

Horses & Art

by Mona Majorowicz

Catch Penny II

"Catch" is a 28-year-old Morgan cross gelding, and Carol Eilers (yes, the same Carol Eilers who is the editor/publisher of *Apples 'n Oats* magazine) has had him for 11. He was a Pony Club horse, and has taken three youths to USPC Nationals, two of them in eventing, (he could jump just about anything in his younger days), and Carol's daughter in dressage in 1998. He *loves* kids and thoroughly enjoys being fussed over. Carol still refers to him as her "dressage schoolmaster" and also takes him on trail rides. He has a naughty streak and can be ornery, but has a marvelous willing attitude when it really counts.

Oh yeah...he gives kisses (for treats). How cute is that?!



About Commissions

In general, I don't agree to do many commission portraits, basically due to time issues. I must schedule my painting time against the day-to-day running of the gallery and selling artwork. So agreeing to paint a portrait under someone else's constraints is far less appealing than painting something for myself. An additional challenge is creating an image that is as pleasing to the owner, as it is to my creative spirit. It needs to be *my* work of art that just happens to feature *their* horse(s).

Once I agree to do a portrait, I prefer to meet the horse. Every horse that I have painted has been an animal that I have personally met and photographed. This strikes me as an important aspect in creating a good portrait. It not only helps with the likeness, but its real benefit comes from getting a feel for their personality and incorporating that into the painting. Carol once said of my work that she thought I painted personalities. The more I think of it, the more I like the way that sounds. It is perhaps one of the nicest compliments that I have ever received.

From the day I first agreed to paint a portrait of Catch, until the painting's completion, about a year's time had passed. Part of the delay dealt with my getting over to photograph him when he had completely shed his winter coat, *and* when I was in the area. After I got to that point, I then wanted to wait until I was past my art show season, so I could devote myself completely to the painting.

Meeting Catch

My husband, Mike, and I visited Catch and Carol last June, with camera in hand and a mountain of film. (I am still old school, in that I haven't gone digital yet.) I usually use dozens of photos for reference—some overall shots, but also some detail pictures, such as photos of eyes, markings or whiskers. So when I am setting out to do a portrait, I may take shoot over a dozen rolls of film, in order to get all of the information that I need.

Mike, Carol and I all sauntered out into the pasture that Catch shares with Hilary, Carol's other mount. Both horses were placidly grazing. As they had just been turned out, Catch really took very little interest in meeting us. This actually makes the photographing part easier. However, he was so engrossed in eating, that after a few shots of him grazing, well... we needed a little more excitement!

So Carol flung bits of grass in the air and was rewarded with a lazy flick of the ear. She did the usual clapping, whistling and flailing of arms. He watched her quizzically, occasionally lifting his head (with large mouthfuls of grass mind you) to get a better look. But after a few brief moments, he promptly resumed grazing.

At this point, we fell to bribery. I had some apples in the van and we tried to lure him into some interesting facial expressions, which hopefully didn't involve chewing or swallowing. I managed to get a few more pictures taken, until of course the

apple was gone.

So Carol, in an earnest desire to help me get some action shots, started jogging around the pasture, occasionally springing into the air, while making excited chirpy noises, accompanied with yet more flailing of arms. The jogging thing got the ol' boy's interest, perhaps out of curiosity more than anything, but he trotted along beside her.

I have to say that Carol, with her relaxed attitude and willingness to look a little silly in order for me to get a good shot, has completely and totally endeared herself to me. Carol had not made any attempts to make Catch look like the show horse that he once was. His ears and whisker were unclipped, his hooves unpolished, and he was allowed to run at liberty. She wanted him portrayed "The Way He Is."

In the end it was an apple feeding shot that I used in conjunction with a wistful photo of him looking away, to create the painting.

The Final Painting

It had been a couple of years since I had last done a water soluble pencil painting. I found it energizing, despite being surprisingly hard on my fingers. I posted about the process on my blog, so Carol was able to sign off on the concept drawing, and follow the painting's progress.

It must have been a leap of faith on Carol's part to have me paint her horse. She didn't really know me, way back when we first discussed the portrait. And at that time,

she hadn't seen any of my paintings in person. Though I was upfront about the time frame for the painting's completion, a year was a long time to be patient. Nonetheless, Carol bore the wait with grace.

I am, in the end, happy with his painting. I like the wistful quality of it and the soft background colors. He's a handsome old man, no doubt about it. I may have over-romanticized him a little bit, but Catch has always fancied himself somewhat of a playboy. I like to think he would approve of his Fabio-inspired hairdo.

Carol's Note: I LOVE my new portrait of Catch. Mona Majorowicz has captured his spirit and personality; not just his good looks. The Fabio-inspired mane is the icing on the cake. Catch is a character - no doubt about it - and I wanted to see if that part of him could be immortalized. Success! Thank you a million times over, Mona. As they say in the credit card ads, "PRICELESS!"

Want to read more about art, animals and the creative life?
Visit my blog at <http://mona.myartbliss.com>

Mona Majorowicz is a professional working artist. She and her husband, Mike, own and operate Wild Faces Gallery in Rolfe, Iowa.
Please visit her website at www.wildfacesgallery.com

