



## Bill Anton

**N**EARLY TWO DECADES AFTER HIS LAST ONE-MAN SHOW, ONE OF THE GREAT WESTERN ARTISTS OF THE day is finally doing another. And he's been holed up in his studio doing nothing but painting during the run-up to it.

Bill Anton has the kind of workspace we should all aspire to. Wide beams of northern light flood into the legendary Western painter's Prescott, Arizona, studio. Hundreds of models and figures—horses, cows, mountain ridgelines—pepper the airy 30-by-30-foot room. Stacks of sketches sit on a table. Leather-bound books line walls and shelves. There are a comfy couch and chair for visitors or if Anton just wants to sit and ponder his next subject. A cowboy roping a calf? A rancher at daybreak sizing up the weather?

It's an appropriately worked-in-leather vibe for an old-school artist. Anton eschews a lot of modern methods and what might be considered shortcuts, like the widespread use of computer technology to set up paintings. He still relies on sketches—phenomenal ones at that—to reference his work. And he sometimes simply sets up an easel outdoors to paint landscapes. “I just love to paint,” he says, revealing a lot of his secret to success.

Anton's respect for hard work and traditional techniques has long informed a catalog of work that might jokingly be described as ranging from cowboys and ranch hands to ranch hands and cowboys. In terms of subject matter, Anton is as focused as any painter on the market.

“He's the best at what he does—he's capturing what will be considered the history of today's working cowboy for many years to come,” says Brad Richardson, who, with wife Jinger, co-owns Legacy Gallery in Scottsdale, Arizona. “But what's most important to Bill is to allow the viewer to experience the mood and atmosphere of what those cowboys are experiencing. Bill's work is part of some of the great Western art collections of all time. One of the things [Legacy





Gallery] strives to do is represent art that will stand the test of time. Bill Anton's work will do that very thing."

Legacy Gallery only recently began representing Anton, but Richardson says he's been a fan and collector for many years. That's why he's ecstatic about hosting *Under the Spell of the West* this March.

"I have been asked to do [a one-man show] in recent years, but I've declined for many reasons," Anton says. "It's now the right time and the right place with the right guy."

Although Anton hints at surprises among the 20 or so paintings that will make up the show—"California ranching seascapes? Portraits?" he teases—the majority of the works will cover the classic themes and nostalgic techniques that have made the award-winning painter a true superstar of Western art. If you want to call a cowboy on horseback fording a stream at dusk with a dark thunderhead looming in the background a cliché, that's just fine with the good-natured and wisecracking Anton.

"It's all cool and it's all cliché and I don't care—I love it," he says, sounding more like a fresh-faced sophomore art student than a 35-year veteran of the trade.

"It's noble, elemental, emotional, and worthy of the brush. Seen TV lately? Western art is groundbreaking neurophysics by comparison."

Once you get him talking—not hard—it doesn't take long for Anton to get around to opinions on what he sees as the desultory direction of a lot of contemporary art.

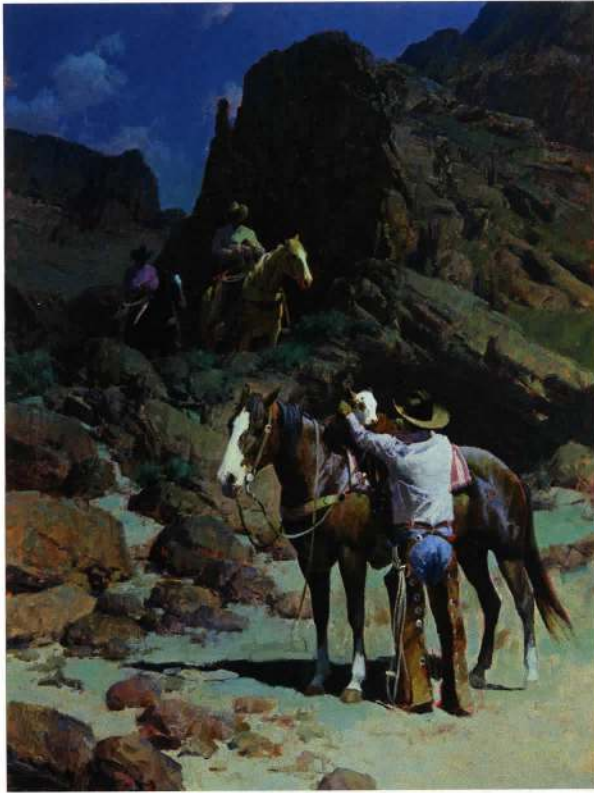
"I believe the sometimes-irrational need for innovation in 'modern art' is what drove it off the cliff into pseudointellectual nonsense," he says. "I'm more interested in 'better' than 'new.'"

"Willingness to honestly self-evaluate is critical to artistic growth," he told *Art of the West* magazine last year. "We just don't have that institutionally today. Everything anyone does is deemed valid; nonsense!"

As it has from the day he first became obsessed with the region's majestic landscapes—a childhood trip to Glacier National Park turned his head and changed his life—it's the grand scenery of the West that continues to form the foundation of Anton's work.

"The West has no competition in my mind," he says, allowing that other places have their merits. "The prairie teaches nuance. Back East teaches you everything you





didn't know about the color green."

Anton's other big show in 2019 will be the elite Prix de West at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City. For a man of Anton's discipline and singular focus, it's hard to imagine a more perfect venue.

"It's no secret that Native American subject matter and art has over the last 20 years become more sellable than cowboy subject matter," Richardson says. "Where a lot of his fellow artists have moved toward that more sellable subject matter, Bill has stood his ground and said, 'This is what I do.' I've always admired that."

So, too, have legions of fans.

—Chuck Thompson

Bill Anton's show *Under the Spell of the West* runs March 7–17 (artist reception March 9), at the Legacy Gallery in Scottsdale ([legacygallery.com](http://legacygallery.com)). Also see his work at Prix de West June 7–August 11 at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City ([nationalcowboymuseum.org](http://nationalcowboymuseum.org)). [billantonstudio.com](http://billantonstudio.com)

**OPENING PAGE:** *Afterglow.*  
**OPPOSITE:** *Shifting Shadows.*  
**THIS PAGE:** *Canyon Rescue.*

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