



*Ponyland*  
The big pony show



Richard Blundell, *Expedition Stallion*, 2012, oil on linen. On loan courtesy of Carol Whittaker.

Front cover and inside back cover: Wendy Stavrianos, *Painting for Samuel Palmer* (detail), 1990, oil on canvas. Logan Art Collection, donated through the Australian Cultural Gifts program by CMcI Boyle, 2014.

Back cover: Wendy Stavrianos, *Drawing for Samuel Palmer* (detail), 1990, ink, charcoal and pastel on paper. Logan Art Collection, donated by the artist 2016.

## Foreword

Images of the horse first appeared over 25,000 years ago painted on the walls of caves in Southern France. The much-loved dappled horse from Pech Merle and the vibrant galloping horses from Lascaux Cave look more like images of devotion than records of hunting prowess. Since the domestication of the horse about 6,000 years ago the horse has been at the centre of human evolution from nomadic tribes to agricultural farmers to migrating armies. From ancient Greek and Roman statues to the present day, the horse has been depicted in the service of humans pulling chariots, being ridden in battles or elevating the status of civil and military leaders in equestrian portraits and statues.

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) was one of the first artists to study the anatomy of the horse. We know from his notebooks that he made detailed measurements of horses and even studied their muscular system and skeletal structure. Three hundred years later, the English artist George Stubbs (1724-1806) also dissected horses and made detailed measurements to ensure

he had the correct proportions in his many portraits of horses. With the rise in popularity of horse racing in the eighteenth century, many artists specialised in painting horses, commissioned by wealthy aristocrats who kept large breeding stables specifically for this sport. As horses became the primary subject of portraits rather than merely props for their rider's portrait, artists like Stubbs in England and later Théodore Géricault (1791-1824) and Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863) in France began exhibiting paintings of horses in the wild, attacked by lions or frightened by storms. These paintings celebrated the power and beauty of the horse in its own right rather than as a human's possession.

For this exhibition *Ponyland: The big pony show* the curator, Sophie Chapman, has selected contemporary Australian artists that follow the tradition of portraying horses as powerful, beautiful creatures in their own right, at rest or grazing in open paddocks. In the twentieth century, as people turned to cars and bicycles to get from one place to another, in many western countries



Grace Costa, *Gerry*, 2016. Photographed inside the Mount Stromlo Observatory, Australia. Limited edition Giclée photographic print. On loan courtesy of the artist.

### *Foreword continued*

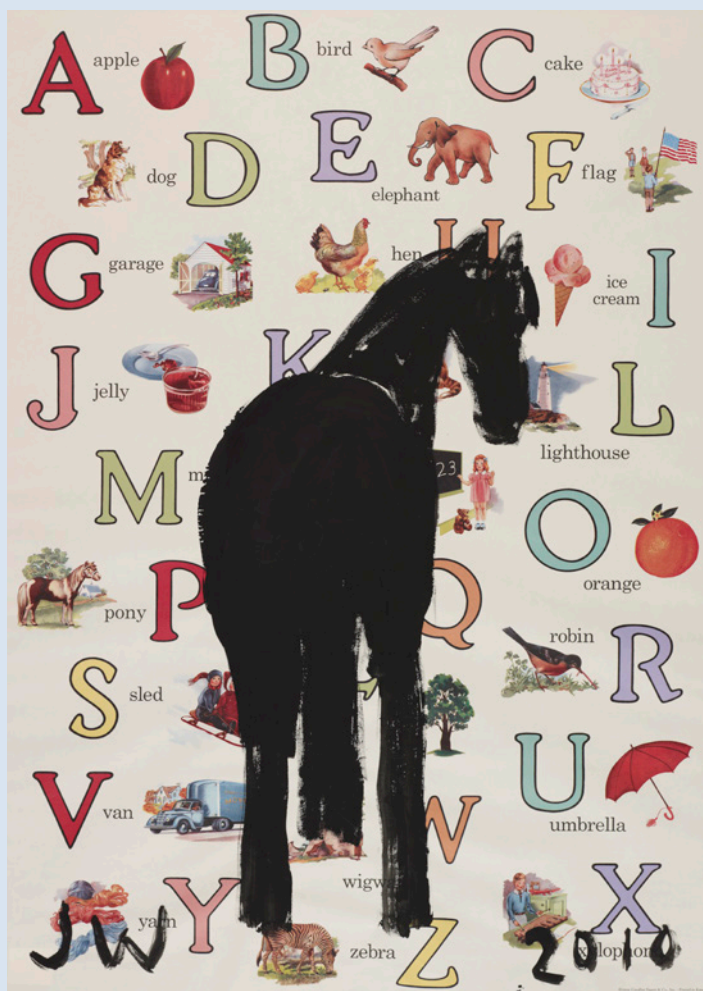
horse-riding became more a sport or pleasurable pastime than an essential mode of transportation. While in Australia the horse continued to be used in stock farming, only recently partly replaced by motorcycles or helicopters, for the majority of young Australians, living in cities, the idea of owning a pony is a fantasy realised by a few. The contemporary artists in *Ponyland* depict the horse in their artworks, not as working animals but free and unbridled, representing rural tranquility or childhood fantasy. Exhibiting works by contemporary Australian artists alongside examples of toy horses, this exhibition celebrates the continuing love and respect we collectively have for this beautiful and majestic animal.

By Michael Wardell, Art Gallery Coordinator,  
Logan Art Gallery.

### *Ponyland: The big pony show*

Every Saturday morning thousands of little girls and young women converge at their local pony club with their horses in tow. They rise early in the morning to meticulously groom and prepare their horses and ponies for competition, shining hoofs and neatly plaiting the horse's manes. The phrase, 'Girls love horses', has become a truism about growing up that is almost cliché. A whole genre of children's literature grew out of this phenomenon, beginning with Anna Sewell's famous novel *Black Beauty*. Where does little girls' fascination with horses originate from? Many girls begin their love of horses with the first gift of a rocking horse or toy pony as a small girl. Countless hours are spent by children playing with toy horses, rocking horses and hobby horses.

In her series *Horse*, artist Grace Costa presents a series of photographic portraits celebrating her lifelong love of horses as handed down by her father. Costa describes, 'When I was a kid I loved anything with horses on it, my bedroom was filled with horse pictures and horse



Jenny Watson (Australia, b. 1951) *Classic Black 9*, 2010, synthetic polymer paint on Italian nursery paper. Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales, Contemporary Collection Benefactors, 2010. Photo: Felicity Jenkins, AGNSW © Jenny Watson 289.2010.9

paraphernalia; I was obsessed with them. Like many other young girls, I had a passion for them. ... Horses are the one animal I understand more than others and can truly connect with on a very personal level, because of my upbringing and my father being a horse trainer and educator of horsemanship all his life.'

To create the series *Horse*, Costa photographed horses in the ruins of the Mount Stromlo Observatory, which was burnt down in the Canberra fires in 2003. The colours and textures of the burnt walls of the observatory create a dramatic setting in which Costa masterfully captures the character and grace of her subjects.

Wendy Stavrianos links the horse with memories of childhood in her large artwork *Painting for Samuel Palmer*. In this work Stavrianos pays tribute to artist Samuel Palmer's ability to create a transcendental and almost mystical response from the viewer, akin to the nostalgia of childhood. As Stavrianos describes, 'The work *Painting for Samuel Palmer* was like a tribute to Palmer's ability to bring me back to the wonder and awe of childhood. This quality

is something I treasure and seek to keep alive in myself and wish to transfer to those who view this work. The double imagery of the horse in the work reflects the conflict of the self, the struggle between two opposing forces of light and darkness or similarly the internal and external sides of being.'

Jenny Watson often explores her memories of childhood in her artwork, and she repeatedly uses the icon of the horse as a form of self-portraiture. As Denise Taylor writes in *The art of Jenny Watson: putting herself in the picture*, 'A love of horses has been a constant for Watson since childhood and her paintings that depict her alter ego alone with her horse are endearing, conveying a sense of seclusion yet connection and freedom.' Watson is in fact an accomplished dressage rider, and lives north of Brisbane with her three beloved horses.

Watson frequently uses found paper and textiles as a support for her paintings, the combination of found materials with her quasi-naïve painting style is nostalgic and evocative. In *Classic Black 9*, Watson has painted a solitary black horse onto

brightly patterned nursery paper. This playful combination leads viewers to conjure memories and associations of early childhood.

Throughout history the horse has captured our imagination as symbols of both power and freedom. In mythology, the horse is ever-present. The ancient Romans linked horses with Mars, the god of war. In Celtic mythology, horses were good luck and were harbingers of good fortune. The white horse was sacred to Celtic society, being associated with the Goddess Rhiannon who occasionally took the form of a white horse. The horse is also one of the most important symbols in numerous Central and Northern Asian shamanic traditions, with the white horse acting as a messenger between worlds.

In his work *Centaur*, Michael Zavros draws on his Greek Cypriot heritage to reference the majestic mythological half horse – half human figure. In his version, the centaur is wearing a tuxedo, giving the mythological creature a contemporary twist. Zavros' love for horses also stems from his childhood.

He recalls, 'Mum and Dad came home with a Shetland pony for my sister and I when I was about five, and it became all-consuming ... My sisters and I were pretty competitive and I went as far as state teams for show jumping and eventing'. Zavros worked at the Gold Coast Turf Club to help support his horse obsession. Here he worked as *Clerk of the Course*, officially assisting judges.

Noel McKenna's relationship with horses is longstanding and ongoing having featured heavily in his artistic output. He has strong memories of going to the races with his father as a child in Brisbane, and each year on 1 August (the birthday for all horses in the southern hemisphere) McKenna paints a portrait of a horse to add to his series *1 August*.

In McKenna's works *Country home*, *Cat and Horse in trees* and *Horse in barn*, the horses appear without human companions, leaving viewers to ponder their inner thoughts. As McKenna writes 'There is a lot going on in a horse's head that we do not know or understand'.



Karan Hayman, *Over the lake*, 2017, oil on linen. On loan courtesy of the artist.

Karan Hayman has grown up owning and caring for horses. She currently lives in country Victoria with her three horses. She uses the horse to evoke a mixture of emotions and symbolism within her works including freedom, independence, power and sublime beauty. Hayman reflects on how the horse has been a historically significant partner to people and has acted as a silent witness to both good and evil in our society.

*Ponyland: The big pony show* showcases works by contemporary Australian artists where the horse or pony features as the key motif. Some artworks explore a whimsical and nostalgic fascination with horses, while others look to the horse as a symbol of power and freedom unrestrained and independent of human service and industry. It is certain that the unique bond that the artists have had with horses throughout their lives has a significant influence on their work. The works presented in *Ponyland: The big pony show* celebrates this affinity and reverence of the friendship of horses.

By Sophie Chapman, Exhibitions Officer,  
Logan Art Gallery.

*“All horses deserve,  
at least once in their  
lives, to be loved by  
a little girl.”*

~ Anon

#### List of works:

##### *Ponyland: The big pony show*

Noel McKenna, *Cat and Horse in trees*, 2016, oil on canvas. Private collection, Melbourne. On loan courtesy of the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

Noel McKenna, *Country home*, 2016, oil on canvas. Private collection, Melbourne. On loan courtesy of the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

Noel McKenna, *Horse in barn*, 2016, oil on canvas. Private collection, Melbourne. On loan courtesy of the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

Ken Whisson, *Far and few, far and few*, 2015 – 2016, oil on linen. Private collection, Melbourne. On loan courtesy of the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

Sonia Lawson, *Girl dreaming of pony*, 2001, screenprint on paper. On loan courtesy of QUT Art Collection. Gift of Dr Douglas Kagi under the Cultural Gifts Program, 2007.

Noel McKenna, *Horse in field*, 2010, ink on paper. On loan courtesy of QUT Art Collection. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Margaret McKenna, 2013.

Noel McKenna, *Scene scene*, 2011, lithograph on paper. On loan courtesy of QUT Art Collection. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Margaret McKenna, 2013.

Mary Walduck, *Horses running*, 1975, woodcut on paper. On loan courtesy of QUT Art Collection, purchased 1975.

William Robinson, *Rocky moon landscape*, 1990, lithograph on paper. On loan courtesy of QUT Art Collection. Gift of the artist under the Cultural Gifts Program, 2002.

William Robinson, *Moon and landscape*, 1990, etching and aquatint with chine colle' on paper. On loan courtesy of QUT Art Collection. Gift of the artist under the Cultural Gifts Program, 2002.

Karan Hayman, *Dark horse*, 2016, oil on linen. On loan courtesy of the artist.

Karan Hayman, *Over the lake*, 2017, oil on linen. On loan courtesy of the artist.

Karan Hayman, *Rain*, 2017, oil on canvas. On loan courtesy of the artist.

Jenny Watson, *Classic Black 9*, 2010, synthetic polymer paint on Italian nursery paper. Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales, Contemporary Collection Benefactors, 2010.

Kate Breakey, *Untitled (horse)*, 1981, gelatin silver photograph, hand coloured with pencil and watercolour. Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased 1982.

Kate Breakey, *Untitled (horse and hand)*, 1981, gelatin silver photograph, hand coloured with pencil and watercolour. Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased 1982.

Michael Zavros, *Centaur*, 2008, oil on canvas. On loan courtesy of Adrian Tobin.

Michael Zavros, *Hoodie 1*, 2008, oil on canvas. On loan courtesy of Daniel Tobin.

Michael Zavros, *Hoodie 2*, 2008, oil on canvas. On loan courtesy of Daniel Tobin.

Grace Costa, *Gerry*, 2016, limited edition Giclée photographic print. Photographed inside the Mount Stromlo Observatory, Australia. On loan courtesy of the artist.

Grace Costa, *Pepe*, 2016, limited edition Giclée photographic print. Photographed inside the Mount Stromlo Observatory, Australia. On loan courtesy of the artist.

Grace Costa, *Blue*, 2016, limited edition Giclée photographic print. Photographed inside the Mount Stromlo Observatory, Australia. On loan courtesy of the artist.

Wendy Stavrianos, *Drawing for Samuel Palmer*, 1990, ink, charcoal and pastel on paper. Logan Art Collection, donated by the artist 2016.

Wendy Stavrianos, *Painting for Samuel Palmer*, 1990, oil on canvas. Logan Art Collection, donated through the Australian Cultural Gifts program by CMcl Boyle, 2014.

Richard Blundell, *Expedition Stallion*, 2012, oil on linen. On loan courtesy of Carol Whittaker.



Noel McKenna, *Horse in barn*, 2016, oil on canvas, private collection, Melbourne. Courtesy of the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne. © Noel McKenna/Licensed by Viscopy, 2017.



Noel McKenna, *Country home*, 2016, oil on canvas, private collection, Melbourne. Courtesy of the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne. © Noel McKenna/Licensed by Viscopy, 2017.



Noel McKenna, *Cat and Horse in trees*, 2016, oil on canvas, private collection, Melbourne. Courtesy of the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne. © Noel McKenna/Licensed by Viscopy, 2017.





Grace Costa, *Pepe*, 2016, photographed inside the Mount Stromlo Observatory, Australia. Limited edition Giclée photographic print. On loan courtesy of the artist.



Grace Costa, *Blue*, 2016, photographed inside the Mount Stromlo Observatory, Australia. Limited edition Giclée photographic print. On loan courtesy of the artist.



Ken Whisson, *Far and few, far and few*, 2005 – 2006, oil on linen, private collection, Melbourne. Courtesy of the artist and Niagara Galleries.

## Acknowledgements

Exhibition curated by Sophie Chapman,  
Exhibitions Officer, Logan Art Gallery.

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*Ponyland: The big pony show*:

- Private collectors, courtesy of Niagara Galleries and artists Ken Whisson and Noel McKenna
- Art Gallery of New South Wales
- QUT Art Museum, William Robinson Gallery QUT
- Urban Art Projects
- Adrian Tobin
- Daniel Tobin
- Brisbane City Council
- Carol Whittaker
- Grace Costa
- Karan Hayman
- Richard Blundell
- Underwood demolition market

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**Logan Art Gallery**

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