

# Horses & Art

by Mona Majorowicz

## Libertador

Occasionally, there are horses that capture my imagination. They have a certain quality of presence that draws me to them. It's not always a beauty thing. At least not in the classic sense of a traditional breed type of beauty. There is this unnameable thing that will pull me back to them time and again. Libertador was just such a horse. I have painted him in one form or another several times. The only horse that I have painted more, is my own.

I met "Leo" at the Minnesota Horse Expo several years back. A friend and I were wandering aimlessly taking pictures, as we do every year at this event. When I first saw him, he was with a group of Peruvian Pasos getting ready to do a breed demonstration. He was a handsome liver chestnut stallion who carried himself proudly as a gentleman. He had an abundant mane and tail and exuded an energy I found intriguing.

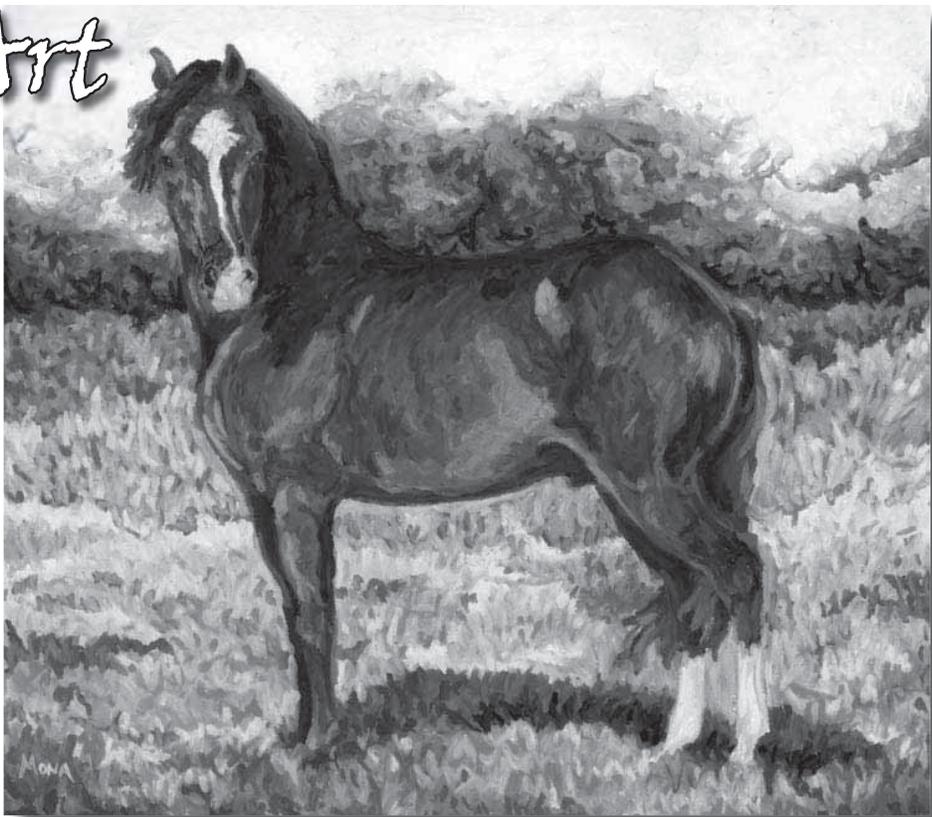
He had drawn a crowd of admirers and though he was a seasoned stallion, he was courteous and gentle. There are some horses at the expos that develop a following akin to a fan club. Leo was one of these. He was an ambassador for the Peruvian Paso breed as well as for horses as a whole. Beautiful to behold, charismatic and loving.

What caught my attention was his extremely expressive face. I asked if I could take some photos and then talked with the owner briefly. As the day wore on, every time I would see him I would take a few more photos. By days end, I was actively searching him out at any event that I thought he might be in.

## Red Carnations

Horse expos are wonderful sources of inspiration. There is nothing like being surrounded by hundreds of beautiful horses in all shapes and sizes to get my creative juices flowing. So upon returning, I enthusiastically sat down to paint. I had this idea for a white horse with red flowers. I just needed to choose a horse for the model. Leo's expressiveness and energy made him perfect for what I had in mind. The painting that resulted was Red Carnations. Though this does not look like his portrait, in many ways, it is all Leo.

One of the many blessings of being an animal artist is that it brings people into



my life that share a common interest. Through a string of events, a print of Red Carnations ended up with the owner Shawn Anderson, as a gift from a friend. She recognized him in the artwork, and wrote me a letter, telling me he had passed away. Leo had injured himself that weekend at the expo where I photographed him. After a 10 month struggle to restore his soundness, he had been put to sleep. I had been one of the last people to photograph him when he was healthy. It was then that I learned his name was Libertador, which means *Liberator* or *to make free* - a prophetic name since that is in some ways what he did for Shawn. I wrote back and sent her the photos that I had



## Dignity

She invited me to visit their farm where she raised Peruvian Pasos with Glenda, her mother and partner in horses. Since then, I have spent a couple of weekends with these warm and generous people. I have met their horses and learned first hand how much they love all their animals, and how truly passionate they are about the Peruvian Paso breed.

Shawn and I talked a great deal about how Leo came into her life and what he has meant to her. At that time she was still deeply feeling his loss. She said something that resonated within me. She said that she had given him a home and love, but that he had given her so much more. Through my art and travels I have heard variations of this story time and time again. I thought I was saving him. But in the end, he saved me.

I have always been fascinated with the bonds people form with their animals. How some can view them as non-sentient beings, while others regard them as family. For those of us who open ourselves up to the friendship and solace that animals have to offer, they can have a profound impact on our lives.

Leo brought many gifts to Shawn's life. I think he was meant to be with her. Personally, I believe animals, as well as people, come into our lives for a purpose. Leo's gift to me was allowing me to meet

the Andersons and become friends. Also, my time spent with Shawn as she shared her stories lead me on a new artistic journey. From my visit, I took away the inspiration for a new art exhibit that I would create, concerning horses and the emotional and spiritual healing that they bring to our lives. This traveling art exhibit will showcase portraits of special horses accompanied by their stories. *Dignity* is Libertador's portrait for this. I have been working on this project for a few years now and I expect it to be a few more before it is ready to be shared with the world.

Though he had many offspring, Leo's final gift to Shawn was a surprise - a lovely black filly named *Aire De Cielo*, or *Breath of Heaven*. She is much loved and has Leo's eyes and charisma.

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Mona Majorowicz is a professional working artist. She and her husband, Mike, own and operate Wild Faces Gallery in Rolfe, Iowa.  
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