



The Gib Singleton Newsletter

"I'm not decorating somebody's living room. I'm not decorating somebody's garden. I'm decorating somebody's heart."

Black Jack Ketchum

While most of Gib's western pieces celebrate heroes and legends, some of his works acknowledge the darker side of the West. "Hey, man," he says, "the outlaws and villains were part of it, too. You can't have good guys unless you have bad guys to compare them to."

Black Jack Ketchum was one of the bad guys. He was a cowboy who became a train robber and murderer, and rode with some of the most notorious characters in western history. Gib's sculpture, *Black Jack Ketchum*, portrays him and his gang as the law closes in.

Black Jack (whose real name was Tom) grew up in Texas, near Abilene. Like most folks in that area, he was a cowpoke. Then in his mid-twenties, Ketchum suddenly headed for New Mexico. "He probably stole something or shot somebody and had to light out," Gib says.

Ketchum ended up in the Pecos River area around 1890 and continued working as a cow hand. But in 1892, he and some companions robbed a train outside of Deming in the southern part of the state. From that point on he lived a life of crime. "They got about \$20,000 from that robbery," Gib says, "which paid a lot better than punching cows.

"Black Jack was part of that whole batch of outlaws we call the Hole in the Wall Gang and the Wild Bunch," Gib says. "He rode with people like Butch Cassidy, 'Kid Curry' Logan and the Sundance Kid. He also hung out with Josie and Ann Bassett, who were the most famous female outlaws in these parts."

Black Jack was a hard man and a deadly shot. On more than one occasion, he and his gang shot it out with posses pursuing them and came out ahead. He once shot and killed two miners in Cape Verde, Arizona over a card game, then shot up the posse that chased him.

Black Jack and his gang robbed trains and payrolls around the West. They were blamed for robberies throughout the Four Corner area, and as far away as Wyoming, where they took refuge in the famous Hole in the Wall outlaw encampment.

"It was a pretty good business for a while," Gib says. "One robbery they were supposed to have gotten away with \$20,000 in gold and \$40,000 in silver.

Then things went south. The Pinkertons were on his trail and his brother Sam was killed in a shootout with lawmen. Another member of the



Black Jack Ketchum, Bronze, Edition of 25
30" x 26" x 16"

gang was captured in the same event, and still others left after a dispute over divvying up the loot.

Despite the loss of his gang, Black Jack decided to rob another train by himself. "The conductor saw him coming," Gib says, "and grabbed a shotgun. He leaned out and drew down, and blew Black Jack off his horse."

Black Jack was nursed back to health – though he lost his right arm – then tried, convicted and sentenced to hang. "He was a tough guy to the end," Gib says. "The legend is he ran up the steps of the gallows and yelled, 'I'll be in hell before you start breakfast, boys.' Then he yelled at the hangman, 'Let her rip!' And they did."

A Bit About Bulls

Gib has created a number of sculptures depicting bulls over his career, ranging from highly abstract to extremely realistic versions. We asked him what that was about, and here's what he told us.

"Well, the bull is one of my favorite subjects. It's a symbol of power and fertility and strength, and it's fascinated artists for about as long as there's been art. You look at those cave drawings of bulls at Lascaux in southern France, which are like 15,000 or 20,000 years old, and they're amazing – just so beautiful and powerful.

"I don't know how to explain it, but there's something in the human psyche that's attracted to bulls and reveres them on a really deep level. Not tigers or bears or horses or whatever. All those are respected in various cultures, but the bull is almost universal across cultures.

"If you look at early civilizations, like *Çatal Hüyük* in Turkey, they were depicting bulls maybe 10,000 years ago. And then the Egyptians, and the Minoans, and the Babylonians, and the Spartans, and the Romans . . .

"Bulls are important in a lot of religions, too. In the Jewish tradition



they sometimes call bulls 'the pedestal of God', and the Torah has instructions on how to sacrifice them. In Islamic cosmology, a bull supports the earth. In the Hindu tradition, Shiva rides on the bull, Nandi. In Christianity, there's a tradition of showing holy men with bull-like horns to depict them receiving communications from God, like Michelangelo did with his 'Moses'.

"In mythology you have heroes wrestling with bulls as part of a quest, like Hercules defeating the Cretan

Bull as one of his 12 labors. Or Theseus having to capture the sacred bull of Marathon before he could fight the Minotaur.

"And it's not just historical. Modern artists love bulls, too. Goya did an incredible series on bullfighting. Singer Sargent painted bulls. So did Toulouse-Lautrec and Manet and Remington and Charlie Russell.

"Picasso did amazing lithographs of bulls, and his 'Bull's Head' is one of my favorite sculptures. And, of course, Salvador Dali's series on bulls and bullfights. And Tyeb Mehta, and Fernando Botero, and Roy Lichtenstein . . .

"You find something that runs through the whole history of art and culture like that, and you know something is happening on some deep level. And that's what I was tapping into."



Top to Bottom
Taurus
Bronze, Edition of 39, 18" x 28" x 12"

Texas Longhorn 11" & 15"
11" Bronze, Edition of 25, 11" x 17" x 6"
15" Bronze, Edition of 45, 15" x 23" x 17"

Abstract Bull
Bronze, Edition of 99, 14" x 22" x 8"