

Curt Mattson

THE LONE RANGER

Curt Mattson's sculptures celebrating the cowboy lifestyle have inspired and enriched the soul for 25 years.

Seven marks a lucky number for sculptor Curt Mattson. Six times he was nominated for membership into the National Sculpture Society and six times he was denied. Founded in 1893, the Society represents the nation's oldest sculpting group.

Mattson learned in July, after his seventh bid, that he was accepted as an elected member into NSS. Each nominee

undergoes a comprehensive screening process and two-thirds of the membership must vote you in. For 25 years, this Arizona artist has set his sights on joining this exclusive group.

"I still can't believe it! It's quite an honor," exclaims Mattson, "To be in the company of the best sculptors in the country makes you want to create and strive for excellence."

But the road to success hasn't been without its bumps. In fact, Mattson never set out to become an artist. Prior to 1983, he spent his days learning to ride and train everything from cutting and reining horses to working on ranches throughout the West. Mattson rode for ranches from California to Alberta, Canada, where he met the woman he would later marry, Wendy Gaastra.





Curt Mattson gives us a sneak peek into his studio in Peoria, Ariz.

“Nothing in my life has ever been easy. I broke horses for a living and thought that would be my life’s ambition,” he recalls from his studio near Phoenix, Ariz.

Mattson’s passion for the world of the buckaroo and horsemen and horsewomen was instilled early on by his grandfather, an excellent horseman and craftsman. He got hooked on sculpture after seeing the famed piece, *End of the Trail*, by James Earle Fraser that greets visitors to the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City, Okla.

“It was so profound. It speaks to your heart. When you see a piece like that it never leaves you,” says Mattson. “There’s no gimmicks. It’s true truth. That’s what sculpture should do.”

That inspiring encounter spurred Mattson to try his hand at sculpting. When he realized he could sculpt his passion—buckaroos and horses—his two worlds became one. From 1983 to 1989, Mattson learned to sculpt from the ground up under the tutelage of Cowboy Artist of America member Mehl Lawson.

“Mehl told me don’t look at the good art or very good art, only look at the great because you’ll hit what you aim,” Mattson recalls.

Mattson continued his intensive training with fellow CA, Pat Haptonstall. Over the years he has honed his skills by attending workshops led by Fritz White, Herb Mignery and Richard MacDonald, among others.

Mattson has since established a solid reputation for sculptures that celebrate the cowboy lifestyle. He has won numerous



Down The Angry River, bronze, edition 9, 35¼ x 19¼ x 13¾"

awards and has participated in multiple prominent national shows and museum exhibitions such as Eiteljorg Museum's *Quest for the West*.

Influenced by personal experiences and tales discovered through much research, Mattson selects obscure stories, both contemporary and historic, that he can tell sculpturally. His knowledge of animal anatomy allows him to replicate four-legged creatures—especially horses and cattle—with realistic full body features.

Mattson's newest sculptures reflect a shift in design and how masses are distributed. He's also concentrating on simplifying the statement to give it impact, as seen in *Too Close for Comfort*. The piece *Ready For Trouble* is another favorite of Mattson's. The inspiration for this sculpture stems from a book on Fort Bowie, located southeast of Wilcox, Ariz. Set in 1857, it captures the story of a "D" trooper on the alert with his Colt Dragoon revolver raised high in the air. The artist blends a classic rich patina, almost olive green, to portray

the trooper on horseback with a lighter gray patina to illustrate rising smoke.

"The gesture of the horse and the way this trooper is positioned, it just came together," says Mattson. "The horse is elegant and he has something."

With these new pieces, Mattson says he's aiming to make great art that will last through the ages. In his quest to achieve this, he says four elements compose great sculpture: mass, texture, light and design. He focuses on these elements in the piece titled *Down The Angry River*. The



Mattson's goal is to sculpt exciting and inspiring records of the buckaroo of today and to tell the lives of the historic horsemen of the West.

The Collectors Say . . .

"Curt Mattson is a stickler for authenticity. Everything he does he researches and he attempts to replicate it in its more authentic detail. He has captured the true appearance of men and women in action on their animals. His animals are very realistic with full body features, and he's very creative in his subject matter."

— Mike and Lucy Cies, Wichita, Kansas

idea derived from a book by Carl P. Russell titled *Firearms, Traps & Tools of the Mountain Men* that explores a stretch of the Snake River by Myrtle, Idaho, that was so rough it questions whether or not mountain men could have traversed it. Russell writes of a historic long rifle that was found at the bottom of a canyon, proving that they indeed went through the area. Mattson started from there in depicting what mountain men may have experienced as they came through the rough patch of water and big dugouts.

"The story is so universal to man and inspiring, particularly of American persona and the American West," he says.

In this piece, Mattson shows a man in a canoe battling his way down a canyon. His use of a French brown patina resembles

water. He spent a year thinking this work through and credits its complexities for making him a better sculptor.

"It was interesting to do water in bronze and make it work and not depend on the patina. The patina is irrelevant," he explains. "To make masses, values and textures read properly was a challenge. It stretches the envelope of your sculptural skills."

It's not uncommon for Mattson to spend over 12 months working on a sculpture because he rotates them out, revisiting them throughout the year.

"When is a piece finished? When I look at it and there's nothing else to take away from it. You want to eliminate everything that's not pertinent to the statement," he says. "I sculpt to bring to the world images that will encourage,

excite and enrich ... It is vitally important to me to leave a record of the buckaroo of today, and to tell the lives of the historic horsemen of the West." 🖱️

For a direct link to the exhibiting gallery go to



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Price Range Indicator

Our at-a-glance Price Range Indicator shows what you can expect to pay for this artist's work.

	Small	Medium	Large
1996	\$1,500	N/A	N/A
2001	\$1,700	\$6,000	N/A
2008	\$2,300	\$8,500	\$20,000



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Ready For Trouble, bronze, edition 9, 25½ x 16 x 8¼"



Too Close For Comfort, bronze, edition 9, 31½ x 20¼ x 13¼"