



HORSETIMES INTERVIEW WITH HAITZ DE DIEGO ARRIZABALAGA

By Nadine Britain

BORN IN 1979 IN ONDARROA, BASQUE COUNTRY. HE FELL IN LOVE WITH ART AS A YOUNG BOY AND COULD BE FOUND PAINTING IN HIS GRANDFATHER'S LAP WHILE HIS PARENTS CONTINUED TO FINISH THEIR EDUCATION. HE WOULD GO ON TO PURSUE HIS PASSION AND STUDYING GRAPHIC ARTS. HAITZ WORKED IN FILM AND ADVERTISING TO SUPPORT HIS EDUCATION BEFORE EMBARKING ON HIS OWN ARTISTIC INITIATIVES. CURRENTLY BASED IN BARCELONA, SPAIN.



What is it like growing up in Basque Country and how does that inspire your art?

It is a wonderful and inspirational place. The brave sea dances in harmony with the mountains. There are many small towns who live from livestock, so I have always been linked to animals. Winter there is dark and mysterious, there is a special light, and that has made my way of painting. Now I live in a mountain town near Barcelona, on a farm with animals.

How old were you when you decided to focus on your own art? Can you share a reflection about what that time in your life was like?

I was in my 30's when I decided to focus exclusively on painting; I had been working for many years as an illustrator and storyboarder, but always for clients. This prevented me from taking full advantage of my potential, being able to capture everything I had inside without conditions. I knew it would be a very hard road

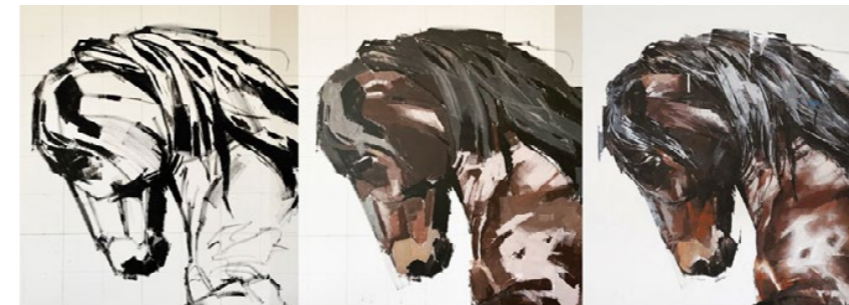
to travel, but it was clear that one day I would take the step, so I did it.

What is your inspiration behind painting horses?

It is an animal I feel I identify with. It is noble, transmits power, elegance, majesty and is therapeutic. This means that I can transmit my feelings in painting with more transparency.

Have you ever played a sport before? If so, are there any similarities you can relate between creating art and participating in sport?

Discipline, work, perseverance and dreams. I was a semi-professional swimmer and I've been a triathlete for many years as well as surfed dangerous waves all around the world. I have always seen many similarities between sport and art. It has helped me to be creative, spontaneous and see that the goals that you set yourself with effort can be achieved.





Horse people have such a passion for their sport, similar to the passion you have for painting. How did you know that art was 'it' for you; how did you shake the thoughts of not being able to live from this passion and push through to be what you are today?

Since I picked up a pencil it was clear to me, but virtue has to go hand in hand with hard work. The art world is not easy – being recognized isn't only based on having talent – it takes perseverance, patience and being at the right place at the right time... and I'm working on it.

Your scenes are quite mysterious but the same techniques leave your depiction of horses so charismatic. What is the difference in feeling when painting these distinct subjects?

There is no difference, I paint both scenes with the same emotional intensity. Although the theme is different, I like to transmit that mysteriousness with "chiaroscuro" (an effect of contrasted light and shadow) in the form of brushstrokes and a very reduced palette. I combine transparencies with very firm and edgy strokes... it goes with my personality.

There is so much talk these days about artificial intelligence (AI) and we are curious; what's your take as a student of graphic design? How do you think AI can be used or compete with art in the future?

The truth is that I have not delved much into this topic. Possibly it has its positive side, but I paint with my heart and this is what AI does not have.

You don't only paint horses, your collections from Syria are beautifully haunting; there is a glimmer of hope surrounded by destruction in each piece. Can you tell us a bit about this experience?

I needed to convey my feelings about such a massacre, with the helplessness of not being able to support as I would have wanted. Despite not being able to be there, I contacted several journalists and Syrian families to be able to feel, in some way, a thousandth part of what they left, and thus to be able to express that feeling in my paintings. The idea came from my partner Núria. She makes me see things more clearly. She's my light.

Have you thought about visiting Egypt or other countries in the Middle East?

Egypt, not yet, but I'm looking forward to visiting you! I have been to Turkey, Jordan, and the Emirates. Traveling is one of my passions. Enriches your soul.

I've read that your large pieces take 3-5 weeks to complete, in the horse world we are aware that good things come with time as well; can you describe this process for an artist?

I contact horse specialists and I go to visit them so as not to lose any detail when painting. Sometimes I make sketches of what I would like to paint, and sometimes I go directly on canvas. Then I see what atmosphere goes well with that sketch.

Where will we be able to see your works in the future and can we expect more horse portraits?

Of course. I have many requests for horse portraits and it is something I really love. This summer I will exhibit 2 paintings at the **MEAM (European Museum of Modern Art)** here in Barcelona, a work at the Minima Gallery in Mykonos (**Greece**) and another piece at a private gallery in Qatar. I am also preparing a presentation of all my work in Barcelona soon.

Are you able now to live off of your passion?

After so many years, I began to be able to live from my passion.

You seem to have unlocked the key to happiness, is there anything else you can share about maintaining a happy life?

Being able to be with your loved ones, living in a magical place surrounded by beloved animals, makes happiness come with open arms. Seeing how our world deteriorates for the interest of "those" few makes me very angry. *I will continue expressing my feelings in the form of painting. I hope that the light of my artwork reaches many hearts.* 🐾