

Bill Gollings: Cowboy Artist
Paintings from the Sherry Nicholas Collection
University of Wyoming Art Museum, 2007
Gallery/Study Guide

Elling William Gollings is one of Wyoming's most celebrated cowboy artists. Born in Fort Pierce, Idaho, he spent his childhood in Michigan with his grandmother and completed his eighth grade education in Chicago. In 1896, longing to be in the West, he boarded a train to South Dakota and eventually arrived on his brother DeWitt's ranch in Montana.

Borrowing a horse, he worked the "grub trail" for the next five years—branding cattle, driving a stagecoach, trapping for fur, and hunting for gold. These odd jobs not only paid his room and board; living the life of a cowboy on the open range would become the source of his artistic work. As a young man, Gollings was fascinated by the drawings of Frederic Remington that he saw in *Harpers Weekly*. His admiration for Remington remained throughout his life. His older brother, Oliver, who could draw a horse from memory, was also an influence, and it was with his encouragement that Gollings started drawing.

In the early spring 1903 I sent to Montgomery Ward & Company for some oil colors and other equipment to paint with. When the snow went off I made a few crude attempts at picture-making. The people on the ranch where I stayed and called home thought them wonderful. That summer I covered the mess tent with charcoal studies; horse heads and certain characters who interested and asked my brother to bring me over. I built a shack and called it a studio. The skylight in the roof gave me the right to call it such.

- Bill Gollings
February, 1923

The first step in understanding any work of art is to take time to look closely. The 15 paintings in this exhibition are selections from the Sherry Nicholas Collection Museum which includes 71 paintings, prints, and drawings and is on extended loan to the University of Wyoming Art.

Here are some questions to consider as you look closely:

- What do you see when you survey the art work in this gallery? What is the primary subject for the artist?
 - Does the artist convey character emotion through the paintings? In other words do the people in the paintings seem happy, sad, angry, or serious?
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- We can derive other important information by looking at how the artist actually painted each piece. For example, how has the artist used brushstroke to convey the mood of a painting? Do some paintings seem to have more "active" brushstrokes than others? Why?

- Would you consider these paintings to be more realistically or abstractly painted? Which do you prefer?
- How does the artist use color to convey a particular time of day, season or place, or mood?

I had met and talked with a few of America's foremost painters: H.H. Sharp, Howard Russell Butler, William B. Henderson, C.M. Russell, Frederic Remington (now dead) and a few lesser lights. They have all had a good influence on my work. My work has had a good distribution throughout the United States and even in foreign countries. Four of my pictures are in the Wyoming capitol at Cheyenne: "The Smoke Signal," "Indian Attack on the Overland Stage," "Emigrants on the Platte," "The Wagon Box Fight." I have no pictures in permanent galleries.

I do not consider the others worth mentioning. Work for the rest of my life is ahead of me with only one thing that would ever take me from it: to be younger and have the country open and unsettled as it was when I first made riding my profession.

- Bill Gollings
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- How many seasons do you see represented here? How can you tell?
- How do you feel when you look at the seasonal changes in the paintings?
- How would you describe the animals in Gollings' paintings? Do they play an important role in the work as the people?
- How can a cultural region inspire and create its own art?
- What is Western art?
- How is it different than Eastern art or Southern art?
- How can we tell an artist feels strongly about a region and its people, animals and plants, landscapes and seasons?
- How can you describe the spirit of a place, like the West, through art?

- How does the cowboy experience in the West influence art making? How does Native American experience in the West influence art making?
- How can art make you understand a place, person or way of life better?
- Can an artist's rendition of a place and time influence the way we think about that subject? How does art contribute to how we define and think about the Cowboy and the West?
- Which is your favorite painting and why?