



FINDING BEAUTY IN BALANCE



Sorrel saddle,
oil on canvas,
38½ by 32 inches



Adolescence itch, oil on canvas, 18 by 18 inches

PAINTER
JILL SOUKUP
DISCOVERS CREATIVITY IN
THE MIDST OF
CHAOS AND ORDER.

INTERVIEW BY **STEPHANIE PETERS**



Dark passages, oil on canvas, 10 by 14 inches



Saddling up,
oil on canvas,
30 by 30 inches



Backup, oil on canvas, 27½ by 14 inches



Jill Soukup was born in Buffalo, New York. Shortly thereafter, her family moved to Colorado, where she still resides. Her affinity for horses as a young girl resulted in countless drawings and studies of them, which developed into a strong drawing foundation. She graduated from Colorado State University in 1991 with a Bachelor of Fine Art degree. There, she received awards for illustration and design and worked as an illustrator and designer for the university. Following 11 years as a designer, she switched to full-time painting. Her work continues to gain recognition as she receives awards, appears in national publications, and shows in important juried and one-woman exhibitions.

Saddled dark horse, oil on canvas,
20 by 16 inches



Can you explain your creative interest in melding opposing elements on the canvas?

It's been a compulsion for a long time. I gather it's rooted in the concept of chaos and order and how the balance of these two equates to beauty. It's a quest to try to articulate this idea abstractly and visually.

What role does texture play on your canvases?

It's an important component of my work. It plays into the exploration of contrasts—busy versus calm or smooth versus rough, for example. I'm always looking for happy accidents and opportunities to introduce new textures. These serendipitous events might be a broken palette knife, a slip of the hand, or something I see or experience. As of late, I've been especially interested in what I can do with the various degrees of paint fluidity as it dries.

You are known for your sophisticated palettes and effective use of light. Has that been an evolutionary process for you?

Yes. Understanding color was particularly difficult for me. I had to work very hard to become halfway good at it. I'm still figuring it out. I'd discovered the book *The Art of Color* by Johannes Itten, and he writes about seven (surprise!) contrasts of color. It was largely through understanding these principles that I was able to move beyond my deficiencies. These ideas, as well as others, continue to fuel my interest in exploring color.

I read that intention is an integral component of your work. Is this something that germinates before you start a new piece?

Ah, "intention" is such a great word. Yes, it's what helps me to be a better artist—and person for that matter. It's my map for every painting. Each painting has specific intentions, such as a particular color combination or pushing the use of line. On a broader spectrum, all my work is a vehicle to explore the concept of balance between contrasts.

What are your favorite aspects of the Western ranch lifestyle?

Mostly it's the connection with the people, animals, and land that have been cultivated over the last 18 years. It's that sense of discovering new layers. The more that is peeled away, the more there is to explore.

Do you enjoy painting working horses and livestock more than sport horses?

Not necessarily. Initially, the majority of my opportunities to collect images and experiences were associated with Ranchlands' Chico Basin Ranch and Zapata Ranch, in Colorado. However, in 2019, I had the opportunity to go to the Calgary Stampede and was mesmerized by the draft horses and the chuckwagon race. A recent trip to Lexington, Kentucky's, Thoroughbred country has provided new inspiration, and I've got a local polo tournament opportunity coming up that I'm excited about. I suspect paintings from these adventures will emerge in the near future.

Your work seems to have broad appeal among collectors. Do you interpret the West in an intentional way?

I'm a suburban gal, so I can't say I understand ranch life other than what I see, learn, and experience when I visit locations such as Chico Basin and Zapata ranches. I'm an outsider looking in. Rather than an intention, it's more of a byproduct of the admiration, respect, curiosity, and awe I feel about Ranchlands. Perhaps that is, in part, the appeal?

Most of your human subjects are rarely gazing at the viewer. Can you explain why?

Keeping the figures vague allows the viewer to place their personalities or loved ones into the picture. There is an aspect of mystery with this as well and a manner of respect for their identity.

You described horses as aesthetic perfection in a *Denver Life* interview. What specifically earned horses your high praise?

They are the perfect balance of chaos and order!



Spring Branding, oil on canvas, 17 by 14 inches



Butters, oil on canvas,
24 by 32 inches



Spring scruff, oil on canvas,
34 by 16 inches



White approach, oil on board,
7 by 9 inches