

Spotted at a rodeo in 1990 by a modelling scout, Mike Hartman was once in the running to be the Marlboro Man. He's been part cowboy and part fine artist since he was a kid when he began selling his mostly horse-inspired paintings to buyers as far away as Europe. He grew up in a macho cowboy setting, working on the family cattle ranch on horseback in British Columbia. That's when horses became his passion; got into his blood.

Today, his home base in Woodburn, he makes his living training, showing, and transporting horses all over the country. His crystal blue eyes twinkle when talking about horses, especially his own.

He values his friendships and family like you'd expect a country boy in a cowboy hat would. But it seems he is completely content being by himself as long as a horse is nearby. Hartman comes with the signature Wrangers, boots, chaps, quiet confidence, and an endearing humility, the kind that makes any number of men, and women, swoon over a straight shootin', straight talkin' cowboy.

A LOT OF GAY MEN SEEM TO LIKE COWBOYS. HAS THAT BEEN YOUR EXPERIENCE?

Ya, it has been. But I wouldn't narrow it down that much. A lot of ladies do too. It's a very romantic kind of image. The whole romantic image of the rough tough cowboy. But I sure wouldn't say it is exclusive to gay men. It's everywhere. Even straight men are attracted to it because they like the whole romantic idea of it.

ON THE ONLINE GAY COWBOY DATING SITES A LOT OF MEN EQUATE COWBOYS AS THE IDEAL MAN: HONEST, HARD-WORKING, UNPRETENTIOUS, MASCULINE, OUTDOORSY, FAITHFUL, SAY WHAT YOU MEAN, MEAN WHAT YOU SAY KIND OF GUY. DOES THAT SOUND LIKE YOU?

I hope so. I know a few people like that. I love the term 'cowboy' — everyone does — I've never used it to describe myself because I think that is something someone else has to choose to call you because I've known a handful of cowboys in my life that I'd really call cowboys. The real deal. It's the way they live there life. It's not just because they ride horses or break horses or ride rodeos, it's everything. It's how they treat people, it's how they are respected...

CAN I CALL YOU A COWBOY?

I would be proud to be called a cowboy. But I can't call myself that.

YOU ARE THAT TYPE. ARE YOU ATTRACTED TO THAT TYPE?

Ya, but I don't think it is a gay or straight thing. It's a people thing. You are attracted to people who know who they are, who are confident, who are the real deal.

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