



EQUESTRIAN ART JAMES GILLICK: PART 1

By James Gillick

HIGHLY RESPECTED FOR BOTH HIS STILL LIFE AND EQUESTRIAN ART, THE PAINTINGS OF BRITISH ARTIST, JAMES GILLICK, WERE RECENTLY SHOWN IN THE ROYAL BOX DURING HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN'S 90TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS AT WINDSOR CASTLE. HE MAKES ALL HIS OWN MATERIALS BY HAND USING TECHNIQUES THAT DATE BACK TO THE 17TH CENTURY. HIS WORK RANGES FROM THE SMALLEST OF STILL LIFES TO GAME PAINTINGS AND LIFE SIZE HORSE PAINTINGS. USING TECHNIQUES DEVELOPED OVER MANY GENERATIONS GILLICK WORKS IN THE TRADITION OF EVERY ARTIST WHO HAS HAD A FASCINATION WITH AND RESPECT FOR THIS SUBJECT, FROM THE FIRST TO DEPICT THE HORSE IN ANCIENT CAVES, THROUGH GREAT BRITISH MASTERS SUCH AS GEORGE STUBBS, TO THE PRESENT DAY. THROUGHOUT JUNE 2016 HIS UNIQUE

EXHIBITION, 'THE HORSE', DEPICTING ARABIAN HORSES AS WELL AS BRITISH THOROUGHBREDS AND POLO PONIES WAS ON SHOW AT LONDON'S SLADMORE GALLERY. (IN MAYFAIR, LONDON) IN ASSOCIATION WITH JONATHAN COOPER GALLERY OF CHELSEA. IN THE FIRST OF A SERIES OF CONVERSATIONS, GILLICK TELLS HT HOW HE DISCOVERED HIS PASSION FOR THE ARABIAN HORSE.

FOR PEOPLE who really know their horses, the pure bred Egyptian Arabian is surely the pinnacle of Arabian horse breeding: an animal entirely distinct in its type. As an artist, you must have an understanding of this from the moment you start painting. Sadly, in England where the British Thoroughbred is so highly prized, attitudes can sometimes be dismissive of Arabian horses.

However, I am a painter more than I am a horse-person and what I see in the Arabian, from a painter's point of view, is an animal of great working and practical use as well as great beauty. I can appreciate the struggle for perfection which is bringing the breed to where it is now. To visit the wonderful Middle East and see Arabian horses at 'home' properly for the first time was a truly glorious experience

My opportunity to see the Arabians in their studs came about last year through Gerry Farrell, owner of the famous

Sladmore Contemporary Gallery (32 Bruton Place, Mayfair London, W 1J 6NW, www.sladmore.com). We visited Kuwait last November 2015 where I immersed myself in the equestrian world of Bait Al Arab and there, through Her Royal Highness Sheikhah Sarah Fahad Al Sabah and her good friend Mr Mohammed Jassim Al Marzouq of Ajmal Arabian Stud, I was able to experience the true personality of the Arabian horse. I spent a wonderful few days.

A high point was meeting Judith Forbis who made a huge impression on me. Through her work, particularly The Blue Book, Judith's contribution to the breed is staggering. She has greatly added to our understanding of the bloodline, and also located the Arabian more centrally in the equine world. She has done so much to restore the purity of the Egyptian Arabian, by re-discovering the original dam and stallion lines of so many famous horses on the very brink of their elimination from history.

The Egyptian and the Arabian people are rightly proud of Judith Forbis. She is in her eighties now and I feel that I am painting at a significant point in the history of the breed. What Mrs. Forbis has done follows on from the work of Egyptians themselves. She is a visionary who has succeeded in recording knowledge that was fast disappearing, as well as re-establishing the worldwide reputation of the breed.

I was able to visit both the Bait al Arab and Ajmal Arabian Studs, where Ansata Stud lines are particularly evident. I discovered that Ansata Hejazi is an especially potent line, and it was this among other factors which inspired me to re-create the true Arabian character in my work.



Arabian scratching foot - 'The Itch'

The trip to Kuwait was a tremendously uplifting experience. The Arabian horse lit a firework underneath me! I came back feeling absolutely inspired, and the Arabian horse became the source and the heart of the exhibition.

As I put the exhibition together, my studies gave me a great insight into the shared genetic history of Arabians and Thoroughbreds. In historic paintings of early British Thoroughbreds, their Arabian breeding can clearly be seen in the way they hold their head, their tail, the bone structures of their leg, their attitude, and the size of the eye. Following from this, I believe Thoroughbred owners can learn a huge amount from Arabian breeders. The Arabian is brought up so very differently from most Thoroughbreds.

The result is that Arabian horses have proud, self-aware body language and a happy, confident demeanour. Even so, there is something even more remarkable about the Arabian horse, something which is hard to describe. As an artist I am determined to use my work to challenge the preconception of Arabian horses as being unmanageable. I want to depict the Arabian properly. I want to describe the Arabian horse as the free moving, energetic, disciplined and courageous animal that its owners know it to be.

In the next issue 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. 🐾

Photos by James Gillick