



Press Release

For Immediate Release:

Horse Culture Celebrated in Bonita through Public Sculpture

Cowboy Artist of America Mehl Lawson has donated a life-size museum bronze of American stud horse *WR This Cats Smart* for public display outside the Bonita Museum and San Diego County Library complex in Bonita. The artist has completed work on the sculpture, which is currently at a foundry for bronzing. The museum has launched a campaign to match a \$25,000 grant to create the bronze horse and base for the public sculpture. The public is invited to contribute to this match and be a part of local history. Legacy donors at the \$2,500 level will receive recognition on the sculpture plaque and a small replica sculpture by Mehl Lawson. All donors will also be invited to the VIP unveiling of the sculpture with the artist, expected to take place late this year or in early 2021.

This public horse sculpture will be a beautiful landmark in South Bay San Diego!

-- Nimpa Akana, President of the Bonita Museum Board of Trustees

About Mehl

Mehl Lawson is an artist in three mediums - sculpture, braiding, and horses. He is an heir to the proud vaquero tradition of Old California - a dedicated disciple of the refined, subtle elegance of the Santa Barbara style that inspired the creative spirits of such men as Ed Borein and Luis Ortega. Mehl has been a member of the *Cowboy Artists of America* since 1982. Mehl has been presented the *Remington Award* at the Prix de West show held at the National Cowboy Hall and Western Heritage Center in Oklahoma City. He has received numerous Gold and Silver Medals and *Best of Show* awards at the *Cowboy Artist of America* show held at the Phoenix Art Museum.

There is the same kind of magic in the hands that shape the sculptor's clay and his rawhide braiding as there is in the hands that hold the reins of a horse,

-- Mehl Lawson

Mehl came to Bonita in 1968 as a horse trainer for Dave Phair. In 1979 he transitioned from horse trainer to full time self-taught sculptor and cowboy artist. He was honored with the *Thomas Moran Gold Medal* in 1998 at the Masters of the American West show at the Gene Autry Museum. In addition, Lawson was the winner of the 2006 *Express Ranches Great American Cowboy Award* at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Center in Oklahoma City. In 2008, he was awarded by the Academy of Western Artists ~ *Braider of the Year*, and in 2009 SYUHM *Vaquero Artist of the Year*. Mehl and his wife, Martha, live in Bonita, California.

About the Museum and Historical Society

Visitors will find permanent works in the museum by Lawson including *Early Morning Disagreement*, featuring a stalwart cowboy attempting to saddle a reluctant horse. Lawson excels at depicting the devotion between humans and their horses. His sculptures capture the spirit of the western buckaroo - the working people of the great California ranches. He is happy to combine the world of horses with that of fine art, and his rawhide braiding artistry.

The Bonita Historical Society is dedicated to preserving, for public education and enjoyment, the culture, history, arts, crafts, and aesthetic facets of the region. The museum provides free exhibitions and programs documenting the local art, history and culture of South Bay San Diego, including Rancho de la Nación. Visitors can find information about the people who lived on early ranchos and what their life was like, including displays of historical objects like brands, maps, tools and saddles.

Mehl created the maquette of WR This Cats Smart in the museum, as an artist in residence, using a process of aluminum supports, foam and plastilina clay. Visitors stopped by the museum weekly to see his progress and ask about the specific steps in making large scale sculpture. We are grateful that Mehl loves passing on the traditions of bronze sculpture, hard work and his artistry.

-- Wendy Wilson-Gibson, Executive Director, Bonita Museum

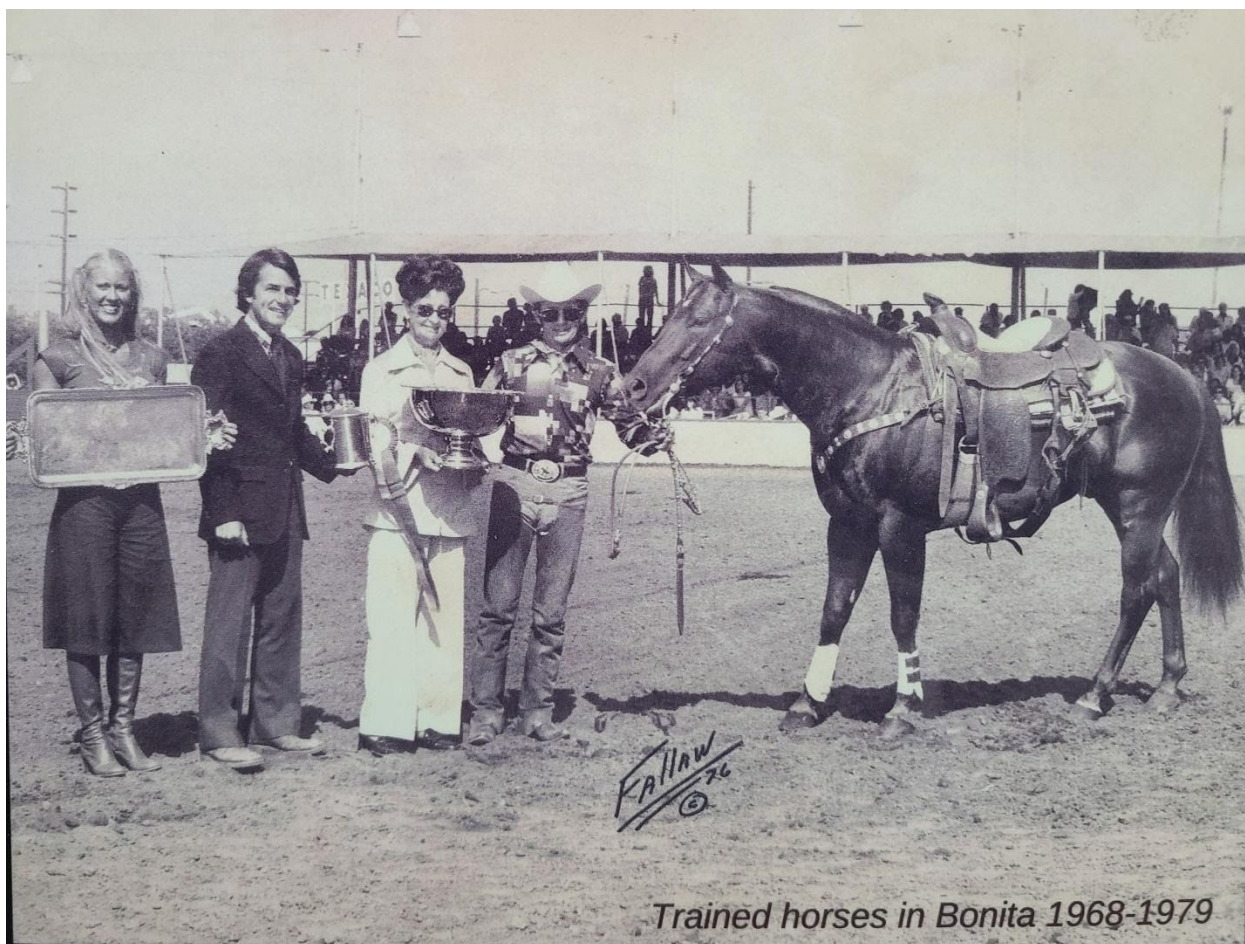
Donations for the public sculpture can be made through the museum located at 4355 Bonita Road in Bonita, CA. 91902 or through online donation campaigns at www.bonitahistoricalsociety.org



Mehl training and exercising horses at Pillsbury Ranch with Duane Pillsbury in Lakeside, California



WR This Cats Smart maquette with Mehl Lawson before traveling to the foundry



In 1976, Mehl won the stock horse stake at Del Mar horse show on a horse he owned named *Corona Cody*. (photo left to right) unknown, Peter Looker, Mrs. Bud Richards, and Mehl next to horse. Photo: June Fallow

About WR This Cats Smart

The 1999 stallion *WR This Cats Smart* (High Brow Cat x The Smart Look x Smart Little Lena) bred by Wiens Ranch Co., Sedalia, Colorado, and owned since 2004 by NRCHA Breeder Sponsor Wagonhound Land and Livestock, began his performance career in the National Cutting Horse Association arena. The fancy sorrel earned \$236,514 in NCHA money, and became a finalist at 24 major NCHA aged events as a 4-, 5-, and 6-year-old. His accolades include the 2005 NCHA

Open Finals Championship, shown by leading cutting horse professional Tim Smith, who described the stallion as “A star all the way – so very smart and stylish.”

The first foal crop by *WR This Cats Smart* arrived in 2005, and he has sired 968 American Quarter Horse Association-registered offspring. His foals quickly proved their abilities in multiple performance arenas, earning more than \$6.1 million in all disciplines, primarily cutting. Eighty-seven foals by *WR This Cats Smart* contributed to his NRCHA Million Dollar Sire status, winning a total \$1,080,082 in the multi-event reined cow horse arena.

WR This Cats Smart has been bred to some of the industry’s finest mares, including leading NRCHA dam and Hall of Fame horse *Smoke Time Tuck* (Doc Tom Tucker x Ima Smoke x Mr Fools Smoke). One foal from that particular cross, the 2007 gelding *Tuckers Smart Cat*, has become *WR This Cats Smart*’s top NRCHA money-earner, with more than \$150,000 and a *Supreme Reined Cow Horse* designation on his resume.

Other top cow horses by *WR This Cats Smart* include *Sinful Cat* (x *Sinful Playgirl* x *Freckles Playboy*), a 2008 stallion and earner of \$102,258; *TF The Gus Man* (x *Classy Remedy* x *Tangys Classy Peppy*), a 2008 gelding who has earned \$83,748; *Halo Cat* (x *Stylin Jewel* x *Docs Stylish Oak*), with \$76,729 in NRCHA earnings; *Camilla The Cat* (x *Bit Of Starlight* x *Grays Starlight*), an earner of \$73,860; and *Shine Smarter* (x *Shiney Tari* x *Shining Spark*), a 2012 mare who has earned \$69,305.

[Link to pedigree](#)



Photo: <http://nrcha.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/WR-This-Cats-Smart-e1446484697474.jpg>



Photo: Cam Essick

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<https://cowboyartistsofamerica.com/active-members/emeritus/mehl-lawson>