



Watercolor Wonders

Lindenwood, Ill., artist C.J. Brown believes she was meant to paint cattle.

by Kindra Gordon

Most everyone who admires cattle has experienced some picture-perfect moments — those memorable cattle scenes worthy of being preserved in a painting.

Fortunately for the cattle industry, artist C.J. Brown has captured many of those serene, pastoral scenes in her watercolor works. Her pieces have quaint titles like “An American Dream,” depicting cowboys on horseback calmly driving a herd of Angus cows across the prairie; “Grazing in the Grove,” which features a herd of black Angus cows and calves in a lush creek-fed pasture; and “Peace on Earth,” showing the tranquility of a still winter night with a rustic red barn and full moon overhead while an Angus cow nuzzles her calf.

Brown paints scenes with Charolais, Simmental, Hereford, Shorthorn and other breeds as well, but it was an Angus piece in 2002 that helped her get her start as a self-described “cow painter.” Here, Brown shares her journey to becoming an artist.

Thanks, Dad

Brown credits her father — an Illinois Angus and Simmental producer — for instilling in her both an interest in art and cattle.

“My parents said I’d draw and paint all the time when I was young,” Brown says. She tells that her dad remodeled several farmhouses, and she’d entertain herself by drawing pictures on the wood.

But it wasn’t until she was a junior in high school that Brown finally had the opportunity to take a “real” art class. She found a natural fit.

When it came time for college, Brown debated between studying journalism or art, but she says, “The art won out.” She received an art degree from Luther College in Decorah, Iowa.

As she established her career as an artist, Brown focused on painting wildlife and rural scenery. But in 2002, some personal changes in her life caused Brown to reflect and rethink her own goals.

Brown says, “I had always wanted to do a cattle print and had done some cattle illustrations for a magazine, but never a print which I would market.”

Thus, for a change of pace, she decided to paint a scene near her family’s farm of the beautiful pasture at Woodlawn Angus Farm at Creston, Ill. She tells that the owners were old family friends. Her dad had purchased his first Angus heifer from them in 1948.

Brown titled her first cattle print, “Grazing in the Grove,” and it was very well-received by the cattle community. In fact, today it is sold out.

For Brown, the admiration of the piece by others was the inspiration she needed at a difficult time in her life. “My life was going through a dark period, but when “Grazing in the Grove” came along, God truly showed me that when doors are shut, he will open windows,” she says. “I say he opened a gigantic ‘picture window,’ and from there my painting just took off.”

A cattle calling

Brown took the success as a sign that she was “meant to paint cattle,” and she refocused her creativity on creating cattle scenes. She has since been commissioned by many breed associations — including Angus — to do artwork for their national junior shows. Most recently, “Angus Blessings” was the piece she did for the 2008 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) in Des Moines, Iowa.

Among her accomplishments is a unique piece that Brown was commissioned to create in 2006 featuring “The 25 Most Influential Bulls of the Angus Breed,” which included sires from 1842-2006. The original was created for the Angus Foundation fundraising benefit that year at Vintage Angus Ranch in Modesto, Calif.

Brown worked closely with Tom Burke of the Angus Hall of Fame on the project, and in putting the detailed piece together she recognized that each bull had to be different and true in his characterization.

She credits her first job out of college doing mechanical drawings with helping her master the detail in her watercolor prints of cattle today. “Doing the mechanical drawings was not the most inspiring at the time, but it was great training. So I look back and appreciate it.”

Presently, Brown is working with the Angus Hall of Fame on illustrating a book of *Angus Cow Legends* — a companion book to the 2004 *Angus Legends* book, which featured influential bulls in Angus history.

Because there are few photos of many of the dams, Brown is working from daughter photos to create illustrations of many of the cows being featured. From these illustrations,

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the intent is to eventually create a print featuring the most influential cows of the Angus breed as well.

Looking ahead, Brown has many additional new release prints in progress. She also travels to several of the national cattle shows throughout the year to sell her work. As a result of her busy schedule, she says she paints wherever and whenever she can.

"I work a lot of late nights, and I do a lot of painting in my hotel room, too. It's a good thing watercolor dries fast," she jokes.

On a more serious note, Brown says

among all the cattle pieces she has created during the past seven years, her first — "Grazing in the Grove" — remains her sentimental favorite.

"That started everything, and I still live not too far from there and that creek," Brown says. Today, in addition to her painting, she remains involved in a family partnership herd with her dad, brother and son near Lindenwood, Ill.

One of her upcoming new releases will be a follow-up to the "Grazing in the Grove" piece. She plans to have it available

in November during the North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE) in Louisville, Ky. The piece is tentatively being called "Back At the Grove" and will feature a scene with Angus cattle along the same creek setting.

To see works available by C.J. Brown, visit her web site at www.cjbrownstudios.com. She has recently completed a "cattle log" available on the site showcasing each of her pieces and offering a bit of history about them.



More about C.J. Brown

Asked what she enjoys most about her career as an artist, C.J. Brown says it is the many endearing friendships she has made from her "cattle-painting career."

"I enjoy the creative part of designing the piece and the production side, but equally as enjoyable is meeting the cattle people," she says.

Brown's authentic admiration for those cattle people is often reflected in the pieces she paints. Many of the pieces include a story about who the cattle belonged to and the setting depicted in the scene.

"With everything I do, there is a story," Brown says.

The industry has recognized Brown for preserving those stories as well. At the 2008 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) in Des Moines, Iowa, she was inducted into the Honorary Angus Foundation for the work she has done for the junior program.

