

Phil Beck

SELF-PROFESSED “animal person” Phil Beck likes to kid that the only wildlife he saw while growing up in Los Angeles were the rats scampering around downtown. He worked as a commercial artist in Chicago for many years, then returned to L.A. before moving to the pastoral environs of Arizona in 1980. There he began painting cowboys and Native Americans, often including cows and horses in the background.

Today the Scottsdale artist gives both creatures solo glory on his canvases. At the heart of his bovine portraits is the white-faced, sweet-natured Hereford cow. “Here

I am, a city boy painting cows,” chuckles Beck, whose admiration for the cattle breed traces back to the 1950s, he says, when his family took Sunday drives into the countryside where the cows grazed.

Three years ago, Beck retired from teaching life-drawing and figurative painting at the Scottsdale Artists’ School for more than two decades, freeing him to paint more and travel in his RV, which doubles as a studio. During calving season he and his wife, Marty, head to southern Arizona ranches, where he’ll spend days studying, sketching, photographing, and painting the Herefords.

The couple also ventures to the Salt River, where wild horses roam. Beck was one of thousands who contacted the U.S. Forest Service to protest their slated removal a few years ago; the plan was soon rescinded. “I’m in awe when I watch those horses,” says Beck, whose observations inspire his moving portrayals of them. “It’s a thing to behold. It’s really special.”

Beck’s work can be seen at Hueys Fine Art, Santa Fe, NM; Southwest Gallery, Dallas, TX; Waterhouse Gallery, Santa Barbara, CA; and www.featherstonearts.net.
—Kim Agrícola



▲ Makin’ a Splash, oil, 24 x 36.

◀ A Tender Moment, oil, 40 x 30.