

## J. MARK KOHLER



*Corner Shot, watercolor, 10" by 14"*

*"I really liked this shot of Shawn Boemmer roping horses out of the remuda. The shadows, the angles, and the colors all make it a good painting. I wanted to do the painting on handmade paper, but backgrounds and handmade paper just don't mix well. The rough-textured paper tends to work poorly for large gradated washes. However, my friend and fellow artist, Jan Mapes, gave me two sheets of this smooth Twin Rocker paper, and I jumped at the chance to tackle the light in this painting. The natural color of this paper doesn't reflect the pigment back to the eye like white paper does, so it was necessary to add small amounts of gouache to the watercolor. Some might call this cheating, but all is fair in war and watercolor."*



"It's nice to know what you were put on the earth to do and to wake up every day and do it. The hardest part for artists is to move beyond the world's expectations of what they should be doing to what they want to do and are meant to do."

J. Mark Kohler wakes up every day eager to tell the story of the cowboy with paints. He hasn't always had that luxury, however, which makes him appreciate it even more. He earned a degree in commercial art and illustration from Southwest Texas State University and spent the next several years working as an illustrator.

"When you're an illustrator, you're just a hired pencil," he says. "I like it but, if you're a fine artist, it's kind of a miserable existence because you do what you have to do, not what you want to do." Kohler painted during his leisure time and eventually made the move into fine art, focusing on the cowboy and using watercolors to do so.

"Watercolors were always kind of a part of me," he says. "I still do some oil painting for fun, but I don't sell them. I love a good oil painting as much



*Comfortable Ground, watercolor, 12" by 8"*

*"Mark Kirkpatrick has had a longing to work on a big outfit wagon since boyhood. A native of Texas, he has missed his window for this calling but jumped at a chance to day work in New Mexico. We both enjoyed our time out West, and I snapped this shot of Mark just basking in the satisfaction that the day's work had offered. I'm not sure which of us was more content with our day's effort, but I know for sure that we both found ourselves on 'comfortable ground.'"*

as the next guy, but it's hard to beat a good watercolor. People who are drawn to watercolors like the airiness and the looseness of it, the transparency, translucency and lightness of it."

Kohler admits that, while watercolors offer many opportunities for an artist, it also brings with it challenges. "The very nature of watercolors is its unpredictability," he says. "When you try to control it, it bites you back. You have to let it do its thing; let it do its job without trying to control it. I'm not a great oil painter but from what I know of it, oils give you latitude. You can work wet into wet. You mix the color, put it there, and it's not going anywhere. With watercolors, it can go somewhere. Your plan is going to change. You have to have some flexibility with it."

Kohler grew up in Austin, Texas, and now lives and works in Yorktown. "I'm pretty much a Texas fixture," he says, adding that he is passionate about portraying the cowboy. "When you are actively involved with your subject matter, you're drawn to tell their stories," he says. "If you know the people you're painting and you tell their stories, then you're connected to it."

Kohler also is connected to his medium and, in addressing the watercolors versus oils issue, says, "There are collectors who think oils are better, and nothing I say will change that perception. People can't say watercolor isn't a permanent medium; watercolors that were painted 200 years ago are still fine. If you have good paper and good paint, the painting won't disappear unless you bake it in the sun. Sargent's watercolors are still here and just like they were the day he painted them."

Happy to be using the medium and painting a subject he is passionate about, Kohler's goal is to constantly improve. "I would like to have more time to do better paintings," he says. "There's a line between trying to make a living and doing the best art you can do. It's the carrot you can't catch, but you keep trying to do the perfect painting."

*Flanker At The Old C.V.,  
watercolor, 9 1/2" by 14"*

*"The images, sounds, and smells of Arizona brandings are constant: the dust, heat, and sweat combine with bawling calves and the sounds of ropes swinging through the air. I never get tired of portraying the work that's done on these old ranches. The cowboys take pride in their heritage, and I feel called to preserve this part of our American story."*



## WILLIAM MATTHEWS

"I've worked in a lot of different mediums, but watercolor has always been my favorite and what I come back to."

So says William Matthews, whose love of art was the result of a family that loved art. "My mother was a portrait painter, and we knew a lot of local artists," he says. "My grandfather was an artist, too, and took us to museums. I painted with my mother. We were always encouraged to paint, draw, and to see. We were told everywhere we went to squint, to see the shapes, the design, the abstract. I taught my kids the same thing. It's become a standing joke in our family. Squinting is an important way to block out extraneous information and to see general shapes, to understand paintings."

When his mother took him to see a show of watercolor paintings by the likes of Wyeth, Sargent, and Homer, Matthews says he made "a very conscious decision that I was going to be a great watercolorist. Watercolor was definitely going to be my medium, and I was going to become proficient at it."

After attending the San Francisco Art Institute for a year in the '60s, Matthews took a job creating album covers for Capitol Records and later opened his own graphic design studio. He continued to paint but didn't show his work until the early '70s. "I had my first one-man show in 1973 in Denver, when I was 23," he says. "At a certain point, the design world became not interesting and the painting world became more interesting. By the end of the '80s, I was a full-time painter living in Denver."

Matthews, who continues to live and work in Denver, takes great joy in portraying the working cowboy. His goal, he says, is not to convey a story or to provide an explanation of his subjects. "If

