



Andy Mast

MOST PEOPLE USE PENCILS MAINLY TO SCRIBBLE THE GROCERY LIST. NOT ANDY MAST. IN THE hands of this 25-year-old master, the ordinary instrument becomes an extraordinary tool. Working exclusively with pencil to express “his soul and life experience,” the Westcliffe, Colorado-based artist says his ultimate goal is for the painstaking details in his drawings to offer hope and strength to people who are struggling and suffering.

You might call his mission artistic equine therapy, because his healing subject matter is almost exclusively horses.

The youngest of five siblings, Mast grew up in a traditional Amish community in rural Illinois working long hours farming fields with the family’s broodmares. (The mares and the family stallion, Zeus, are the subjects of many of his drawings.) “I recall long days in the field, coming in after sundown and I’d sketch into the night by lantern while the rest of the family was asleep. Although I was worn-out after my day’s work, drawing brought me peace.” By his teenage years, Mast was entering his drawings in contests—and winning.

Then on a bitterly cold January day when he was 17, Mast suffered a life-changing accident. “I was alone, leading a horse to pasture, when something happened that I can neither remember nor explain. My father discovered me unconscious on top of a mangled steel gate. I had serious head injuries and had to be life-flighted to a hospital in St. Louis.”

He remained in a coma for several days and underwent two surgeries. “Over the course of the next five years, my health increasingly deteriorated to the point that I was not only incapable of performing any physical labor on the farm, but was also unable to participate in [Amish] community functions. The worst of it was when I got so weak that I was unable to draw. Until that point, drawing was my solace and sanctuary and the only thing that provided any relief or distraction from my struggle. But when my drawing was taken from me, I was devastated.”

It was during this very dark period that Mast conceptualized what would become his personal masterpiece and symbolic expression of his battle back to life: *A Long Day*. For the next year and a half—nearly 300 hours—he worked on it. “The reason this scene moved me was because of all the darkness that represented the tribulation I was experiencing. The minimal amount of light, I felt so keenly in my own life. I envisioned myself as the cowboy:



His posture is stooped and suggestive of my own exhaustion and illness. Although tired after his day’s work, the cowboy is still dedicated and has a job to do. In my darkness, it would have been easier to give up. But somehow it felt like I had to work to get better and to stay dedicated to my recovery. The dim light beam faintly shining down on the cowboy and his horse matched my own dim ray of hope.”

The horse’s power and expression are the soul of the drawing. “Amid all the darkness and exhaustion, its body is strong and full of life and is wrapped around the weary cowboy almost as if embracing him. The eye exemplifies the incredible strength I pulled from this horse to get through those tough times. I hope my work will offer encouragement to people who are going through turbulent, dark times in their own lives.”

His signature piece would go on to win 1st place at the Old West Museum’s Western Spirit Art Show & Sale in Cheyenne, Wyoming. More recently, at the 20th annual Art for the Sangres last September, he sold out on opening night and buyers snapped up all 10 of his pieces by the close of the show, a record-breaking testament not only to the growing demand for his work but also to the possibility of recovery through willpower, resilience, and healing hard work. —Deanne L. Joseph

Find Andy Mast’s limited-edition prints for sale at www.yodersmountainviewfurniture.com (under “Home Décor”). Contact his business, *Pencil Passions*, at 618.246.2964. His oversize piece *Best Friends* will be auctioned at the 28th annual *Air Works Consignment Auction* (330.317.9259, www.airworksauktion.com) at 8 p.m. EST, February 17, in Mt. Hope, Ohio. Bid online through *AuctionZip* (www.auctionzip.com, auctioneer ID 40052). You can also find Mast’s work at the *Western Spirit Art Show & Sale* in Cheyenne, Wyoming (March 4–April 16, 2017).

OPPOSITE: *Spirit of the Valley*. **THIS PAGE:** *A Long Day*.