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# A City Girl in the Rural World

A horse-obsessed childhood and a journalist's eye help shape the artwork of Denver's Jill Soukup.

Essay by Elizabeth Train

Artwork by Jill Soukup

Jill Soukup has been drawing and painting horses since she was a little girl. The daughter of a veterinarian, she drew animals of all kinds as a young artist, but her true love was equine subjects. Even before Soukup became an artist full time (she made her living as a graphic designer for 11 years prior) she would seek solace by finding a field and sketching horses.

A full-time painter for the past 10 years, Soukup primarily explores city themes, western life, and what she refers to as “the architectural art of things” through her work. The structural elements in cityscapes and urban scenes influence the way she sees and paints organic forms, like horses, and she notes that her seemingly divergent subjects truly complement and enhance one another.

“*Purple Charge* and *In Stride* offer complex and dynamic compositions, which are in part influenced by complex architectural paintings I’ve done,” Soukup notes. “*Zapata Grays* was also inspired by my interest in architecture – in complex and linear elements.”

Over the past five years, Soukup’s work has evolved toward a nearly singular focus on ranching – specifically the animals that are central to the landscape and lifestyle of the West. She produces powerful renderings of

horses, cattle, bison and the ranchers who work with them, and her pieces range in size from tiny studies to life-sized works.

Though she’s careful to note that she doesn’t live a rancher’s life, Soukup paints the lifestyle with the insight of one who’s been deeply immersed in it. She sees herself as a journalist of sorts, recording the day to day of ranch life through her paintings. “I’m not a true cowgirl,” she admits. “I’ve never wrangled a calf...but I’ve been an observer.”

In fact, Soukup has spent the last 12 years of her life visiting the Chico Basin and Zapata ranches, participating in artist retreats there and, more recently, serving as an instructor and guiding other artists through the intricacies of capturing equine subjects on canvas. (Though she says she’s not a cowgirl, she’s spent a fair bit of time in the saddle along the way.)

“Just being there and taking part in the activities – moving cattle, bringing in the horses, riding, hanging out with the people who run the ranch – you feel how different that lifestyle is.”

On an emotional level, Soukup is drawn to what she describes as a “down-to-earth-ness, calmness, and don’t-sweat-the-small-stuff” quality she feels when





*Doubleback*



*Orange Repose*



*Fall Grazing Cow & Calf*

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spending time with ranching people and animals. She appreciates the contrast to her urban life in Denver, which she admits can sometimes feel frantic, neurotic, and out of touch with the bigger picture.

“I’m a city girl who gets to dip her toes in the rural world and bring it back to the city and share that with others. That’s my part.”

But really, at the heart, it’s about a girl’s love for horses. Soukup admits that her favorite time at the ranches is spent in the corrals, studying the horses – the way their ears move, their joints bend, their coats glow

in the sunlight – and taking images and sketches back to her studio, where she produces final paintings.

“I always wanted a horse of my own when I was little, and I couldn’t have one,” she muses. “I love the concept of being able to have a horse in our living room, especially one life-sized.”

Jill Soukup’s work can be seen at Saks Galleries in Denver, Colorado; Ann Korologos Gallery in Basalt, Colorado; Astoria Fine art in Jackson, Wyoming; and Eisenhower Gallery on Martha’s Vineyard. Upcoming exhibits of her work include:



*White Horse in Gray*



*Morning Bull*

**The Russell**

Exhibition and Sale, March 19-21  
CM Russell Museum, Great Falls, Montana

**Cowgirl Up: Art From the Other Half of the West**

Invitational Exhibition & Sale, March 20-May 3  
Desert Caballeros Western Museum, Wickenburg,  
Arizona

**The Renaissance of Realism**

National Symposium for Collectors, November 13  
Gallery 1261, Denver, Colorado

**Aviation of the American West**

Art Show & Auction Event, November 13-15  
Southwest Gallery, Dallas, Texas



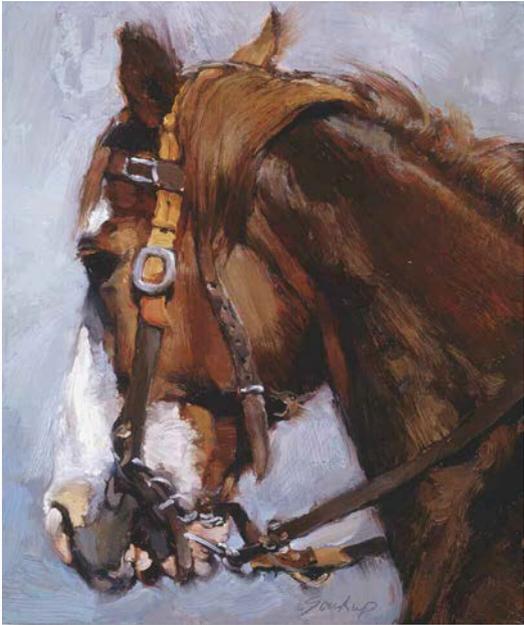
*Purple Charge*



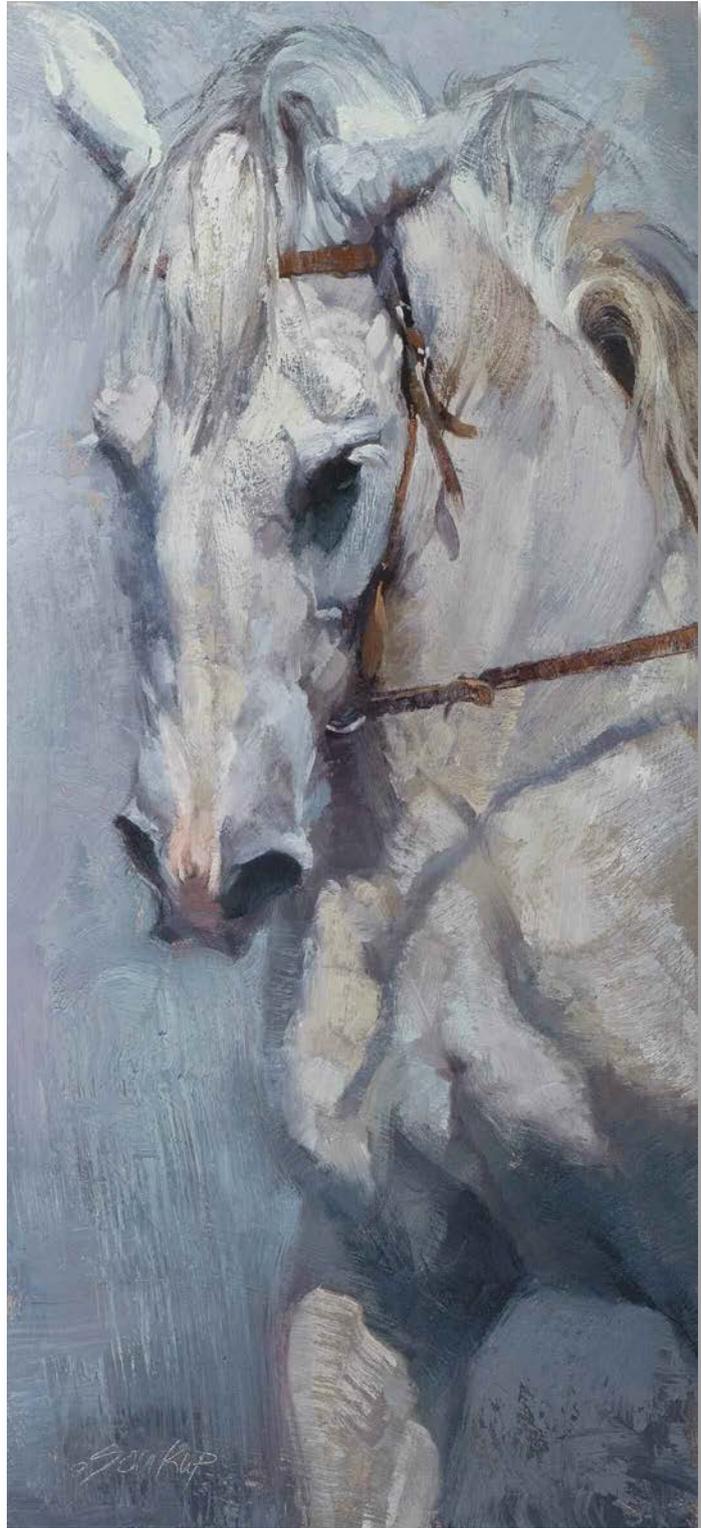
*In Stride*



*Saddling Up*



*Dashing Dandy*



*White Grip*



*Hold Steady*

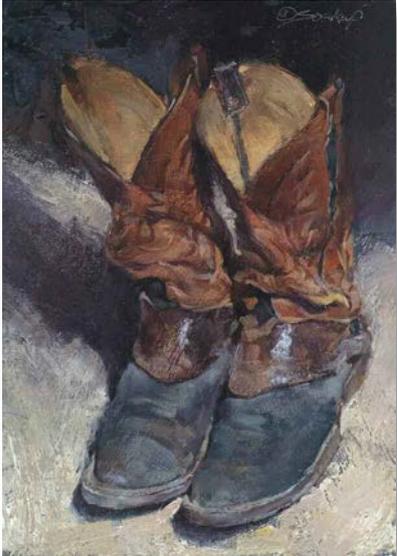




*Dark Passages*



*Bull Scratch*



*Boots Abiding*



*Zapata Grays*



*Coyote Trot*



<http://youtu.be/onOSUU8p22M>  
Saks Galleries produced this interview  
with Colorado artist Jill Soukup.

