

Horses an integral part of Calgary's past and present From the Stampede to Spruce Meadows, horses capture our attention

BY MARIO TONEGUZZI, CALGARY HERALD AUGUST 7, 2013

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Photo of painting Equine Tsunami, a 60 x 80 oil on canvas by artist Paul Van Ginkel. Photo courtesy Paul Van Ginkel.

Photograph by: Photo courtesy Paul Van Ginkel

CALGARY — If you spend any time in the Calgary area during the summer, there is one animal that grabs your attention.

And the spotlight.

The majestic horse.

From the Calgary Stampede to Spruce Meadows, horses are front and centre during this time period.

I was thinking about this recently while travelling through rural Alberta into rural Saskatchewan.

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Along the way, there were many horses grazing in fields and ponds as the vehicle headed down the highway at a fast clip.

But the images these fine animals conveyed brought a sense of peace and, quite frankly, awe.

Our city and our province are closely connected to the horse.

Horses bring about thoughts of power, energy, majesty, spirit, strength, gracefulness and agility.

As well as independence.

I asked local artist Paul Van Ginkel for some of his thoughts about horses. The well-known painter has over the years specialized in portraying this beautiful animal in numerous settings.

"I've been a professional artist for 30 years. Over that time I've painted many different subjects, however, by far my favourite subject is the horse," he says. "With the horse I feel I can create so many different versions of the same subject and express myself in a variety of ways — from a quiet, small painting of a single filly or colt to a large format piece with over a hundred stampeding horses, to an abstract, aggressive image of a majestic stallion."

A tour of his gallery in Inglewood is a mesmerizing experience as you wander through it. The portrayal of horses in his pieces of art is enchanting. When you come across his masterpiece Equine Tsunami, you can't help but stop and marvel. It depicts the Calgary Stampede horses on their way to the city from a ranch north of here. They were herded by cowboys and the painting shows the signature moment on the "Trail 2000" when the herd crosses the Red Deer River. There are 161 horses in this painting.

"In addition to the beautiful esthetic of the animal with its complex and powerful muscle structure and flowing mane and tail, I find the romance and history of the horse to be very compelling and alluring. It's an animal that has essentially been around through the history of time and has almost single-handedly changed the direction of many civilizations. Further, I feel the horse represents beauty, passion, strength, nobility and wisdom," adds Van Ginkel.

Nancy Lowery, owner of the Natural Leader which offers programs exploring leadership and team learning through purposeful activities with horses, says horses used to be integral to Calgary — everyone needed one just to get a job done. Now for the most part we use horses for pleasure and entertainment.



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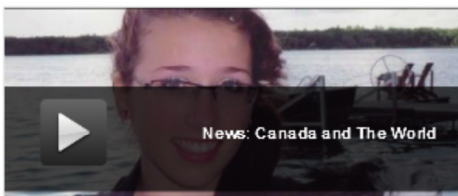
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"I believe horses are a perfect metaphor for Calgary and I for one loved the Heart of the New West as Calgary's byline. While the city is becoming very metro where else would you have 700 horses on the main downtown traffic routes. We are surrounded by iconic horse country and even the most neophyte is interested in the allure of horses, if not a trail ride in the hills," she says.

"There are a few horsemen and women who have always known that horses are our mirrors and it's a learning trend that has grown by leaps and bounds over the past decade. Programs with horses for personal and professional development have sprung up all over the place. Horses for therapeutic purposes have been a trend for years now. I do believe the idea of working with a horse without having to get on it enables a lot of people to want to get out and experience it and getting on with support allows them to experience the excitement of trying something new."

The beauty of horses running around seems to bring up all kinds of emotion and desires, she says.

Horses have plenty of meaning and significance in different cultures.

I did a quick search on the Internet about this and found one website that used these symbolic words in association with horses — power, grace, beauty, nobility, strength, freedom.

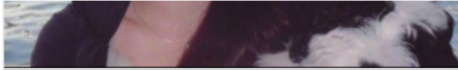
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