

INSIDE Sporting Art • Eddie Basha Collection • Robert Lougheed • Bill Anton

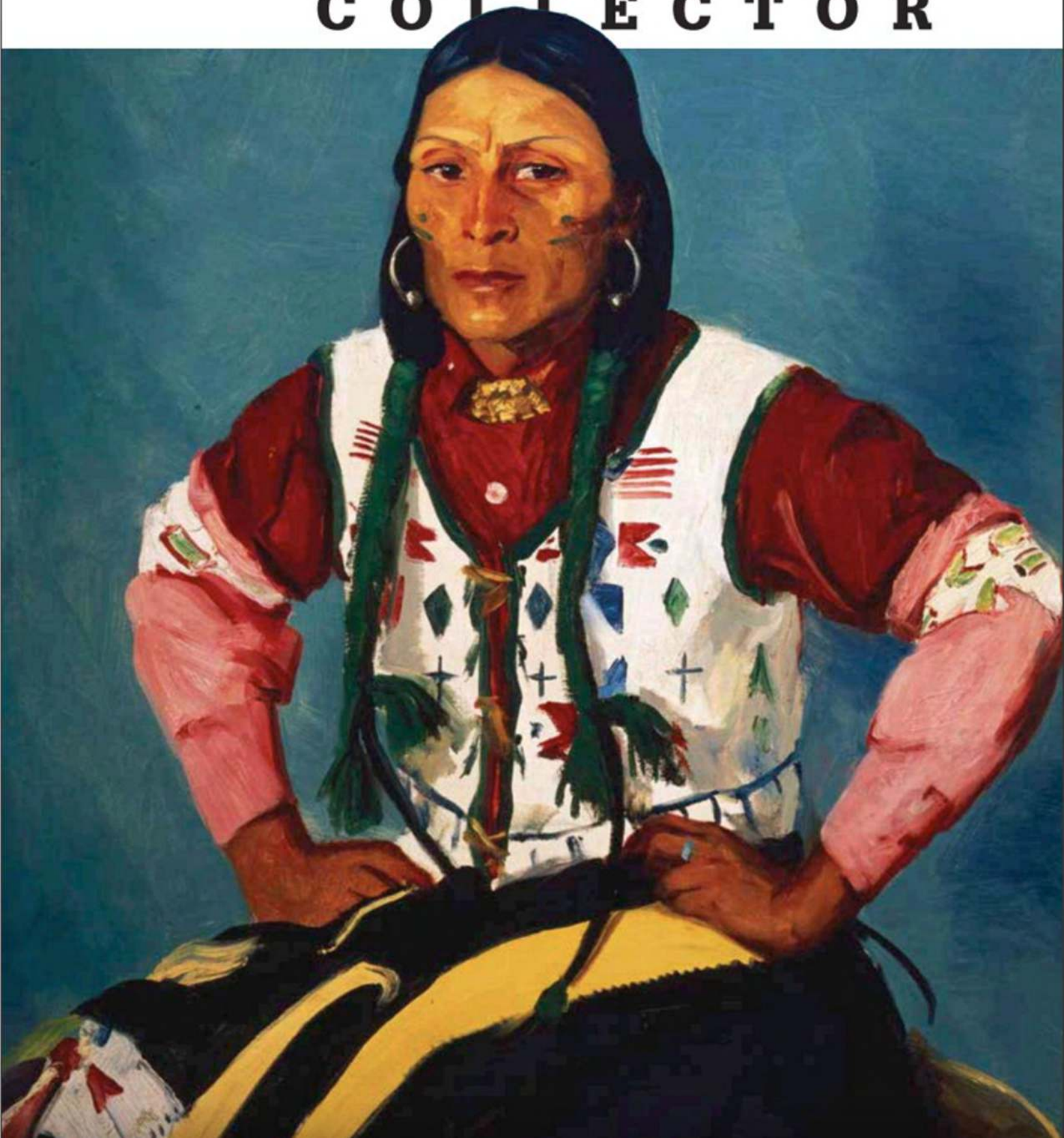
Previews of Works For Sale at Upcoming Shows

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WESTERN ART

COLLECTOR



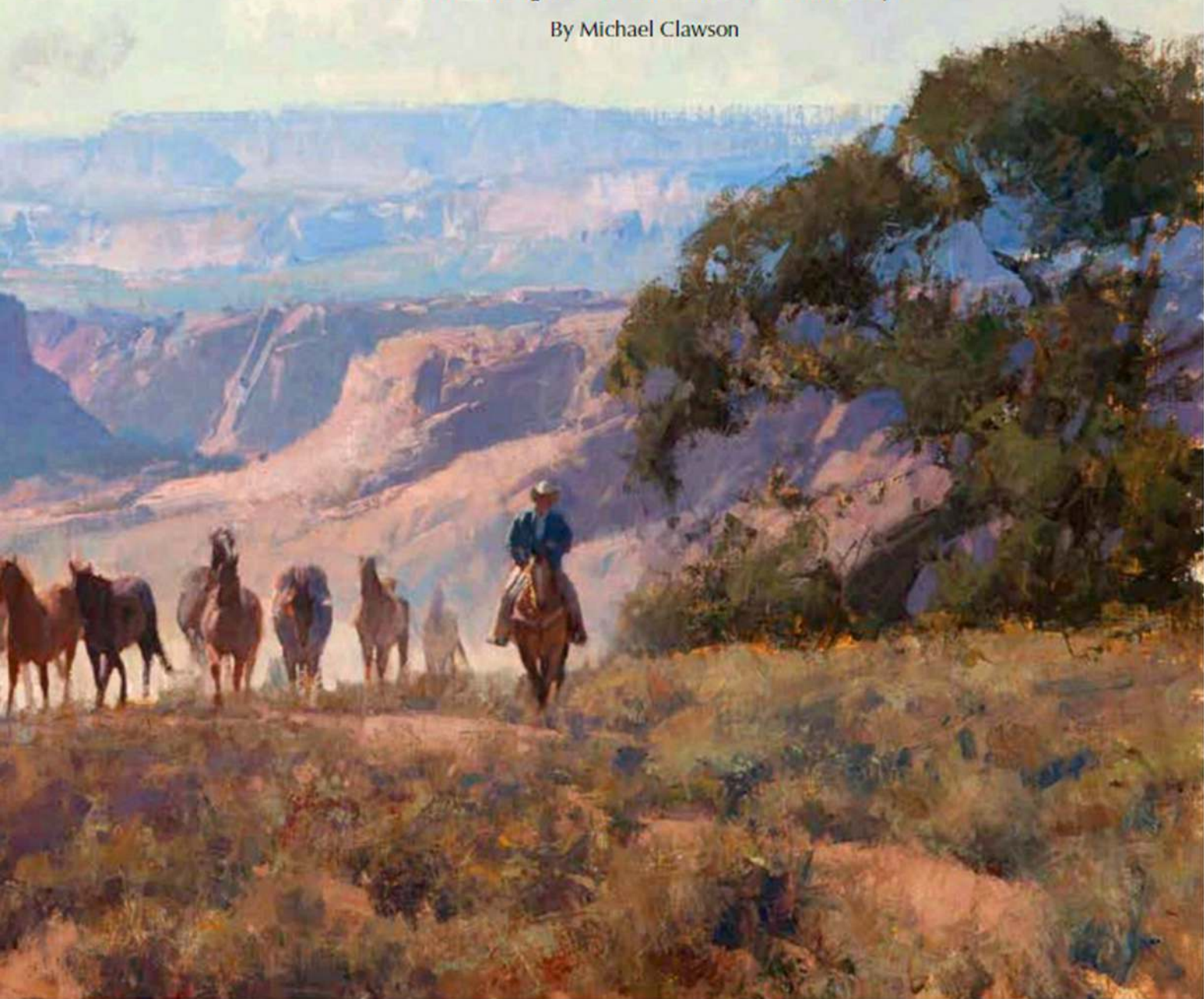


The Great Southwest, oil on linen, 30 x 48"

EPIC PAIRINGS

Bill Anton's marvelous new paintings evoke the mood and spirit of the American cowboy.

By Michael Clawson





Winding Down, oil on linen, 28 x 40"

“I do not see myself as the biographer of the cowboy,” painter Bill Anton says plainly in the first line of his biography on his website. “The focus of my works has always been about mood and passion.”

It’s a minor distinction—from visual documentarian to emotional storyteller—but one Anton embraces with his deep love for the cowboy and all he represents to America’s core values and to the artist himself.

Continuing from his studio in Prescott, Arizona, Anton elaborates on his role as a recorder of the West: “First of all, I like to ride. I like to experience things for myself. I admire historical artists immensely, but the factual accuracy demanded of them seems limiting to me. They have to have the right accoutrements, the right rigging, the right era necessitating a lot of research,” he says. “Some of that is fun, but I’d rather go to the source that’s still around and see him in his element first-hand. It’s a little like outdoor painting in that regard. See it, smell it, taste it and translate it. It is thrilling to ride new country, to watch sunlight flash off horseflesh and see dust diffuse color and value. Watching something ancient and timeless—

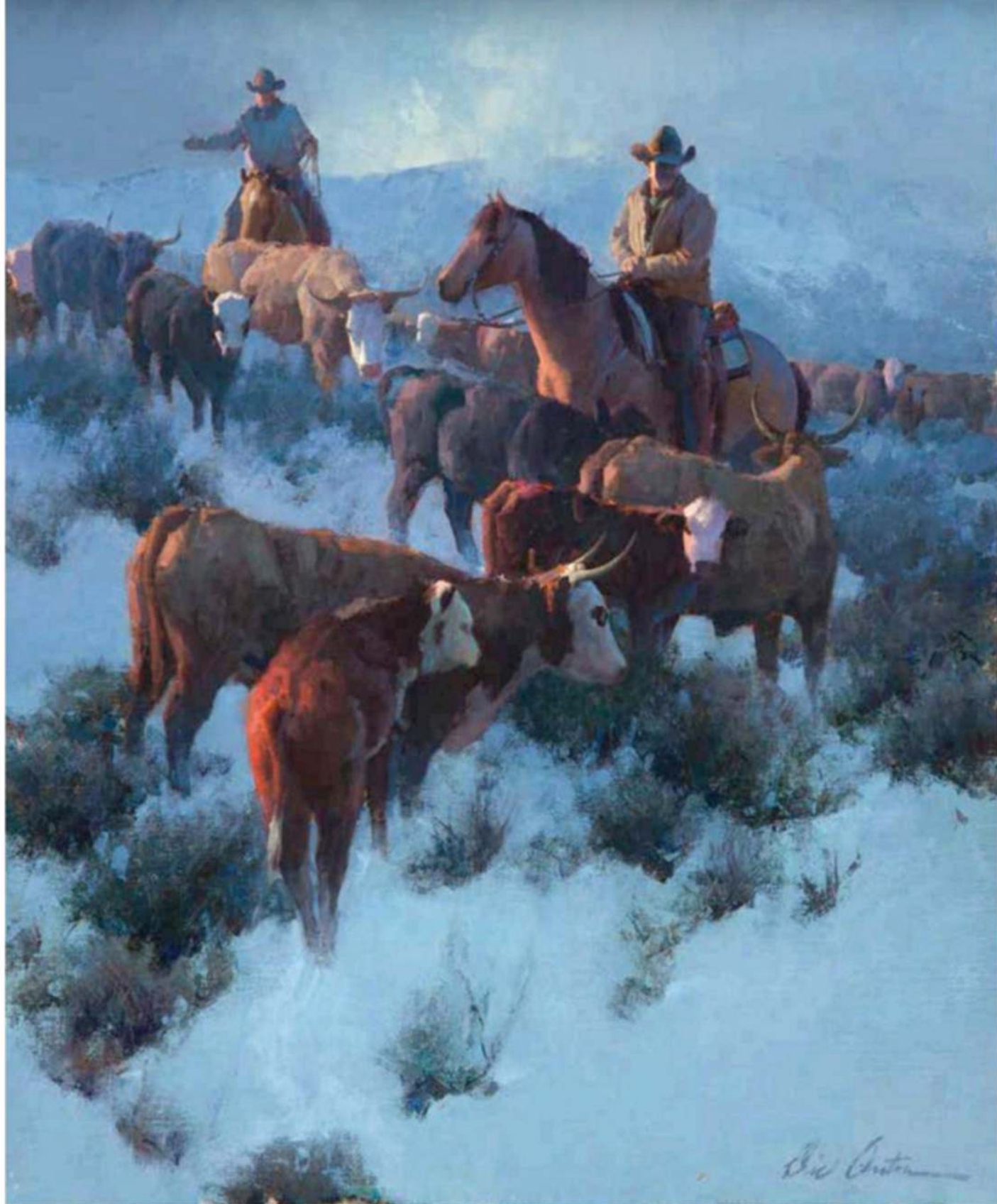
man and animal in nature—is monumentally compelling to me.”

While his subjects are largely cowboys and cattle drives, examining his new works reveals there are deeper levels of

artistic expression inside his iconic subject matter. In many pieces, Anton explores the juxtaposition of the vastness of the West with the intimate closeness of its central figures. In *Winding Down*, a line of riders descends



Jailbreak, oil on linen, 24 x 36"



Winter Palette, oil on linen, 30 x 24"

into an expansive valley lit only by the moon and a small cabin emitting a warm orange glow. While the landscape is grand in size and scope, he hones in on his cast of figures who are bound together in mission and purpose. It's a theme that is also present in *Wyoming Conference Call*, with its idling cowboys in conversation on horseback, and

in *As West As It Gets*, with a lone figure having a quiet moment of reflection with his horse overlooking the Pacific Ocean. In Anton's paintings, the West is a backdrop for the humanity of his figures.

This motif is a core trait of the artist's works—as well as depth, gorgeous nocturnes and his careful depiction of the horse—

and they're aspects Anton has gradually tinkered with as his work has developed. "I'm always conscious of variety with any grouping, so there was a range of sizes with varying degrees of complexity, mood and color key. Now I'm shifting gears and trying to rethink how I do everything. I'm asking myself questions about my strengths and

weaknesses, my motivations and fears," he says. "New challenges are great but you don't necessarily want your audience watching you experiment. There's a fine line between invention and failure."

There is a fine line, but it's a line Anton has mastered, even as he changes some of his time-tested compositional formulas. "Sometimes the changes are so minute, only I notice them. Sometimes the dominance of the figure will be the shift; other times the paint handling will be more textural and layered, other times more visceral. So, hopefully there's always growth," he says. "But change for change's sake doesn't move me. I don't want 'different' as much as I want 'better.' How do I refine without losing passion? That's key for me. It's not just technical, and it's not just heart. That interplay of mind and mood is a tension that can be endlessly explored."

Anton, who is represented by both Trailside Galleries in Arizona and Wyoming and InSight Gallery in Texas, says he admires many important artists who came before him, but especially the works of Edgar Payne and Frank Tenney Johnson. "Payne's chunky broken color and ability to get 'air' into a picture is breathtaking. Johnson was the simply the best Western painter ever, in my mind. But he could do it all, from horses to seascapes to magnificent skies to those incredibly abstract foregrounds—the complete master artist."

Like Payne and Johnson, the Prescott artist has brought his particularly unique style of painting to a variety of subjects, from the snowy cattle ride in *Winter Palette*, to the timeless camping scene of *Evening Arrival*, to the iconic action of *Jail Break*. He even turns to coastal landscape with *Gem of the Pacific*, and nocturnes befitting of Johnson with *Boys' Night Out* and *Into the Lion's Lair*. Each piece

showcases Anton's delicate use of color, form and composition.

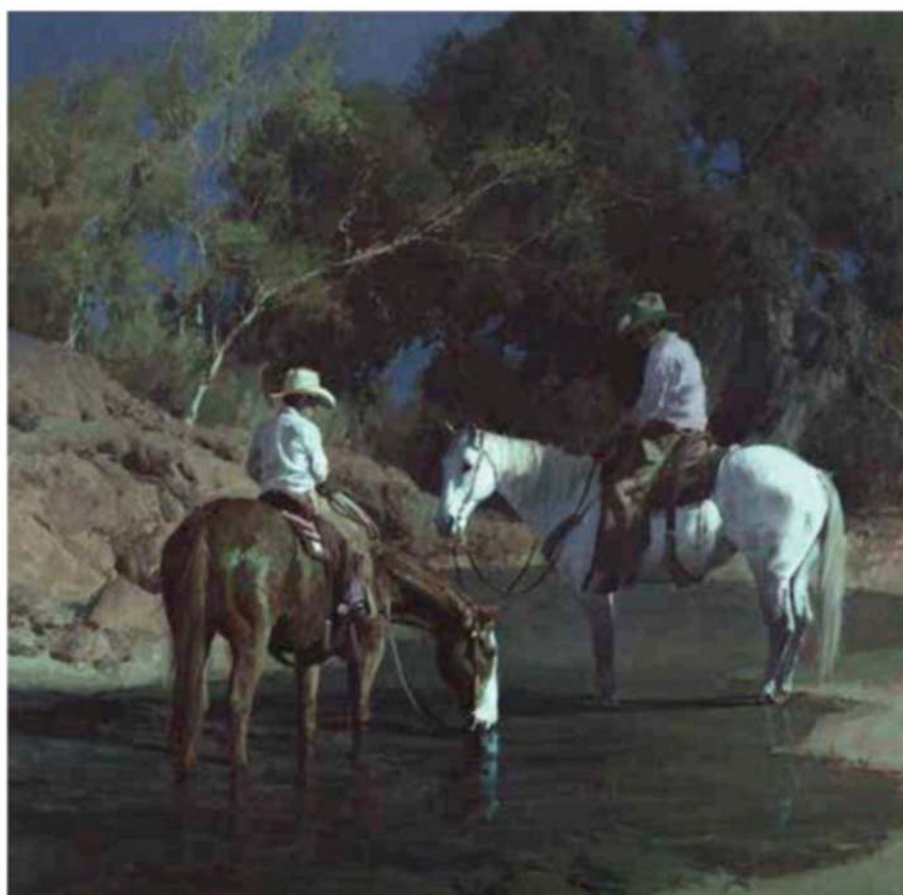
"I've always felt style was just an outgrowth of one's working method. I cut my teeth painting outdoors where detail is greatly subordinated to the boiled-down essence of the subject. As I gained experience outside, I learned the value of gestural painting and brush calligraphy. Being able to suggest detail without agonizing over it is the hallmark of advanced painting to me," he says. "Keeping some separation in mixtures adds the interest and complexity found in nature without defining it too literally. If bits of analogous color show up in a single stroke of a brush, that adds dimension and vitality to the work. You learn that stuff outside and repeat it in the studio if you want an outdoor feeling to a more finished painting. Spontaneity and risk are required outside. I want those same



Evening Arrival, oil on linen, 40 x 48"



Reading Sign, oil on linen, 30 x 36"



qualities in the studio. You just can't noodle outside. Why do it inside? I think too much detail sucks the life right out of a painting. Good picture-making is more about what you leave out than what you put in; therefore, if everything is spelled out, you leave the viewer's imagination disengaged. They become spectators rather than participants."

While Anton continues to push himself artistically, the artist worries little for the state of Western art, and more for the state of culture. "We seem bent on junking the past without regard to our future as we do it. When a society begins to think that 5,000 years of civilization had it all wrong, that it knows best as it leaps into restriction-free living, it tells me that hedonism and its attendant arrogance is alive and well in the 21st century," he says. "I know I am indebted to the wisdom and character of the past. I love what I do because it looks backward with admiration and respect. It is unashamed of American values. It honors the Creator. If there continues to be enough people who feel the same way, Western art will still thrive." ☞

Boys' Night Out, oil on linen, 36 x 36"