

Hoof Prints throughout History:
A Look into the Representation of Horses in Art through the Centuries

Thesis Prospectus by

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22 July 2013

MLA Program

Auburn University of Montgomery

Throughout history, the horse has been a popular subject matter to almost all cultures and peoples. The scientific name for the modern and domesticated horse is *Equus caballus*, but the wild horse's name is *Equus ferus caballus*.¹ The horse has been depicted in art since prehistoric times such as the cave paintings from the Stone Age in 30,000 BC.² Horses have been highlighted by certain artists throughout the centuries. By spotlighting certain artistic periods that show the horse and using my own style of art, I want to recreate the feeling and emotion of a horse-loving artist. I plan to present a world of horses to both the reader and viewer. From the Stone Ages to today's contemporary art, horses have always been a source for conversation whether it contains spoken words, written words, or artistic forms. By revisiting past artists and their styles, I plan to show how the horse has been such a common topic for so long, and also bring to light how others have portrayed these gorgeous animals throughout the years. The relationship between man and horse is a strong one. Humans have always had a special bond with horses. This relationship consists of trust and loyalty to one another. This bond is obviously one that can withstand many hardships throughout many centuries. Devotion, love, and trust have kept these two species in each other's lives for a very long time.

Ever since I can remember, horses have been a part of my life. I was taught how to ride by my grandmother and have won many competitions across the United States in Peruvian Paso horse shows. I did not start off riding Peruvians though. I started on Tennessee Walkers, one specifically name Jake who lived through three generations of my family. When I started riding by myself around age 5, I was given a pony named Peanut. Not long after, at age eight, I began

¹ Tamsin Pickeral, *The Encyclopedia of Horses and Ponies*, (Bath: Parragon Publishing, 1999), 164-168.

² Tamsin Pickeral, *The Horse: 30,000 Years of the Horse in Art*, (London: Merrell Publishers Limited, 2006), 28.

showing Peruvian Pasos as a junior competitor. My love for horses stretches far beyond looking and fantasizing; I was lucky enough to be raised as a farm girl surrounded by them. I was able to ride and see them every day if I wished because my grandparents have owned a horse ranch for most of my life.

Being raised around horses has given me some amazing memories and gifts. I believe that responsibility and patience are the two most important lessons that I have learned while having horses. From showing and trail riding to training tricks, I have done it all. Having a horse has always been a constant in my life. I have had several that I have shown, but one has stood out more than any other, and he is my current horse who I have personally owned for five years. This horse was originally given to me as a replacement show horse while my mare was pregnant. I began showing this horse in 2006, but he officially came under my name in 2008. His name is LHL Diego Rey, or “Diego” for short. Diego has been my inspiration for all of my horse art. Graphite and charcoal drawings, paintings, sculptures, and mixed media artworks have all been inspired by my horse and my relationship with him. Diego continues to play the part as my model as well as my muse.

A man by the name of George Stubbs is a very influential artist for me because of his large amount of horse paintings. Stubbs was born in 1724 and died in 1806. During his lifetime, Stubbs became fascinated by anatomy and used it to scientifically and accurately portray several different animals, including the horse. He studied the skeletal, muscular, and integumentary (skin) systems of the horse.³

With all of this research, Stubbs also took part in dissections of the horse, so he knew horses inside and out. “Stubbs spent some eighteen months dissecting horses, stripping away

³ *George Stubbs 1724-1806*, (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1984), 31.

layer after layer of skin and muscle until he came to the skeleton; as he dissected, he drew and made notes.”³ Stubbs used these studies of anatomy to further his knowledge for painting. “His research had been primarily governed by his own wish to know, as a painter, what lay beneath the skin, what contours muscles might shape and how subcutaneous veins might appear... ‘my search there being only matter of curiosity.’”⁴ Throughout all of these methods, George Stubbs ended up spending more than enough time with these animals both mentally and physically, whether they were dead or alive.

I, much like Stubbs, have spent an enormous amount of time with horses, although all of my experience has been with the living. Whenever I showed Peruvian Pasos in my early years, I had to study the different parts of the horse’s body and be able to identify them on my horse. I also had to know the difference between a horse with a good composition and a bad one. Manners were definitely a key factor in some of the classes that I entered at these horse shows. Being a young rider meant having a well-trained, cooperative, and respectful horse. The personality of a horse can sometimes take a long time to discover. Just like people, they must feel comfortable enough and put their full trust into his/her owner’s hands.

Diego is no different. It probably took a full year for him to trust me, and I put him to the test by blindfolding him when I led him or rode him. One incident in particular strengthened our bond more than any other. On my grandparent’s ranch, there is a small running creek that crosses one of the wooded trails and it has always caused trouble with the horses and them crossing it. Most of our horses tried to jump, skip, or even avoid crossing the creek completely and break out in a frantic state of mind. Well, one day as I was riding along this trail, Diego suddenly stops and starts panicking. He had convinced himself that the creek was harmful to

⁴ *George Stubbs 1724-1806*, 31.

him and that he was not going to cross it with ease. I calmed him down and climbed off of the saddle. I led him around in a few circles to keep his mind off of the creek. After a few minutes, I took off my light jacket that I had been wearing, and tied it around the front of his face to cover his eyes. I stood there with him for a few moments and tried to keep him calm. Once he had gotten used to being blindfolded for a few minutes, I led Diego to the edge of the creek. He instantly started snorting and pawing at the ground as if he was measuring how far he was from the actual water. I pulled him closer to me while I stepped into the middle of the creek. One hoof entered the water along with me. I let Diego stand there as I rubbed him down and talked to him quietly. After another few minutes, I led him a bit further into the creek and there we were both standing in the middle together. I did the same as before by trying to keep him calm and preoccupied. Finally, I reached up to take down the jacket from his face, and he automatically looked down at the water, but did not panic. He realized that I was standing in the water with him, and must have felt comfortable enough to stand with me. He reached down and sniffed the water a few times before I led him across the other half. Once across, I patted him down and gave him praise. I led him across that creek several times before mounting the saddle again. Once I was in the rider's position, I urged him towards the creek to cross it without me by his side. With ease, Diego comfortably and calmly crossed it. We crossed it several times back to back. Ever since we spent that day at the creek together, we have bonded and trusted one another. That moment has become one of my favorite throughout my whole equestrian life. Pride, trust, and loyalty were achieved in just a few hours.

When Diego finally let go and stopped resisting, I let my guard down a little too. I took the reins as his owner and partner. George Stubbs must have had quite a few interesting experiences with horses while he was using them as his models. When George Stubbs was

finished with one of his most popular paintings in 1762, even his model, Whistlejacket, believed it was realistic. “There can be no doubt that the artist who modelled this horse knew the structure and function of every muscle and bone in its body.”⁵ The horse who had been depicted in this 115 x 97 inch oil painting gave his own reaction.

A stable boy was leading Whistlejacket near the stables when Stubbs removed the picture from his easel and placed it against the stable wall ‘to view the effort of it, and was scrumbling and glazing it here and there.’ Whistlejacket, suddenly catching sight for the first time of his own image, began to ‘stare and look wildly at the picture, endeavouring to get at it, to fight and to kick it.’ Stubbs had to come to the stable boy’s assistance and ‘pummel Whistlejacket with his palette and Mahl stick,’ before the horse could be quietened and led away.⁴

George Stubbs is probably the one artist that I can relate to the most. His work with horses and art definitely reminds me of my own artwork and life. Working with horses as our models, using multiple mediums, and going the extra mile to learn about the subject that intrigues us most, are all examples of how we are similar. Similarities can also be found between the equestrian and the artist.

Riding horses is actually very similar to working with different mediums in art. Each one is very different from the other, and each one must be practiced with until the artist or equestrian is comfortable. The mediums that I use in my art ranges and depends on what idea or subject I am trying to achieve. My favorite mediums are working with clay to sculpt and graphite or charcoal drawing. Acrylic paint and watercolor paint have also been used in much of my art and so has the use of wire for various sculptures.

⁵ *George Stubbs 1724-1806*, 60.

Diego has been my model. His shape, color, and specific markings have been used in almost all of my artwork completed for my gallery show. Diego's color is most commonly known as dark bay, which means that his body is a dark brown, but his mane and tail are both black. Diego has very distinctive markings on his body. He has four white socks and a greyish brown birthmark behind his front left shoulder. Birthmarks on horses are not very common, and this definitely makes my horse stand out. Digital images of Diego were used to capture his various poses like standing, running, holding his head up or dropping it down, having a tucked and set head, and of course, his leg positioning. The large wire piece was fitted to his exact composition. It is exactly the same size of Diego.

When deciding what I wanted to focus on artistically at the beginning of my graduate courses, many ideas came to mind, but I always came back to one: horses. Art and horses are the two things that motivate, inspire, and captivate me more than any other. Simply combining these two important parts of my life was easy and seemed sensible, but it also opened up a whole new world of creativity for me. Throughout my artistic career, I have been influenced by several different artists and art movements. It has been extremely helpful to study and research the horse through art history. I believe it has enhanced both my knowledge and my artwork which mostly portrays the horse. Learning about the various art periods has created a firm foundation for how and why I depict the horse the way I do.

Horse art dates back to prehistoric times. The earliest known depictions were found in caves throughout France. These primitive cave paintings are some of the oldest forms of art, the oldest being from around 30,000 BC and it's called *Horse Panel* from the Chauvet Caves.⁶ Raw animal hides and cave walls were the canvases for the primitive people. In the early

⁶ Pickeral, *The Horse: 30,000 Years of the Horse in Art*, 28.

civilizations, horses were important and documented as such. Little is known about individual artists in these early years so most artwork is distinguished by date, location, and culture alone.⁷

Moving a bit further in time, the Renaissance, or era of rebirth, brought new ideas on how to portray the horse. From some of the masters of art like Leonardo da Vinci, Donatello, and Paolo Uccello, the horse begins to enter art more frequently. These artists included horses in military battle scenes, mythological scenes, and others as well. The horse also becomes symbolic for ideas such as loyalty, honor, and bravery. During the Renaissance, artists, like da Vinci, began to use science to gain a better understanding on how to accurately portray a horse's body. Through this, anatomical studies became cartoons and sketches which later turned into amazingly precise paintings and sculptures, like the future artworks of George Stubbs.⁸

The next artistic movement known as the Baroque gives viewers some of the most beautiful horse art pieces. The artwork in this period is dramatic, full of extreme light and dark shadows, and contains rich, deep color. In the Baroque style, horses' bodies look very voluptuous and muscular. The manes and tails are long, curly, and voluminous. During this era, horses were depicted as modes of transportation as well as the untamed, wild, and crazy, yet beautiful animal. Much of the artist's focus was on completing portraits for nobility, the higher status, and the wealthy. Commissions were extremely important for artists, and many people were placed on horseback in their portraits.⁹ Charles I was captured on canvas as an equestrian by Anthony van Dyck, who completed several equestrian portraits during his artistic career.¹⁰ The artists that portrayed the best horses with these Baroque characteristics were Peter Paul

⁷Pickeral, *The Horse: 30,000 Years of the Horse in Art*, 6-7.

⁸ *ibid.*, 69-71.

⁹ John Baskett, *The Horse in Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 72.

¹⁰ Pickeral, *The Horse: 30,000 Years of the Horse in Art*, 76.

Rubens, Anthony van Dyck, and Diego Velazquez. This art period also included the mythological beasts such as unicorns, the Pegasus, and the centaur.

Not long after, the Romantic period came along. This style was and still is very popular today. Romanticism began in landscape paintings where the artists tried to depict the sublime. The artists during this movement were trying to portray nationalism, and history paintings that carried a political message. The brushwork from most of these paintings are loose, but there is a thick application of paint. These Romantic artists were trying to evoke emotion, faith, and spirituality.¹¹ “The main characteristics of Romanticism included subjectivity, individualism, spirituality, and love of nature.”¹² During Romanticism, the best known artists were Theodore Gericault, Francisco Goya, and Eugene Delacroix. Gericault “loved horses, both in the flesh and as artistic subjects.”¹³ Gericault and Delacroix both used horses in some of their paintings that included battle scenes.

Realists depicted horses as well, but in a slightly different manner. Much of the work in this art period called realism is focused on the working class, including peasants and even the common soldiers. On the other hand, some realist artists portrayed the upper class involving jockeys and racehorses. The savage Indian becomes an interesting subject as well, especially to George Catlin. The hunting scene with Indians riding bareback, involving large buffalo, is one of the most popular pictures created by Catlin.¹⁴ The working class art pieces show scenes of agriculture like the farm and plow horse. The upper class artworks show scenes from around the horse race tracks. Other horse artists during this period include Jean-Louis Ernest Meissonier

¹¹ Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, *Nineteenth Century European Art* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2006), 161.

¹² *ibid.*, 179.

¹³ *ibid.*, 209.

¹⁴ Pickeral, *The Horse: 30,000 Years of the Horse in Art*, 237.

and George Stubbs. Most of the horses in this movement are depicted as tall and lanky or short and fat; these portrayals are not at all idealized or abstracted. The idea of realism was for the artists to paint or draw the subject as realistically as possible. Stubbs used science much like da Vinci did when painting a horse. Both of these artists, even though they lived centuries apart, used anatomy to precisely create a portrait of a horse. This is an interesting fact that continues to draw attention to viewers because of how extremely accurate George Stubbs' horses appear.¹⁵

The horse continues to be the subject through the centuries for many artists and styles, but none was so popular as in Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. These artists mostly focused on the leisure time of the upper class including events at the racetrack, the hunt with the hounds, and trail and meadow leisure rides.¹⁶ These artworks represent the skill of horseback riders like jockeys and even women on sidesaddles.¹⁷ The horse is viewed as a luxury instead of a necessity like that in much of realism which depicted a lot of the working class. Most of the horses in these Impressionist and Post-impressionist paintings are well-groomed and conditioned like their owners. These artists really captured light and the use of color is expansive and stunning. In Impressionist paintings, the artist used wet paint on top of wet paint with little color mixing. Short and thick brushstrokes of various solid colors left a beautiful optical illusion for viewers. Small details are not included. Light, color, and the reflection from one object to another was carefully paid attention to and used to create wonderful works of art. Impressionists wanted to show visual effects of light and color rather than details of a scene.¹⁸ The best known

¹⁵ Pickeral, *The Horse: 30,000 Years of the Horse in Art*, 130.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 164-175.

¹⁷ Baskett, *The Horse in Art*, 158.

¹⁸ Margaret Samu, "Impressionism: Art and Modernity," in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000-), accessed June 20, 2013, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd_imml.htm (October 2004).

artists of this style were Pierre Auguste Renoir, Edgar Degas, and Edouard Manet. Each of these great artists depicted horses in some of their artwork.

Manet and especially Degas depicted horses from the derbies and race tracks. Degas used the techniques of thick application, fast brushstrokes, and wet on wet paint to capture scenes dealing with the horse races. These are some of his best pieces of art and have been recognized because of the blurry backgrounds which help to demonstrate that the horses and their riders are in motion. “Degas was a master of representing the moving horse, a subject that had always presented a challenge to artists... Horses move fast, and depicting their four legs, in motion, requires great powers of observation.”¹⁹

Post-impressionism is a bit different although sometimes Post-impressionist and Impressionist artworks have been shown together. Post-impressionist artists wanted a little more control and clarity so they used solid areas of color and distinctive forms. These artists wanted to show defined shapes and forms with the same idea of using solid colors like the Impressionists. Pointillism comes about during this period as well. Instead of wet on wet like in Impressionism, each dot of paint is allowed to dry so that they will not bleed or blend together. Georges Seurat was one of the best artists to create a painting using pointillism. He used this style precisely, scientifically, and diligently. Each dot is its own color and viewers can see how a pointillist painting is full of different colors but with none overlapping or blending. Upon close inspection, the viewer can differentiate between the colors, yet far away it looks as if everything is shaded and blended nicely. This is yet another optical illusion for viewers. All of these artists, both Impressionist and Post-Impressionist, leave a textured canvas due to the thick application of

¹⁹ Chu, *Nineteenth Century European Art*, 402.

paint. Great artists from the Post-Impressionist movement include Paul Gauguin, Georges Seurat, and Vincent van Gogh.²⁰

Continuing through art history, Cubism becomes a fascinating new art form created by the master of abstraction, Pablo Picasso. Cubist artworks are created from abstract forms using mostly pointed-edged shapes like rectangles, triangles, and squares. Picasso used these shapes to make a scene or subject of a painting. Cubist art is made to trick the eye and the mind like yet another optical illusion. Much of this work is made to state a position, whether it be religious, political, emotional, or mental. Of course, they are aesthetically pleasing as well, bearing interesting color choice, composition, and subject matter. *Guernica* is a famous painting by Picasso that falls into this category, and it includes a horse.²¹

Surrealism comes about as an artistic movement that captures the ideas of fantasy, dreams, the subconscious, and the strange and bizarre. This art can also trick the eye and mind like that in Cubism. This artwork uses exaggerations and imagination more than any other form. The subject matter seems unreal and strange. The palette is very colorful and most surrealist artworks have a sense of darkness with the use of so many shadows. Georgia O'Keefe and Salvador Dali are two of the most prestigious artists of this movement.²² Vasko Taskovski is another artist whose concentration is mostly on portraying the horse in the surrealist style.

²⁰ James Voorhies, "Post-Impressionism," in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000- , http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/poim/hd_poim.htm (October 2004).

²¹ Sabine Rewald, "Cubism," in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000-, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cube/hd_cube.htm (October 2004).

²²James Voorhies, "Surrealism," in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000-, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/surr/hd_surr.htm (October 2004)

Regarding contemporary art, there seems to be a lot of abstract forms and shapes. Many modern artists look for size to capture attention from viewers as well as taking techniques from several past art movements and combining them into one painting. Sculpture has been reinvented and reborn as a popular medium like that of the Classical and Greco-Roman marble statues. A few artists that use this modern type of art include Theresa Paden, Heather Jansch, and Andy Scott. Paden uses abstraction, bright colors, and large canvases to paint contemporary horse figures. It seems that she has combined Surrealism and Impressionism to capture the beauty of horses in a very different way. Heather Jansch creates life size sculptural horses out of driftwood while Andy Scott uses metal and wire to create giant welded sculptures of horses.

Throughout the many centuries, artists have used a multitude of methods and techniques to capture the beauty and spirit of horses. The most accurate portrayals of the horse body come from the artists who studied their subjects like da Vinci, Stubbs, and even myself. Spending a vast amount of time with such a powerful, yet beautiful animal can be captivating. Whether the horse hangs on a wall in an exhibition frame, sits in a glass case, or runs through an open field, the effect is fascinating. All sorts of influence have surfaced and inspired the artwork that lines museums. The horse fits into this category and has always been a popular subject matter. Regardless of the medium used, or the size, horse art has produced a type of timeline like hoof prints throughout history.

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