

**P**aul Van Ginkel is a self-proclaimed city guy. But when you live in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, home to the largest rodeo event in the world, you can't help but be attracted to the cowboy way of life. Paul moved to Calgary as an impressionable 13-year-old, and one Calgary Stampede was all it took to instill a lifetime of inspiration and a passion for creating western-themed art.

These days, Paul paints everything from nudes and travel scenes to American Indians and cowboys, though he's most known for his horses. His work is well-respected throughout the western art community and has earned him invitation-only access to events such as the Calgary Stampede art show, the Artists' Ride in South Dakota and Mike Hanley's Stagecoach photo shoot.

"Horses are breathtakingly extraordinary," Paul says of his favored subject. "The combination of the wildness of their manes and tails, muscle structure and profound dignity make the animal a joy to paint."

Paul's interest in horses stems not only from the animal's aesthetics, but also its heritage. He appreciates the horse's importance and significance throughout the history of civilization, as well as the animal's role in society today. With an affinity for the old, Paul is equally fascinated by cowboy and American Indian themes, finding much of his inspiration for them from the Calgary Stampede experience.

"Seeing the Indians as a young boy, I was fascinated by the way they looked — their faces and colorful regalia with the wonderful feathers and beads", Paul recalls. "But it was also what they represented. With the cowboys and Indians it's that ruggedness, quiet pride and respect for nature and animals."

## INSPIRATION

"There's an endless supply of inspiration and ways in which to paint the horse," Paul says. "Whether it be alone and dignified; or in a powerful, charging herd; or a gigantic composition of more than 100 standing united."

Though Paul has never owned a horse, he's enchanted with their energy and presence. "They're just intoxicatingly beautiful," Paul adds.

The horses themselves inspire Paul to get to his easel, but once he gets there it's the sheer joy of painting that propels him forward. "There are always 100 images swirling around in my head waiting to get painted," he says. "There's simply never enough time to paint. Sometimes I think about an image for more



**"Horsing Around," oil 48" x 72"**

than five years before I actually paint it."

Paul also finds inspiration in the works of other artists he admires and returns to time after time. "I have my own favorite painters," Paul says. "Some of my favorites include John Singer Sargent, Diego Velazquez and Frans Halls."

In addition, Paul primarily relies on his own life experiences and travel. "I'm changing and evolving as a human — so will my art," he adds.

Paul pursues photo shoots to create a bank of ideas from which to draw. He's attended the invitation-only Artists' Ride near Wall, South Dakota, the location for the filming of Kevin Costner's epic "Dances With Wolves." The event allows artists to photograph reenactments of various western-themed scenes and situations, including cowboys, ranchers, mountain men and American Indians. With approximately 25 models at their disposal, artists are able to shoot literally thousands of images for future use.

Paul also attended Mike Hanley's Stagecoach photo shoot in Oregon's Jordan Valley where artists photographed vintage late-1800s coaches and western lifestyles. Complementing this pool of western imagery, Paul has also photographed a herd of 200 Spanish mustangs near Sundance, Wyoming.

"I have thousands and thousands of photographs for the sole purpose of inspiring paintings," Paul says. "However, the photographs are a starting point and for reference only. What I primarily try to capture is the moment and the memory of being in these situations. Therein lies the emotion and power of the painting."

## ENERGY AND EMOTION

A full-time painter the past 10-plus years, Paul averages about 90 paintings a year. Much of his work is done in series of more than 20 canvases. Currently