



"24 and 49 with Friends," oil on board, 34" x 48"

OUT STANDING IN THEIR FIELDS

Heather Foster is as curious about her subjects as they are about her.

BY SUSAN HALLSTEN MCGARRY

In 2001, Heather Foster had an encounter that would redirect her choice of subject matter. During her artist-in-residency on a working cattle ranch in the foothills of Wyoming's Big Horn mountains, she had set up her easel in a field.

"I was painting a landscape when I sensed that someone was watching me," she recalls. "I turned around and there was a line of cattle some distance away. So I went back to work, but every few minutes I would turn around and they would be a little bit closer, frozen in their tracks, staring at me."

That experience left an imprint that

motivated Foster to meet cows and cattle wherever she lives, which has been quite a few places in her 36 years. Born and reared in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, she was a city girl who barely traveled west of the Poconos. Instead, she focused her free time on art studies and high school scholarships to attend classes at Philadelphia College of Art and Moore College of Art.

She finished with her BFA in painting and drawing at the Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore. In celebration of graduation, Foster began her nomadic lifestyle with a bike trip—from San Francisco,

California, to the east coast. "It took us two months. We met wonderful folks and it was a great way to see the country," she explains.

Today, settled into her Santa Fe, New Mexico, studio, Foster packs her paints and camera for fieldtrips to area ranches and dairies, where she asks permission to "hang out" with everything from Angus cattle to Jersey cows and Texas Longhorns. "I spend quite a bit of time with the animals, and I appreciate it when their owners take the time to tell me about what they do," she says, adding, "You'd be amazed at the effort that goes into producing a glass of milk!"



"Lunchtime with Olivia," oil on board, 48" x 54"

Developed over the past three years, the bovine series started with the cattle in herds, silhouetted against the landscape. More recently, however, individual animals have become increasingly heroic in scale, dominating the space. "I love everything about them," she enthuses, "their shapes, their spindly legs, the funny 'toupees' between their ears, their eyes, colors, and attitudes. I'm still learning about them."

Asked if the paintings carry a message about beef on the hoof, Foster declines an answer, except to note that she doesn't eat them anymore. "I bring my own experiences to a painting and each viewer brings his or her experiences. I hope they trigger memories or encourage others to look more closely at the animals with which we share this planet."

Heather Foster will have a solo show September 10-17 at The Downey Gallery, 225 Canyon Road. A reception for the artist takes place on Friday, September 10, from 5:00 to 7:00 pm. Hours: Monday-Saturday 10:00-5:00, Sunday 11:00-4:00. (505) 982-6701, www.downey-gallery.com.



"34," oil on board, 48" x 38"