

powerhouse women

Female artists shine in male-dominated Western art scene

A Woman to Watch



JILL SOUKUP IS just as happy painting a cow as she is a boat.

Known in Jackson for her oil paintings of horses and bison, some might be surprised to know Soukup also takes an interest in old factories, fire escapes and other urban scenes. "I feel a horse and city scene could inform each other," said Soukup, who lives outside Denver.

The crisscrossing brush strokes in a fire escape scene recently inspired several paintings of running horses, she says.

"That intricate pattern and break up of the background that the horses created—the inspiration came from the building and how that was broken up," she says.

Soukup, who started a pet portrait business as a teenager, earned her bachelor of fine arts from Colorado State University in 1991 but didn't start painting full time until 2002. Since then, she's been on a fast track to becoming just as accomplished as older female artists such as Nancy Glazier, said Greg Fulton, proprietor of Astoria Fine Art in Jackson.

The recession put a damper on sales at the Coors Western Art Exhibit & Sale in 2009, Fulton says, but Soukup wouldn't have noticed. Buyers put their names in artists' boxes for a chance to buy their works, and Soukup's boxes were filled to the brim. In a silent auction, known collectors bid up the prices on Soukup's art to two or three times what it was selling for in galleries, he says.

It's hard to classify Soukup's work, Fulton says. "She puts the paint on real thick and heavy," he says. "It's quite accurate to the animals, but it's also impressionistic at the same time."

Soukup has been influenced by the impressionist and abstract



Jill Soukup, left, uses thick paint to depict lifelike creatures with impressionistic style. This is "Bull Sway," a 48-by-80-inch oil.

movements, she says, but painting ultimately is a form of self-discovery. "I feel very much that painting is for anyone," she says. "It's a very individual form of expression."

Though she's never felt any discrimination as a woman painter, Soukup says she's jazzed that more and more women have been making names for themselves in the art world. By nature, women face choices when it comes to having a family and a career. "I really seriously never thought I'd have children because I really wanted to be a painter," says Soukup, who has a 3-year-old. "So here I am now. I'm a mom and still painting professionally."

And while her art career isn't supporting her family—at least not yet, she says, she's happy with where she's at. "I'm just grateful to be painting," she says.

Soukup will be included in the All Artist – Best of Astoria show from noon to 3 p.m. September 17, immediately following the Quick Draw during the Fall Arts Festival. The show will continue with a Sunday brunch from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. September 18.

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