

Donna Long *A Survey of Recent Works*



“Unsteady in school as a child, I developed a passion for horses. I drew little cartoon horses on the pages of math books, and I gazed from the classroom windows at the surrounding landscape envisioning myself atop one of my equine friends when I couldn’t listen to the class instructor.

Horses have always been my release from tension. Over the years, I rode and showed American Saddlebreds, American Quarterhorses, Arabians, Thoroughbreds and Dutch Warmbloods. What remains from a herd of thirty equines are two Miniature horses, one Thoroughbred mare and three Paint Horse Association animals. I was present for most of their births and a few of their deaths. Professionally I galloped two and three year old babies in training at race tracks. I bought horses from slaughter yards. I taught riding at commercial facilities commencing when I was fifteen until my

husband and I opened our own barn when I was twenty four.

When I was in my senior year at Vanderbilt University planning a career in special education, I became involved in a program to develop language in children diagnosed at birth as autistic. The children assigned to us had been hospitalized before each was a year old. They came to us wearing football helmets, taking medications and with no language but an occasional scream. After two weeks of making no progress in trying to develop consonant sounds as a precursor to developing language, I began taking one of the autistic boys, Eric, to see my children’s pony. From our first encounter with Butch, Eric’s language development was spectacular.

Horses are social animals. They play with each other, they have ego struggles, they nip and kick at each other, they nuzzle one another and stand head to toe to keep the flies out each others eyes by flicking their tails. They get marks and scars on their coats, but at the end of the day, with the right conditions, they are content. Most of us humans do not consider what we do with our horses to be abusive to them. The horses in my paintings look as though they’re grinning. Some are grimacing. The colors I use, the expressions in their eyes reveal the ironies. My mute horses looking out from their paintings’ borders have so much to say and so little time to say it.” **Donna Long**

The conflict between nature and the man-made world is the inexhaustible subject of Donna Long’s work, reflecting her concern for the environment and her lifelong passion for horses. In Long’s expressive oil paintings, horses often do appear in vibrant landscapes or even as portrait subjects. She uses brilliant color combinations and cropped compositional elements to depict dramatic scenes ranging from the humorous to the surreal. Her equine subjects are full of personality, from the innocent colt in Toys R Us to the blue and black horse’s head in Big Yawn, portrayed with quick and sure painterly gestures. Long’s tragicomic outlook is succinctly expressed in Peace of Pisa. Here, the cart horse pulling a tourist carriage is striped like a zebra, creating a visual parallel with the familiar black and white stonework of the leaning tower and

Renaissance cathedral dome - eliciting a sympathetic double take from the viewer. The striking, acid-colored *Nuclear Winter* also deals with the suffering of animals in a toxic human environment, as a lone horse peers from a Fauvist landscape. In *Muse Meets Poet*, Long paints an eerie Surrealist scene of a dark horse in a vast blue plaza, where the exaggerated perspective of a pink arcade is reminiscent of Giorgio De Chirico. In recent works, Long fills a broad, pictorial canvas with detailed images of anthropomorphic equines engaged in human activities such as sitting in chairs, eating in restaurants, dancing together or playing musical instruments.

Donna Long was born in New York City in 1937 and traveled the world for many years as a photographer. Remarkably, she picked up her first brush only in 2003, enrolling in a class at the Armory Art Center in West Palm Beach. Long's background as a photographer is apparent in her compositional devices. Like Degas, who also chose horses as subjects, she focuses in, crops the view and freezes the action to mimic the immediacy of a snapshot in many of her oil paintings. Now living in and working in West Palm Beach, Long frequently visits family members in California and during a recent stay in the Napa Valley, began a new series of paintings depicting the landscape and livestock of the Carneros district.

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