COLLECTOR’S FOCUS: ART OF THE HORSE

ROAMING FREE

BY JOHN O’HERN
1. Vose Galleries, *The View from the Knoll, Morrill Farm, Sumner, Maine* (detail), oil on linen, 21 1/4 x 27 1/4", by Joel Babb.
The wild horse is thought to have originated in North America several million years ago. They migrated to Eurasia and back and eventually died out on this continent about 11,000 to 13,000 years ago. Christopher Columbus brought domesticated horses to the Virgin Islands in 1493 and then Mexico by 1519. There are still debates about whether or not the modern horse is native to the continent.

There is no debate, however, about the importance of the horse in the development of America from their adoption by the Native tribes of the Plains and the West to the horses brought by settlers on the East Coast.

The domesticated horse has been, literally, the workhorse for American farmers. Joel Babb painted *The View from the Knoll, Morrill Farm, Sumner, Maine*, in 2011 when it was “one of the few working farms left in Sumner...It is exciting to spend time painting on a working farm, where the seasons and the weather are so important to the life of the farm...Painting on the farm you begin to understand the farmer’s perspectives, his love for the land and the life, and the dedication of his whole family.”

Although working farms are disappearing, the Amish continue to maintain their traditional ways with sturdy draft horses pulling their farm machinery and
even-tempered saddlebreds pulling their iconic buggies on busy, 21st-century roads.

Loren Entz grew up in the farm country of Kansas and now lives in Montana, where he worked as a ranch hand. His paintings of rural life come from his firsthand experience and reflect a timelessness that echoes the life of the Amish. *Amish Autumn* depicts grazing horses next to a field with characteristic Amish haystacks and a windmill in the background.

Similar subjects are in *Texas Haydays* by Francois Koch, with the horses eating hay that has been put out for them while in the background the windmill pumps water for their trough. Koch was one of South Africa’s foremost landscape and wildlife artists before moving to the U.S. and settling in Texas. When he came here for his first exhibition in Arizona he found his paintings were too subtle compared to other artists of the Southwest. He says, “I became quite brave with my use of color...I love nature. My inspiration may come from taking a walk, looking at the shape of rocks, the texture of grasses. But my ultimate inspiration is always light, shadow and atmosphere.” The backlit horses and hay rack demonstrate how successfully he has been able to combine his initial subtlety with his newfound bolder use of color.

Peter Poskas has been painting New England scenes from Connecticut to Maine for 30 years, often returning to familiar places. He says, “I like to return to the same farms because I can anticipate what’s going on with the change in seasons, but I also anticipate being surprised. The weather and light are always a great mystery and a great treasure you find when you return to a place. You see the farms morph over the years—buildings fall down, they’re rebuilt, they’re painted different colors.”

In *Draft Horses, Bethlehem Fair*, he ventures to a venue where the farmers can show off their own and their animals’ skills. The Bethlehem Fair in western Connecticut began in 1924 “to provide agricultural education, improve agriculture and rural living by holding an annual agricultural fair.” Here the powerful draft horses are being readied to pull a heavy load in a competition. The crowd watches in the
dusty hot sun in a painting full of atmosphere and tension.

In the pages of this special collector’s focus, readers will find works depicting equine subject matter from some of the country’s leading artists and galleries. Readers will also discover the inspiration behind the artwork, and gain knowledgeable insight on collecting these masterful works.

Equine and sporting artist Carrie Nygren hails from Nashville, Tennessee, and draws on her Southern routes and love of animals to depict the splendor of woman’s best friend—the horse. “I try to take a simple moment in time and capture the true spirit and majestic character of the horse,” she says. “To me, there is nothing nobler than a horse, and the intimate relationships of trust and partnership that are built with the rider.”

“Best of Show from my Black Series was created to allow the viewer an extremely up-close and rare experience of standing in front of tame and wild animals,” Mike Weber reflects. The work is done in his signature style, a combination of paint and nature photography shot by the artist. “My layering process of gold and silver leaf, large format photographic transfers, acrylic paint and high-gloss resin create a very dimensional and realistic visual, leaving the viewer wondering how the effect was achieved.”

Beginning her career as a veterinary surgeon in England, Kathleen Friedenberg grew an affinity toward horses. After moving to the U.S. on a Thouron scholarship, she studied human and equine orthopedics at the University of Pennsylvania. After getting married, she decided to return to school to pursue medical and veterinary illustration, which eventually led her to her sculpting. Of her bronze The Farrier, Friedenberg says “Whenever a farrier is trimming hooves, any dog in the vicinity will be enjoying chewing the trimmings. With any of my artwork, I try to make the composition interesting. Sculpture should be attractive from all viewpoints, anatomically correct and for me, above all, alive!”