

The Kentucky Derby in Art

By SARAH COBLE



The Kentucky Derby has become the high watermark around the world for far more than the strongest and fastest of thoroughbred racing. The entire city of Louisville, Kentucky has taken the two most exciting minutes in equine sport and turned it into a month-long extravaganza of festivals, fun and fashion.

Ever since "Bluegrass Pegasus" became the official image of the Kentucky Derby, artists ranging from Bart Forbes to Tony Bennett have put their own mark on the 133-year old Run for the Roses.

Motion and Muscularity

Official Derby Artist Trish Biddle Takes on the Physical Power of the Horse "Being chosen as the official artist of the Kentucky Derby has definitely taken my art to an entirely different level," declares Trish Biddle of the honor of her art becoming the signature image of the 133rd running of the most prestigious thoroughbred race in the world.

It has also taken her work in an entirely new direction: into the elegant motion and streamlined muscularity of the horse. Born into an outdoorsy, sporting life of hunting dogs and field trials in Minnesota, Biddle studied at the Dallas Institute of Art before launching a respectable career as an illustrator and textile designer. "I always had an interest in fashion and thought about a career as a fashion illustrator, so textile design seemed to toggle into those interests," Biddle explains from her home in Texas. "But then, there was always this desire to be a painter. So I started with a publisher doing landscapes, and then moved into doing figurative paintings, which seemed a natural fit."

It was Biddle's vibrantly-hued unabashedly romantic, jazz age-style depictions of high fashion society: tango tea dances, champagne lounges, scenes from the Riviera—that caught the eye of Clare Jett, owner of JettStream Productions, Churchill Downs' events

marketing company that selects the artists for the Kentucky Derby series. "The Derby is about far more than just the horses, so they seek more than just equine artists" says Biddle.

But ever since, Biddle's eye has been captured by the rich textures, graceful lines and powerful symbolism of horses and equine sport.

But ever since, Biddle's eye has been captured by the rich textures, graceful lines and powerful symbolism of horses and equine sport. "As an artist, I didn't realize that until I really started studying it," says Biddle. "The proportions of the muscles and their nostrils seemed so exaggerated, but these animals are like powerful engines, designed so perfectly."

Biddle's equine art touches on the charming sweetness of children's ponies to the elegant salute of a hunter/jumper rider to the homestretch charge of the Kentucky Derby dark horse, Street Sense, who came from 18th in the field to win in the homestretch. "Street Sense's story really spoke to me as a working mom, and as an artist at the time, I really felt like the horse in the 18th position," says Biddle, who was introduced to Carl Nafzger, Street Sense's trainer, as well as author of Traits of a Winner, a motivational book for horse trainers that has made a deep impression on Biddle. "The energy level in the Street Sense paintings is so high. He's a dark brown horse and he's splattered in mud as he charges into the homestretch. There's a lot in there for me personally about perseverance through discouragement and overcoming obstacles. About pursuing your dream all the way to the finish line." •

www.derbyartgifts.com or
see other works on Trish's website:
www.trishbiddle.com



Trish Biddle and thoroughbred Trainer Carl Nafzger



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