

Horses & Art . . .

by Iowa artist, Mona Majorowicz



"Inspirations and Motivations"

I have spent the day ambling around the gallery looking for ideas to begin a new horse painting. The inspirations behind new paintings vary greatly. Sometimes it is all about one particular horse that is special to me in some way. Other times there is a mood or feeling I want to express. And now and then it is about a composition that strikes me as interesting.

I use my own photographs for reference and ideas. On rare occasion, I have a wonderful photo where all the elements are exactly right and I just do it. Most of the time though, there is a vague idea or concept, in which I need to search for photographic support. Today, however, there is even less than that. I just know that I want to do a horse painting. And my muse, it seems, has gone into hiding.

I began my quest for inspiration by going through my stack of photos that I keep out as my *'gonna do something with these, someday soon'* pile. The stack shifts between a few hundred to close to a thousand at times. No small feat to conquer it. The bulk of my reference photos are stored neatly away in drawers. A few years back I did a rough count to find my collection of horse photos ranged well over 10,000.

Because the past several paintings have been larger in size and of a challenging nature, I think I want to go for a more simple graphic. I come across some photos I took at the Albert City Thresher Bee several years ago. The mare was demonstrating well digging. I am pretty sure it was the first time she had been



away from home with her foal, as she was extremely nervous and continually nuzzled, nickered and reassured the youngster.

"Letting go of Reality"

They will make great models on which to base the next painting. I have over two dozen shots of them together. When working, most of these will be out on my drafting table, as well as some additional photos of other horses to help provide information for some of the changes I intend to make. After examining them closely, I select one photo which I think is the most pleasing in composition and mood.

I altered the color of the horses primarily so I could play a bit with the reflected light. Even though an all white animal is exceptionally challenging for me, I went ahead and used white as the base color of my mare. I thought a bay foal would offer some brightness and contrast as well as allow me to cast some interesting colors onto the mare. I utilized gingers and oranges as well as purples, blues and greens for shadow areas. While the coloring is not reality, it reads as authentic when casually viewed. It is only upon closer inspection that the rainbow of colors become apparent.

I draw upon personal experiences and emotions when creating. However, photos play an important role as my primary reference source. Using them can be a bit of a two-edged sword. They are extremely helpful for anatomy and lighting, but they can also distort reality, both figuratively and literally. Plus, relying too heavily on photographs can easily become a crutch, where it becomes more and more difficult to deviate from them. Sometimes, in the interest of maintaining a good creative energy, it is helpful to not cling too tightly to reality.

"Freeing the Muse"

The main reference photo for this painting has been included here, so that you can see how similar the end result is to the photo. It is in many ways exactly the same and yet it is completely different. I like the foal looking out at the viewer. And I especially like the tenderness expressed by the mare. On a compositional level I find the tension between them intriguing. The lines of their bodies and the way their heads come together to form a subtle heart shape—it is almost as if it is a hidden symbol reflecting their bond.

Not so long ago, I worked hard towards a more realistic look. But over time this approach no longer fed my creative side. The older I get, the farther I stray from it. I feel I am transitioning now. More and more, my paintings are being approached from a new perspective. My work is not so much about trying to recreate reality, as it is about filtering reality from an emotional and spiritual place.

In the end, I don't know if this would have been a more powerful painting had I created it just like the photo. It certainly would have told a different story. I will most likely paint the two of them again. But for this painting, I captured the intimacy of the moment which is what attracted me to it originally. Plus, I was able to give my creative spirit, my muse if you will, some room to grow and flourish. This, in turn, will hopefully make finding the inspiration for the next painting just a little bit easier.

Mona Majorowicz is a professional working artist. She and her husband, Mike, own and operate Wild Faces Gallery in Rolfe, Iowa. If you would like to view her artistic journaling, see work in progress, photos, or order a print of "Devotion" or one of many horse images available, please visit her website www.wildfacesgallery.com

