



EQUESTRIAN ART JAMES GILLICK (PART 2)

By James Gillick

FROM 7TH– 28TH JUNE, 2016 SLADMORE CONTEMPORARY IN LONDON, RENOWNED WORLDWIDE FOR ITS ANIMAL BRONZES, SHOWED TWENTY FIVE OF JAMES GILLICK'S EQUESTRIAN PAINTINGS AND SKETCHES, A SHARED PROJECT WITH JONATHAN COOPER, JAMES' DEALER FOR SIXTEEN YEARS. IN THE SECOND CONVERSATION IN OUR SERIES, JAMES GILLICK DESCRIBES HOW HE WORKED CLOSELY WITH HORSE PEOPLE AND PATRONS TO ACHIEVE HIS GOAL OF PAINTING THE ARABIAN HORSE AS A TRUE EMBLEM OF ARAB CULTURE AND TRADITION.





As I spent more time studying the horses I could see that they are a mirror of their culture. The Arabian horses have also taught me a lot about horses generally. **Working with all three types of horse**, what was very obvious was that horses connect hugely. As humans we prize language and we suppose that since animals can't speak they can't communicate, but that is not true at all. All animals connect through sound and smell and body movement. **There is nothing a horse can't say that it needs to say.** But humans find it very difficult to connect, even though we have the power of speech. Certainly these Arabian horses spoke very clearly to me.

I went from stud yard to stud yard with some wonderful clients, which has enabled me to get so closely involved with the horses and their owners. I particularly admire **the connosseurship of Mohammed Jassim Al-Marzouk**, of **Ajmal Arabian Stud**. Artists have always needed good patrons. Art needs people prepared to support it, and value the skill that they are promoting. In return, as the artist, part of my role is to make an effort to make my painting distinguished. I see the patron and the artist as a team to make great art and to make desirable art. We have to cooperate to produce this.

Particularly in my work for this exhibition, this has become a priority. I admire the efforts being made to establish the **Arabian horse as a national emblem**. I am interested in the horses as an icon, something which defines what people are about. I don't think we in the West are really understanding the situation in the Middle East at present. So I wanted to create an iconic image. With the painting, *Brave Stallion*, that was a deliberate metaphor for the **Middle East**. The rocks I referenced from a quarry and the cliffs are in Kuwait, and the sand storm is rolling up behind. And there is the brave Arabian stallion trapped in this very difficult precarious position, but he isn't giving up. 🐾

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Meeting all the people who work with Arabian horses at every level: from the stud grooms, to the breeders and owners, has given me such an insight into **the Arabian horse**, and equally importantly, the world it lives in. Unlike the methods with Thoroughbreds in Britain, Europe and the United States, I have discovered that Arabian horses in their studs usually live in familial groups. The stallions are in close proximity to the mares. I have been very impressed by this, and I get the idea that the horses are much more relaxed and less lonely as a result.

In the West people tend to be rather frightened of the famous Thoroughbred racehorse

stallions, so I think there is a lot to be learnt. I have tried to convey my ideas about this in **my exhibition** by throwing together images of horses from the different breeds and showing them as they are. I feel it is a brave move, but I want to say: **“Behold the Horse.”**

The Arabian horse communicates beautifully with other horses, and in my art I wanted to capture these strong familial bonds between the horses, because that was what I found among the people as well. I think this real affection in each family and tribe is reflected by the way their horses behave. I wanted to show the Arab

peoples through their horses. Each different culture in the world develops the type of horse that encapsulates what the people value. So for me, it is a wonderful opportunity to try to enter the mind-set of the people of the Middle East and to show their dignity. **For example, the white stallion that I have painted is standing on a precipice in front of a sand storm.** The horse has nowhere to go, yet he is calmly not shifting and he is being brave and he understands his responsibilities. This attitude, which I think is mutual between the horses and the people, has been one of the chief things I wanted to depict in this exhibition.

