

Chapter 4

Collectors Tell Their Own Stories

As the research progressed on the life and times of Fred Darge, as many collectors as possible were contacted in order to find known art works by this artist. It wasn't long before somewhat of a pattern seemed to develop that was thought to be unusual. There were quite a number of collectors who owned more than just one painting. Like everything else associated with Darge, there had to be an interesting story. And as it turned out, it was.

After a great deal of thought and speaking with some of the collectors on a random basis, it was decided to ask these individual collectors why they chose to buy multiple paintings rather than just one. Their stories are interesting and diverse, yet many are similar. It all came down to the simple fact that they liked what they saw in Darge's art work so much, they felt compelled to have more than just one painting. As they continued with their collecting of Darge's art work, it just seemed to become more and more appealing. They never stopped buying. They persistently kept on acquiring pieces that reminded them of the West of their dreams, visions and memories.

"We purchased two small 12" x 16" Darge paintings in 2000 from a private seller in Fredericksburg, Texas that offered us the paintings at a very favorable price. We were aware of the artists name but other than that, very little else. The price we paid for the two paintings was nominal compared to what we thought was the quality of the art work. After this purchase we would occasionally read or see something about Fred Darge but really didn't pay that much attention. We were more interested in other artists and didn't want to take the necessary time to learn more about. Looking back, what a mistake we made! And a big one to go along with it."

"Seven years went by before lightning struck. Heritage Auctions in Dallas on May 19, 2007 sold *Old Pedro the Goat Herder*. That one painting got our attention. Fred Darge was for real and a very good artist, if not misunderstood and underrated. The search was on. Upon further study, we decided we very much liked his subject matter and style. Fred Darge delivered the visions of what it used to be like on the big ranches far out west. Over a period of years, we went on to purchase six more of his paintings. And we still do not consider that enough! The search continues." (anonymous)

"My art affair with Fred Darge began in the 1980's. I met Darge's art through the courtesy of Ken Duperry at the State Fair of Texas Antique and Collectibles Show in Dallas. It was a love at first sight. The reason I felt that way about Fred Darge's art was because I had seen those scenes. I was an eager traveler of western Texas and New Mexico. Fred Darge captured those huge clouds in an expansive sky, shadow shifting mountains, great boulders standing like guardians among deserts below. His graceful horses and the elegant pronghorn were the ones I saw on my own road trips."

“The colors were remarkable. A true feast to my eyes. I can imagine the color of the sage being mixed on the spot as he painted it. That is how true those colors were to me. I could not resist the lure of this beautiful art that spoke to me. My memories had been transferred to canvas by a man that clearly was a master artist. There was no need for me to fish through fading vacation photos that I had stored somewhere in my house. I can look on the walls and be transported back to the Big Bend and New Mexico that I experienced decades ago. It would have been something to watch Fred Darge paint his beautiful works.” (Joan E., Texas)

“My first introduction to Fred Darge was in the chambers of Judge Fred “Red” Harris at the Dallas County Courthouse. When Darge passed away, the Judge called me and said a lot of his paintings would be available. I limited my purchases to northern New Mexico and scenes of the Taos area. My brother, who raised Longhorns, purchased paintings of Longhorns.”

“As a collector of the Taos School of Art, in my opinion, Darge captured the sage, mountains, and adobes with the contrasting shadows and clouds as well as any other artist. Our homes in Taos and Dallas, as well as my office, exhibit numerous paintings by Fred Darge and serve to keep the Taos spirit in our minds.” (Roy C., Dallas)

“We have collected Early Texas Art for over 30 years. The first major piece was a Fred Darge painting *Shearing Season* showing a shearing crew, West Texas style with one gas engine and four leads and four shirtless shearers working on goats. It had to have been done on site, all the extra pieces such as the gatherer and bagger, water bottle were present. There was a lot of action in this painting as well as our second piece, two wrestlers at Bert Willoughby’s Stadium. The first painting needed considerable conservation. Darge’s work was not highly prized at the time, in fact the best source of supply was the Fair Park Antique sale were an antique dealer had come into several dozen Darge paintings, smaller ones which you could buy for about \$100 each. Darge got no respect. Mr. Joseph Sartor of Dallas, Sartor Gallery told me the story about a Darge sale he held where a major Darge painting was offered. Someone offered a small amount and Mr. Darge told them that the canvas and painting cost more than that – no sale.”

“In reflection I would buy and keep as many important paintings as I could find. Darge’s work is so very accessible. I can go into a room with a hanging Darge and immediately find myself in front of it. I was raised in West Texas and the background makes a link inescapable. The animals and landscape and rattlesnakes shout out Texas and making it only by hard and long hours as well as dangerous work. Rising before dawn and coming in after dark. My Dad was bitten by a rattlesnake when he was a child and lost his thumb and almost his life. Mr. Darge’s snakes are very real to me and anyone who has walked or ridden the pasture lands. Mr. Darge’s work will live for many more years and be the subject of many and large and respected collections accumulated by unpretentious lovers of the West Texas way.” (Bill C., Dallas)

“As a collector of the work of Fred Darge, I was drawn to his art because of his keen ability to capture the spirit of the people and places of Texas with an inspired authenticity. When I started collecting art in earnest it was with the goal of building a collection of Texas art: artworks which are the creation of Texans and reflect and evoke the history, cultures, and spirit of our great state. Among my earliest

acquisitions were two paintings by Fred Darge, *The Water Hole* and *The Hunter*, which depict big-hatted cowboys and their horses at home in the Texas landscape. From the depiction of the riders' saddles to the bright, big skies above them, Darge not only captured the details and the iconic features of the Texas experience, he created paintings that almost indescribably feel like Texas. It was Darge's ability to so powerfully and authentically evoke both the feeling of the place and its people that resonated with me and led me to continue to seek out his work for my collection."

"Over the years, my Darge acquisitions have included paintings in which he focused solely on landscape, and others in which his focus was the people of Texas and their daily lives. In both instances, I found Darge to be absolutely successful. His landscapes have a palpability that is uncanny. You can almost sense the heat of the day and hear the buzz of locusts. His portraits of Texans ring true in their attention to the details of both site, architecture, and the clothing and gear of ranchers, farmers, hunters, and laborers. In paintings such as *Beginning of the Day* which depicts ranchers attempting to saddle a horse, and *Feeding Time* which portrays a young farmer's wife feeding chickens, it is clear that Darge had great respect for the hard work and perseverant spirit that he observed in the working people of Texas."

"*Shearing Season*," Darge depicts an interior scene of a sheep shearing operation. In this painting, he once again celebrates the working people of Texas and provides a compelling snapshot of the shearing process. This painting, with its detailed description of machinery and interior architecture, puts Darge in line with the modern sensibilities of Regionalist artists and shows his range and ease with both a romantic description of landscape and a stark portrait of 1930's modern life."

"In conclusion, let me share that I also collect and have long admired the great Texas artist, Frank Reaugh, who profoundly influenced generations of Texas artists. I was fortunate to acquire Darge's portrait, *Frank Reaugh*, which wonderfully depicts in montage fashion – the artist, his studio, his iconic subject matter the Texas longhorn, and the artist painting en plein air in the Texas landscape. It is truly Darge's homage to Frank Reaugh and a great testament to the reach of Reaugh's influence, as well as the high regard and respect in which he was held by younger Texas artists."

"As a collector of Texas art for more than 15 years, it is an honor to have the ability to contribute to the preservation of the artistic legacy of Fred Darge and to share it with my fellow Texans."

(John L. Nau, III - The John L. Nau, III Collection of Texas Art)

"I suppose the main reason that I have collected paintings by Fred Darge is the perceived romance that has almost always been associated with the "old west". The expanse of his vistas, the documentation of the day-to-day work that ranch hands performed add to their allure. And although his work can be inconsistent, certainly part of the appeal for me is the color palate he chose to use that was unlike other artists of his time. In short, it was the west as it was; honest, hard scrabble, difficult, but fulfilling."

(Konrad Shields, Dallas)

"There is just something about Fred Darge's artwork that reaches out and grabs your imagination in wonderment like none other and never goes away. Wouldn't it be fun to ride one of those bucking broncs, round up cattle with the ranch hands and have dinner served from an old chuckwagon. As you stand and look at his iconic art it takes you back in time to what West Texas was like in the early part of the twentieth century and before. You think to yourself and wish you could have been there. You can't go back, but you can still imagine. Then what do you do? You buy another one of his paintings, over and over." (anonymous)