

# Horses in His Dreams

THE COWBOY ART OF PAUL SOLLOSY

by William C. Reynolds

**T**here is something about riding out in the early morning. The smells and light are special that time of day, as there is a crispness that seems to amplify the senses. The only sounds are the songs of morning birds and the music of spur rowels and rein chains. At 95 years young, Paul Sollosy has experienced many a morning ride, and much more. For over 50 years he has depicted the life of the cowboy in his art, mostly subjects from his own experience—the outfits, the horses, and the cowboys he has worked with all his life. He continues as one of the most “quietly collected” artists of the American West, still at work today from his studio in Arizona.

Born in 1911, native Californian Paul R. Sollosy began cowboying back in 1926 in the Simi Valley area of Southern California. Back then it was ranching country, and Sollosy found work at a number of ranches in Southern California. Later, he went to work in Los Alamos, a tiny Western town in the heart of central California’s Santa Barbara County. On those Southern and Central California ranchos, Sollosy met and befriended many working vaqueros, who shared with him their time-woven expertise with cattle and horses. He learned the ways of the bridle horse, the long reata, and the spade bit. For a young cowboy, it was an apprenticeship with living history.

“I started to sketch and draw on anything I could find,” Sollosy says, “old cardboard boxes, anything.” It was this



**TOP: Skilled Labor, oil, 20½ x 29.**  
**ABOVE: Round Pen Horse Catcher, watercolor on board, 9¼ x 13¼.**

beginning that focused his life path. He had always loved the work of Russell and Borein because they cared that the scene was right and could have actually happened as they portrayed it. Authenticity continues to be a hallmark of Sollosy’s art. “My work is mostly about where I’ve been and what I’ve seen,” he says. “The cowboys and horses I paint were all part of my life. They were important and I wanted to remember them right.”

And right they are: Few artists have depicted proper horse conformation, head set, and gear as accurately as Sollosy. It was a skill honed mostly from time and observation. Principally self-taught, he spent a short time in art school in Los Angeles, but his life-drawing instructors couldn’t keep him directed on the models. He kept drawing horses on the edges of his paper. Such was his single-mindedness that his mother managed to arrange a meeting in Los Angeles between her young son and one of his powerful influences, cowboy artist and writer Will James.

L.A. proved good for the developing artist. Sollosy found work to support the time needed to grow his art skills. In the ’30s, he worked for a number of different saddle shops, including Litchenberger-Ferguson and Hollywood Saddlery in Los Angeles and later Jedlicka’s Saddlery in Santa Barbara. Every job proved another opportunity to apply what he had



**Compadres—On Circle, watercolor on board, 10¾ x 14½.**

learned to his painting and drawing.

The ’30s were a golden time for the romanticized cowboy in Hollywood. But Sollosy’s life was real cowboying, and he worked around the West until 1967, when he finally decided to make his art his life’s work. He rode until the age of 86, but the great horses and the big gathers inhabited his dreams and so Sollosy continues to paint and draw the best parts of his life—from memory.

“I rode some great horses and with some really good hands.” He pauses. “Most of them are gone now but not the memories. And I’ll keep at it as long as I can.”

To learn more about Paul Sollosy’s art, call him in Tucson at (520) 219-4595.



**Scattering the Riders, oil, 21½ x 29.**



**Detail from Drover on Point, pencil on board, 10 x 15.**