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Power and beauty

Paul Van Ginkel portrays his signature subjects.





"The Boss," oil 40" x 50"

Brushstrokes

Paul Van Ginkel's bold brush strokes and larger-than-life portrayals capture the power and beauty of his signature subject, the horse.

BY ROBIN HENDRICKSON

Paul Van Ginkel is a self-proclaimed city guy. But when you live in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, home to the largest rodeo event in the world, you can't help but be attracted to the cowboy way of life. Paul moved to Calgary as an impressionable 13-year-old, and one Calgary Stampede was all it took to instill a lifetime of inspiration and a passion for creating western-themed art.

These days, Paul paints everything from nudes and travel scenes to American Indians and cowboys, though he's most known for his horses. His work is well-respected throughout the western art community and has earned him invitation-only access to events such as the Calgary Stampede art show, the Artists' Ride in South Dakota and Mike Hanley's Stagecoach photo shoot.

"Horses are breathtakingly extraordinary," Paul says of his favored subject. "The combination of the wildness of their manes and tails, muscle structure and profound dignity make the animal a joy to paint."

Paul's interest in horses stems not only from the animal's aesthetics, but also its heritage. He appreciates the horse's importance and significance throughout the history of civilization, as well as the animal's role in society today. With an affinity for the old, Paul is equally fascinated by cowboy and American Indian themes, finding much of his inspiration for them from the Calgary Stampede experience.

"Seeing the Indians as a young boy, I was fascinated by the way they looked — their faces and colorful regalia with the wonderful feathers and beads", Paul recalls. "But it was also what they represented. With the cowboys and Indians it's that ruggedness, quiet pride and respect for nature and animals."

INSPIRATION

"There's an endless supply of inspiration and ways in which to paint the horse," Paul says. "Whether it be alone and dignified; or in a powerful, charging herd; or a gigantic composition of more than 100 standing united."

Though Paul has never owned a horse, he's enchanted with their energy and presence. "They're just intoxicatingly beautiful," Paul adds.

The horses themselves inspire Paul to get to his easel, but once he gets there it's the sheer joy of painting that propels him forward. "There are always 100 images swirling around in my head waiting to get painted," he says. "There's simply never enough time to paint. Sometimes I think about an image for more



"Horsing Around," oil 48" x 72"

than five years before I actually paint it."

Paul also finds inspiration in the works of other artists he admires and returns to time after time. "I have my own favorite painters," Paul says. "Some of my favorites include John Singer Sargent, Diego Velazquez and Frans Halls."

In addition, Paul primarily relies on his own life experiences and travel. "I'm changing and evolving as a human — so will my art," he adds.

Paul pursues photo shoots to create a bank of ideas from which to draw. He's attended the invitation-only Artists' Ride near Wall, South Dakota, the location for the filming of Kevin Costner's epic "Dances With Wolves." The event allows artists to photograph reenactments of various western-themed scenes and situations, including cowboys, ranchers, mountain men and American Indians. With approximately 25 models at their disposal, artists are able to shoot literally thousands of images for future use.

Paul also attended Mike Hanley's Stagecoach photo shoot in Oregon's Jordan Valley where artists photographed vintage late-1800s coaches and western lifestyles. Complementing this pool of western imagery, Paul has also photographed a herd of 200 Spanish mustangs near Sundance, Wyoming.

"I have thousands and thousands of photographs for the sole purpose of inspiring paintings," Paul says. "However, the photographs are a starting point and for reference only. What I primarily try to capture is the moment and the memory of being in these situations. Therein lies the emotion and power of the painting."

ENERGY AND EMOTION

A full-time painter the past 10-plus years, Paul averages about 90 paintings a year. Much of his work is done in series of more than 20 canvases. Currently



"Cowboy Crossing," oil 36" x 60"

The life of a painter

Born in St. Boniface, Manitoba, Canada, Paul Van Ginkel's interest in art reaches back to his childhood. As a youth, art became a favored subject in school and Paul's talent put him at the top of the class. In high school, Paul began to consider what life path to take, and found himself returning again and again to the visual arts. Following his art instructor's advice, Paul went on to attend the Alberta College of Art in Calgary. Once at college, Paul found that the commercial arts program offered the discipline and structure he felt would best benefit an art career.

The commercial art studies gave specific assignments that involved problem solving and experimenting with various mediums and methods — a good fit for Paul's personality and personal goals.

Then, in Paul's last year of art school, he applied for and was offered a job at the Calgary Herald newspaper as an illustrator and graphic designer. Though the decision to drop out of art school was difficult, Paul relied on his instructors' advice and took the opportunity. He later continued his schooling, earning a Master of Fine Arts degree from Syracuse University in New York in 1989.

In 1990, after almost seven years at the Calgary Herald, Paul resigned to become a full-time painter and fine artist. During Paul's first few years as a painter, he dabbled in some freelance illustration work. In 1996 he moved to Vancouver for a change of pace but returned to Calgary in 2001. In February 2004, Paul married Kristin Bell, a talented architect from the Calgary area. The couple is in the process of building a large home, which Kristin designed to include both studio and gallery space from which Paul will create, promote and sell his work.

"The artist must wear two hats," Paul says, " — a creative hat in the studio and subsequently a business hat once a painting is done. I'm first and foremost an artist, but I also consider myself a small businessman."

Paul and Kristin plan to host their own art shows from their home gallery. "Our intention is to provide a wonderful art show experience complete with live music, great food and drink in a stimulating environment overlooking the majestic Rocky Mountains," he says.

Over the years, Paul has received many awards and distinctions. He's most proud of being recently selected by Albuquerque's Fresco Fine Art Publications as one of the top 38 western artists working today. In addition to being featured in a beautiful hard-cover book, *Western Traditions — Contemporary Artists of the American West*, he was among featured artists in an exhibition that opened October 1, 2005, at Borsini-Burr gallery in Half Moon Bay, California.

Editor's note: For more information about the artist or to view his work, visit his Web site at www.paulvanginkel.com.

located in a downtown Calgary loft, Paul's living and work spaces are artfully blended together. He surrounds himself with much of his own work and the work of other artists he admires, as well as masks, American Indian artifacts, antique Mexican saddles and crosses from all over the world. His floor-to-ceiling salon-style environment is designed to provide stimulation and inspiration.

Paul attacks the canvas with passion, standing up and pacing back and forth as he paints. He enjoys the process of creating as much as the satisfaction he derives from signing his name to a completed piece.

"The way I paint is very intense and I'm acutely aware of what I'm doing," Paul says. "If I happen to paint something quite beautiful in the moment, I consciously leave that alone as opposed to obviously painting over it."

In his work he strives to express his commitment to the subject, and as a result, his paintings pulse with energy and emotion. With his aggressive and loose painting style, Paul creates mood and movement, and his expressive paintings command acknowledgement of their presence.

"I'd like to think my work jumps off the wall as opposed to just sort of blending in as decoration," Paul says. "I chose my style to be aggressive so that when one walks into the room they'll notice the painting and feel the energy of the brush strokes."

His larger-than-life pieces, averaging around 40 by 60 inches, frequently crop in tightly on the subject. Using large brushes to apply liberal amounts of paint, Paul creates pattern and rhythm. His use of lighting glistens off velvety horseflesh, luring the viewer back

for yet another look. Once he's captured viewers' attention, Paul hopes they'll appreciate the subtle details and composition of each piece. He's quick to note, though, that he doesn't get caught up in the details of realism. Instead, his style captures the sensation of the moment, dancing around the details.

"I want the viewer's experience to be very satisfying," Paul says, "and not to end there. An aggressive and loose painting usually changes and grows with the owner.

"And, I want the viewer to get a sense of who I am through the painting," Paul continues.

A romantic, Paul thinks about the potential future of each painting. "When someone has a painting, it's just for their lifetime, then it gets passed on," Paul says. "Because I'm responsible for giving birth to these paintings, naturally I'm emotionally attached to their futures."

REFLECTING SOULS

"I think the way an artist paints is a reflection of their personality and who they are," Paul says. Whether it's the nobleness of a venerable American Indian chief, the quiet pride of a lone cowboy moving his herd, the velvety softness of the herd itself — or even the expressive movement of a dancer — Paul's soul is indeed revealed. Sometimes it peeks from the canvas as if just a whisper; other times it commands to be noticed through bold simplicity and elegance. And for those who admire Paul's work, they may just find reflections of themselves hidden among the brush strokes. 🐾



"Lunch Time," oil 36" x 72"