

FAUST'S WAY

A painterly exercise



“His paintings make us feel like we are looking at our horses through *our* eyes and not how someone else pictures them.”



TERRY CONWAY 🐾 PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOEL PLOTKIN

Powerful and gentle, docile yet wild, horses lay their hearts out for Shawn Faust to put on canvas.

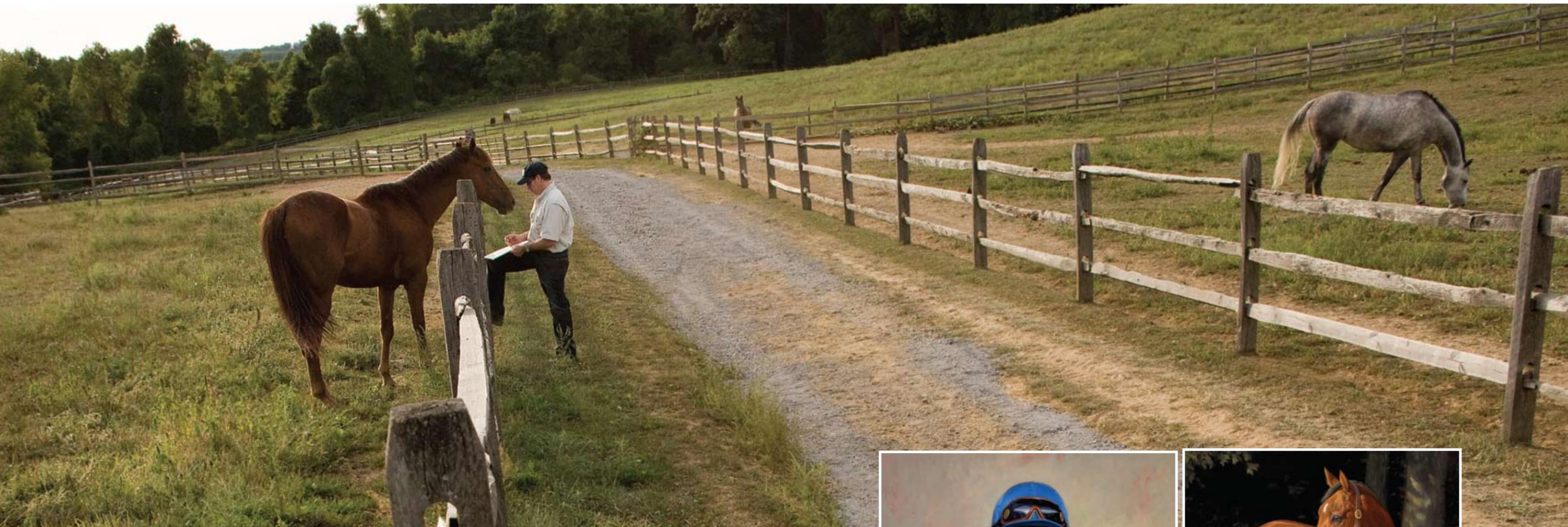
“People admire the majesty, elegance, and physical beauty,” says Faust. “That’s foremost. But I want to go beyond that, touching the soul and getting into the horse’s head. I want people to grasp the inner feelings I have when I’m painting that horse.”

The painter came to his calling at age four. He was just tagging along when his grandfather was teaching art to an older brother.

“He broke a piece of pastel to make it small for me; boy, I was hooked,” Faust says with a big grin.

A fine arts graduate of the University of Delaware, Faust initially worked as a freelance illustrator. His natural talent was cut and polished through years of grueling drawing classes that are the foundation for his lifelike paintings. In the early 1990s, when he wanted to enhance his portrait studies in oils, Faust enrolled in a class with Daniel Greene, one of America’s foremost artists in oils and pastels.

“Daniel stressed the eyes,” says Faust. “He told us, ‘if you



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don't have anyone to sit for you, go find a cow, a deer, or a horse.' Here was my chance to get up close to horses.”

After returning home Faust slipped notes into mailboxes at nearby horse farms around Chesapeake City, Md. He received a call from Richard Golden of Northview Stallion Station, giving permission to paint some of his thoroughbreds.

His first subject was White Ice Cream. She shadowed Faust along the paddock fence, then stopped and posed. His camera clicked away.

“I was intrigued by the horse owner's description of its very attentive, or confident eye,” Faust says. “I began to see it that day.”

Golden was bowled over with the head portrait of White Ice

CONTINUED ON PAGE 84



Cream. Then he quipped, can you put the body on a horse?

Faust did. *Polish Numbers* now hangs along with other Faust pieces in the Goldens' Florida and Maryland homes.

"Shawn has always captured our horses' expression and conformation in the same way that we view them," Golden says. "His paintings make us feel like we are looking at our horses through *our* eyes and not how someone else pictures them."

Prominent owner Stuart Janney III spotted the *Polish Numbers* piece and commissioned the artist to paint Coronado's Quest.

"From there I expanded to standardbreds, quarter horses, and some that had passed away," Faust recalls. "My business just kind of took off."

Nearly a decade later, Faust has an impressive network of clients in the thoroughbred industry. Trainer Larry Jones strolled into the artist's exhibit tent on Owners Day 2007 at Delaware Park. He had spied a portrait of longtime outrider Steve Kisielewski.

Jones invited the artist to paint his blazing fast Hard Spun, recognized as one of the elite 2007 three-year olds, earning purses of more than \$2.7 million for owner Rick Porter of Wilmington.

When Faust arrived at the barn, Hard Spun had just returned from a morning workout and was cooling out.

"He knew where I was with my camera and when he went past he gave me the 'whole eye.' Just checking me out. That's how Larry saw him every day, just being himself."

"I've seen a lot of artists over all my years at the track, but Shawn's work really caught my eye," Jones says. "Cindy and I think his painting of Hard Spun is exceptional. We snapped it up."

To bring a horse to life, Faust typically spends a month or two researching the look of the horse. Next he draws a full outline or silhouette. He builds multiple layers of paint to reach the final finished and detailed painting. That process alone takes a full month.

Faust studies "Everything from the head and the bone structure to muscle tone and weight distribution. "I'm paying attention to every little nuance. I want to hear the owner say, 'Yes, that's my horse!'"

Jane MacElree felt that same kind of excitement. She purchased a portrait of steeplechase star McDynamo and presented it to her thoroughbred trainer Michael Moran, who lives near Unionville and owns the horse.

"From a distance I said, 'wow, look at that horse,'" recalls MacElree, the honorary chairman of the Devon Horse Show. "Turned out to be McDynamo. I loved the lighting, the horse's head looking sideways. It was a striking painting."

Faust's portrait *Outrider* was awarded the People's Choice Award from the American Academy of Equine Art last year. In a competition open to artists worldwide, *Outrider* was a Top Ten finalist selection by the *International Art Magazine*.

The publication was voted the best art magazine in the world in 2007.

The artist and his wife Christy live with their two young sons in Bear, Del. In his studio, Chester County-bred Storm Cat (the world's top-priced stallion for several years) and 2008 Derby winner Big Brown currently alternate on his easel.

One of his most personal portraits is of Barbaro. Faust tossed aside 20 portrait concepts before deciding on *The Look Back*.

"It is meant as a thankful gesture to all his fans and the folks at New Bolton who gave Barbaro their best effort. His look says, 'I feel no pain, I'm at peace.'"

Elizabeth Beer, who represents Faust as the owner of Beresford Gallery in Unionville and Saratoga Springs, likes how he tells a story.

"Shawn captures both the conformation and emotion," Beer says, "and that is really hard. People want more than just a reproduction. They want [the painting] to tell them something about the horse. He does it beautifully with the look in the eye, the tilt of the head."

Faust feels blessed and fortunate to be painting his "stable" of living legends, saying, "When people walk away from a painting, I want them to experience the same awe that I have for these wonderful animals." □

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