

Horses In Harmony

by Donna Jones

The Wedding Horses is a portrait of two gray draft horses. Their leather harnesses with bright silver trim set off the horses' silvery manes. Behind the horses is a granite block wall, echoing the gray of the horses, set off by a heavy oaken door. It's a study in shades of gray—only if you look closely, you'll see that the grays in the painting aren't gray at all. They're a harmonious blend of colors chosen by the artist

that unifies the painting and makes shades of gray sing. The artist, Elaine Juska Keeley, has made the right choices for her life as well, balancing her love of art with a passion for horses.

Elaine Keeley is an award-winning professional artist. She also owns, along with her husband, Cedar Knoll Farm, a horse drawn livery service. She manages these two very different careers with the finesse of a well-seasoned driver. The two divergent careers work like a team of well-trained horses, each pulling her along and playing off one another. Keeley keeps a balance between them with equal parts organization and hard work. The horses' needs come first, and then the myriad of other details of the carriage operation are a close second. Art isn't on as crucial a time frame, but the studio beckons her whether she's busy or not. She explains her passion for her art as "such an integral part of my being that without art I would be a totally different person physically, emotionally and spiritually."

Elaine's paintings are inspired by many things, but generally it is her experiences with her own horses, attending horse shows and plow matches, that capture her attention. Her equine paintings are nearly 100% harness and draft horse imagery because of her connection to her carriage business.

She begins her equine paintings with several different photographs, sketched into composites to make a single image. Once the thumbnail is sketched out, she determines the color chords for the painting with color swatches and notes. Then she transfers the sketch to the final medium with a strong value drawing. The painting then evolves as she layers the primary colors from dark to light. She says, "Most of my paintings (although not all) are completely made up of three



The Wedding Horses – Pastel by Elaine Juska Keeley.

primaries to create the color chords...rarely do I just grab the local color out of the box, particularly for the 'meat' of the painting. Those special, brilliantly colored sticks, the ones that make artist want to be pastelists in the first place, are reserved for the final details."

Pastels have been Elaine's medium of choice since 1997. She says, "Working in soft pastel is like second nature to me, like breathing, or snacking on cookies or something." But recently she acquired a set of oil pastels and has found that these paintings, although not accepted for exhibits by the Pastel Society of America, sell well at local galleries and are easier to ship. With both media she uses a sanded pastel paper called "Wallis" which has a nice "tooth" that grabs the color and accepts many layers of pastel. This layering technique adds luminosity and vibrancy. Cross-hatching, rather than blending, allows the viewer's eye to optically mix the colors.

In addition to the importance of color theory, the dynamics of composition are a strong element in Keeley's paintings. Her paintings are cropped so that the subject tells the story. Each horse is represented as an individual; each setting depicts a specific time. She captures movement by having her subjects coming very close to the edge of the frame—one blink and that moment is gone.

Elaine groups her paintings into "realistic" and "esoteric" works. Realistic subjects include horses, landscapes and portraits. The esoteric paintings are done with the same style and technique, but with dreamlike images rich in symbolism. These paintings are very personal and carry private messages to the artist.

Elaine expresses herself with another personal medium

— collage and altered books. She makes them for fun and creative release.

Her creativity is expressed in many other ways. She gives private art lessons to children, writes articles for the *Horseman's Yankee Peddler*, and she designs and maintains the website for the Eastern CT Draft Horse Association. She also represents other artists to collectors and hopes to own another gallery in addition to the one she has now. A signature member of the Pastel Society of America, she is working toward becoming a signature member of the American Academy of Equine Arts.

Elaine knew from the time she was a child that she would be an artist and she always drew horses. She says, "I never had any doubt that I would be an artist. There were doubts my entire childhood, however, that I would ever own my own horse. Now I have eight horses and a carriage operation. It just goes to show you the power of determination." ▲

Elaine Juska Keeley and her husband, Terry Joseph, own Cedar Knoll Farms in Lisbon, CT. They have two children, Brandon, age 17 and Maegan, age 13. The website for Cedar Knoll Farms is: www.cedarknoll.net. Elaine Juska Keeley's website is: www.ejkstudios.net.

PHOTO BY TERRY JOSEPH



Elaine driving a restored antique hearse for a funeral. Percheron, Gillette, is between the shafts. The hearse belongs to Loon Meadow Farm.

Elaine (left) and Terry driving the black wedding carriage (Cedar Knoll also has a white one). The horse is again Gillette.

PHOTO BY SAM CHINIGO



Bit of History

Percherons

The ancestors to the modern day Percheron originated in le Perche region of France. Originally developed as warhorses, and later refined as mail-coach carriage horses, Percherons, with an Arab influence, were much more light footed and spirited than some of the other draft breeds. Over time, however, the breed started taking on the characteristics of a heavier, taller draft animal, particularly in the United States.

The last half of the 19th century saw a huge growth in Percheron population. They were the heavy horse of choice for both the American farmer and city teamster. Due to their strength, speed, and intelligence, they were also the most trusted breed for fire fighters. By 1930, the Percherons were so popular that US government census showed that there were three times as many Percherons in the US than all other draft breeds combined. They were, unfortunately, also the horse of choice for the US Army, and were shipped off as gun horses during WWI and even WWII. Following WWII, with the advent of a modern, mechanized world, the Percheron breed nearly fell into extinction. Except for the diligence of a few farmers, including many within the Amish community, all draft breeds had been in danger of extinction. Since that time, however, the draft horse has seen a renaissance, and they are once again plowing the fields and pulling carriages for pleasure and show, and Percherons in particular are very popular in the ever-growing commercial carriage trade.

Percherons are generally either black or grey in color. They commonly stand between 16-18HH, weighing in at 1800 - 2200lbs. Due in part to their Arab influence, Percherons sport a very refined head, delicate ears, and elegant gait, with very light feathering on their legs.

by Elaine Juska Keeley

Belgians

Belgians are descended from the Great War Horse of medieval times and come from the country of Belgium in Northern Europe. The Brabant or modern day European Belgian is really the true Belgian. Generally of roan or bay coloring, the Brabant is short, stout, and heavy boned, with prolific feathering. The American Style Belgian started taking shape in the US into what is now considered the quintessential draft horse - tall, leggy and with less feathering, deep barrel, good slope to the shoulder, and more style and animation in their gaits. Unlike the Brabants, the American Belgians typically sport variations of chestnut and sorrel colors - from red roans to light blonde sorrels, to deep red sorrels with white manes, tails, and legs.

Modern day Belgians are excellent, sturdy workers, easy keepers, and trustworthy carriage and farm horses. They are undeniably the most popular breed of draft horse in the sport of horse pulls, an activity where owners challenge each other to pulling heavy stone boats laden with concrete blocks over a short distance, testing their team's strength, stamina, and concentration.

The American Belgian generally stands 16-18HH or more, and weighs anywhere from 1800 - 2200 lbs. Belgians are currently the most populous breed of draft horse in the United States today, and, like the Percheron, owe much of their rebirth to die-hard Amish and small-farming communities.