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Review of *Buckeye Blake: Art on the Western Front* By Sarah E. Boehme

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Buckeye Blake: Art on the Western Front. By Sarah E. Boehme. Cody, Wyoming: Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 1993. Preface, illustrations, plate series. 50 pp. \$15.00.

This handsomely designed exhibition catalogue presents an overview of appealing work by Buckeye Blake, an important contemporary artist of the American West. Published by the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in association with the University of Washington Press, the catalogue includes a preface by Center director Peter H. Hassrick, introduction by Thomas McGuane, insightful essay by crator Sarah E. Boehme, and colored plates of 44 pieces by, or relating to, Blake.

Son and grandson of cowboys, James Coke Blake was born in Fullerton, California, in 1946, and took the name Buckeye from an Arizona rodeo town through which his family passed. He has continued the family cowboy tradition by riding in cutting horse competitions rather than rodeos. In background and

experience, he belongs to the American tradition of "cowboy art," which stems from classic originators Frederic S. Remington and Charles M. Russell. Indeed, Boehme carefully establishes Blake's connections to this tradition and illuminates the particular importance of Russell's art to Blake, who was also an essentially self-taught artist.

She notes, for example, stylistic affinities between the two artists, and Blake's tributes to Russell in several extremely accomplished bronze sculptures. At the same time, Boehme also elucidates Blake's distinctive iconography (i.e., depiction of cutting horses, close relationship between human and animal, and immigrant workers). Her selection of pieces also highlights his extraordinary versatility. Not only does he create impressive work in oil, watercolor and gouache, pen and ink, and bronze sculpture, but also produces designs for posters textiles, pottery, and furniture. While depicting his subjects in a realistic mode, Blake has felt free, when he finds it artistically appropriate, to develop a linear stylization of form (p. 34) undergirded by an astute sense of design. His sensitivity to overall design in painting and drawing sometimes extends to details such as unique painted or drawn borders. Boehme persuasively argues that these tendencies, seen, for example, in some paintings that successfully combine lettering and realistic scenes, manifest Blake's "modern sensibility" toward the past.

The superb color reproductions in this catalog indicate Blake's bold yet controlled palette of vivid colors. Informative, well written, and a delight to the eye, this catalog would make a fine addition to any book collection on western art.

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