



4 Western Artists Under 45

A new generation of cowboy artists continues the evolving tradition of depicting life in the West.

TALK TO WESTERN ART COLLECTORS today, and you'll find some can't see past the works of Charles Russell, Federic Remington and Edward Borein. The works of these classic cowboy artists are the standard by which most Western art is viewed, but Western art is more than what these three masters depicted. The work created by many young, contemporary artists carries equal respect and reverence. Today, a new group of artists are offering their takes on the 21st century West. Here are four, all under age 45.



View more pieces of the artists' work at westernhorseman.com.

TEAL BLAKE ★ Weatherford, Texas

ASK TEAL BLAKE about his subject choices and he responds, "Early on, I was always on the edge, asking if I paint what I want or what other people want. I think now, after a few years, folks seem to like what I'm doing with my subjects."



A stickler for detail, Blake might take several hours laying down watercolor, just to make sure his shadows are right. But he loves action.

"I love bucking horses," he says. "They're classic subjects with big action. But I'm also drawn to quiet moments ranch people experience every day."

Blake is sensitive to ranch life, because he and his wife, Joncee, have a ranch outside Weatherford, Texas. There, they raise Longhorns, four of which Blake

obtained in a trade for a mural.

An artist who loves the painting process, Blake works primarily in watercolor on handmade, hand-pressed paper. It's a delicate process, but the results are works he describes as authentic and traditional, showing Western images reflecting the contemporary West, but also harkening back to the 1800s.

"Authenticity has to come from experiencing it," Blake says. "It validates the scene or subject you're painting."



The Diamond Hand,
10-by-14-inch
watercolor

COURTESY TEAL BLAKE

ASHER FREEMAN ✪ Elko, Nevada

IT'S ABOUT 9:45 P.M., and Asher Freeman has just come back from checking heifers. At 26, the Nevada buckaroo, who works on ranches throughout Northern Nevada and Southern Idaho, is quick to talk about his portrait art.

"There are special moments in life when something about an individual grabs you, and no matter how hard you try you can't



explain it," he says. "Nonetheless, that image is burned into your mind forever. To try and duplicate that moment in art is impossible. However, being given the chance to transfer that particular 'something' of a person onto paper keeps driving me to reach the impossible."

As a homeschooled, self-taught artist, Asher says the opportunity to meet artist Carrie Ballantyne—another self-taught artist whose highly detailed, realistic portraits and paintings are highly collected—was a big break for him.

"It's been inspirational," he says, "being mentored by one of the real masters of this age."

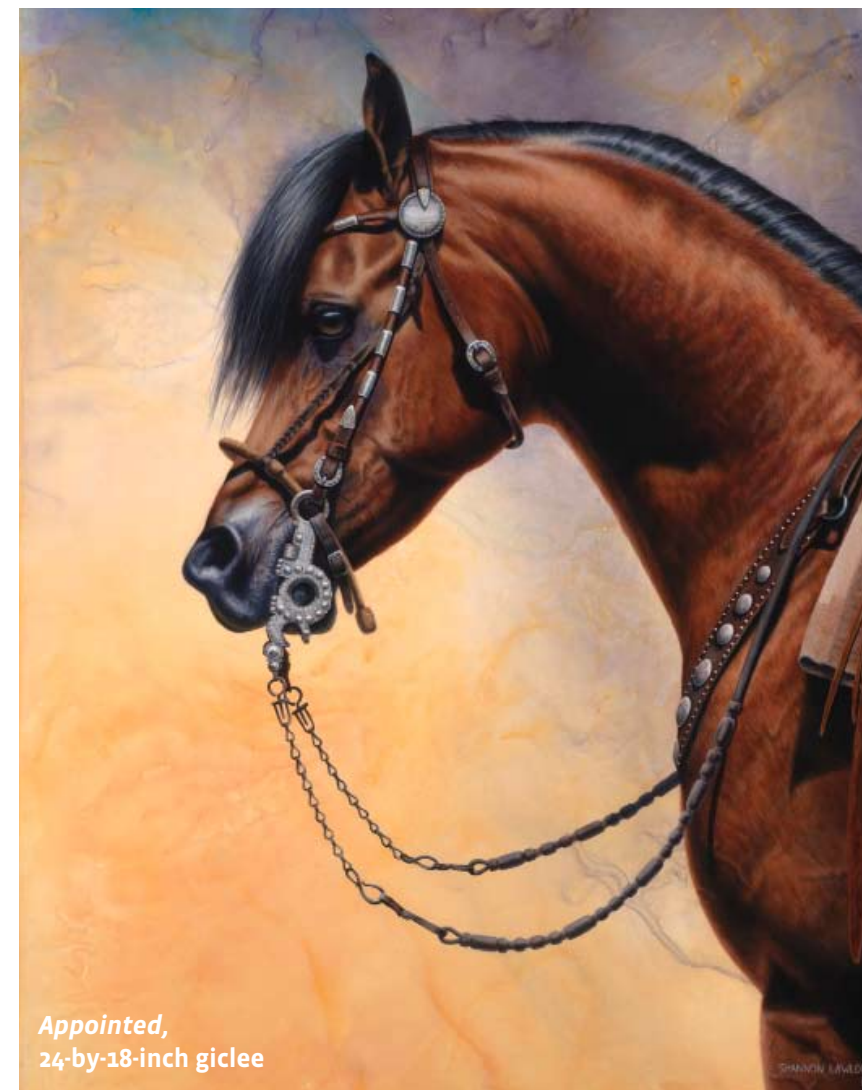
Asher works mainly in graphite and constantly tries to carve out time to work on his art, difficult during calving time. That's why you often find him sketching at any given moment, regardless of where he might be. One is reminded of a young Borein, who used to sketch on any scrap of paper he could find, even old shoebox lids.

"I guess some things in the West never change," Asher says.



Shades and Undertones,
xx-by-xx-inch
pencil

COURTESY ASHER FREEMAN



Appointed,
24-by-18-inch
giclee

COURTESY SHANNON LAWLOR

SHANNON LAWLOR ✪ Caley, Alberta

GIVEN THE CHOICE of being at the easel or being horseback, Canadian artist Shannon Lawlor says it's no contest. "I'd rather be horseback," she says. "I've never known life without being around horses."

Shannon has always had an affinity for bridle-horse culture. Working primarily in acrylic, her work delves into the refined, subtle world of horses straight up in the bridle or working to get there. Her images pay tribute to the old ways, yet reflect the many contemporary horsemen and -women who respectfully revisit the traditions developed by early California vaqueros.

"I love the elegance and character shown by the horses and riders," she says. "I try to reflect the incredible relationships these horses have with the people who



ride them."

Shannon's work combines historical truth with sharp anatomical accuracy. As an artist, she considers herself a work in progress.

"I'm constantly learning," she admits, "both from the horses I see and from artists I study."

DUSTIN PAYNE ★ Cody, Wyoming

BRONZE SCULPTOR Dustin Payne is busy. He's speaking with a visitor at Mountain Trails Gallery in Sedona, Arizona, where this spring he's the artist-in-residence. Only 27 years old, Dustin has been sculpting and selling pieces for more than 15 years.

Sculpting was a natural path for Dustin. His father, Vic Payne, and grandfather, Ken Payne, are both established bronze artists. Each has helped pave the way for Dustin to enter the family business.

As a kid, Dustin enjoyed the drawings and books of Will James, and was heavily influenced by the historical nature of his father and grandfather's work.

"I like to depict everyday moments," he says. "There's always a moment when action happens and nobody's there to see it but those involved. I try to capture that. Maybe it's just a horse and a cowboy, or maybe it's a stage with a six-up team. No



matter what, the West is all about some kind of action. The main thing I'm trying to get people to understand are the underlying values Westerners have in the work they do, even when tough things happen. They still get the work done. And today, it matters as much as it did in the 1800s."



Spring on the Divide,
25-by-15-inch
bronze

Authenticity, action, respect for traditions. Each of these four young artists, although working in different mediums, care passionately about those messages. Consider the letter Charles M. Russell wrote to a fledgling young artist asking for advice. In his 1920 letter of encouragement to a young Will James, Russell wrote, "James, as I said before, use paint but don't get smeary. Let somebody else do that. Keep on making real men, horses and cows. Of course the real artistic may never know you, but nature-loving, regular men will, and there're more of the last kind in this world and they're the kind you want to shake hands with." 🐎

"South Coast" Follow-Up

March 2009's "Out West" column discussed the nearly lost history of "South Coast," a classic California vaquero song derived from a revered 1926 poem by Lillian Bos Ross. The song has been performed by the likes of Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Arlo Guthrie, the Kingston Trio, Tom Russell and Dave Stamey. The column presented the opportunity to put on record an important piece of vaquero culture, a way of life that, at times, has suffered from a lack of thorough historical documentation. To make the story complete, we chose to print the lyrics to the most-often-performed version of "South Coast," which included some language readers may have found offensive. By way of explanation, our decision was based on an obligation to history; respect for Ms. Ross's choices as a writer; respect for *Western Horseman* readers' appreciation for accurate, honest depictions of cowboy culture, as opposed to whitewashed, filtered or censored versions of the same; and a respect for our readers' abilities to read and interpret Ms. Ross's words in the context of a fictional story being told by an equally fictional narrator. Any offense was unintentional.

—EDITORS

Bill Reynolds is the author of The Art of the Western Saddle, and co-author of The Faraway Horses and Believe: A Horseman's Journey, both collaborations with Buck Brannaman. Bill lives in California's Santa Ynez Valley, where he produces programming for Ranch & Reata, an on-line Western radio station.