

MAY | JUNE 2013

# routes

*Shannon  
Lawlor*  
EXQUISITE  
equine artist

5 Vintage  
TRENDS

Caring CANINES

Permaculture  
EARTH CARE

SUSHI  
Fast n' Fresh

FISH TALES  
Contest Winners





# THE CHANGING LIFE OF A TRUE HORSEWOMAN

By Veronica Kloiber Photos by Neville Palmer

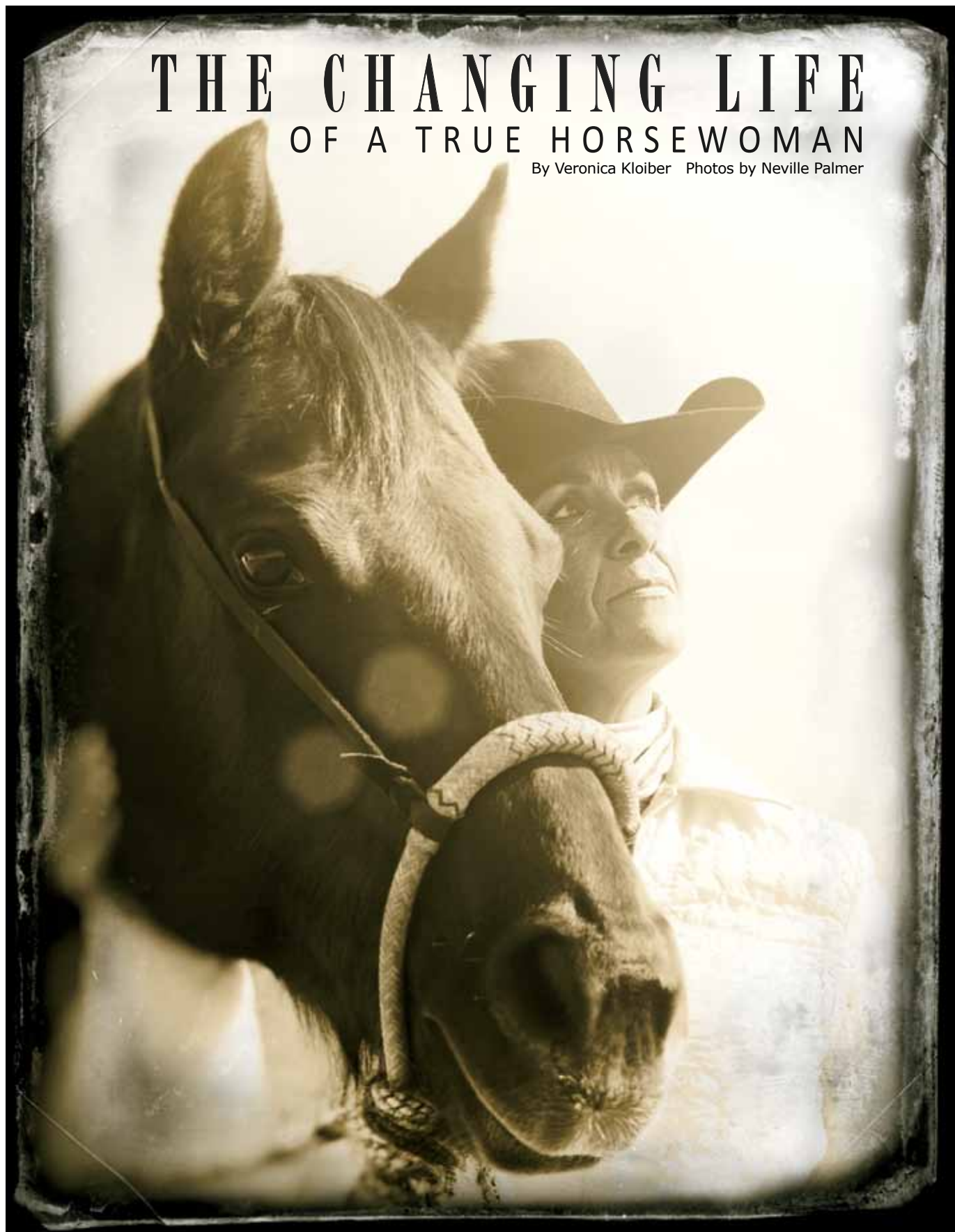


Photo processed to resemble a favourite printing technique of Shannon's called Tintype.  
Photo by Neville Palmer

Her horse paintings are exquisite, more like photographs than brushstrokes. They capture the true essence of the animal from each hair and contour to their spirits. And in her art, the stories unfold, both of bridle horses and of Lawlor's life.

Shannon Lawlor knows horses. "I've never not been around them," she said. "If I wasn't riding them I was drawing them." From an early age, Lawlor found her path in life. While she may not have known it as a child, looking back it's apparent that she would make her way with horses.

She grew up in a Manitoba town barely big enough to fill in the dot on the map. The small farming town of Kenton shaped her early years. Horses featured strongly during her girlhood with most of her time spent at a small barn on the outskirts of town.

"As a kid I was always painting and drawing them," reminisced Lawlor. "All I wanted to do was be around them."

As time passed, Lawlor's girlish crush grew deeper still. By high school she knew her life's work was to be with horses, be it as a trainer or somewhere in the equine industry. What she didn't know was that she was to become an artist.

After years of western competitions, equine companions loved and lost, and working in the equine industry, Lawlor found herself in Alberta (currently Nanton). She continued to live and breathe horses until 2005 when everything changed.

"I worked so hard for so many years I became exhausted, physically burnt out," she said. "I rode so many horses I wasn't enjoying it anymore and I was mortified because I never thought I'd feel that way."

So she quit riding, sold all her horses and sat down for some hard thinking.

"I never took the art seriously. I never thought I could make a living at this, ever," said Lawlor. "I had no other source of income besides art and no idea what I was doing but somehow I made it stick."

Cliché's best detail what happened next for Lawlor: One door closes, another opens. It's always the darkest hour before the dawn. The people and things you need most somehow materialize right when you need them. Enter Lawlor's mentor, friend, teacher and confidant David Kitler. They met in 1998 and in 2005 when Lawlor changed horses mid-stream so to speak, she began taking art lessons from Kitler.

Fifteen years on and the lessons have worked well. Lawlor's talent, obvious from the get go, has grown into a type of mastery. The fine details she sees and coaxes off her canvas are intense. You have to take a break from looking at her work or your eyes will become lost in the precision.



Amber Wind  
40" x 30" acrylic on board



Big Medicine  
48" x 30"  
acrylic on board



Cholo  
36" x 24"  
Giclee print



"I'm obsessed," she joked. "I close my eyes and there's a horse. It's like breathing, I know them so well."

Her bond with the horse is apparent in her work. It's not just her comfort with the anatomy and conformation that makes her paintings mesmerizing. Lawlor can capture a feeling of being in their presence and share it on canvas.

Two of her most acclaimed works are Cholo (right), a close-up study of a flea bitten grey in a tooled silver bridle and bosal, and Casey, a portrait of a beautiful bay with a mane and forelock to die for. Both paintings won the Ex Arte Equinus International Equine Art Competition in 2007 and 2011 respectively. To date Lawlor is the only artist to have received this award twice.

Cholo also won the People's Choice Award at the Phippen Museum Wild Horse Exhibit in Prescott, Arizona. Lawlor considers Cholo her signature piece and one of her most recognizable works.

It wasn't always so. When she first broke into the western art scene, naturally no one had heard of her. She recalls



Piaff  
48" x 60"  
acrylic on board



Left: Having travelled to Poland in 2011 to embrace and photograph the Polish Arabians, Shannon has been working on a collection of paintings from that trip for almost two years now.

Shannon's roots are deeply tied to the Arabian horse and she felt compelled to travel abroad to gain knowledge, insight and inspiration from these much sought-after worldly steeds.

She hopes to have her new collection completed in the next few months.

bringing her own lunches to weeklong shows in the United States and watching longingly as other exhibitors walked by with fancy coffees she couldn't afford.

"I hope that phase is over," Lawlor said. "I did the starving artist thing for the first five or six years. It took a long time, but a couple of years ago it started to change."

Her next big show will be this July at the Calgary Stampede where she plans to unveil the next phase of her art, something she's been working on for some time and something that will bring her full circle.

"The work is changing and it's a little exciting and a little scary," she said.

Shannon Lawlor knows horses. She can ride them, train them and capture their very spirit in paint, but perhaps her greatest gift is recognizing her dreams from the past when they play out in real life. ■