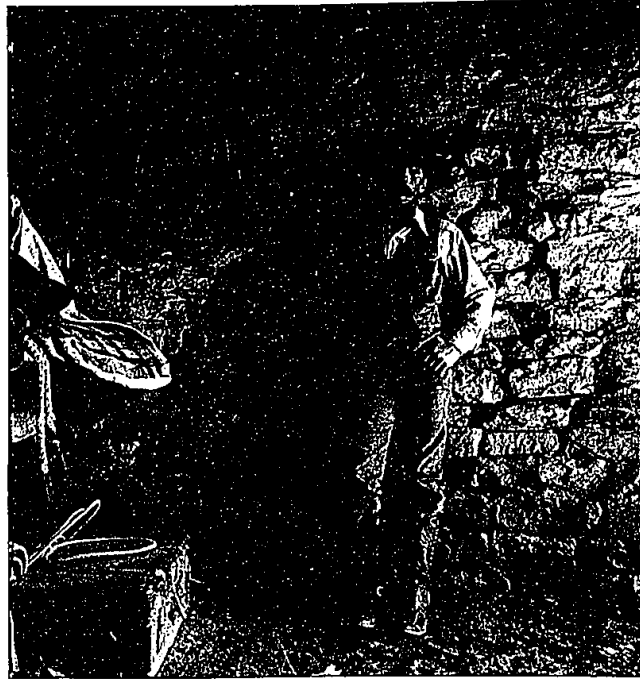




The striking contrasts in black and white in Kurt Markus's photo reinforce the relationship between the cowgirl and her dog.



It may be the Western movie-type pose, which Markus chose for his subject, but this cowboy

still looks like he's seen more weather and work than his Hollywood counterparts.

## Photographs depict cowboy's rugged life

By Ira Lax  
special writer

It's a sunny morning in early January. The furnace just clicked on, warming the chilly night air to a conservative 66 degrees or maybe even an opulent 70.

The coffee's brewed and from the kitchen window I see cardinals and chickadees scattering the light snow of the bird feeder.

Before 10 o'clock, the clouds move in and the fading imagined warmth from the sun leads me to make my own fire.

Kurt Markus' photography of working cowboys and cowgirls from out West reminds me of how protected we city people (the lucky ones) are from the effect of the elements on our everyday lives.

Their eyes reflect the daily confrontations with wind, rain, heat or cold. And Markus's camera has captured this weathered face in people who are still quite young.

CENTURY-OLD photographs of the first non-Indian settlers and herd-

ers taken by relatively unknowns such as George Edward Anderson, Andrew Alexander Forbes and L.A. Huffman were less formal in style than these. Those early photographers were chronicling what was seen as a progressive settlement process of a "virgin land" being changed forever.

Their subjects are pictured at work on the range or taking meals around the chuck wagon; men of all ages in all manner of garb. They look scared by drudgery, weather and loneliness and seem full of private thoughts no camera could penetrate. Their working appears only to have stopped for the short trip of the camera's shutter.

Markus' environments are more staged, while his subjects are more relaxed. They lean on one leg, with their hats cocked and thumbs hooked into their jeans like the Western movies.

But, despite the 20th century nonchalance, these people are real. Their daily concern for the weather, the immense landscape and the absence of canned smiles link them to their herding forebears.

Some of Markus' subjects stand just an uncomfortably before the lens

as the old-timers, but a few appear to have most of the afternoon to pose. This relaxed attitude may reflect the modern pervasiveness of photographs and their power to shape the way we see our world and ourselves.

THE TONE and composition of these images create an atmosphere of understated strength, even repressed violence. The directness is intense and very interesting and there is much to learn from the details. In addition to the portraits there are pictures of a roundup, a branding and one especially striking image of old-time spurs (it's by the front door, so don't miss it when visiting the gallery).

Markus was born in Whitefish, Mont., near Glacier Park. Until last year he was editor of Western Horseman magazine. He is married and lives in Colorado Springs.

The show continues at Halsted Gallery, 560 N. Woodward, Birmingham, through January.

I highly recommend it for everyone interested in today's cowboy or in good portraiture.



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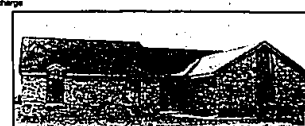


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