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A BRUSHWORK ROUNDUP:

Western Paintings and Drawings

by Craig Sheppard

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Silent Shadows
Watercolor
Not dated

Library Special Collections,
University of Nevada, Reno

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■
 Untitled, from "The Dead Horse"
 series
 Oil on masonite
 Not dated

University Galleries,
 University of Nevada, Reno



■
 "Subzero Cold Makes Running
 in Circles Necessary" Black Rock
 Desert, 1975
 Watercolor
 1975

University Galleries,
 University of Nevada, Reno

A BRUSHWORK ROUNDUP:

Western Paintings and Drawings
 by Craig Sheppard

by **Jim McCormick**

The practiced hand of western artist Craig Sheppard (1913–1978) deserves a re-ride.



Craig Sheppard

Library Special
 Collections, University of
 Nevada, Reno

In rodeo parlance, a cowboy is granted a re-ride out of the bucking chute, often because the horse he drew performed in a way that negatively affected his initial score. In the case of Craig Sheppard, it was the Nevada Arts Council and Fred Reid and Jim McCormick, co-curators of *A Brushwork Roundup: Western Paintings and Drawings by Craig Sheppard*, who called for a re-ride in the arena in which Sheppard excelled.

When the artist's hand was stilled in the summer of 1978, Sheppard, a native of the Southwest Oklahoma town of Lawton, and former bull rider in Madison Square Garden, was remembered as a prime mover in Reno's cultural community in the years following World War II. He arrived on the University of Nevada campus in the fall of 1947 with the savvy of a seasoned cowboy and the skills necessary to teach most all courses in the art department he had been charged with building.

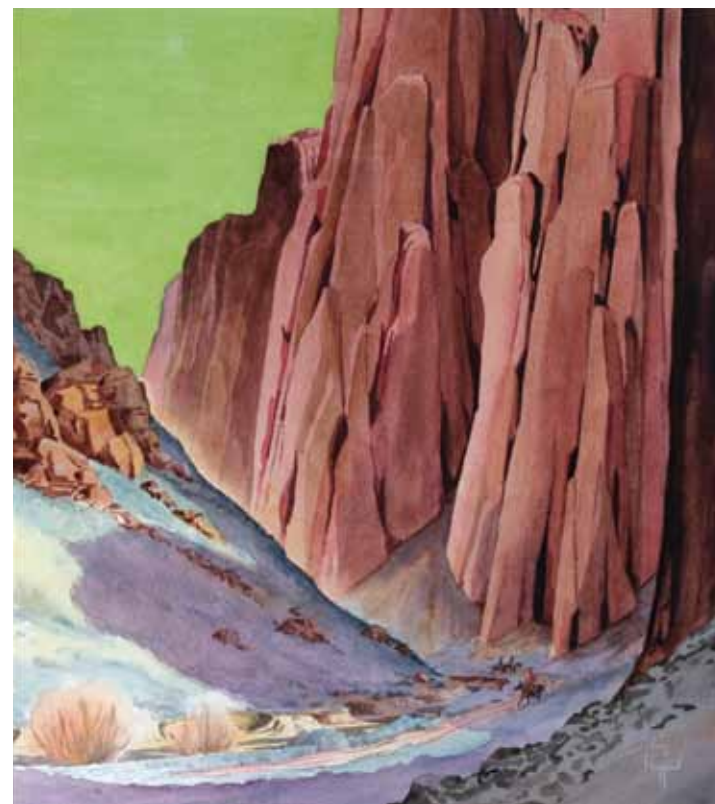
Rather than organizing *A Brushwork Roundup* as a survey of the artist's diverse output, Reid and McCormick took into account the modest size of many of the venues where Nevada Arts Council traveling shows are featured, and curated an exhibit that focuses on Sheppard's abiding fascination with men and horses.

It is helpful to understand that Sheppard is not an artist who is easily branded. Throughout his long career he was constantly reinventing himself. Caught on the cusp between the regionalism that prevailed at the University of Oklahoma where he obtained two degrees in art in the 1930s, and Abstract Expressionism which saturated American universities during the 50s, Sheppard restlessly experimented with numerous materials and approaches to subject matter. However, the theme he kept returning to during periods of abundant inspiration, personal crisis or even while on leaves of absence abroad, drew upon the rural life he led as a youth in the Sooner State.



Luminous Reverence
Oil on masonite
Not dated

Nevada Museum of Art, Reno,
Gift of Sophie Sheppard



Riders in Canyon
Watercolor
Not dated

Library Special Collections,
University of Nevada, Reno



■
Untitled (Self Portrait of Craig in the Studio)
Oil on masonite
Not dated

University Galleries,
University of Nevada, Reno

Sheppard moved west along a serpentine route. At the beginning of World War II, he accepted a position in the art department at Montana State University at Bozeman, where he taught from 1940 to 1942. Shortly thereafter, Sheppard was engaged by Douglas Aircraft in Tulsa to render three-dimensional drawings that enabled assembly line workers to better understand the complex blueprints for fighters and bombers being fitted for the wartime effort.

By the time Sheppard arrived in Reno, he and his wife, Yolande (1921–1998), were ready to settle and begin their respective careers. Married in 1941, Yo, as friends called her, was the daughter of Oscar Jacobsen (1882–1966), head of the Oklahoma University art department in Norman, and a respected regional painter. While Craig expressed himself in a variety of two-dimensional disciplines, Yo obtained a degree in sculpture at OU, and later was recognized for her distinctive figurative works, notably commissioned busts of children and prominent Nevadans. Her full-length bronze statue of Senator Patrick McCarran has resided in National Statuary Hall in Washington, D.C. since 1960.



■
Male Nude and Horse
Charcoal
Not dated

University Galleries,
University of Nevada, Reno



The Sheppard's children: Sophie (1946-) was born in Tulsa and Sim Sheppard IV (1948-) in Reno. Both have pursued careers in the arts—Sophie as a watercolorist, plein air painter and now a sheep rancher with husband Lynn in Surprise Valley, California, where she spins and weaves with a community of like-minded artisans. Sim, as with his mother, works in the round—designing one-of-a-kind jewelry crafted in silver, gold and precious stones. For many years he maintained a jewelry shop in Graeagle, California that included space where patrons could observe him at work.

Craig Sheppard's versatility was apparent from the moment he arrived in Northern Nevada. The art department, housed in battered WWII Quonset huts, initially survived with only two full-time instructors: Ed Yates, a fellow Oklahoman, joined Sheppard in 1951 and specialized in sculpture and ceramics. Sheppard offered instruction in painting and drawing. By 1960, when the department moved into the new Church Fine Arts Building, the faculty numbered a half-dozen, and some of Sheppard's teaching load was displaced by the administrative chores most department chairs encountered in the rapidly growing university. From Sheppard's perspective paperwork was a dreary but necessary evil!



Journey
French watercolor
Early 60's

University Galleries,
University of Nevada, Reno



Untitled, from "The Dead Horse" series
Pen and ink
Not dated

University Galleries,
University of Nevada, Reno



Study of Cowboys
pencil
circa 1962

Collection of Monique Laxalt,
Reno

By nature, Sheppard was a gregarious sort and often made himself available for campus and community projects during which he generously called into play his various graphic skills. He painted murals, one for an organization of prominent business and professional men (only) in downtown Reno, and created what he called “potboilers,” quick and entertaining ephemera such as posters, hand-lettered greeting cards and, with his students, sets and colorful costumes for beaux arts balls. Occasionally, a commission from a local business firm would provide extra income, this during an era when faculty salaries were nominal.

Sheppard served several years on the board of the Nevada Art Gallery. Nevada governor Paul Laxalt appointed him the first chair of the fledgling Nevada State Council on the Arts, now the Nevada Arts Council.

On occasions, when Sheppard withdrew a pen, pencil or brush from his shirt pocket, one of his “talking sticks,” he would deftly demonstrate how a contour line or firmer stroke with a stick of charcoal could strengthen the gesture in a figure drawing. He could rapidly move his stylus across a sketchbook page, aka “talking paper,” and suggest the twisting action of a cowboy desperately trying to stay astride a bucking horse. Witness the delicate yet dynamic treatment of the clusters of animals and humans in “Study of Cowboys,” lent to this exhibition by long-time Sheppard family friend, Monique Laxalt.

To his students at the university, Sheppard's facility with the tools of his trade must have seemed akin to magic. On the other hand, his children accepted their father's talent as normal, and openly wondered why other parents in the neighborhood couldn't draw like their dad.

One work featured in *A Brushwork Roundup* is clearly by someone other than Sheppard. Titled "High Rock Dog," it's a ceramic sculpture by Fred Reid, a student of Sheppard's in the 1960s, who went on to teach in the UNR ceramic program for several decades. He retired in 2012. "High Rock Dog" is one of a number of Reid's sculptures and oil crayon drawings that was a homage to his longtime mentor. The "walls" of the dog reveal High Rock Canyon near the Black Rock Desert with color glazes applied to resemble the terrain in several Sheppard watercolors on the same subject. Speaking about Sheppard today, Reid unabashedly acknowledges the respect and awe in which he still holds his former teacher. One of his prized possessions is a container filled with many of Sheppard's well-worn bristle and sable brushes.



Fred Reid
High Rock Dog
Ceramic
2013

Collection of Fred Reid, Reno



Horse and Rider
Gouache
1937

Collection of Loretta Terlizzi
and Jim McCormick, Reno



■
Strange Vigil
Oil on canvas
1959

Nevada Museum of Art, Reno,
Gift of Sophie Sheppard



■
Rider Mounting Horse
Sumi ink on paper
circa 1962

Collection of Wally Cuchine,
Eureka

For sheer artistic whiplash, two pictures in the exhibit sharply illustrate Sheppard's stylistic range. "Rider Mounting Horse" dates from the 1950s when, on sabbatical leave in Norway, the artist spent long-night hours painting stark black and white studies of horses and riders. In these sumi brush paintings, the inspiration of oriental calligraphy is unmistakable. Yo recalled that as many as fifty wash studies might be painted at one sitting. Note that the individual marks made with a bamboo-handle brush don't suggest recognizable parts of human or equine anatomy. The magic lies in the connection between the isolated strokes; clearly they add up to a horse and rider. The earliest work in the exhibit, dating from 1937 during the artist's undergraduate days at OU, is "Horse and Rider." It reveals a younger Sheppard's sure knowledge of the horse's anatomy and accompanying tack—achieved with delicate strokes of gouache medium. If one didn't know, these two paintings might appear to be the work of different artists.

Then, consider Sheppard's "Dead Horse" period during the late 1950s, when a deep sense of melancholy and pathos swept over his work. In "Strange Vigil," a splayed horse lies at the feet of an emaciated man who clutches his knees to his chest; he seems to be waiting for nothing in particular, on a plain that suggests no place in particular. Sheppard's indebtedness to cubism in his treatment of the bloated and faceted nag is apparent.

An untitled oil painting on canvas, *Untitled*, from “*The Dead Horse*” series, 1959, presents the viewer with a far more complex composition. When Sheppard executed it, he was definitely in the thrall of Picasso’s tragi-epic painting, “*Guernica*,” and, more personally, his own demons. The major motifs in “*Guernica*” appear in Sheppard’s work as well: horses sprawled asunder, humans weighted down by unseen conditions and a red lamp that fails to illuminate the scene. Like Picasso, Sheppard is unclear whether it is night or day—interior or exterior. Of the “*Dead Horse*” period, Sheppard’s daughter Sophie described her father as “typically taciturn, he would say no more about them, although disillusionment with university politics at the time may have provided the impetus for these works.” In fact, Sheppard’s philosophy and methods of teaching began to differ significantly from several younger instructors; this gap left him uneasy and examining long held assumptions regarding approaches to the studio classroom.



■
Untitled, from “*The Dead Horse*” series
 Oil on canvas
 1959

Nevada Museum of Art, Reno,
 Gift of Sophie Sheppard



■
Untitled, (*Cowboy with Spurs*)
 Oil on board
 1972

University Galleries,
 University of Nevada, Reno



November Rain
Watercolor with acrylic varnish
on board
1973

Nevada Museum of Art, Reno,
Gift of Richard and Antonia
Lowden

Craig Sheppard Bronc Riding
in the 1930s

Collection of Sophie Sheppard



Craig Sheppard's reputation as an artist reached its peak during the 1970s when he painted the "Yellow Slicker" series. These luminous watercolors of cowboys lost in their work, with slickers glowing in sharp contrast to watery reflections and the dense atmosphere beyond the corrals, prompted favorable responses from Reno critics and collectors. "Warming Up" and "November Rain" allow viewers to glimpse anonymous ranch hands silently going about their rain-soaked chores. To this writer, these paintings point beyond illustration, beyond appearance, toward a state that could be regarded as sublime.

"Heart" is a spirited addition to *A Brushwork Roundup*, a new poem by the highly-respected Montana poet, Paul Zarzyski—commissioned for this exhibit by the Nevada Arts Council.* The poem is an impassioned homage to Craig Sheppard by a poet whose appearances at the Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Elko have been a mainstage attraction since the event's beginning.

Sheppard and Zarzyski are an easy pairing. Sheppard rode bulls in his early years, and Zarzyski was a bronc rider on the ProRodeo and Senior circuits a couple of generations later. In 1978, the last year of his life, Sheppard received the prestigious Decade Award from the Nevada State Council on the Arts; Zarzyski was honored with the Montana Governor's Arts Award for Literature in 2005.

*Paul Zarzyski's poem "Heart" located on back cover.

When Zarsyski writes “it takes the painter who has perched the hurricane deck of the Equus tempest to sense how everything equine begins and ends wildest at the withers,” he knows from hard experience where Sheppard’s heart and savvy come from.

With *A Brushwork Roundup*, viewers may find themselves challenged by Sheppard’s abrupt shifts in mood and pictorial matters. On the other hand, his paintings and drawings may resonate with those who venture beyond the limits of Nevada’s glittering gulches and realize that isolated ranches, and their cowboys, not to mention wild horses, still exist in the outback—a lesser echo of Craig Sheppard’s life during the last century when the West was a shade wilder.



Warming Up
Watercolor
Not dated

Library Special Collections,
University of Nevada, Reno



Untitled (Self Portrait)
Pencil
Not dated

University Galleries,
University of Nevada, Reno

BIOGRAPHIES



Jim McCormick was born in Chicago, and attended the University of Tulsa where he received his BA /MA degrees in art. When he joined the art faculty at the University of Nevada

in 1960, Craig Sheppard was department chair and served as his mentor. Over the next 32 years, McCormick offered instruction in a variety of disciplines including printmaking, drawing, papermaking and art history—until his retirement in 1992. From 1990 to 2005, McCormick directed the Nevada Art Research Project at the Nevada Historical Society, a program that documented Nevada-related artists from the mid-19th century to the present.

In 1989, McCormick was honored with the UNR Distinguished Teacher Award, and received the Distinguished Faculty Award in 1998. A member of the original Nevada State Council on the Arts; in 1990, he received the Nevada Governor's Art Award. McCormick has been featured in solo and group exhibitions across the United States. He has illustrated a number of books, and co-authored *Brushwork Diary*, published by the University of Nevada Press and, *An Elegant Line: The Art of the Sheppard Family* in conjunction with an exhibit at the Nevada Museum of Art. Prior to *A Brushwork Roundup*, McCormick curated and wrote the Gallery Notes for another Nevada Arts Council-sponsored traveling exhibit: "Wally's World: the Loneliest Art Collection in Nevada."



Fred Reid was born in Caliente, a fourth generation Nevadan. Following his father's premature death in a car accident, Fred moved to his grandparents' ranch in Alamo, Nevada and, a few years later, settled in Las Vegas where, in 1961, he graduated from Las Vegas High School.

1964 was a fateful year—a serious motorcycle accident proved to be a major turning point in Reid's life. After a period of healing and saving money, he decided to enroll in the University of Nevada in Reno, and obtained an undergraduate degree in 1970. Encouraged, Reid decided to further his studies in art and education at UNR, and so impressed the art faculty that he was hired to teach evening pottery classes in the fall of 1973. Along with fellow artist, Walt McNamara, Reid was appointed art preparator, a faculty support position that demanded a wide range of technical and artistic skills. More importantly, Reid remained as an accessible and challenging instructor in ceramics and drawing until his retirement in 2012.

Reid credits professors Ed Yates (ceramics), Don Kerr (drawing), Jim McCormick (printmaking), Bill Howard (painting), Edw Martinez (printmaking and ceramics) Howard Rosenberg (education), and Craig Sheppard with delivering "the best art education on the planet." Of Craig Sheppard he says, "I thought he was my father incarnate, whose work I continue to emulate."



Fred Reid and Jim McCormick at the University of Nevada, Reno in the late 1970s.

RESOURCES

An Elegant Line: The Art of the Sheppard Family, essays by James C. McCormick and Monique Laxalt, Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, Nevada, 2000

Craig Sheppard: Western Drawings in Brush and Ink (portfolio), commentary by Jim McCormick, University of Nevada Press, Reno, Nevada, 1980

The Year of the Horse (portfolio), commentary by Sophie Sheppard, Carmel Publishing Company, Carmel, California, 2000

“Craig Sheppard,” Nevada Online Encyclopedia, Nevada Humanities, Reno, Nevada, reprinted from article by Sophie Sheppard, *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 1990
www.onlinenevada.org

PERMANENT COLLECTIONS

The Nevada Museum of Art permanent collection is divided into four thematic focus areas: *Contemporary Art*, *Altered Landscape Photography*, *Art of the Greater West*, and the *Work Ethic Collection*. The Center for Art + Environment Archive Collections and Library serve scholars and researchers seeking information related to creative interactions between people and their natural, built, and virtual environments.

These thematic, rather than historical or stylistic, specializations are a natural outgrowth of the institution’s collecting practices over the years. The art collections consist of over 2,000 objects from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Center for Art + Environment houses nearly 50 archives comprised of 12,000 items in its Archive Collections and over 5,000 books in its Library. To search the museum’s online database, visit: <http://www.nevadaart.org/collections/database>

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The University of Nevada, Reno, Department of Art Permanent Collection represents an impressive, decades-old collecting program that is noteworthy for its early attention to regional painters including Jim McCormick and Craig Sheppard. In addition to its collection of 19th and 20th century paintings, the collection is exceptionally strong in prints. Emeritus professor Ed Martinez organized the collection of a number of print portfolios from major international printmakers to supplement a deep and diverse print collection that also includes examples of rare Japanese wood block prints, a who’s who of contemporary printmakers and master prints dating as far back as the 16th century. Website: <http://www.unr.edu/art/galleries/permanent-collection>

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The University of Nevada, Special Collections and University Archives, located in the Knowledge Center in Reno houses work by several Western artists, including Maynard Dixon, Theodore Waddell, Will James, and Lorenzo Latimer. The collection also includes work by prominent Northern Nevada artists such as Craig Sheppard, Robert Caples, Hans Meyerkassel, and James McCormick. A substantial portion of this collection forms the James R. Herz Collection, and was donated by James R. Herz, M.D. of Reno, an avid collector of Nevada materials. A number of other donors have enhanced the art collection for the benefit of local history scholars.

The Craig Sheppard collection in University Archives documents the professional careers of Craig Sheppard and Yolande Jacobson Sheppard. The 5 cubic feet of materials includes limited correspondence and lecture notes; photographs of their work in sculpture, paint, and murals; posters and brochures of exhibits; and scrapbooks. Website: <http://contentdm.library.unr.edu/explore/UNRArtExplore/unrart-home.html>.

NEVADA ARTS COUNCIL

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GALLERY NOTES

Essay written by Jim McCormick and edited by Fran Morrow and Patricia A. Atkinson, and design by Lori Kunder, Kunder Design Studio



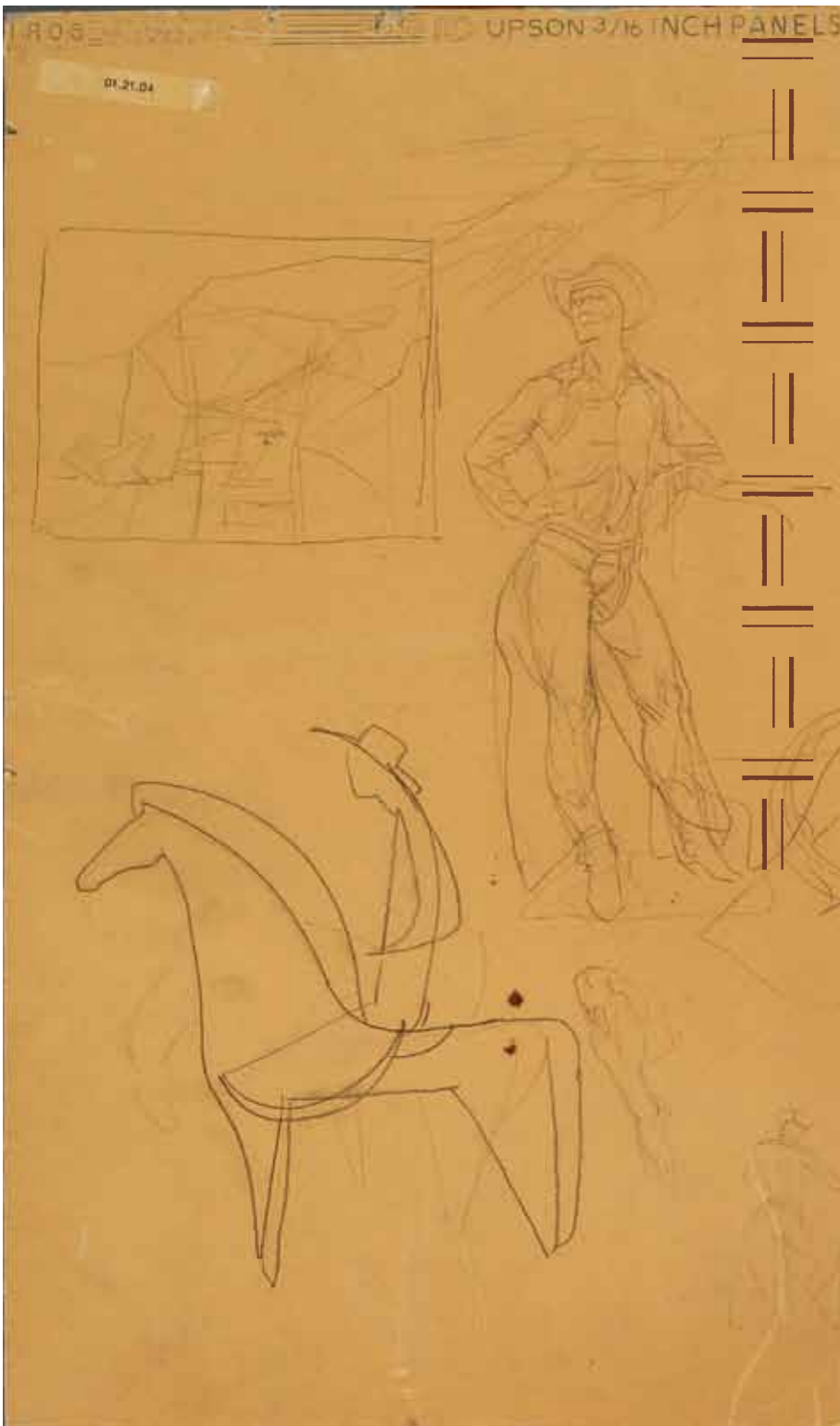
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HEART

For Craig Sheppard

Forked to the jump-'n'-kick brush stroke,
forelock to fetlock, into the vast
landscape of canvas, into the open
range of paper, otherwise known as "time
and space," it takes the painter
who has perched the hurricane
deck of the Equus tempest
to sense how everything equine
begins and ends wildest
at the withers.

Above the horse's heart
press your coarse ear to the soft
nimbus of bristle. Listen, breath
stilled, to this stirring of rides lived,
lived into the oils, into the sumi ink,
watercolor, charcoal, crayon, into the medium
of sheer air—oh, sweet molecule, sweet melody—
into the prehistoric flesh-'n'-blood
contorted defiance of horse
anatomy, all static wooden-model study
bushwhacked at the academic pass.

With back hooves
splitting the nuclei of Nevada high desert
air into thin infinities of contour line,
don't we stake our claim to all
big bang fallouts—of creation, of desolation—
the imagination's afterglow, like the bronc
hip-cocked, at rest, for our graced glimpse
into the mystery?

Let us now sing
our most primal hymns from the cave
walls of Chauvet, of Lascaux,
to gallery walls everywhere still echoing
the heavy-gaited riddle echoed deep from within
all time and space: what *is* the soul
if not the heart in flight, both aura and form,
soaring before us toward the light,
the light its ancient self
illuminated by this one, blazing
musical movement of truth, the horse.

—PAUL ZARZYSKI

