



Olaf Wieghorst
Bringing in the Strays, 1959
Oil on canvas, 1978.115

Bringing in the Strays



Olaf Wieghorst (1899–1988) While working on a stock farm at the age of 18, Wieghorst learned to ride horses and taught himself to paint. He had a particular fascination with the American West. Wieghorst joined the crew of a Dutch shipping vessel only to jump ship in New York City. He had very little money and didn't speak English, and quickly joined the U.S. Cavalry where he was stationed at the Mexican border as a horse-shoer. There he learned rodeo and trick riding, and continued to paint. Later he worked as a ranch hand in Arizona and finally as a member of the New York City mounted police force before his art began to sell in earnest. After retiring to California in 1944, Wieghorst produced the majority of his works. He is best known for his portraits of horses, painting Roy Rogers' Trigger and Gene Autry's Champion.

A product of its time

Throughout the 19th Century the landscape of the American western frontier changed drastically. Artists portrayed the stories of the people moving west as icons and heroes, and also tried to capture the beautiful landscape that was disappearing as more people settled and cities grew. Unlike some of his contemporaries, Wieghorst lived the scenes he painted, offering special insight. Cowboy, cavalryman, ranch hand and friend of the Indians, he roamed the West during its transition from open range to the modern world.

Take a closer look

The artist used atmospheric perspective, where colors grow muted the further they are from the viewer. Additionally, Wieghorst emphasized details, having once stated, "I try to paint the little natural things, the way a horse turns his tail to the wind on cold nights, the way he flattens his ears in the rain, seasonal changes in the coat of a horse, and psychology of his behavior. Horses have been my life."

Did you know?

President Ronald Reagan was an admirer of Wieghorst's work and said "From the opening of the American West until this present day, artists have sought to capture the rugged beauty, the drama and the romance of this unique part of our national heritage. None have been more successful than Olaf Wieghorst."

On your own

Taos and Santa Fe Painters: <http://www.olafwieghorstpaintings.com/>

National Museum of Wildlife Art: <http://www.wildlifeart.org/collection/artists/?artistid=483>

Wieghorst Western Heritage Center: <http://wieghorstmuseum.org/>