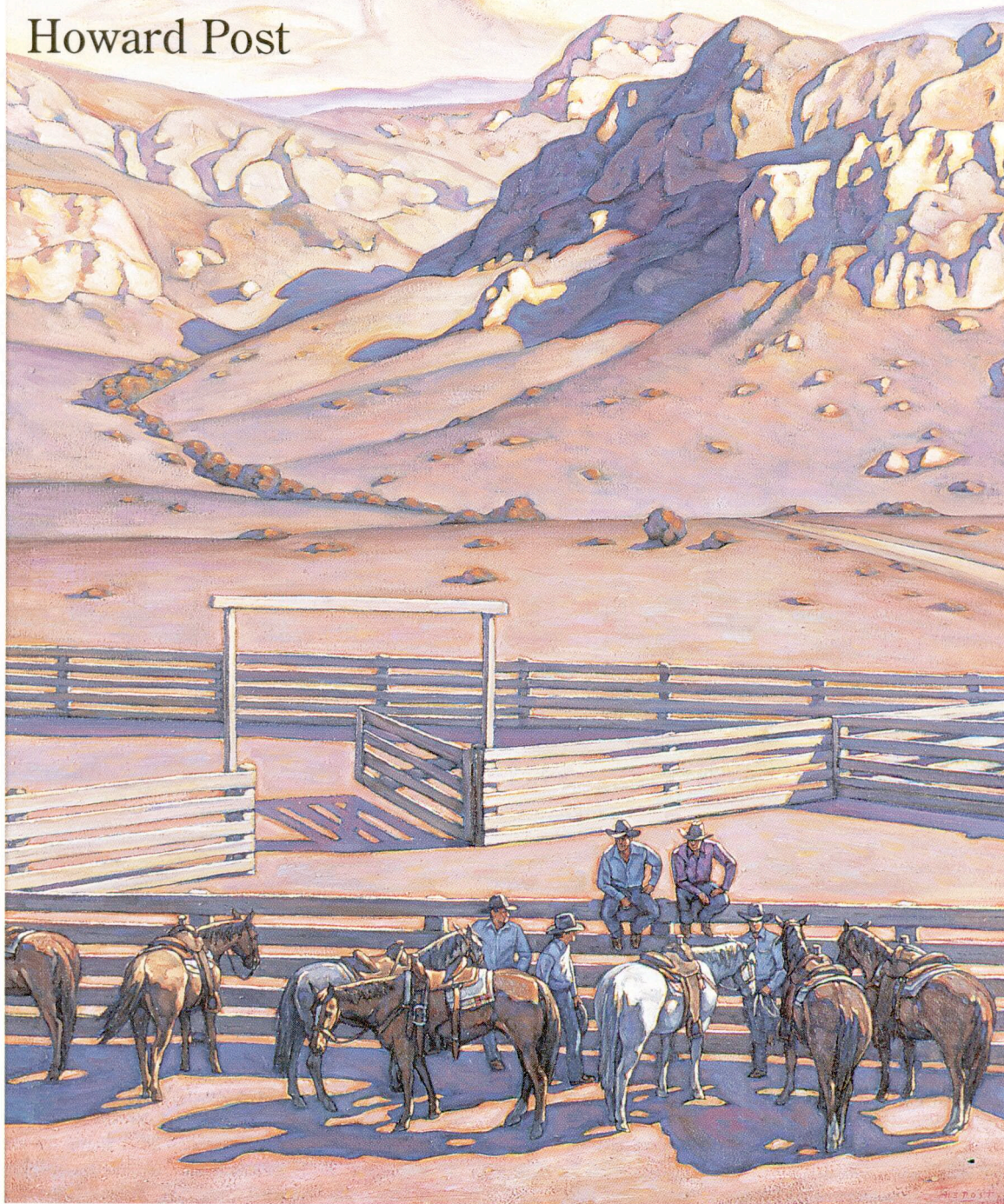


Howard Post



Memorable Moments

By Nancy Gillespie

Roundup Crew, oil, 54" by 44"

"If an artist can be identified with one particular painting, I've been told this might be it for me. That would be okay, since I feel like all the visual elements I love are working together in this piece."

In Howard Post's case, you can't take the man out of the West or the West out of the man. With the exception of a short sojourn in Utah, Post has been a lifelong resident of Arizona. He's also a rodeo rider and an artist.

In retrospect, one might well wonder if Post could have taken any

other direction in his life. He grew up on a small ranch in Tucson, where his family was involved in rodeo and raised cattle and horses for rodeo competitions.

"My dad had a feed and hardware store on the edge of town, so I kind of grew up around that business," Post says. "As far as I'm concerned,



Homestead, oil, 48" by 52"

"Having grown up around ranching and the rural life, the essence of that lifestyle has always intrigued me. Since we had a big cottonwood next to our home when I was growing up, I can hardly resist whenever I see one."

my childhood was idyllic, because I had the best of both worlds: ranch life and city life."

In some ways, however, Post was a bit of a maverick, a cowboy who attended what he laughingly calls a "preppie high school. I might have been the only cowboy there. If there were others, they sure didn't talk about it." Post certainly didn't lack friends, he says, "but when the other kids went home to play ball, I went home to practice rodeo."

In Arizona, high school students compete as enthusiastically in rodeo as they do in baseball or basketball. Post's background gave him an early start; he rode in his first rodeo when he was just 14. "From the time I was in the third grade," he says, "I had a burning desire to be a cowboy, but I also drew constantly, mostly pictures of horses. My third grade

teacher entered one of my drawings, a picture of my dad, in a contest sponsored by the city newspaper. I won first prize and a yellow toy bulldozer. That's when I decided that art must be my calling in life."

His family was supportive, and Post took all the available art courses he could get in high school and attended night classes at a private studio in Tucson. "I was really into it, knew this was what I wanted to do," he says. "I was intent on art, but I continued to compete in rodeo."

Post's natural ability at rodeoing won him the title of Arizona High School All-Around Rodeo Champion, a title that is not taken lightly in the West. "Rodeo is equivalent to, say, track and field, where there are competitors all over the state," he says. "And, while rodeo is more of an individual sport rather than a

team sport endorsed by the school, participants still have to keep their grades up. Rodeo maintains a large and ardent following with year-round competitions, state and national finals. All 50 states have rodeo, but it's more prominent in the West."

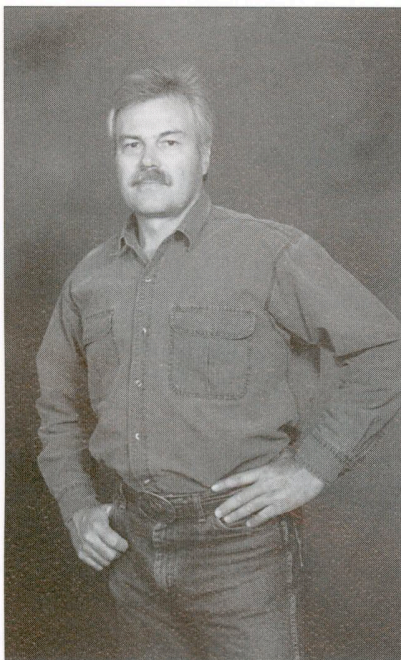
Following his graduation from high school, Post enrolled at the University of Arizona, where he majored in art and, not surprisingly, became a member of the rodeo team. Riding rodeo at the college level allowed him to travel around the West. As for his art, Post was a little out of step with the mainstream. "It was a bit awkward, since my friends were ag majors," he says. "So I ended up being the 'weird artist' in regular classes, the 'weird cowboy' in art classes."

When he had completed one year



Changing Pastures, oil, 36" by 44"

"I've always been offended by trite clichés, so I find it a real challenge sometimes to portray a seemingly familiar subject in such a way that the viewer can feel like he hasn't seen it all before."



of college, Post, a Mormon, took two years off and devoted his energies to missionary service, spending time in Oklahoma and in the Midwest. When he returned to Arizona, Post married Marilyn, his high school sweetheart, and returned to school, concentrating on illustration. Marilyn, who already had graduated from college, worked while Post earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. Graduation brought him an offer from a studio in Salt Lake City, Utah, which he happily accepted.

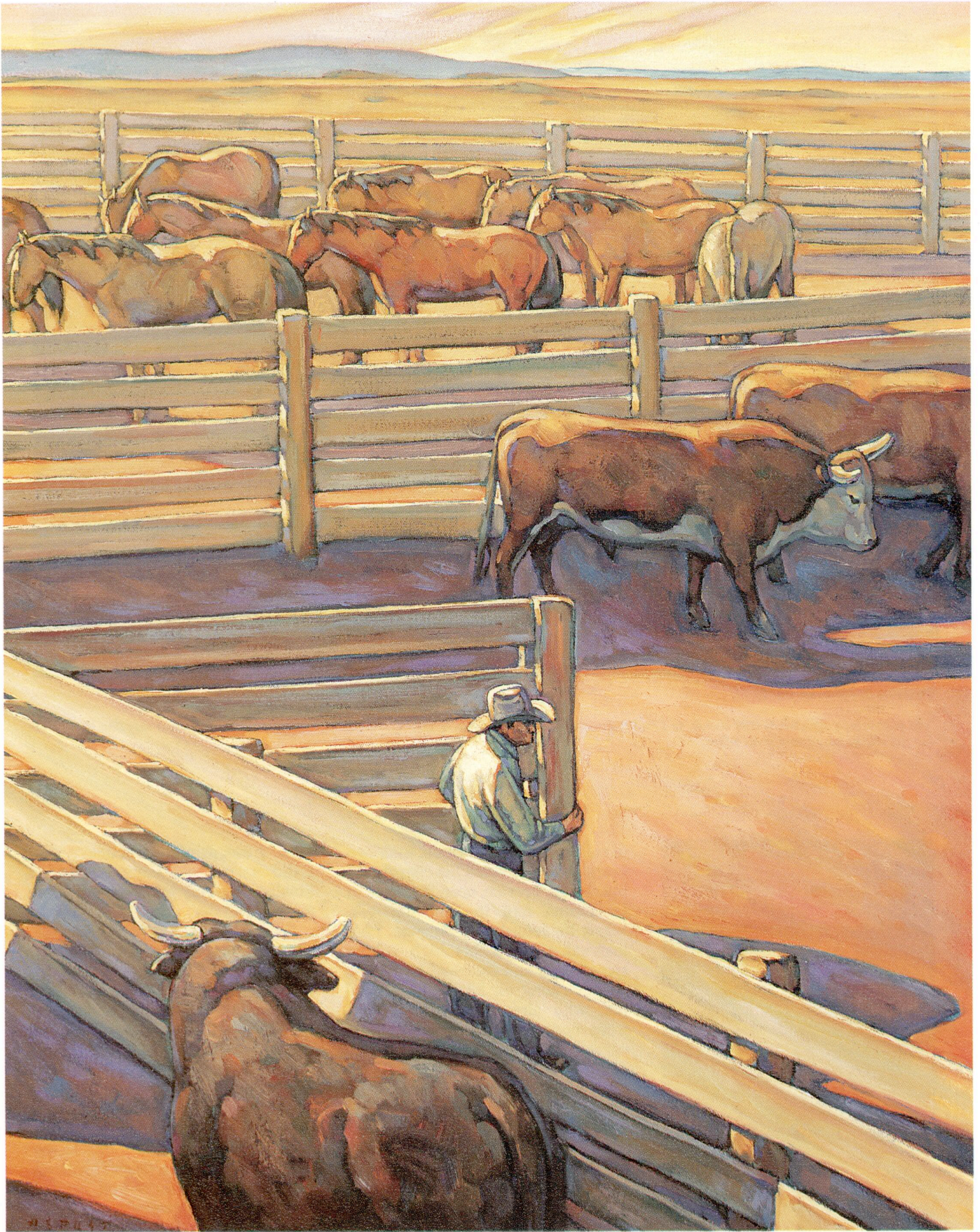
Three years in Salt Lake City and two years teaching at the University of Arizona were followed by a Masters of Fine Arts degree and another job as an illustrator. Despite the restrictions on his time, however, Post was able to build up a body of work. "I'd go to my day job, then come home and paint at night," he

says. "I was painting real heavy, and I did secure a gallery affiliation. Finally, I quit my job and freelanced for awhile."

During those hectic years, Post was able to make a breakthrough in his painting. "I had always known I wanted to paint the West," he says, "but I didn't want my art to be associated with the countless Western clichés. And I had been exposed to other than the traditional illustrative approach."

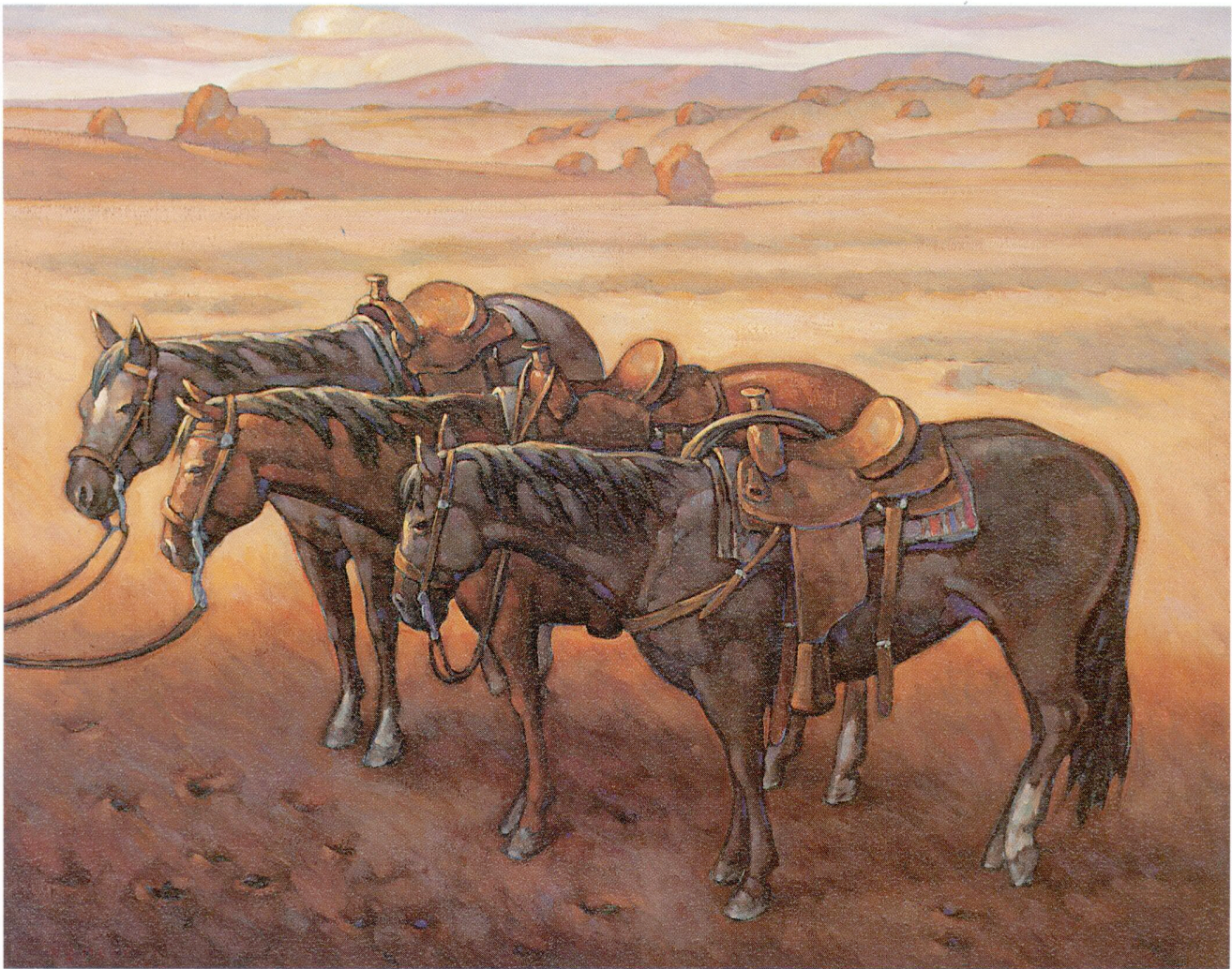
The quandary was resolved when Post decided to paint what he knew best. That led him to re-examine the images he had been familiar with all his life, and he discovered that all images had the power to be fresh and exciting. In 1980, Post decided he had enough going as a painter to be just that—and only that.

Interestingly enough, Post says



Sortin' the Bulls, oil, 30" by 24"

"I've always loved the stark contrast of animals against the angularity of pens or corrals. The fact that there's a story going on here is almost secondary to me."



Lunch Break, oil, 24" by 30"

"Some artists choose to portray the action and the climactic moment. I enjoy capturing the moments in between. In reality, much of ranch life is quiet and solitary. I suppose I enjoy the challenge of painting even the mundane in such a way as to make it visually exciting."

he has never officially abandoned illustration and still has an agent. In addition to the 60 or so paintings he does every year, Post has written and illustrated two children's books, *The Magic Boots* and *Under the Moon and Stars*, published by Gibb Smith Publishing. Post had done some illustrations for Gibb and, when the company decided to create children's books with a Western flavor, it contacted Post to see if he could recommend someone for the job. After giving it some thought, Post recommended himself and went on to write the books, which have done well in the marketplace.

No matter how many other irons he has in the fire, however, Post remains resolute about his fine art goals. "The best advice I can give any young, aspiring artist is this: Keep yourself in a position where

you're always in control of your personal art," he says. "I had income from my illustration, so I always had that control."

As for his own art, Post says that like every other artist, he has more material stored in his head than he could ever use. Traveling to rodeo competitions and art exhibits allows him to constantly add new imagery and new ideas, "my form of research," he says. "I go to Wyoming, New Mexico, Colorado, California, and Idaho, and I take lots of pictures. I must have thousands of photos and slides, and I'll edit through those images until I find something that intrigues me. Hardly any of my work is literally from a photo, but I often make a tiny, spontaneous sketch of the composition. The photo is only the impetus for the piece, then I edit and borrow from

other sources to develop the final painting."

Explained another way, Post recalls someone asking him about the location of a mountain in one of his paintings. "It was nowhere, a combination of many mountains, perhaps; anything but site-specific," he says.

Post has his own vision of art. "I want to portray the visual and emotional elements of a subject that make it memorable to me, approach subjects without preconceived notions, look for the incidental design qualities in the natural or commonplace," he says.

In the process of searching for a unique, individual statement of the world around him, Post became known in the Seventies and Eighties for his birds-eye, overhead view of his subjects, the patterns created by



*Ranch at the Buttes, oil,
62" by 58"*

"People often ask the location in my paintings. Even though this painting was inspired by a ranch near my home, my objective was to distill or edit the content until I captured the essence of what attracted me to the scene, not to portray a specific location."

light and shadow as the viewer looks down. "The idea derived from attending rodeos, sitting on the chutes and looking down," he says. "It's become my trademark."

In the early days, Post rarely did landscapes, but gradually, he says, he pulled back into the vistas, along with the animals and figures. "Ranchscapes, I call them, as I travel around and see those little settlements in the West, the stereotypical ranch, barn, poplars, cottonwoods, and corrals," he says.

Today, Post produces oils and pastels in a nearly 1,000-square-foot studio behind the new house he and Marilyn built early this year. "I try to get out in the studio early every morning, after I finish the chores," Post says. "These days, it seems there's more business to take care of and, therefore, less time for art."

Post also is devoted to his family: wife Marilyn and their five children. Kim, 25, and Riley, 23, are married;

daughter Carley, 21, is in Italy on a mission; Kyle, 18, and Mariley, 14, live at home. Kyle, who definitely takes after his father, competes in rodeos, while Post competes on the Senior Pro Tour. "We still practice roping events in the late afternoon," Post says. "And, while all the kids can ride, Kyle has demonstrated the most talent."

Post says all the children have dabbled in art, but he doesn't push them. "They see the practical side, know how difficult it is," he says. "My theory is that all kids are artists. They just get 'untrained' as they grow older."

In summing up his philosophy, Post borrows from an anecdote about singer and actor George Strait. "Someone once asked Strait what attracted him to a piece, the tune or the lyrics," Post says. "He answered that it was almost always the tune. Once the tune got his attention, he went back and listened

more carefully to the lyrics. It's the same with my art. What grabs me aren't the cows and the corrals, but the light and shadow. And then, oh by the way, there are 10 horses. The light and shadow is the tune, the horses the lyrics."

Post's ability to successfully combine tune and lyrics in his paintings has placed him high on the list of Western painters. His work is included in the collections of several corporations and hangs in the Smithsonian, as well. It also has been featured in numerous exhibitions and publications.

Post doesn't rest on his laurels, however. He will never cease to look for fresh images and new ways to represent the old ones. □

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