

# Canvassing Life



Having grown up in Mexico, this punchy-appearing cowboy isn't someone you would pick out of a crowd as a renowned artist and distinguished alumnus of Texas Tech University. When visiting ranches, he may be just another cowboy in a Palm Leaf hat riding the range, but in the studio he creates masterpieces that can now be found around the world.

Edgar Sotelo was born and raised in Mexico where he hailed from a long line of artists. Sotelo grew up watching his father and grandfather sketch

pencil drawings of the surrounding landscapes and happenings of daily life.

Sotelo recalled sitting at the kitchen table with his father when he was just 5 years old, intently watching how his father drew the angles of a horse's hock and shaded the dark side of a drawing. Imitating his father's work was Sotelo's first real experience with creating art.

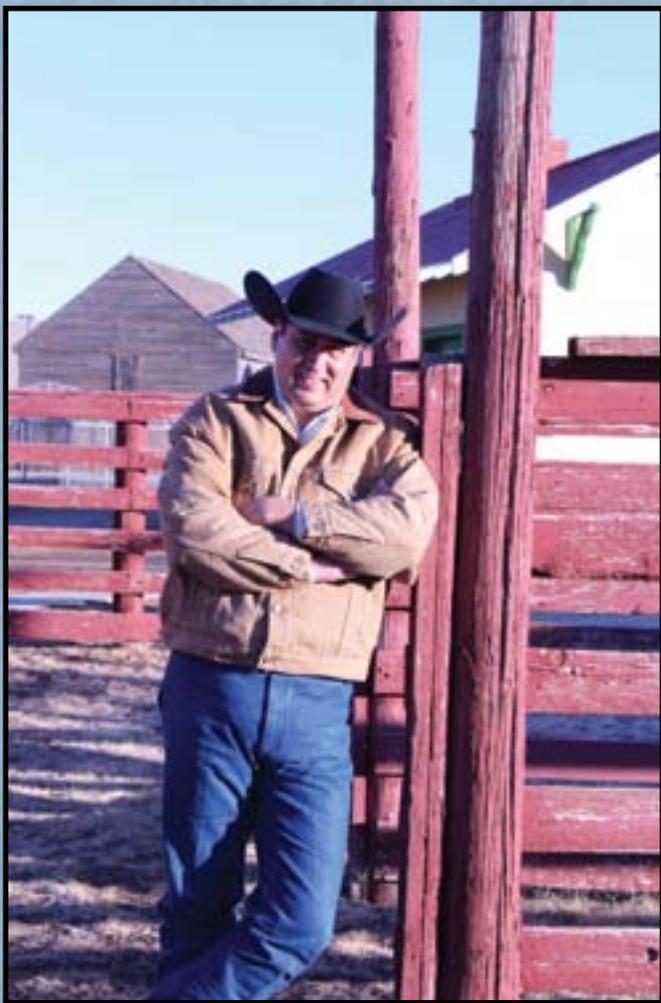
Sotelo said he never had any real training or education in art as a child. All of his talent was God-given or self-taught. As high school graduation

neared, his friends persuaded him to learn English and make the trek north to Lubbock to attend Texas Tech University. For Sotelo, the journey led him to the Department of Animal and Food Sciences.

Like many college students, Sotelo looked for creative ways to fund his education. He had never sold his art before, let alone accepted commissions from people and made a profit. Along the way Sotelo continued to improve his skills with pencil sketches, learning more about shading, angles, and light sources.

After graduating in 1988, Sotelo continued to sketch for fun and sell pieces on the side. In his late 20s, his wife, Michelle, encouraged him to look into oil painting because she believed it was something that he would truly enjoy, but Sotelo was not sold on the idea. After continuing to discuss the topic with his wife, Michelle finally just signed him up for an oil painting workshop.

"I was apprehensive about painting just because it was so different, but she knew that I wouldn't be able to say no if she just signed me up for the workshop,"



Sotelo said with a smile. “Turns out, she was right about the painting thing.”

After years of working in “corporate-America,” Sotelo and his wife opened their own packaging company in 2005 as their primary source of income, creating promotional packages for companies such as Nestlé and Ocean Spray. Starting their own business allowed Sotelo the opportunity to approach his art with more gusto than ever – taking on a practically full-time art career.

As his schedule permits, Sotelo travels across the southwest, studying and capturing his settings through photographs, quick sketches, and small paintings.

“You have to have a real passion for your subject matter,” Sotelo said. “Whether you’re painting apple pies, portraits, or horses, if you have a passion for that, it shows through your art.”

Beyond art, Sotelo has another passion in life – his family. He and his wife have three daughters; Alissa, age 14; Aleha, age 8; and Ava, age 6.

“All three of my daughters already show a lot of artistic talent. They get up early in the morning before school, and while they are eating their breakfasts they

are sketching – dogs, horses, Barbies – whatever they can copy,” Sotelo said with a boastful grin. “It’s just so neat to see.”

Sotelo said his daughters enjoy getting to ride along on trips to go sketch, or just sitting on his lap and helping him paint.

“It’s great that they already show so much interest. The little one [Ava] always asks if she can help me paint. If I’m just starting a canvas, I will let her help for a bit,” Sotelo said with a grin that lights up his whole face.

Sotelo’s artwork can be found all over the country, including in the atrium of the Animal and Food Sciences building at Texas Tech. Even though it has been a few years since Sotelo attended classes here at Texas Tech, he can still be found in the classroom on occasion.

The Animal and Food Science Department has started a “Horses in World Art” class taught by Dr. Heidi Brady. The class is fortunate enough to have Sotelo drop in once a semester, according to department chair, Leslie Thompson, Ph.D.

“Edgar takes the time to come in, discuss art from the artists point of view, and actually take the time to do a painting in class,” Thompson said. “He’s been involved in donating some of his art. He’s come and taught our students and has just been really engaged in helping the program.”

Sotelo is also currently working with Brady and Scott White, Ph.D., Curator of Art at the Ranching Heritage Center at Texas Tech to create a book that could be used as not only a textbook for the class at Texas Tech, but also will be available to the public for art enthusiasts.

“I am really looking forward to what it will mean for the college and for the Ranching Heritage Center,” Sotelo said.

White said he is very excited to continue working with Sotelo on the book project because he brings a modern twist to a more traditional painting style.

“In looking at art, there are different ways to reach people, and one of those is intellectual, a connection with the subject, but the ones that are really good can touch on an emotional point, and that’s what keeps people coming back to them,” White said. “They find something that they can identify with.” 

Tressa Lawrence

Butte, Wyoming

