

SUCCESS STORIES

catching up with artists we've featured over the years



▲ AND THE DOG JUMPED OVER THE MOON, MIXED MEDIA, 40 X 60.

Donna Howell-Sickles

Capturing contemporary western women

A 1930s postcard depicting a cowgirl on horseback with fire-engine-red lips first inspired native Texan Donna Howell-Sickles to paint women of the West. More than 30 years later, the artist is still fascinated with cowgirls—both the real and the mythological ones. Her signature bold and energetic works continue to capture the contemporary cowgirl's stories, strengths, and daily lives.

As this story was going to press, Howell-Sickles was preparing for a gallery show at Altamira Fine Art in Jackson, WY. And she has a long-term goal, too: completing a major remodeling project. She and her husband, John, are restoring five buildings situated in a row on the downtown square in Saint Jo, TX, a small town about an hour and a half northwest of Dallas-Fort Worth. "We are doing it because we love this place and it needs to be done," she says. "It's going to have quite an impact on the town." As part of the project, Howell-Sickles is opening a gallery to display her works as well as those of a few other artists. She describes the space as "small but elegant, in an 1889-ish building." The official grand opening for the gallery is on April 24. —**BONNIE GANGELHOFF**

First appearance in
Southwest Art: May 1991

Awards won since then: William E. Weiss Purchase Award, Buffalo Bill Art Show & Sale, 1993. National Cowgirl Hall of Fame Inductee, Fort Worth, TX, 2007.

Price change since then: "A 40-by-60-inch mixed-media piece on paper, unframed, was \$3,500. Today, the same thing would cost \$9,000."

How has your style or approach to your art changed since you first appeared in *Southwest Art*?

By that time in my career, I was already fixed on what I was doing. Between then and now—I speak the language better than I used to. But I don't think I have any remarkable style changes. I am still trying to capture fresh movement in my work.

Why are you drawn to contemporary western art? It's the world I live in. I'm a contemporary western woman.

What draws you to the cowgirl imagery? I think it's a good way to tell stories about the things I see as valuable to who we are as women. It's a good way to tell very old stories about the strengths of women in a very contemporary context, and in an accessible context.

What is your proudest accomplishment in art? I actually think I am proudest of having been inducted into the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame because of my body of work about the cowgirl.

Would you have done anything differently in your career? No. I love where I am. Every misstep along the way was part of the process.

What advice would you give to young artists just starting out? Just stay in your studio and do the work. It takes a lot of time and a lot of long hours to create enough work to become the artist you are capable of being. Ignore the naysayers and just do it. It's hard to stay in studio; you get lonely.

What motto do you live by? Well, every motto I live by sounds so hopelessly hokey. But one is: Joy is a deliberate choice that I make every day.

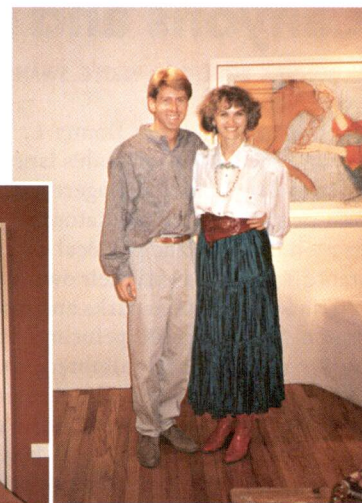
What are you working on now? I am working on a short series—six small sketches for bigger pieces. The series is called *A Walk in the Woods*. It's loosely about being on your own path and the areas that you go through that are fraught with danger. One piece shows some coyotes that are trailing on the heels of a walking woman. Then there is one where



▲ A LITTLE TOUCH OF MAGIC, ACRYLIC, 36 X 36.

a woman is climbing into a tree. The idea is that you have to go out on a limb every now and then. Another has a woman with a giant bear behind her. The bear stands for all those uncontrollable aspects of life. It's best to turn your back on them because it can be overwhelming. The pieces are going to a show in two weeks at Altamira Gallery.

What galleries represent your work? McLarry Fine Art, Santa Fe, NM; Altamira Fine Art, Jackson, WY; Insight Gallery, Fredericksburg, TX; Big Horn Galleries, Cody, WY, and Tubac, AZ; Davis & Blevins, Saint Jo, TX; Hayden Hays Gallery, Colorado Springs, CO. ❖



THEN AND NOW: DONNA HOWELL-SICKLES WITH GALLERY OWNER CHRIS McLARRY AT HER SOLO SHOW LAST FALL (LEFT) AND MANY YEARS AGO (TOP).