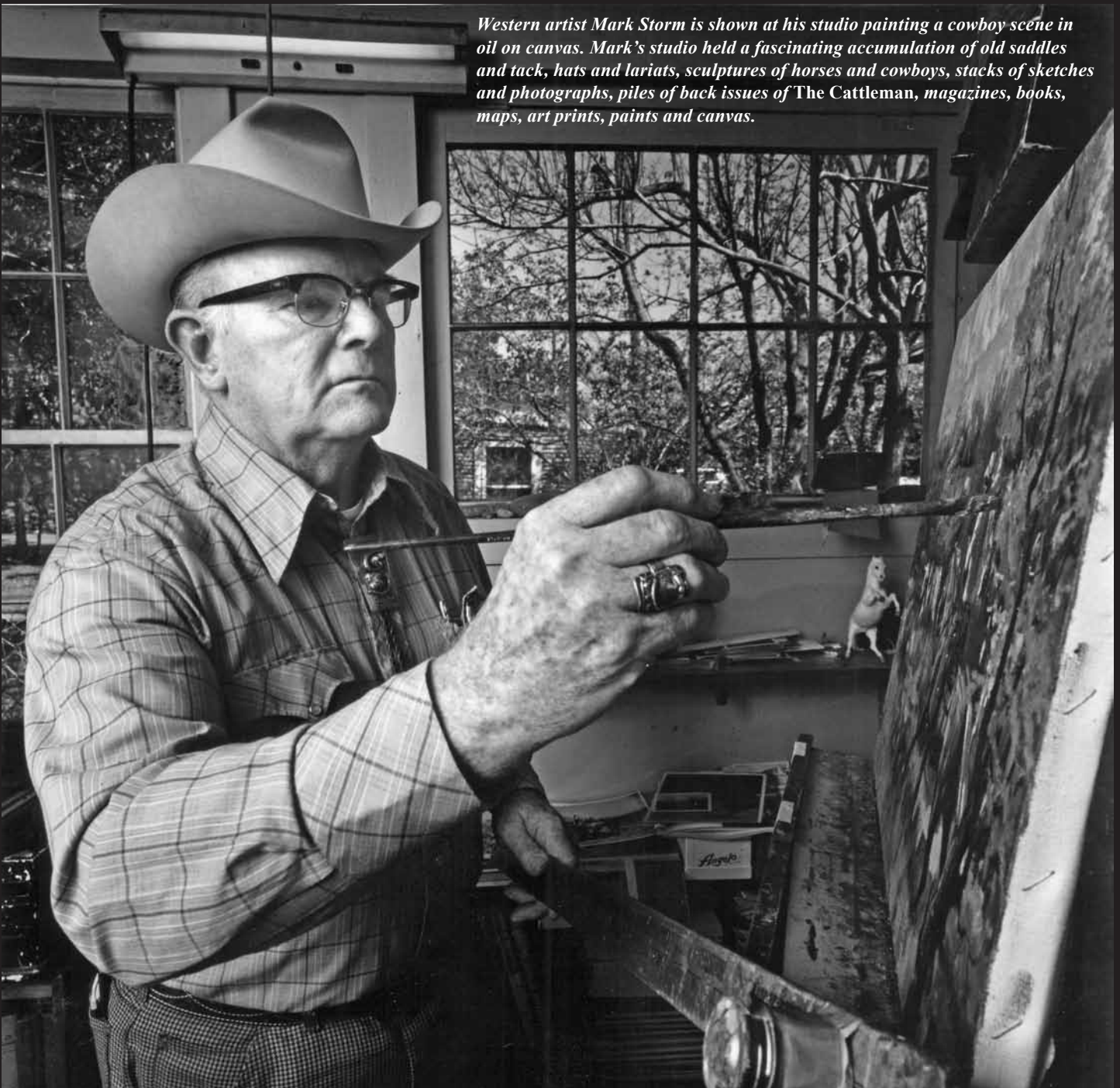


# REMEMBERING MARK STORM — Cowboy Artist

by Jim Saye

**M**ark Storm died seven long years ago; on Friday, October 4, 2002. Yet his quiet, competent, multi-talented presence abides. Mark's impressive body of work, produced through a long and inspired career is proving to be an important means for preserving the cowboy heritage.

It is often said "a picture is worth a thousand words." Mark created a thousand eye-catching and truthful pictures that focus attention on the "Cowboy Way." Once, when he was immersed in sculpting a statue of Stuart Lang, Mark explained his painstaking efforts devoted to the folds of the trousers around the knees. "An artist is above all a careful observer. Noticing and attaching significance to the tiniest of details becomes almost an obsession. Truth is in the details," Mark related as his big, powerful hands smoothed and shaped the folds into the sculpting clay.



*Western artist Mark Storm is shown at his studio painting a cowboy scene in oil on canvas. Mark's studio held a fascinating accumulation of old saddles and tack, hats and lariats, sculptures of horses and cowboys, stacks of sketches and photographs, piles of back issues of The Cattleman, magazines, books, maps, art prints, paints and canvas.*

Standing five-feet ten and weighing about 200 solid pounds, the stocky Storm in his cowboy boots and hat looked more like a successful rancher or oilman than a gifted artist. However, his prolific work through a distinguished career as a painter and a sculptor have established Mark securely in the front rank of Texas and Western artists. Mark was a charter member of the Texas Cowboy Artists Association. His canvases hang in offices, homes, and ranches throughout Texas and New Mexico, and in other western states. Prints of his oilfield paintings are posted on the walls of drilling rig “dog houses” worldwide.

In the field of sculpture, Mark designed the Lombardi Trophy, which is presented annually to the winner of the Super Bowl, and many of the trophies awarded each year by the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. He sculpted busts and life-size statues of a number of prominent Houstonians, including Leroy Melcher and Stuart Lang. Paintings by Mark Storm were featured in many Western magazines, including *The Cattleman*, *Quarter Horse Journal*, and *Horseman Magazine*. Prints of some of his paintings and posters still sell briskly.



Mark Storm's statue of Stuart Lang in the Allen H. "Buddy" Carruth Plaza at Reliant Park was created to honor the man who led the Show's move from the Coliseum to the Astrodome.

## GENUINE COWBOY

Mark's father was a mining engineer who designed and built mine structures in remote areas. Mark was born in Valdez, Alaska, in 1911. This was an era when the “Wild West,” especially in the more remote areas, was still more than somewhat wild. At the turn of the century, the U.S. flag had only forty-five stars. Oklahoma became a state in 1907. New Mexico and Arizona joined in 1912, filling out the “Lower Forty-Eight.” Alaska finally joined the Union in 1959.

The Storm family, including Mark and his two brothers, moved more often than most. After Alaska, the family moved to Oregon, then made a major move to a location in the Sierra Madre Mountains of Mexico. Young Mark found this to be a fascinating learning experience. Upon completion of the mining project in Mexico, the Storm family moved north to New

Mexico—to a working horse ranch of 150 acres in the heart of what became the Ruidoso resort locale.

The Storm ranch is near Glencoe in southeastern New Mexico, in the vicinity of the Mescalero Apache Reservation. This area is famous as the scene of the “Lincoln County War” in the 1870s. Billy the Kid, Sheriff Pat Garrett, and a large number of ranchers, cowboys, and gunslingers waged ferocious shoot-outs in this rugged, sparsely inhabited area.

Abundant water, fertile pastures and moderate climate, plus grazing rights on adjacent government land, made the Storm ranch well suited for breeding and raising fine horses, as well as cattle. Mark and his brothers grew up as ranch hands, tending the horses and cattle, roping and branding, building fences, repairing corrals, performing all manner of chores, and keeping up with school. Mark developed skills in plain and fancy roping that stayed with him all of his life.

He also gained a wealth of experience with horses. His life-long fascination with sketching, drawing, and painting horses was built upon hard-won knowledge from years of constant interaction with them. Some of this involved bronc busting. One of Mark's proudest memories was of winning the bronc riding event at the big July 4th holiday rodeo in Fort Stanton, New Mexico, in 1933.

While the family kept the ranch, and always considered it “home,” they moved to Austin to enroll the boys in the University of Texas. Mark majored in art and architecture. His interest in higher education waned when he met a beautiful coed from Houston, Ferne Sweeny. They were married, and settled in Houston in the 1930s.

## THERE ARE JOBS FOR ARTISTS IN HOUSTON

A headquarters city for much of the worldwide oil industry, Houston offered opportunity for talented young people in the growing graphic arts support businesses. Publishers, printers, engravers, typesetters, commercial artists, writers, and associated trades were needed—even in the Depression Era years.

In one capacity or another, most of the people in Houston's graphics community did work for Humble Oil & Refining Company. Humble was big and prestigious, and the company expected the very best; but it was always open to creative artists, especially in 1934 to 1935, when the State of Texas was making preparations for the 1936 Texas Centennial celebration.

Centennial activities were centered in Dallas. The Texas State Fairgrounds were almost totally rebuilt. Leading Texas corporations vied for spaces for elaborate productions of historical and futuristic displays. Because of its special relationship as one of the largest corporations in the state, and its close rapport with Texas historical commissions and societies, and artists and writers, Humble was expected to have bigger and better displays than all others at the Centennial Fairgrounds. Which it did.

Mark Storm was one of the artists hired to augment the Humble Oil staff to produce the Centennial display in Dallas. This was a career-building opportunity. Subsequently, Mark was called upon frequently by Humble's public relations and advertising departments, and he was commissioned to produce a number of cover paintings and illustrations for *The Humble Way*. Reprints of his covers were widely distributed by Humble. Gulf Publishing Company reprinted numerous color paintings by Mark, and the framed prints lined the walls of the second floor hallway of its building on Allen Parkway.

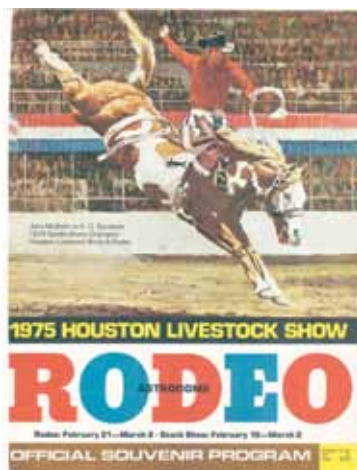
Wetmore Printing Company hired Mark to be a staff commercial artist. At the time, Wetmore was one of the few Houston printers to offer both standard letterpress and silkscreen printing. The silkscreen process offered excellent color reproduction values on sturdy cardboard. Wetmore used their silkscreen facilities to print the large, colorful, sturdy cardboard posters created to advertise the annual Houston Fat Stock Show and Livestock Exposition.

During the 1940s, these posters were the primary medium of advertising for the Fat Stock Show. Mack Wetmore put Mark to work on creating cowboy art posters that would attract attention and sell tickets to the Show. Mark's posters did that; in addition, they featured realistic portrayals of horses and cowboys. These Fat Stock Show posters were proudly displayed all over Houston—in corporate lobbies, banks, offices, shops, restaurants, schools, feed stores, ice houses, service stations, dance halls, and honky-tonks. It was not unusual for the Show to get calls from shop owners reporting that the sun had bleached the color out of their poster and requesting a replacement.

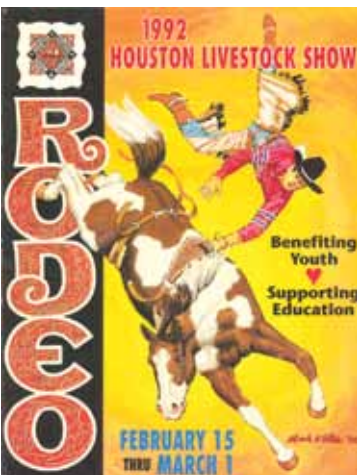
### YEARS WORKING FOR THE HOUSTON LIVESTOCK SHOW AND RODEO

The annual Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo Souvenir Program is a “telephone book” size volume, running to about 1,100 pages each year. Most Houston businesses, both large and small, buy space for an advertisement in the program. The design of the program's front cover sets the basic art theme for most of the Show's marketing activities—advertisements, posters, television spots, and all of the related materials.

The 1975 Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo Souvenir



*This 1975 Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo Program cover was a reproduction of a 20" x 24" oil on canvas painting by Mark Storm. It has the distinction of being the first work of fine art to be featured on the program's cover.*



*As this 1992 Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo program illustrates, Mark Storm's covers were lively and vibrant portrayals of the Show. Storm designed the covers from 1974 to 1999, and the cover of the 2000 edition was dedicated to him.*

Artwork courtesy of Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo.



*Mark Storm, seated, with sharpshooter Joe Bowman on the left, and Ray K. Bullock, former Show vice-president on the right.*

Program was the first to use a fine art painting for the front cover. Mark Storm created the art for that cover. The painting portrayed John McBeth, winner of the 1974 Houston Saddle Bronc finals and the 1974 RCA Saddle Bronc Champion riding K.O. Sundown. This dramatic action painting was so popular that the Show's Souvenir Program for the next twenty-four years featured an original painting by Mark Storm. In honor of his many years designing and producing program covers, the year 2000 cover was dedicated to Mark.

In 1992 Mark was commissioned to sculpt a bronze statue of past Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo President Stuart Lang, who had borne the tremendous responsibility when the Show moved from the old Coliseum out to the Astrodome on the site of the Astrodome complex. This impressive larger-than-life sized statue is about eight feet tall. It stands on a four foot pedestal. At the foot of the figure, on the top of the pedestal, there is a sculpture of the Astrodome complex—the Astrodome, Astrohall, and Astroarena. This sculpture is now situated in a prominent location in the Allen H. “Buddy” Carruth Plaza, across from the Reliant Center Building.

Mark Storm strongly influenced the Houston graphic arts community during the middle years of the twentieth century when Houston saw many major changes in the communication industry. He will long be remembered for his work with the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, which is as it should be.<sup>1</sup>

**Jim Saye** has written for magazines, newspapers, radio, and television during his life-long career in advertising in Houston. He and Mark Storm were friends and business associates for more than forty years.