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## New Hampshire artist's pony blazes a painted trail

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His name is Abenaki, and he stands about 2 feet tall — a horse that is too small to even be a pony.

No matter his diminutive size, Abenaki is the product of more than 120 hours of work by Portsmouth artist Denise Brown, and the painted horse sculpture has made her the only New England representative in the annual "Trail of Painted Ponies" art competition.

"I had no idea it would take that long," Brown says.

The competition, which was started in 2001 by Rod Barker, also the executive director, looks to celebrate Native American art styles, as well as give artists a new place to share their trade, instead of the usual ways through a gallery, show, or advertisement.

There are more than 400 entries, which are whittled down to the top 20 by three judges.

"Denise's is colorful and interpretive," Barker says. He adds that the written attachment that explains Abenaki helped as well. "We're pleased she's from New Hampshire. It shows that national character and range of interest the competition draws."

Brown, 51, a computer graph-



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Denise Brown of Portsmouth is a finalist in the national "Trail of Painted Ponies" competition.

ics artist by trade, became involved with Trail of Painted Ponies after she saw the ads for the contest in Southwest Art

Magazine in November.

That left her with three weeks to put together and submit a two dimensional design of what

she would paint on the sculpture. On Christmas weekend, Brown says, she found out her creation was going to be includ-

ed in the 20-finalist field

"I was jumping up and down," she says with a laugh. "I'm pretty excited."

She received her blank horse sculpture and got to work; before she could paint, she had to prep her three dimensional canvas, which she named Abenaki in an effort to represent all of New England. The name means "People of the Dawn," or "Easterners."

On the horse, she painted moose, bear, rabbits, buffalo, wolves and bald eagles, among others.

"My pony is about critters a horse would encounter in its lifetime," Brown says.

The horse, she says, was 10 times harder than a regular painting because of the curves and shapes, but "you have to keep in mind how you can photograph the horse from all directions," Brown says.

Brown says she has always been crazy about horses, including when she grew up in Rye, right next to them. Her love for equines included her drawings and paintings of them.

When she attended the University of New Hampshire from 1973 to '76, Brown created her own major, where she worked under one of her influences, her adviser John Hatch

of Durham.

"I geared myself toward artwork for a long time," she says.

Now, Brown runs Raccoon Studios, where her artwork is available. All of her work, which includes landscapes, watercolors, architecture, portraits, and seascapes as well as her coloring book, Ted the Cat, are available online at [www.raccoonstudios.com](http://www.raccoonstudios.com).

There are pictures of Abenaki as well, which will soon be sent out to Arizona for judging.

The 20 finalists in the competition vie to get their creation made into a figurine, as well as take part in an online vote by the public for cash prizes at [www.trailofpaintedponies.com](http://www.trailofpaintedponies.com).

The figurines, according to Barker, are some of the hottest collectibles around. On eBay, for instance, the figurines sell for about \$50, with at least one autographed horse going for more than \$200. Some have gone as high as \$20,000 in auctions, and \$50,000 in sales.

The winning horse as well, will go on a year-long tour of the country.

"I hope I might see him again," she says. "It'll be hard to let him go."

For such a small horse, Abenaki gives Brown some big hopes.