



► Crossing the Cheyenne

# Angus

## Inspiration

Montana ranch wife  
Karen Boylan is inspired  
by the Angus scenes surrounding her.

by Kindra Gordon

**F**or Karen Boylan of Bozeman, Mont., ranch life often takes up much of her time. She and her husband have a herd of 120 registered Angus cattle along with a few horses on their ranch.

But, Boylan doesn't mind working in the picturesque mountain setting amidst the cattle, horses and wildlife, because it provides her great inspiration for her "hobby." Boylan works as an artist painting those ranch scenes in her free time.

"I like the balance between ranching and artwork," Boylan says of her dual role. "Ranching gives me physical activity, and I love being outside around the cattle and horses."

### A natural artist

Boylan's road to becoming an artist began when she was a young girl growing up in Billings, Mont. She had a love for horses — and drawing them. Her

father recognized that she had "something special."

He encouraged her to study art when it came time to head to college. However, Boylan had other interests and majored in physical education at Montana State University (MSU) instead. To please her dad, she did tack on a minor in art.

By the time she graduated from MSU she was even less interested in art. She tells that the program was fairly modern, whereas she

describes her style as much more detailed.

Thus, thoughts of art were put on the back burner. In the years that followed, Boylan married, the couple rented a 5,000-acre ranch from her father near Red Lodge, Mont., and they were blessed with two daughters and a son. They spent 14 years ranching at Red Lodge with a herd of 400 black Angus cow-calf pairs.

It was here in the

scenic setting of the Beartooth Mountains that Boylan's interest in art was renewed.

"There was so much wildlife and scenery that I started to paint a few pieces for my own home," she recalls. When an artist friend saw Boylan's work, she encouraged her to exhibit at local art shows. Boylan was hesitant, but kept the idea in the back of her mind. A few years later she was ready to give it a try. To her surprise, she did quite well.

### Painting blacks

That was more than 20 years ago, and Boylan has had the artist bug ever since. About that same time, the Boylans relocated to the Gallatin Valley outside of Bozeman. They've continued to ranch, and the scenic setting still gives Karen ample inspiration for painting.

Horses, wildlife and ranch scenes dominate most of her work. She frequently carries a camera with her to capture ideas for future pieces. About five years ago, she began painting scenes with Angus cattle because she was getting several requests at art shows for "all black cattle."

"Most artists paint Hereford cattle, and I can understand why — because the red and white is such a nice contrast to paint," Boylan says.

But because of her own personal ranching experience, she was willing to give the blacks a try. "Since we raise Angus, I have lots of reference material," she says. Today, she has several pieces showcasing Angus cattle. Boylan says she's learned the key to painting a good Angus is the lighting and highlights on the animal as well as making sure the background offers some color.

Looking ahead, Boylan says she's got a long list of pieces she'd like to paint in her mind. "There are certain scenes I know I'd like to do," she says.

She looks forward to the challenge of continually improving her work. Of her style, she says, "I'm a detail person. I once tried to loosen up my painting style, and it didn't work for me. So I stopped fighting it and went back to the detail. The best thing is to do what you enjoy."

Boylan aims to produce five to six originals per year.

"Once I start on a piece it is hard for me to stop; I don't like to get away from it," Boylan says. Larger pieces can take her one to two months.

Her biggest challenge is finding the time to paint. With just she and her husband on the ranch, she spends a lot of time outside. She also has five grandchildren nearby who she makes a top priority.



► Karen Boylan

“For me painting is important, but it gets behind ranch work and my grandchildren. So I paint whenever I can,” she says.

Because of her limited amount of originals available, Boylan only has them on display in two small galleries — one at Wall Drug, S.D., and the other at Ennis, Mont., south of Bozeman. Boylan’s primary outlet for selling her art is through the five to six shows she exhibits at annually, including the Northern International Livestock Exposition (NILE) in Billings in October; the Ellensburg, Wash., art show and auction each May; and the Cowboy Christmas Gift Show at the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo (NFR) every December.

Boylan says the rewarding part of being

an artist is the sense of accomplishment from creating what you set out to do.

“I also like that people enjoy my work,” she adds. “That’s primarily why I do shows, because I like talking to the people.”

In addition to offering originals and litho prints, Boylan has started offering giclee prints on canvas, which can look incredibly close to an original. She also offers note cards, ceramic tiles and coffee mugs with her artwork on them.



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► **Right:** “Ahead of the Storm” is the title of this painting by Montana artist Karen Boylan, who raises Angus with her husband near Bozeman.

