

It's all in the Details

Artist CJ Brown takes a long drive through northern Illinois in search of the picture emulating “living the dream in 2018.”

by Lindsay King, assistant editor

Commissioned to paint a piece for class winners at the 2018 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS), CJ Brown sought inspiration to what she imagines “living the dream” looks like. A homestead on the Wisconsin and Illinois border provides the barn and pasture elements of the mural used in the NJAS show ring, but the house came from a different location.

“That is the great thing about being an artist, you can switch things around,” Brown explains. “I had this idea in my head that I wanted it to be a triptych.”

Made up of three individual pictures, a triptych brings the three panels together as one image — representing each individual aspect of the theme.

The first panel shows a mama cow with her calf, titled “building the dream;” this part represents the first stage of raising cattle. “Living the dream” is the largest of the three, and in the center, showing the barn with cattle grazing. The right side follows two kids halter breaking cattle in what Brown calls “loving the dream.”

She poured a couple hundred hours into this one piece specifically made for the NJAS. The three images were used to paint the mural in the show ring in Madison this year.

Where it all began

After getting her degree at Luther



College in Decorah, Iowa, Brown’s talent was used in a corporate art studio on technical drawings of machinery. This developed her uncanny knack for detailed drawings of buildings and animals alike.

“I painted a lot for the gift and furniture industry, mostly of barns,” Brown says. “The barns I painted were once featured in a Smithsonian documentary called *Weathered Secrets*.”

A commission by Pheasants Forever to paint a piece for their banquet led to the first depiction of Angus cattle by Brown. Little did she know where this would take her.

“I grew up on a beef cattle farm where my dad raised Angus cattle,” Brown says. “After the Pheasants Forever banquet, I put some ads in a couple of cattle magazines. The show cattle thing took off from there.”

Back in the 1980s when trade shows consisted of pharmaceutical and feed booths, Brown was there with prints of her paintings. The

Illinois Beef Expo was her first trade show experience.

“I started coming to the NJAS in 2004 when it was in Indiana,” Brown recounts. “I try to make a new print for each junior national I have a booth at.”

A lasting image

Brown’s work for the American Angus Association is evident in

more than just the class awards; her work is printed on tea towels alongside images by Frank Murphy, her mentor.

“After Frank saw my first cattle piece in a magazine he decided he wanted to meet me,” Brown says. “He was only about an hour and a half from my house so I went to his condo. He was an Angus enthusiast just like me.”

Katy Holdener, digital content manager for the American Angus Association, is part of the team redesigning the Angus brand and products sold by the Foundation. She helped handpick Brown’s artwork to print on various pieces, including the tea towels.

“We just give her a picture of what we would like to have drawn and CJ makes it look even better than the picture itself,” Holdener says.

Brown intends to continue her work for various breeds of the show and commercial industry, as well as raising her own cattle on Paintbrush Farm in Lindenwood, Ill. 🐾