



HEATHER FOSTER

Heather Foster's unabashedly closeup depictions of her animal subjects in a recent series of paintings render them at once charming and amusing. Her clever compositional approach does nothing short of grab the viewer from a distance. But once viewers come closer, it's the invitation to truly observe how the paint was applied, in a painstaking process of building layers and scraping others away, that draws them in. Foster first moved to Santa Fe when a side trip while en route to Arizona became a permanent stay. "Our van died on the hill approaching town.... In retrospect, what then seemed troublesome turned out to have a good outcome," says the artist, a former East Coaster who earned her bachelor of fine arts degree at the Maryland Institute College of Art. Several years ago, Foster switched from oils to acrylic, but the key in either medium, she says, is "the layering, refining and developing of the painting on the canvas."

Q&A

What inspired this painting?

The inquisitive personality and quirky spirit of this wonderful horse. We met at the Santa Fe Rodeo. She was insatiably curious, and her velvety nose was like a soft, warm hand greeting a new visitor.

What was your greatest challenge in making it?

There is always a debate in my mind, as I work through a painting, about how much detail various areas should have. When I feel I have overworked a section, I then back-pedal a bit and paint it out with a simplified block of color. Finding the balance I desire, between finer detail and simplified brushstrokes, is usually my greatest challenge.

What is your favorite part of this piece?

The scale in combination with the exaggerated and distorted features bring out the character of the horse. For me, I can recall that meeting and feel the horse's breath puffing from her nose.

How does it relate to your other paintings?

I have been painting mostly cattle for the past few years. Although this painting is different in its specific subject, it is similar to my other work in its technique and style and also its intent to capture the attitude of an animal with a little humor.

What does this painting mean to you?

I hope it tells a bit of a story about this horse and gives her the respect she is entitled to. It exemplifies how I see the world and how I feel about animals with the scale and space they merit.