

## American Museum of Western Art – The Anschutz Collection

Writing the West: Season 6, October 2024

### Iconic Animals

175 years ago, the relationship between people and animals in the West was based upon domestication. Quite possibly, it's the same today. We see a dog and we think domesticated. A wolf, wildness. The paintings and writing prompts below will help you dig into the continuum of domesticity and the wild.

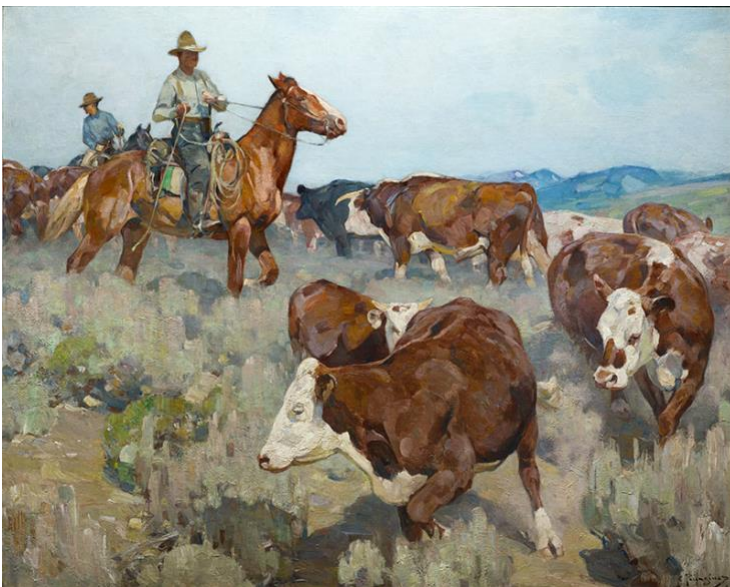


Alfred Jacob Miller, *Breaking up Camp at Sunrise*, ca. 1845



George Caleb Bingham, *Family Life on the Frontier*, ca. 1845

Dogs and cats, whether on the rendezvous trail or fireside, have become so domesticated they fade into these paintings' backgrounds. In reality, is this the case? Do we relate to our dogs and cats as furniture? If not, the people from 1845 probably didn't either. Choose a painting depicting a dog or cat and re-focus it so these iconic animals are less furniture and more featured.



Carl Rungius, *In the Sagebrush*, ca. 1921

Through thousands of years of breeding, a dog is a fully domesticated animal. Horses, although possibly on their way, seem wilder. For example, why does a horse need to be broken? Broken from what? Broken into what? Imagine a character (or yourself) climbing onto a horse's back. What smells, textures, sights, and sounds are present? What work is the human now joined with the horse setting out to do—relaying a message from one place to another, wrangling stock, riding to war, pulling a chuck wagon, or simply going for a ride? What happens to the horse and the person when working together?



Herman Herzog, *Nevada Fall, Yosemite*, 1875

In this painting both human and dog seem to be looking up at the wild bird flying by. The bald eagle, golden eagle, osprey, turkey buzzard, goshawk, and other birds of prey live inside the Yosemite region. Whatever the type of bird here, it is possibly looking back at the human with his fishing gear and dog companion leading the way. Between the person and his dog and the bird exists a gulf. Not just in distance, but in wildness. The bird's great ancestor is the dinosaur. The dog's the wolf. The river where all three are fishing separates them. But what else? What is the wildness of the goshawk compared to the dog, compared to the man?