



RENO, Nev. - His artwork has been described as having the “fire of Pollock” and the “fixed gaze of Resnick.”

Now, a Reno artist will be making his international debut, having been invited to exhibit his work in a juried art competition in Italy.

He won't be going abroad, however, to bask in the aura of great Italian masters. Instead, this artist will remain at home, contemplating his next masterpiece while gnawing on his paintbrushes — between mouthfuls of hay.

Cholla is a mustang-quarter horse mix whose paintings have been featured in art exhibits from San Francisco to New York and now overseas.

His creation, “The Big Red Buck,” was selected for exhibit in the 3rd International Art Prize Arte Laguna, Oct. 18-Nov. 2, Mogliano Veneto, Italy.

More than 3,000 paintings, sculptures and photographs were entered in this year's competition. In painting, there were 1,770 from artists around the world. The international contest is organized by the Italian cultural association MoCA in collaboration with Arte Laguna and is aimed at promoting contemporary art.

A spokeswoman for the competition acknowledges there was some consternation among the judges when they realized Cholla was of the equine species.

Jurors perplexed, angry, and amused

"We have to admit that we did not expect the application of a horse," Arte Laguna spokeswoman Cristina Del Favero said in response to an e-mail inquiry by The Associated Press.

"At first we were very perplexed, but we subsequently looked for more information about Cholla on the Web and the jury decided to accept his application by considering his prestige in the USA."

While Cholla was not eligible to win any cash prizes, "he obtained a special mention," Del Favero said.

Viviana Siviero, president of the four-member jury, said she at first was suspicious of Cholla's entry.

"All of us knew that Cholla is a horse. When the organization informed me about that, I was at first doubtful and incredulous," Siviero said, adding she researched Cholla to ensure his authenticity.

"Sincerely, some of the jurors were perplexed or even angry. Some others were amused about it."

In selecting his work as an honorable mention, Siviero said, the jury "did not value ... his gesture nor his chromatic choice, since it has to be considered the result of casualty."

Cholla's acceptance in the juried show prompted interest from another gallery in Venice, Italy, where a solo exhibit of Cholla artwork is being planned for next spring.

Rosalba Giorcelli, curator at Giudecca 795 Art Gallery, said she and her associate were curious, after seeing Cholla's work, why he was not eligible for a special award in the upcoming Arte Laguna.