

Home Page:

Welcome to the Olaf Wieghorst Museum Foundation Website

The Foundation is dedicated to developing and nurturing the performing and visual arts through the preservation of the legacy of Olaf Wieghorst and the art and heritage of the American West. It is the intent of the Museum to become a valuable cultural and educational resource, reaching out to the community and schools to promote educational and art programs. Scholarships in the name of Olaf Wieghorst will be created for aspiring artists. Please join us in preserving our Western Heritage.

The Wieghorst Gallery displays and offers for sale a variety of western objects as well as fine lithographs of Olaf's treasured and immortal paintings. The Gallery sponsors occasional exhibits of works by other talented Western artists.

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History:

OLAF WIEGHORST

The talented painter known today as "The Dean of Western Art" had a lifelong love of horses and of the rugged individuals who helped shape the American West. Olaf's life and careers were intimately linked to horses. Born in Viborg, Denmark, on April 30, 1899, he was a stunt rider for a Danish circus before migrating to the United States at the age of 19. Arriving penniless from Denmark in 1918, he spent his working career on mounted patrol with the U.S. Cavalry and the New York City Police Department Mounted Division, with occasional interludes as a wrangler on ranches in the West. Wherever he went, he sketched and painted the Western culture he loved, often selling his work as calendar and magazine illustrations.

Wieghorst traveled the West extensively, gathering material for his paintings. On frequent visits to Indian reservations, he became familiar with the most prominent Western tribes. He insisted on authenticity in every detail of his work. While adhering to the Remington/Russell tradition, Olaf's work was based on his own experiences and reflected his emotional ties with the great Western landscapes. The Quarter Circle 2C brand which became his signature logo honored the Cunningham ranch near Alma, New Mexico, where Wieghorst worked as a cowboy in the early 1920s.

Retiring from the New York City Police Department in 1944, Wieghorst moved west with his wife, Mae, and their son, Roy, eventually settling in El Cajon in 1945. He bought a small house on open land south of the center of town and, with the help of friends, built a studio for himself, a stable and corral for his beloved horses. In 1951, he hung his first "Adobe Wall Art Exhibit" on the patio in front of his home.

Artistic Accomplishments

In his work, the artist recreated his memories of the country's vast and majestic landscapes, and of the multicultural people who lived and worked on the land. His focus was often the horse and he had the ability, as both artist and friend, to depict the powerful strength and character of the magnificent animals he portrayed. Skilled in a number of artistic techniques, Wieghorst painted in oil and watercolor, sculpted in bronze, etched in copper, and sketched in pen and ink. As his reputation grew, he was honored with a number of memorable exhibitions including the following:

1954 - "The Great American West", 28 paintings at the Grand Central Art gallery in New York City

1962 - "The West of Olaf Wieghorst" at the San Diego Museum of Art

1974 - Retrospective Exhibit at the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center in Oklahoma City.

2002 - San Diego Historical Society in Balboa Park

Additionally, the artist's work has been shown at major galleries and museums nationwide including the Maxwell Gallery, San Francisco; Camelback Gallery, Scottsdale, Arizona; Phoenix Museum of Fine Art; and Whitney Gallery of Western Art, Cody, Wyoming. Retrospective exhibits have been held at the Tucson Museum of Art and the Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

In 1982, the National Wildlife and Western Art Collectors Society honored Wieghorst as the Western Artist of the Year. That same year, Navajo Madonna, painted in 1962 and given to Mae, sold for a reported \$450,000. Three years later, the painting and its mate, Navajo Man, were purchased for a reported \$1,000,000 in a private sale. Famous private collectors of Wieghorst's art include U.S. Presidents Reagan, Ford, Nixon and Eisenhower; Senator Barry Goldwater, J. P. Morgan, Leonard Firestone, Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, Bing Crosby, John Wayne, Burt Reynolds and Clint Eastwood.

"When the time comes for me to put away my palette and unsaddle my pony for the last time," he said, "I hope that my canvases will in some small measure add to the historical recording of an era: the cowpony, the cowboy, and the Great American West."

Art:

- Apaches on the Trail- 1958 oil on canvas 24" x 30"
Rugged Central Arizona scenery is the background for the four Apaches on their ponies. Although the mountains dwarf the riders, the riders do not seem dominated by them, but rather in harmony, part of a somewhat harsh environment.

Olaf first became acquainted with Apache Indians when he worked as a cowhand in 1922 in Arizona and New Mexico. In later years he took sketching trips to the Apache Reservation in Northern Arizona.

- Big Bend Patrol- 1974 oil on canvas 24" x 30"
Olaf considered his years with the U.S. Cavalry, 1919 to 1922, among the most important and influential in shaping his artistic career. He frequently portrayed historic cavalry figures, the Indian scout, and the field-wise sergeant of the mid 1800s. He expressed his deep regret at the disbandment of the U.S. Cavalry in favor of the armored divisions by pointing out, "You can't fall in love with a Sherman Tank!"

The subject of this painting is drawn from Wieghorst's personal experiences patrolling the Mexican border. Although he served three years guarding against Pancho Villa's revolutionaries, the most he saw of them were their campfires across the Rio Grande.

- Buffalo Scout- 1968 oil on canvas 20" x 24"
This is one of Wieghorst's best known paintings. It is considered one of his finest and has been reproduced in magazine articles and as a limited edition print.

This is a Plains Indian waiting patiently for the sighting of a buffalo herd. His tribe's livelihood depends upon a successful hunt. The time frame is the early 1880s when the herds were already being decimated by white hunters.

Olaf spent many summers on ranches in Montana sketching and gathering background information. A Paiute Indian, Joe Galvin, posed for this painting.

- Caballero- 1965 oil on canvas 20" x 24"
Wieghorst liked to paint scenes set at different times of day: early morning with the sun not yet up, mid-day when there are no shadows, sunset skies, and the dark of night. Achieving the correct lighting effects were a challenge to him. He often painted nocturnal scenes of his favorite subjects, cowboys, Indians and horses.

"Caballero" translates from Spanish as "gentleman rider." The Spanish were the first cattlemen of the New World. Many of the techniques used by cowboys today were passed down from them.

The adobe building in the background of this tranquil night scene is Wieghorst's first home and studio in El Cajon, California.

- Desert Trail- 1954 oil on canvas 24" x 30"

Wieghorst enjoyed trail riding and was a member of "Los Charros del Desierto" a Tuscon, Arizona based men's riding group that holds an annual trail ride in Southern Arizona.

- Rocky Mountain Trail- 1981 oil on canvas 24" x 30"

Wieghorst described this painting as a cowhand packng down from the high summer range after the first snow had fallen.

- The Trail West- 1962 oil on canvas 24" x 30"

One of Wieghorst's historical paintings showing settler's wagons' inching their way West. The focal point is the Indian guide who is pointing out the way to the wagon boss.

The painting was given to the Rabilbakker American Historical Museum in Jutland, Denmark. The outside of the frame was originally decorated with sand from Arizona, New Mexico and Texas.

With Wieghorst's permission it was sold some years later for one million Danish Kroner to create a fund to support the Museum.

Membership:

Mission Statement

The Olaf Wieghorst Museum Foundation is dedicated to developing and nurturing the performing and visual arts through the preservation and enhancement of the legacy of Olaf Wieghorst and the art and heritage of the American West.

Your membership provides important financial support to help us implement our mission. We currently have a group of dedicated individuals working to restore the relocated Wieghorst home in downtown El Cajon and to complete the Museum and Western Heritage Center complex. With your help we will be able to make available to everyone the joy and excitement of fine Western American art while also providing a fascinating and educational look at our history.

Olaf Wieghorst Museum Foundation Levels of Giving

\$5,000 or more - Corporate Patron
\$1,000 to \$4,999 - Patron
\$500 to \$999 - Pioneer
\$200 to \$499 - Buffalo Scout
\$100 to \$199 - Adventurer
\$25 to \$99 - Sustaining Member

As an added incentive, the Foundation's Board of Directors is pleased to offer several items in appreciation of your support:

Donations of \$150 or more - receive a copy of the video produced by Roy and Barbara Wieghorst and shown on PBS television. It contains lengthy interviews with Olaf and friends, and provides a remarkable opportunity to watch the artist at work.

Donations of \$300 or more - receive a long-sleeve denim shirt with the "OW Quarter Circle 2C" brand which became the signature logo on Olaf's artwork.

Donations of \$500 or more - receive a copy of the recently published "A Collector's Guide to the Prints of Olaf Wieghorst" written by Arizona author and collector James Drye

All membership fees are tax-deductible donations to the Olaf Wieghorst Museum Foundation a non-profit organization as defined in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Tax I.D. number 33-0799944.