

‘Hoofmarks’ supplement

‘My Kingdom for a Horse!’ So starts the editorial to the ‘Hoofmarks’ issue of *Agenda*, with this quotation from Shakespeare’s *Richard III*. Horses have been man’s faithful servants for as long as memory goes back. Xenophon wrote lucidly about this in his *The Art of Horsemanship* more than 2,300 years ago. Among many other instructions useful to classical riders and trainers of horses today, he says of the horse: ‘As for his mouth, you must take as much care to make it soft as you take to make his hoofs hard; and the same treatment softens a horse’s mouth that softens a man’s flesh’.



Sally Martin: Best Brow-band

Sally specialises in equestrian art. She has won many awards in the UK and the US and has exhibited her work nationally and in the US. To her the equine form is endlessly beautiful and fascinating. Her special interest is in the connection between horse and rider, the process of daily training in the pursuit of perfection in unity and movement. She parallels the horse/rider partnership with possible human attainment of balance in life and living with grace, patience, harmony and understanding. www.sallymartin.co.uk

Alison Brackenbury

Navigator

'You must look at Google Maps,' she tells me,
my horse friend, who heaves wet straw. 'She was
too impatient,' (Vicki, her one daughter),
'she clicked so fast, I could not see Woody'
who is our pony, but I am not keen
to spend this evening chilled before a screen.

I click the flowing lanes. I forget Woody,
dog roses spin, in snowy swags, at me.
The valleyed fields glitter. Here it is,
endless summer, where I brought my daughter,
long rides, late bed-times, after the glow-worms
on high banks prickled green before our eyes.

Rough hedge-crests, now lower than my daughter,
fall away, though I cannot see Woody.
(When she dies, all this will be lost to me.)
Should I print each green wave as it is,
whirl of hill and sky, to freeze, like water,
until, all joints one ache, I treasure paper?

On screen, the cob's gleam by the noon trough is
black; that speck, a pony, which my daughter
bounced upon, aged five. But where is Woody?
Her blurred eyes, zoomed in shadowed doors, find me.
She is kept in, feet poisoned by rich grass.
Summer betrays. Shut out is Paradise.

The dull screen fades. First blackbird shrills at me
from railside trees, my small wet ground, that is
bumblebees, rough roses, held for daughter.
Marriage to mend; a smaller sky; no Woody.
I found, I tell my friend, lost lights, our day.
She nods, mind strayed. She maps her winter hay.

Wilfred Owen at the Advanced Horse Transport Depot, 1917

(based on his letters)

These are the best days I have ever had
since I enlisted, with the frostbite gone
melted with nights I thought I would go mad

into the horses, solid as their muck
One leapt as I got on. Somehow I at
each stiff-legged buck.

Then we bowled four horse wagons through the frost.
We passed the fields of Crécy, blind with light.
Nothing is lost.

A boy, I galloped Scarborough's sand. The dance
of hooves beat in my head. With aching back
I pound white roads of France.

How horses jar us, scar us, but our rest
falls sweet as their oats' hiss.
Let my days pout.
These are the best.

Rosie

You block the slope, chestnut and truculent.
When you came, a gangling two-year-old
you spotted me at once.
My muddy coat was rich with mints;
heart, with foolish love of horses.

My own horse hated you
since you were turned out with the foal,
her foster-child. You were her distant cousin.
At twenty-two, she spotted her young rival
without her fine socks; with a pale blonde mane
which, grazing, combed moon daisies. Effortless.

How the old hate the young. How the young pine.
Once you pawed the wire fence, hooked your front shoe,
yet hurtled over, unhurt, my true cob.
I should have bobbed through April's woods on you,
have bolted in the blurring stubble field,
sweated, cursed, forgot. Horses are love

but love is for the young and I am old,
my right hip's stabbing held at bay by pills.
My old mare, curled beside the water trough,
sleeps like a warm dog. How did you make
scuffs on your polished forehead? Still half-broken,
you have been advertised. You are for sale.
This is your chance.

We smell the mints' perfume
blow from my pocket. The tiny crescent moon
rides on your shoulder. The deer stir in the woods,
the swifts surge higher. But I take my course
down the rough grasses, in the heat's last haze.
You are not my horse.

Foxy

He was young, with a red glint to his coat
(I weigh horses as beauties weigh up men).
No red is like that, straight from a Welsh hill
(you might just glimpse it as the beeches spill
leaf at first frost), fire beneath your hands.

Yes, he was young, and in the riding school
I saw him rear, explode, the black-maned head
charge at the horizon. The teacher ran to him,
rode him with light leg, soft clicks of tongue.
'He has confused canter and trot,' she said,

'he is too young.' He would be thirty now.
Should I warm hands at red remembered blaze?
Instead I feel confusion lick my days,
The horses gone. Beneath the beech trees' glow
I click my own tongue. 'Canter. Canter. Trot.'

Stubbs and the horse

Stubbs' painting hangs still in the cool gallery
(three bombs shut the Tate). As I led my pony
I twisted my foot; swelling hid the fanned bone.
Unsound, I skim catalogues, coolly, at home.
For eighteen months Stubbs camped in a farmhouse,
aided by Mary, aged fifteen, his 'niece'.

For his *Anatomy*, (tendons, nerves, bones),
he slaughtered his horses, slit the hot vein.
After the gallons of blood had pumped through,
she hauled up each carcass. Stubbs carved, then drew.

But even half-skinned, each horse keeps its blaze,
trots on, brisk skeleton, apples for knees,
pelvis a cave, each bulged muscle a hill
glossed as black agate, stinking but still.
Here are the hunters, the racers the rich
poured cash through like water. These horses will live.

So Stubbs, with his wild strong Mary, survived
off the Marquess's stallion, mares with bright eyes,
improbable hills (lions were a mistake)
but nobody praised the enamels he baked,
their colours still pure When the Prince broke his faith
Stubbs painted the huge bay, after its race.

The canvas is filled by the plunging dark back.
The horse had been whipped. The trainer was sacked.
The patron's power is the horse's alone.
The muscles are hills. There is pain in the bone.
The stableboy crouches. The owner refused
to pay Stubbs a pound. Stubbs successfully sued.

Poor, he retired; for years pondered bones,
died wrapped in his gown, in his silence, alone.
The mares glow like guineas. Their flanks hold the heat
of the hands curled on dusk in a Bloomsbury street.



Sally Martin: Exuberante II

Angela France

The Horse Breeder Talks about the Stable Girl

Best stable girl I ever had, but she's a strange one.
Just turns up one day; tells me I've got a job
for her and fixes me with a look you could
call insolent, but next thing I know I'm giving her
a month's trial.

The horses are fools around her; even that black
stallion with a mean streak a yard wide follows
her like a puppy dog. I get the feeling she only uses
a halter on him when I'm around, for the look of it.
She doesn't mix though; I said to her on her day off
when she was going off riding again Epona, I said,
why don't you go into town, meet some other
youngsters? She just gives me that look
and says Why? – leaves me blushing
and stuttering like the kid she's meant to be.

She's worth it all for the brood mares: she always
wants to stay in the stable when they're due;
she says cameras can't do the job. The vet's
not had to come to a foaling once since she's
been here, and the foals are all stars. Every filly
sweet-natured and perfectly formed, every colt
with as much fire as Old Nick himself could want.

What does she do? I don't know, but once
I went back after dark: that small appaloosa was due
and I wasn't sure about it, I've needed the vet before
with her. So, I go to take a look and the mare is quiet.
Not pacing, nor kicking, but sweating and Epona's
got her head against the mare's tight belly and she's talking
but I can't hear what she's saying. Then she pulls
on the mare's twitchy ear, stares in the liquid eyes
and in seconds the foal's on the straw, slippery
and steaming; the strong life in it already kicking,
fighting to get to the pull of the milk,
to lift its head to the stars.



Sally Martin: La Garrocha

Martin Jones

Two Horses

Two horses, one grey, one bay,
bright in the sunlight,
casting their shadows
across the paddock.

Two horses, one grey, one bay,
their noses resting
on the morning air,
pictures of patience.

As Swift might have said,
an example to human beings.



Sally Martin: Pirouette

David Cooke

A Northern Resort

That tacky parade of gift shops,
amusements, and cheap cafés,
still touting for Sunday strollers,
confronts an expanse of winter sea

with a chirpy faith
in its permanence: a structure
raised in an age of cagey virtues
as a pleasure-ground for low pay.

When the first trains
clattered in, a skylight opened up
in the miners' vaulted dark;
and straight-laced locals

staked a claim
in gifts accrued from Progress:
a pier, and a neat stone prom
giving shape to a coast

that drifts, a definition
so that work might leave its mark.
But summers here were duds,
and money seeks a florid climate.

A baroque of shells and gimcrack
won't bring those heydays back –
their awkward, dead smiles
buried in faded snaps.



Sally Martin: Yield

Sue Roe

Quick

After Francis Bacon : *Study for a Portrait of Van Gogh*

the land is sunlit yellow
streaked with scarlet, his shadow
quick on the path, vivid wraith

the earth gapes
like a pit, screeds of every colour
scintillating to streaks of white

his yellow hat
the mark we remember him by
his as a flower, its petals

but the earth is opening
on uncanny knock-back of tree forms
the sky recedes at his step

still, he makes his way swiftly
phantom, swift-footed revenant, patterning
earth into step with his footfall

this lengthening stretch
himself at his own heels, hooked
to the soil with a passage of scarlet

the sky is bloodshed
its reflection a pool of red nothing
cut to the quick by his passing

Radial Space

After Picasso : *Woman with Fan* (or, *After the Ball*)

her face slips through
slides beneath the surface
he knows he can't secure her
loves to remind himself

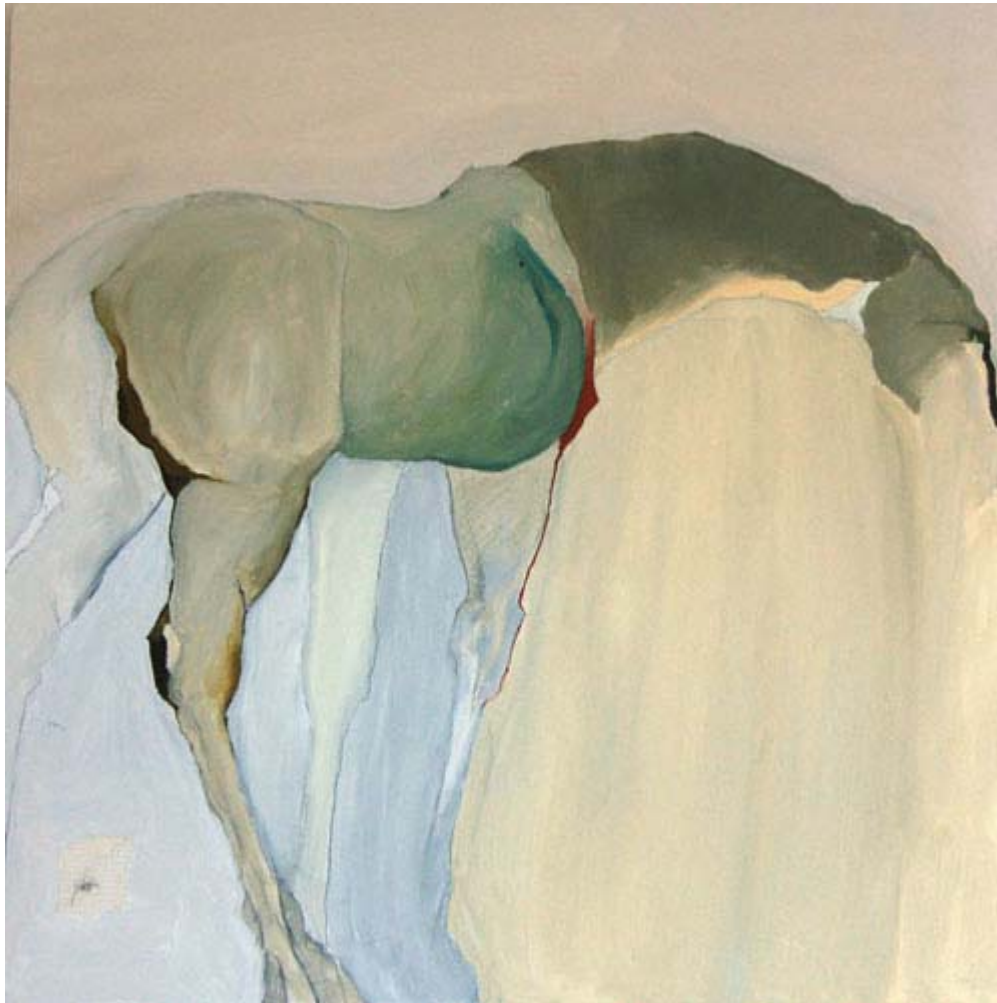
she's a trampolinist
tight-rope walker, acrobat
and he is only one clown
of the duo, their repartee

echoing to silence
a violin in a collage
paper and broken strings
empty of music

after the ball
he sits her on the broken chair
paints her, holding her fan
she poses, fan partially unfolded

seeing the picture
she objects to the *rappports* he has made
her face, thighs and her expression
vacant, variegated, radial

eloquent only of air and space
and she, wedged in a triangle
like a complementary carving
but she can't see what she's complementing



Ana Barden: Irish Secret

Ana was born in Dublin in 1971 and brought up in Cork where she still lives with her son. She has had a lifetime in close contact with horses. Her paintings show her fascination with their form and an exploration of colour. Her work can be seen in the Greenlane Gallery, Dingle, Co. Kerry. www.greenlanegallery.com

Patricia McCarthy

Three months apart

You died only three months apart,
yet I can write more of you, my horse,
than of my mother. Maybe
because she had so many near deaths,
so many almost leavetakings,
last sacraments and smiles –

whereas you had but one: one
last nibble of grass, bite of an apple;
one last breath down my nostrils,
one last whinny. And the empty space
in the uneven field you poached
greening over minute by changed minute.

The little bay mare with whom
you grazed nose to nose, belly to belly
for eighteen years nuzzled your body
as I held my mother just after she had gone.
We take death in your long strides now:
Nature's way: nothing else to lean upon.



Ana Bardens: Irish Roan Reclining

Tony Roberts

Temps de Poisson

Up in Maine one time and packing fish
for four weeks under a guano-splashed tin roof
at a rusting, wet conveyor belt,
next in line to a student ballet dancer
with a turned-up nose; pulling swim bladders
out of headless whiting; packing them
crossways in waxed boxes for Vermont schools
(‘Our fish are dovetailed to perfection’);
yelling ‘gut bucket’ when the box of pink
swim bladders fills; trying to beat the nimble
fingers of the oysterwives at the line head
before settling for state minimum;

smoking to Sparky’s stories in the breaks;
reeling off the wharf with fishheads; gawking
at a two hundred pound tuna on the deck;
chugging icy cokes and trying to get
the student ballet dancer in cut-offs,
with the bandaged thigh, to dump her handsome

giggling boyfriend; clocking in mid-mornings
and working on to rosy-fingered dawn,
cold and wet and hosing down the splattered wharf;
driving one-eyed to a rented mildewed
clapboard house, to beer and squid and sloppy joes
until roused from sleep and back to work again

and one time, when the guts wagon cab showed
three days late, the huge mound of gurry
turning truck grey, volunteering to shovel
it out at the dump – anything to get out
of the packing line for an hour or two;
having to slip and slide in rancid water
around the hill of guts; jabbing shovels
into its stinking bulk, releasing crazy
runs of maggots; coming home to burn the clothes
and stand for an hour in the shower
singing to the fish scales and pink bladder strings
John Denver’s Country Roads’, and in two weeks

only one free night for beer and pizza –
the one cop car parked outside the one bar –
with the student ballet dancer (of the nose
retroussé, cut-offs and the bandaged thigh)
a mermaid in her sea anemone
tie-dyed t-shirt, dumping her giggling boyfriend
and slipping off with 'Pizza' Margarita,
leaving this limey tuna high and dry.



Ana Bardens: Red Horse

Patricia McCarthy

Clothes that escaped the Great War

Not the familiar ghosts: the shaggy dog of Thorne Waste
that appeared only to children; the chains clanking
from the Gyme seat, nor the black barge at Waterside.

These were the most scary, my mother recalled: clothes
piled high on the wobbly cart, their wearers gone.
Overalls caked in dung, shirts torn from the muscle strain

of heavy hemp sacks, socks matted with cow-cake
from yards nearby, and the old horse plodding, on the nod.
Its uneven gait never varied whether coming from farms

where lads were collected like milk churns, or going back
with its harvest of dungarees scented by first fags,
notes in pockets to sweethearts; boots with laces undone,

jerseys knitted – purl, plain – around coke fires.
And the plod, plod, quadruple time; then the catch
in the plod from the clank of loose shoes, from windgalls

on the fetlocks of the horse, each missed beat on the lane
a missed beat in a heart. As a small girl she could see –
at their windows – the mothers pressing memories

too young for mothballs into lavender bags, staring out
propaganda posters, dreading the shouts of telegraph boys
from lines of defence and attack. As the harness creaked

and the faithful old horse clopped forward and back,
the lads were new-dressed in the years never to be had,
piled higher than high over the shafts of the buckling cart.



Ana Bardens: Turning Grey Horse

Gig at Matt Molloy's

(Westport, Co Mayo)

In the corner of the crowded bar
the musicians gather for the love of it.
Taking out instruments like saddles
to be weighed by their own standards

of performance, they reject rickety chairs
on offer for the night as clothes horses.
Already warmed up in the smoky fug,
they call from Clew bay salt stallions

to leap, unbroken, through the window
and stand, suddenly tame amid the chink
of glasses. Yet the players vault on top
and urge them on to courses beyond

finishing posts, turfed with inspiration.
There, black notes are the only hurdles
on staves of a handed-down repertoire,
every mount an unchallenged winner.

While bows stroke into excited rhythms
flanks customarily whipped, and locals
breathe into the nostrils of contrary mares
to elicit a sympathy, the riders crouch

in matching colours of each jig. Taking
the bends on different leading legs,
they move so fast they hardly seem
to move at all but gallop on the spot

as if secretly trained in rings by crews
from armadas that failed to ride the rodeos
of the Irish Sea. Steaming with their steeds,
the jockeys emerge as centaurs.

In the corner of the crowded bar
they put a singing in pained blood
and tickle knowingly the nerve of a land
where skewbald shadows of drum-horses

get battered, still, for being harnessed
to the cavalry of an English king or queen.
After closing time, their hooves echo
so sharply that tinker stallions buck

from tethers and twitches. Then race,
heavyweights, back to the sea to restore
its thunder and produce from folk idiom
pure-breds, up to the best of them.



Ana Bardens: Palo Arising

Goddess of the Horses

i.m. Lois Watson

She rides our memories of her.
Bareback, she bends through trunks
that hold, in rings, the years she had.

Through the blue flax in fields
she owns differently now, Elysian,
she canters, sequined and plumed,

her noble profile turned to winds
into the space taken by cherry blossom
that her meditation found. All the horses

ever hers: greys, skewbalds, bays
and roans, even those she drew on walls
and pages, come to the call of her voice

echoing gently to another call:
of the first cuckoo that keeps us here.
The wings she gave them, they give back

to her. While we scatter her ashes,
and the ground gives under the green
badged by primroses, they graze,

heads down, sure she will feed them still
without bowls in mud, drought and storm.
A carthorse in blinkers whickers

to the little girl she was who sat
backwards on his quarters. She can be
in every age at once: a horse goddess -

Epona or Macha, hair unplaited,
eyes shining where she dismounts
to grace, with her presence, our hearts.



Sally Martin: Reflecting Glory

Pegasus

'Saddle your Pegasus here'

Anna Wickham, notice for her boarding house

Though you sprang from my head,
hooves rasped by my thoughts,
myself between your teeth
like a bit, I could never quite
own you. As if you did not wish
to give wings to words
lest you became cross-bred.

The muse was out to turn you
into a clothes-horse from jealousy.
Her twitch tightened on your nose
so you could concentrate only
on pain, your gifts forgotten.
Perhaps it was her bad hands
into which you fell, her abuse

which made a rack of your ribs,
broke your knees on iced roads;
her stick that scrawled white lines
of scars on which she alone
reviewed unfavourably even what
I could not write. I wanted to kidnap
her legacy that made you rear, jib

and back away in order to expel
the final indignity kept in store
by her for you: of export –
if not to the meat trade –
then to a Breton fair where
you would be twirled mechanically
in tightest circles on a carrousel

while she jeered into a microphone.
No wonder I shyed so long
from calling on you for tests
that also went in circles, the page
the arena. I preferred to jump you
with never a refusal over her,
to stable you in my skin and bone.

I did try once to school you
who should have schooled me.
You foamed at the mouth with vowels
and consonants. But her gun
pointed between your eyes.
And she stood you in line
with old warhorses. One, two...

I never tried again
to break you into diction. Now
you stand snorting, head high,
any colour that I please, breathing
my breath down your flared nostrils.
While she fails to hobble you,
you mouth for me a refrain.



Sally Martin: Totilas Magic



Sally Martin: Exuberante