

CLEVER GIRLS



by Mona Majorowicz

Big Is Beautiful

Those of you who know me, know that I love the big horses. There's just something about those Roman-nosed, thick-legged, bulgy-musled heavy horses that has me enthralled. Of course I have always loved horses of every shape and size. But in regard to my paintings, I keep coming back to doing drafts again and again.

My earliest memory of seeing a draft horse in person was when I was about four years old. There was a local farmer with a team, who came to town every spring and for a small fee plowed gardens. I remember being so excited as my father set me down a safe distance away in the grass, with the strict orders to "stay put" so I could watch the action.

I remember thinking how huge they were and how quiet the whole proceeding was. Other than the snorting of the horses, the jangling chains and the tearing of the earth, the only sound was the occasional command uttered by their handler. Whatever it is that he said was completely

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unintelligible to me. It was something between a growl and a bark. But of course the horses understood and did their work efficiently and willingly.

Fast Forward About 20 Years

When we moved to Iowa, I was blessed to move to a farm where the neighboring farm raised Percherons. The numbers varied but there were usually around a dozen mares with foals. These horses have since moved on but for nearly a decade they were a constant source of pleasure and painting inspiration for me.

Having these beauties next door meant that I always kept a camera in my vehicle, so that whenever I was leaving for the gallery or coming home, if the horses were doing anything interesting, I could take a few shots. You know like the sun was rising or setting and hitting them just right. Or if it

was overcast, or foggy, or raining or... well, pretty much anything that I did not already have reference photos of, I took a few more. As a result I have collected thousands of photos of these mares.

I walk daily, and when they were in the pasture, I would often time my rest breaks in places where I could watch them. They were always a curious bunch and would gather around watching me, watching them. Sometimes I would pick the tall ditch grass as an offering, which they always seemed to prefer over picking their own. I would scratch a few itchies and rub a few noses. This particular painting was based on a very old photo from one of these moments.

I have painted this herd time and again. And the magic of these mares is that even now, years after they have moved away, I find I am still inspired to paint them.

Those Clever Girls

One of my favorite memories of these horses happened several years ago when I awoke in the morning to the telltale signs

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“Clever Girls;”

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(manure piles and dinner plate-sized hoof prints) of horses having run amok in the yard. After checking to make sure my horse was safely grazing in the pasture, I immediately called my neighbors to tell them the girls were out.

We received a call back a few minutes later to say that all their horses were in the yard paddock. “Huh?” was all I could say to that.

The following evening, in the wee hours, I was awakened by strange noises. As I looked out my living room window, I saw giant black shapes moving about in the darkness. The noises were the horses

stepping on the cellar door and it groaning under the weight. They seemed to be intrigued by this, as a few moments after stepping off it, they would step back on. Frankly, it was a miracle that the cellar door held them.

So with the dawn came a repeat of the previous morning, where I called next door, and again was told that the horses were all peaceably waiting by the barn.

After the second call, though, my neighbors did a more thorough search. As it turns out, after a closer inspection, the fence was found to be weak in one area. The mares apparently pushed on it and just stepped over. How the whole herd managed this is unclear. Whether one held it down

for all to leave and all to return or whether each horse did the same maneuver to attain freedom is still known only to them.

Whatever the case, the end result was that they frolicked and cavorted in our yard all night long (probably taunting my horse and sheep with their freedom.) Then just before dawn they’d return home, sneaking back in the same way they got out, only to be found standing around waiting for their breakfast grain ration looking bored and hungry. And if it weren’t for my ratting them out, they’d probably have continued doing it for quite some time.

Those clever, clever girls.
