the fundraising coffee with the President Friday morning, and said he hoped to tell him briefly about his gift, “but there probably won’t be time.”

Smith, a native Northern Californian, has lived in Montana 12 years. His studio-home is near Park City along the banks of the Yellowstone River.

His artwork is primarily wildlife-inspired and he uses several foundries to cast the bronzes.

The eagle bronze normally sells for \$7,200.

If the gift is placed at the White House, Smith said, “it will be the most famous home of one of my sculptures.”

Protocol dictates that the President enjoy the sculpture, but that it stay with the office — not the individual — after his departure from the White House.

“If the president really likes something he is given he may purchase it from the government,” Fuller said.

“All White House gifts go to a special Gift Unit,” she said, “and this President enjoys wearing the T-shirts, and seeing that the artwork and gift displays are rotated.”

Smith said he is honored that the gift is being accepted, even if he is losing \$7,200.

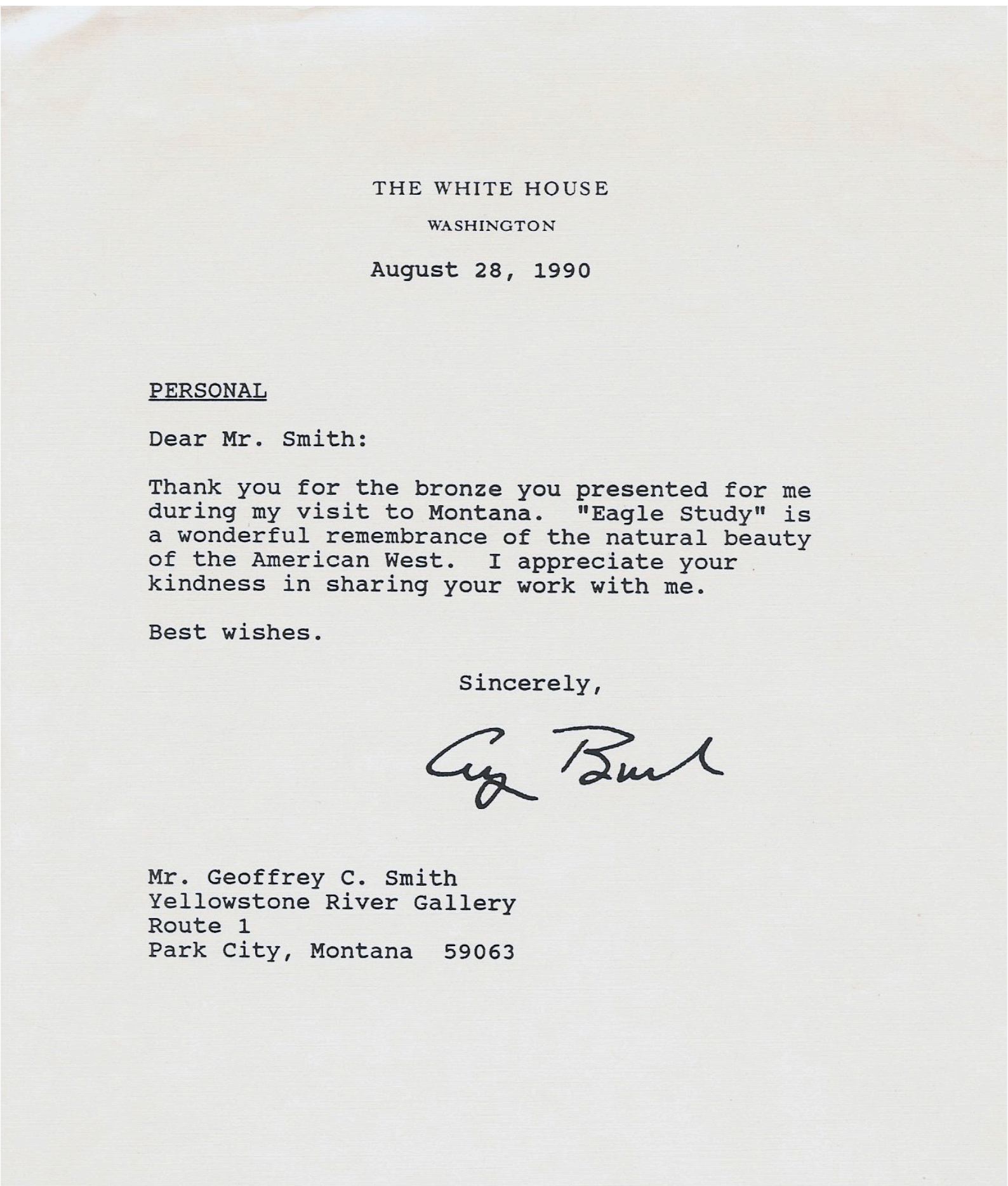
“I can still pay the bills,” he smiled, “and I’ll see that Durango gets another bronze in about six weeks.”



Eagle Study now lives at the George H. W. Bush presidential Library in College Station, Texas.



Geoffrey Smith meeting President George H. W. Bush in Montana, 1990.



1990 Thank you note from George Bush to Geoffrey Smith