

# THE STORY OF GEOFFREY HUGHES

## DIRECTOR OF THE OSBORNE STUDIO GALLERY

By Theo Woodham Smith



GEOFFREY HUGHES IS AN ART DEALER AND DIRECTOR IMPERVIOUS TO TRANSIENT FADS AND FASHIONS. HIS CUSTOMERS LOOK FOR A HAPPY FIND, NOT JUST A FUTURE INVESTMENT, THOUGH IT CAN HAPPEN. ORIGINALLY BASED IN COVENT GARDEN, THE OSBORNE STUDIO GALLERY HAS BEEN A FIXTURE OF THE KNIGHTSBRIDGE ART SCENE FOR THE PAST FOURTEEN YEARS, ONE OF THE MOST ELEGANT RESIDENTIAL AND SHOPPING AREAS OF LONDON, CLOSE TO HYDE PARK. LOCATED ON MOTCOMB STREET, A NARROW STREET CRAMMED WITH CAFES, BARS AND LOCAL ARTISAN SHOPS, THE GALLERY IS JUST A FEW MOMENTS FROM HARRODS THE FAMOUS DEPARTMENT STORE, SURROUNDED BY GRAND WHITE MANSIONS AND STATE EMBASSIES.







*"Horses and racing have always been an inspiration to great artists, and you can turn that into a contemporary form". Geoffrey, ever discreet, has won the confidence of serious collectors, owners and breeders of horses. He sells art that will stand the test of time.*

#### ART AND ARTISTS FROM THE OSBORNE STUDIO GALLERY

From November 7th to 25th November there will be an exhibition of two women artists, new to the gallery. Fired clay sculptures of horses by Susan Leyland, created in her Tuscan studio, a perfect fusion of the classical and the contemporary.

Scottish figurative painter Patsy McArthur presents her collection of large scale charcoal drawings. *"I enjoy the directness of drawing, and find that monochrome work serves to strip the image down, without colour to seduce, it focuses one on the content. This year I have been filming horses to draw from as well as working with the human figure in motion. The power and energy that comes from the horse in movement has been a fantastic inspiration for me in recent months"*, she explains

One of the most successful artists at the Osborne Studio Gallery over the years has been French equestrian painter Hubert de Watrigant, born 1954 in the South West of France where his father bred and trained racehorses. Watrigant has a distinctly impressionist

approach to the world of racing, allowing us freedom to interpret his vision.

Watrigant has exhibited his work several times at the Osborne Studio Gallery, but also in France, America, the Emirates and Japan. Private collectors include HM Queen Elizabeth, HM The King of Morocco, HH Sheikh Mohammed al-Thani, and many other connoisseurs of equestrian art, including the Wildenstein and Niarchos families.

Katie O'Sullivan, born in London 1959, has been exhibiting her work since 1981, most often at The Osborne Studio Gallery, but also in New York City, Tokyo and Hong Kong. Since her first exhibition, commissions from racehorse owners and trainers have never ceased. A specialty seems to be commissioned portraits of winning mounts.

Married to ex-National Hunt jockey, now trainer, Jamie Osborne, who keeps at least 70 horses in their stables at one time, she lives and works in the middle of the racing scene at their large family house in Upper Lambourn, Berkshire. Sir Peter O'Sullivan, who was Chairman of the Osborne Studio Gallery, described her painting. *"Katie is quite simply one of the most original and beguiling interpreters of the power and grace of the horse in the history of equine art."*

*All paintings by Hubert de Watrigant*

It has two light airy floors devoted to painting and sculpture, mostly equestrian, and a leafy back garden, embellished with bronze nymphs by sculptor Jonathan Wylder. Hughes guides his clients towards paintings and bronzes that reflect their own tastes. It could be a field of flowers; a cinematic glimpse of life on the racecourse, an equine portrait, or even a beach; purchases are intended to light up their lives with aesthetic pleasure every day.

The Osborne Studio Gallery was opened in March 1986 by a devoted lover of all things equine, **HRH Princess Anne, the Princess Royal**. She is the first member of the Royal family to compete for Great Britain in the 1976 Olympics, having won gold and silver medals for eventing in the 1975 European championships.

The gallery was named after the sculptor and co-founder James Osborne, who was the guiding force behind the gallery until his death in 1991. Geoffrey Hughes has spent many years discovering and nurturing his artists. He understood that the gallery needed a distinctive personality to make its mark, but the gallery is not fashion orientated, his customers buy paintings to remember past and present pleasures. Top hats at Royal Ascot or a Venetian lagoon. His most successful artists are consumed by a love of horse racing, its atmosphere, drama and speed, and the beauty of thoroughbreds in motion.

Hughes, an English gentleman with no hint of 'art world' braggadocio, is sensitive to the feelings of his artists, and alert to the tastes of customers. A love affair with horses and racing began at seven years old, the classic

age of discovery, when influences take hold. "I had a twin brother, and as a schoolboy at seven years of age we were racing round our school playground pretending to be jockeys," he says.

Geoffrey grew up listening to Peter O'Sullivan's memorable horse racing commentaries on television (The Voice of Racing), and he says that as a boy, it transported him to a 'much bigger, more interesting world.'

Years later he would not only meet his idol, but Peter would become chairman of the gallery and a close friend. *"He used to come to the gallery in the early days in Covent Garden and we gradually became friends"*, Geoffrey says. *"He retired in 1997 and I took him out to lunch a week later, asked him whether he would become our chairman. He rang me up the next day and said he would do it. We were thrilled."*

Before becoming an art dealer with the revered Peter O'Sullivan as chairman, Geoffrey had an adventurous life, taking chances, canoeing down the Zambezi River, working in auction houses in **London** and Johannesburg. While living in Johannesburg for three years Geoffrey considered a career as a diplomat, but on his return believes his decision to open a gallery was the right one.

When he moved the gallery from Covent Garden to Belgravia he was one of seven in and around Motcomb Street. Now he is the sole survivor. "The niche", he says, "for horses, is essential; many of our exhibitions are horse-orientated".

