

Horses

by Peggy Kinstler

We asked seven artists who paint or sculpt horses to tell us about the creation of one piece. Enjoy the entertaining responses we received from Karen Boylan, June Cade, Yvonne Kitchen, Joan Larson, Margo Petterson, Jim Rey, and Karen Stoddard.

River Dance by Margo Petterson



Margo Petterson

A herd of horses was tearing across the river right towards her camera. Margo Petterson knew they'd turn and not trample her as this was a staged photo shoot... but really? "This was the most exciting moment of my life," she exhales. "I'll never have a better feeling than that. I wanted to burst, I was so excited."

Petterson later admitted that there was one other moment that boosted the adrenaline a notch higher. A couple of years later, at the same annual photo shoot, called The Artists' Ride in South Dakota, she says that rather than driving the horses across the Cheyenne River towards the camera-ready artists, the wranglers drove them downstream towards the artists. "It was a different route than before and I was snapping away when I realized, 'Oh my God, they are coming right at me, and this time there are no turns.' I put the camera down, clambered to the side of the river but the bank was too high for me to climb. Fortunately the horses coming at me leaped up there rather than run over me.

That's nothing I want to try again."

Petterson explains that the Artists' Ride gathers horses, models, and cattle for artists to sketch and photograph. "I was basically a figurative painter and was there to take pictures of the women and children. This was my first time and I was looking around at the women and children... and the horses would go by. They were so beautiful.

"Later in the day, I realized this was one opportunity I couldn't miss. Even though I didn't paint horses, I had to get some photos of those beautiful animals charging across the river.

"After I got home, I found I could recreate the excitement I'd felt by looking at my photos." *River Dance* was painted from one of those photos. "I thought out in my head exactly what I wanted. The first two horses, the paints, had to be the strong ones with the others faded out so they wouldn't be quite so distinct. This would give me a center point, coming right out at you from the painting. It flowed and came together. I couldn't ask for anything better.

"This was a turning point for me in my art career. Now I'm painting horses left and right."

As a figurative painter, Petterson's earlier work was largely portraiture. "When I paint something, the look, the stance, the body language click in my head and I see what I want. I'm not that good at posing people, but I've always been able to catch the personality." She's finding she can do this with horses too. "I think they have their own personalities and body language."

"One of the first horses I painted was Goldie, a golden palomino, and she astounded me. I went with my model and when Goldie saw the model she got so excited that she started prancing around the corral wanting to play, just like a dog. Through that whole photo shoot, Goldie was the star. She stole the show from the lovely model with her long blond hair."

Petterson says she still paints women and children, but finds the excitement of horses irresistible. Δ

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