



# Pencil Passion

## Artist Andy Mast

by Lynn Telleen

Our industry is full of surprises that never cease to amaze. For example, who'd know that Jonathan Cush was a maestro pianist; Jack Bellamy could whip anyone on "Dancing With The Stars;" Gerald Wismer could belt out the Canadian and American National Anthems with the best of them; Bruce Roy is a veritable curling phenom; or that Nelson Schrock is an architectural virtuoso when it comes to building chicken coops?

Well, here's another one ...

Not unlike so many Amish families in the Midwest, the Mahlon Mast Family of Belle Rive, Illinois, is a hard-working tight-knit clan that pulls together at their chosen vocation of farming. Besides using draft horses to this end, they also breed a few

under the "Goshen Trail Percherons" banner. The Masts have a handful of broodmares along with their own stallion, Vintage Lazarus Zeus (1st place stud foal at the 2006 World Percheron Congress). Occasionally, they consign a horse to public auctions like Gordyville, Lansing or Madison. Goshen Trail D. Boone topped the stallion offering at East Lansing in 2006, selling for \$12,000; Goshen Trail Duane sold for \$8,000 at the 2007 Gordyville Sale; and Goshen Trail Hank sold for \$7,500 at the same venue in 2004, to name a few of the

family's highlights.

Mahlon and Mary have five kids (one girl and four boys). The youngest of the litter is Andy, who is a bit of curiosity as he possesses an undeniable talent for drawing with a graphite pencil. Where the ability comes from, he cannot say, though he admits that his maternal great-grandfather was a sign painter and calligrapher. Regardless, anyone that saw his sketch of Pleasant View King that was auctioned off at the 2010 World Percheron Congress banquet can attest to his skill level.

**The sketch hunter moves through life as he finds it,  
not passing negligently the things he loves,  
but stopping to know them,  
and to note them down  
in the shorthand of his sketchbook.**

—Robert Henri

Today, Andy is making inroads into the world of Western Art. That's a tough gig, likely made more so by the fact that this 24-year-old Amish man has had no formal training. His journey is as intriguing as is his art.

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Andy says that for him, there was no "introduction" to either art or sketching. "When people ask me how long I've been drawing, my answer usually is 'All my life', because I really can't remember a time I wasn't drawing. Drawing is among my first memories. Even before I went to school, I was always doodling and scribbling everywhere—on scrap paper, cardboard or whatever I could find. Even the big white walls in our house beckoned as blank canvases and targets for my pencils.

"My mother says I never was satisfied with toys as a youngster. Pencils, paper and crayons were what I was drawn to. The tablets Mother purchased for herself always ended up being filled with my sketches. As a child, I didn't associate drawing with talent. It was just what I did, wanted to do and dearly loved doing. I couldn't envision myself doing anything else. It always felt like a part of me.

"Later in my school years, however, I had this deeper feeling and relationship with my pencil. I recall sitting in the classroom thinking that someday, I will make my living as an artist ... although, back then, I didn't have a clue how I'd do it.

"As a teenager, after I completed 8th grade and graduated from our parochial school, I was busy on our horse farm, but my desire to draw



**Andy's drawing of Pleasant View King was one of the highlights auctioned at the 2010 World Percheron Congress as a fundraiser. It was purchased by the horse's owners, Chad & Rhonda Cole.**



never diminished. I recall long days of hauling manure, coming in after sundown and I'd sketch into the night while the rest of the family was asleep. Although tired and worn out after my day's work, drawing brought me peace."

In 2009, Andy's first attempt to draw a human being—something he'd read was the most difficult to master—was a portrait of Abraham Lincoln. He entered the piece in a

regional museum competition open to all artists and brought home an Honorable Mention for his work. "At a time when I was seeking guidance, it was extremely gratifying and humbling to have my work validated by professionals. Up until that point, I'd had no one to tell me right from wrong, good from bad." It served as a confidence builder, and kept him on the path towards more art.

"My family has been raised on farms for generations, so we country folk really knew

nothing about art, although we all admire it," he explains. "It was when I actually started producing this level of work, entering museum competitions and exhibitions and having a small taste of success as a teenager, that my parents realized I was seriously pursuing my passion.

"I'm fortunate how my parents, family and friends have supported me through the years, however, the folks around me didn't know anything about the art world—nor did I. So I was on my own as far as developing what I do. It was a humble beginning, starting from the ground up. It was an evolving struggle. I went through a period when I literally craved to learn more, but there was no one in my surroundings that could offer constructive criticism. With little or no instruction or leadership in art in our rural community, I had to explore, seek and find on my own without the convenience of electricity and/or the Internet. So my art education is as raw as my medium."

#### **TURNING POINT**

Seven years ago (2009), Andy was incapacitated from a serious accident



**"Dream Team"**

**This team of horses symbolizes the strength, power, compassion, harmony, unity, love and grace that Andy felt from his loved ones during his illness. The original will have just sold at the Air Works Consignment Auction in Mt. Hope, OH, on February 19.**

involving a horse. He was alone at the time and cannot to this day explain what happened or how it happened. Mahlon discovered him with head injuries atop a mangled steel gate in freezing temperatures. Andy was life-flighted to St. Louis, where he remained unconscious for two days. A myriad of health issues ensued, resulting in two surgeries.

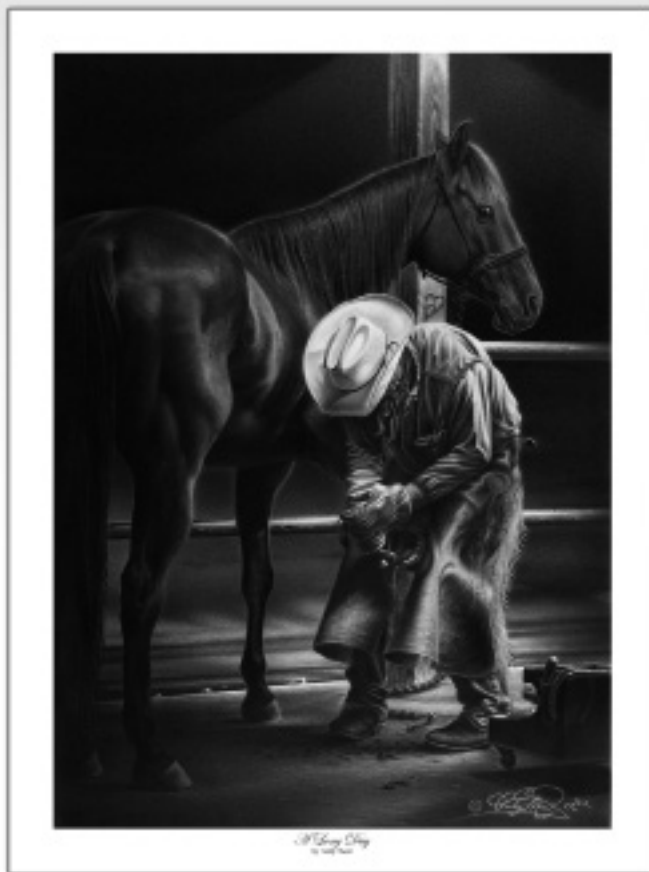
Over the next five years, Andy was incapable of performing any physical labor, and drawing became, as he terms it, his "sanctuary." However, his health deteriorated to the point where he could no longer draw for a period of time.

"I was devastated," Andy recalls. "The going was rough and my world was dark. I had lost all hope. It's when the concept of 'A Long Day' was born, based on a real scene, yet also in relation to what I was going through." Because of his extreme debilitation, the piece took Andy over a year-and-a-half to complete.

"The reason this scene moved me was because of all the darkness that seemed to represent the tribulation I was living through," he relates. "Its minimal amount of light, I felt so keenly with my own life. For days, I would go into the studio to undertake this work in progress, but I lacked the strength.

"I envisioned myself as the cowboy. His posture is stooped and suggestive of my own exhaustion and illness. Although tired and worn after his day's work, the cowboy is still dedicated and has a job to do. This concept I felt in relation to my own experience. In darkness, it would've been easier to give up ... nevertheless, 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 in life.

"The expression of the horse is the soul of this work. Among all the darkness and exhaustion, the horse's body is erect and full of life. He seemed to be bubbling with energy. His body wraps around the weary cowboy almost as if embracing him. The eye of the horse, the most impor-



**"A Long Day"**

**This piece received an Award of Merit at the Cedarhurst Center for the Arts' Annual Fine Art Competition in 2013 and placed first at the Old West Museum's Western Spirit Art Show.**

tant of all, exemplifies the incredible amount of strength I pulled from to get through those tough times.

"The carving and the post stands in fond memory of a true friend I made during my illness. The title not only indicates the cowboy's 'Long Day', but also my lengthy recovery and this work's lengthy completion."

Van Gogh had his seizures; Michelangelo his obsessive

**"The eyes of my horses  
feel like  
windows to my soul."**

**—Andy Mast**

compulsive disorder; and Picasso his clinical depression. Whether it was cathartic or simply unfortunate for Andy, no one can say, but as his condition continued to improve, he emerged more resolute and determined about his art. In turn, the mood and mes-

sage of his works began to reflect hope and opportunity. "Because of how I've struggled both physically and emotionally," he reflects, "I have a yearning to bring a message of hope and peace to others who experience difficulty in life."

Andy continued to push the boundaries of what he knew about art, to self-evaluate and to experiment, all the while producing more drawings. The common denominator through all of it, was (and remains) his preferred subject matter. "I was raised simple and therefore, it's the simple things in life that speak to me, mean a lot to me—and that I appreciate. At a very young age, I went to church in a horse-drawn buggy (still do, actually). We farmed with horses, we made our living with horses. We depended on them and our life was wrapped around them. Our Amish lifestyle wouldn't be possible without them. Being around horses as a child, I developed a kinship with them that, in later years, has become my passion.

"Whenever I was inspired to create art while growing up, it

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**"Spirit Unbroken"**

**Andy says their stallion Zeus was the perfect model to express his feelings of anticipation and optimism.**



*Pencil Passion continued*

was always connected with horses. Having always been around them, I never imagined, dreamed or envisioned of drawing anything else. Horses are a part of me."

**ARTIST'S PROOF**

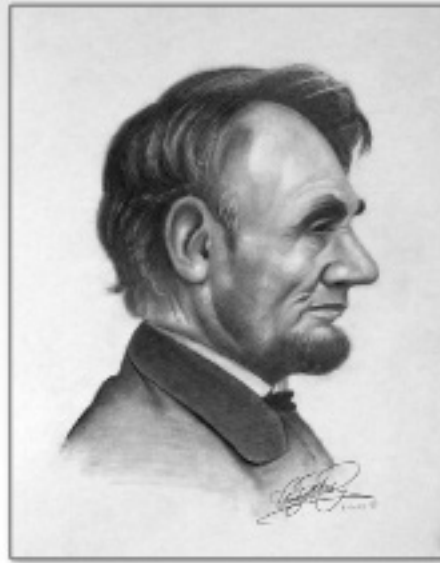
With newfound confidence and optimism, Andy entered the Cedarhurst Center for the Arts' Annual Fine Art Competition, in nearby Mt. Vernon, Illinois, winning various awards four of five years. "I developed a good relationship with the museum," he says. "One of the directors approached me about doing a one-man show with my work in one of their galleries. Having one entire gallery dedicated to my work was a bit intimidating, however, the director had confidence in me, which helped. While a bit skeptical at first, I ended up making the commitment.

"For a year I worked toward this endeavor, which opened in January 2014. Being quite renowned and 'the go-to place' for art in southern Illinois, it was certainly another honor for me, as well as a milestone in my career. Opening night was one of their best attended. The Museum

also wanted me to give a 'gallery talk' explaining the stories behind my works as well as my approach to art. I suffered the biggest and worst case of stage fright you could imagine.

"Later, the director informed me what a success and smash hit it was, with the best attendance she had experienced for a presentation. It was extremely humbling, yet gratifying to see audience members with tears in their eyes.

"This taste of success gave my confidence a significant boost, so I applied to the Old West Museum in Cheyenne, Wyoming, for the juried process of their Western Spirit Art Show & Sale." This venue is a great opportunity for emerging artists, one



**"Honest Abe"**

When he was just 17, Andy's portrait of Abraham Lincoln received an Honorable Mention in a regional museum competition.

that can serve as a stepping stone. But one still has to get there. "You only get on their wall if you get selected," Andy continues. "The museum houses some of the finest western artists in their permanent collection—artists whom I greatly admired."

To his surprise, Andy received an invitation.

"In March 2014, I traveled out to Cheyenne via Amtrack to pursue my passion, take a plunge into the

Western Art world and, most importantly, to attend my first art show of this level. This event was open to all artists across the country—getting accepted was a big deal to me. Having my work in such a venue was overwhelming.

"Opening night, when the award



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winners were announced, was the day after my 23rd birthday. My accident had taken a toll on my courage to socialize with the general public, especially large groups of people. I withdrew myself from publicity and crowds. Representing my work in such a venue was very intimidating. Not only was my work front and center for appraisal by professionals, but I, myself as an individual and artist, was as well. But when I heard my name as the first place winner in drawing for 'A Long Day', my knees buckled. I couldn't believe it—I thought I was dreaming. I thought such things only happened to other people. I was so humbled and overwhelmed, and the feeling of validation and acceptance was beyond words. The support and fellowship with other artists was incredible."

Besides being a morale builder, Andy learned how essential networking and socializing with fellow artists actually was to a beginner. He now had access to knowledge and other resources that he'd been lacking.

He returned to the show again in March 2015, and though he did not win the top award this time, he gained even more valuable experience. The doors to the show opened at 6 p.m., and by 6:02, Andy had already sold a piece of his art!

The Old West Museum also hosts an even more prominent art show

each summer during the Cheyenne Frontier Days. The Governor's Show exhibits some of the top names in the Western Art world. "My goal is to build a good relationship with the Museum, and try to be successful and patient," says Andy. "Perhaps someday I'll be fortunate enough to get in. I know I have museum staff and members rooting for me."

While in Colorado last summer, Andy stayed in the town of Westcliffe, which is home to the Sangre de Cristo Art Guild. He entered "Carefree Canter" a drawing of one of his family's mares, S.G. Rosie Lyn, and her 2010 foal, Goshen Trail Smokey, in the 2015 Sangre de Cristo Art Guild's Summer Show, winning First Place. Capping off the summer, he released his first series of limited editions, of which prints are now available.

#### CHOSEN MEDIUM

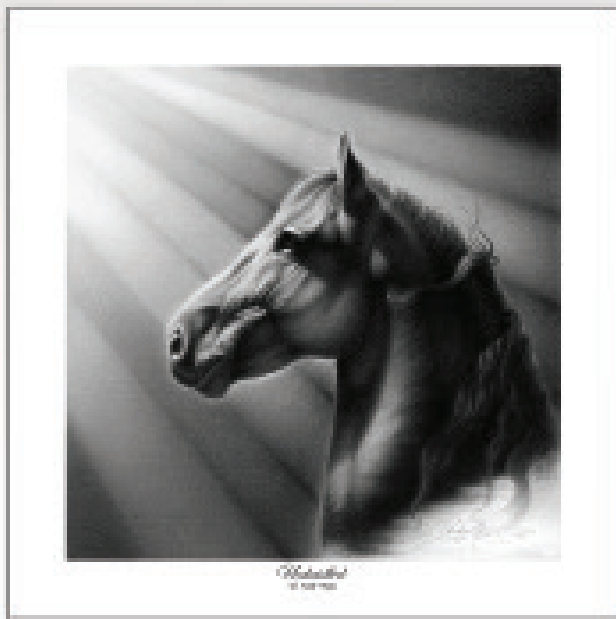
As with the breed of horse every horseman decides upon, the medium an artist prefers or excels at (or hopefully both) can be a complex, easy or even unconscious choice. There are simply an endless number of

choices, from oil paints to ceramics to wood to metals. Each artist has to follow his own path.

The oil paintings of Tim Cox, member of the Cowboy Artists of America, have been an inspiration to Andy for many years. "His paintings have inspired, captivated, motivated and healed me for years," Andy affirms. Perhaps out of admiration for Tim, Andy tried oil and acrylic paints, but says, in the end, the experience only tipped the scales back toward his pencil. "I draw with graphite pencils because they are simple and straight forward," he explains. "It's just the pencil, the paper and me. It's a very common tool that everyone has used, and to which everyone can relate."

As for his method, it too, is very personal. "I often witness something simple that touches my heart, such as a mare's affection toward her foal, the light in a stallion's eye or a horse's mane blowing in the breeze. I am often inspired by light—it is so important to me and I strive to use it to represent spirituality" he says. "My process is a journey. From con-

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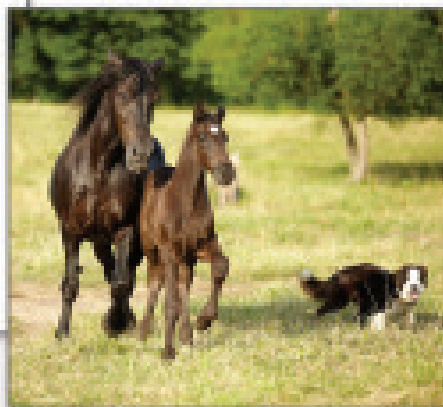


Andy completed "Unbridled" as he was recovering from his long illness. The scene shows their stallion Zeus as the clouds open allowing rays of sunshine to blanket him.



"Carefree Canter"

Andy won a first place award at the 2015 Sangre de Cristo Art Guild's Summer Show in Westcliffe, CO, with this piece. It features his family's mare S.G. Rosie Lyn and her foal. His goal was to capture the freedom that both mare and foal enjoyed.



Rosie and Goshen Trail Smokey, the subjects featured in his drawing.

cept to completion, it takes months, if not longer." Andy's largest work to date, "Best Friends" which is 24" x 30", represents over 320 hours at the drawing board, in addition to countless hours of research in the field. "There is so much inside me waiting to happen," he concludes.

So does he have a favorite sketch that he's completed? "There are certainly favorite features in all of my works. I loved doing them all. Singling one out isn't easy because they are all, in essence, a part of me. When I reflect upon the process of each one, my personal feelings to each and what they mean to me—from all angles—I would have to say 'A Long Day' was the most fulfilling and rewarding—not because of a methodical process where everything clicked, but because it's a real reflection of what I was going through at that time.

"I've received a lot of wonderful compliments over the years, along with a lot of encouragement. The one that stands out in my mind, however, was when a lady bought 'A Long Day' for her brother, a blacksmith, as a Christmas gift. The family wanted to hang it in the family room so everyone could see it, but this lady's brother firmly said, 'No. I will hang it in my bedroom, right in front of my bed so it's the last thing I see before I close my eyes each night ... and the first thing I see when I open them each morning.'

"This compliment is very touching to me. I've never forgotten it."

#### STATE-OF-THE-ART

To date, Andy has sold his drawings to buyers in the U.S., Mexico, Canada and Germany. His current work in progress, consisting of a spirited Morgan stallion, already has a waiting list of buyers who can't seem to wait until it's completed. An enthusiastic fan base isn't a bad thing for a young artist, nor are realistic goals.


"While I have my sights set on a few things ahead, such as Cheyenne's summer Governor's Show at the Old West Museum," he says, "for the most part, I want to leave it up to God and see where he leads me. He has really blessed me with success thus far, so I want to depend on Him for the remainder of my journey."

Another of Andy's goals has been to make his living entirely from his art. Realizing what a big step this is, he says, "Any full-time professional artist at some point, took the plunge, letting go of a part-time job or other form of supplemental income. It's not an easy thing to do. I'm rounding that curve, coming to a crossroads in my career—one that will require significant decisions in the near future." Having recently given up a part-time job, he is, already, at that point. "I feel this is my life's calling—my mission on earth," he maintains.

Art has been described simply as a way of looking at the world. It's clear that Andy Mast's perception of his world has changed, and continues to change. "The older I get, the broader my visions in art become," he permits. "I think an important part of my artwork is to draw what I live, and the fact that I live what I draw. While living in Colorado this summer, I collected a lot of inspiration. I delight in opportunities to ride with cowboys and to assist with their work of caring for, sorting, driving and trailing cows. Living it is essential.

"I hope it's evident in my work that I don't draw from romanticized notions, but from real life experiences and familiar settings—that relate to my own physical lifestyle, admiration and association with horses—how I see them, know them and work with them. I hope to stir deep emotions in the viewer, to relate to them and to share that common bond we, as horse people, have. I also love and appreciate nature and wildlife, but the spirit of the horse is what remains in my heart and soul. The horse is definitely what my work is about."

If the purpose of visual art is to elicit emotional, social or intellectual responses from those that view it, then Andy Mast has the right formula. He understands the intrinsic value of it, that it matters.

"People often ask how I refer to my work because they think it seems like more than just a drawing ... yet, it's not a painting ... the best I know, it's simply passion from the point of my pencil." 

To contact the artist, write Andy Mast  
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