



GRETCHEN SAMMIS, 1997, STONE LITHOGRAPH



LYNDA LANKER, PHOTO BY BRIAN LANKER



BEV WALTER, 2004, STONE LITHOGRAPH

The 1993 engraving of Lois Stevenson, with cattle from her Eugene-area Knee Deep Cattle Company in the background, goes another route in its depiction of a strong woman of the West. The drypoint engraving uses that medium's characteristic blurred lines to create another, less detailed but equally personal image of a strong woman, looking directly into your eyes. More than half the portraits in "Tough by Nature," like this engraving, are black and white.

"I love black and white," Lanker says. "It has a certain level of abstraction. I think it shows character particularly well." Color can be distracting, she says. "You have to have a reason to use color."

Lanker admits that she didn't realize at first how unusual it is for a portrait artist to work in such a diversity of media.

"Part of it is keeping myself challenged," she says.

Her portrait of cowboy poet Georgie Sicking is a 16-by 20-inch egg tempera, while

some of her charcoals, including one of barrel racer Jenna Johnson of Oregon's Warm Springs Indian Reservation, are 36 by 66 inches wide.

"It's five-and-a-half feet wide," Lanker says, gesturing to one of her broad charcoals. "You can immerse yourself in it. The size is kind of exhilarating."

Stevenson, in an oral history interview that accompanies her portrait in the book, voices the concerns many of the women ranchers shared with Lanker, saying "I don't agree with the problems environmentalists have with ranching because I think we are environmentalists as well as anybody. Most ranchers have to take care of the land. I mean it's how they make their living."

Lanker agrees. "All the people I dealt with are very careful about the land," she says, adding that, that ranchers are "pretty much demonized" by some — not all — environmental groups. "It's such a treasured way of life to them," Lanker says. "They love being outside on a horse with the sky overhead."

Stevenson's Knee Deep Cattle Company is known these days for its certified humane, grass-fed, free-range cattle. The animals are herded on horseback, with the family's border collies and on Honda four-wheelers. Stevenson will participate in August in a panel on land use and preservation as part of the JSMA exhibit.

It's not hard to see how Lanker's project became not just paintings but oral history. Petite, with graying hair and a charming smile, she doesn't just answer questions about her art; she converses, asks questions herself. Lanker is interested in the women she depicts not simply as objects of art, but as people and as a culture. She says that the idea to start recording her conversations with the cowgirls and ranch women came from her husband, Brian Lanker, after she would come home from her trips around the West and tell him about the lives of the women she was working with.

Another theme that permeates through Lanker's paintings and interviews is the mingled pleasure and pain

of ranch and rodeo life. "I've walked out of the arena with broken legs before," two-time women's world champion bull rider Jonnie Jonckowski told Lanker, "because the crowd gets so flattened if a gal gets hurt."

Still others tell of raising children and of warming frozen calves in the kitchen, and Lanker's portraits show them with their working dogs, their horses, their trucks and their kids. Some of them look tired, others pensive and still others purely joyful.

And tied to the topic of what is the highest and best use of the last of America's open spaces are the worries the women voice about losing their ranches to development or to large corporations that raise animals on feedlots instead of on the range.

"Ranching isn't about to die, because of demand for the product," Elizabeth "Bet" Kettle, who raises Hereford cattle in Colorado, told Lanker as she sat for her portrait in 2007. "But the future of ranching will be big ranches, agribusinesses."

Lanker also knows about loss, if not the loss of the land. "I'm an urban person," she says. "I'd never been on a ranch or a farm." She's survived the loss of a loved one. Her husband, Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Brian Lanker died while work for the exhibit was still under way.

"He was so supportive," Lynda Lanker says. "At the beginning of 2011 he said 'This is my project for the year.'" But Brian Lanker died in March of that year, though not until after he had designed a mock-up of the book for the show, and asked McMurtry, Maya Angelou and retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor to write pieces for it.

"He had the vision," Lanker says of her husband. "He was definitely my biggest fan."

Now that her nearly two-decade project has wrapped up, Lanker says her next work is a commissioned portrait — a lithograph of Betty Roberts, the first woman justice on the Oregon Supreme Court.

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LINDA JARRAD, 1999, STONE LITHOGRAPH

PANEL: Ranch Women and Cowgirls Tell their Stories
2 pm Sunday, July 1
With bull rider Jonnie Jonckowski, Eugene-based Eastern Oregon ranch-owner Susie Papé, cowboy poet Georgia Sicking and local rancher Lois Stevenson

ARTIST TALK: Lynda Lanker
2 pm Saturday, July 7
Family Art Round-Up
1 pm Saturday, July 14
Explore the West in "Tough by Nature" and make "cowhide" paintings and wire sculpture horses.

MUSEUM AFTER HOURS: Hoedown and Film
6 pm Wednesday, August 8, \$5; free for members
Dancing, film and tours of the museum; free outdoor screening of *Cat Ballou* at 9:30 pm

PANEL: Land Use and Preservation
5:30 pm Thursday, August 9
With Gerda Hyde, Billie Roney and Lois Stevenson