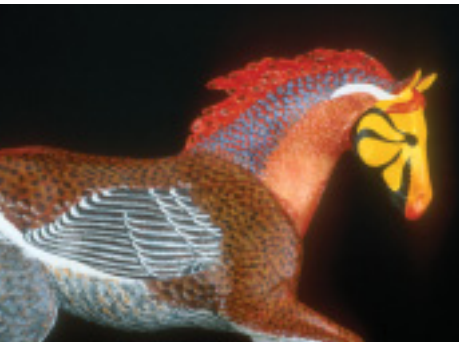


ART ABLAZE:

The Trail of Painted Ponies

BY KRISTIN JEKEL



ART BECOMES MAGICAL WHEN IT TRANSCENDS CULTURAL, LANGUAGE AND AGE BARRIERS TO CONNECT PEOPLE FROM ALL WALKS AND STAGES OF LIFE. THE TRAIL OF PAINTED PONIES, AN INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC ART PROGRAM HEADQUARTERED IN THE SCOTTSDALE AIRPARK, HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL FROM ITS INCEPTION THREE YEARS AGO FOR JUST THAT REASON; IT PRESENTS ART IN A FORM — BRIGHTLY HAND-PAINTED HORSE SCULPTURES — THAT IS ACCESSIBLE AND MEANINGFUL TO EVERYONE.

There is a timeless, universal appeal about the horse. Throughout history, the graceful equine beast of burden has provided transportation, entertainment, and companionship. Mindful of the powerful connection between man, horse and art, Rodney Barker, a journalist and non-fiction novelist, founded The Trail of Painted Ponies in Santa Fe in 2000. Inspired by animal art projects such as cows in Chicago and pigs in Cincinnati, he instinctively recognized the potential for horse art to attract and unite communities, not only in New Mexico, where horses

are so deeply imbedded in the culture and history, but throughout the world.

The most important goal of the project was to meet the highest standard of artistic excellence and diversity during every step of the process. To that end, award-winning New Mexico sculptor Star Liana York was commissioned to create the original designs for two horse forms — standing horse and running horse. Based on York's designs, an Albuquerque company cast the ponies in polyurethane to serve as "canvases" for acclaimed artists to express themselves: their



heritage, their patriotism, their memories, and their dreams. Initially, 120 artists were chosen by a jury of community members to hand-paint the horse form they preferred. The result as Barker explains, became “art on art.”

The dazzling life-size painted ponies were exhibited with rave reviews in various New Mexico venues such as the Albuquerque Sunport. Eventually the equine masterpieces were sold or auctioned off. Nearly half a million dollars were raised for philanthropic causes. A second round of ponies was produced, displayed and sold to businesses, galleries and homeowners, some selling for \$20,000 or more. Poised to introduce the ponies to new markets, Barker relocated to Scottsdale in 2002 and joined forces with marketing expert Karlynn Keyes of Double Star Studio. As the design and promotion consultant, Keyes’ role is to continue to creatively explore new ways for The Trail of Painted Ponies to stimulate the art economy, raise funds for charitable organizations, provide a viable method for artists to promote themselves and create a bond in the local community and beyond.

Barker and Keyes are dedicated to finding avenues for bringing fine art to the masses. While a life-size painted pony statue may not be affordable or practical for everybody to own, desk-size versions hand-painted by the original artists are available, as well as a collectors’ series of miniatures. Every six months, 12 painted pony collectables are released for sale on the internet and in fine retail shops throughout the country. Each figurine is hand-painted with the same attention to detail as the original. Retailing for about \$25.00, The Trail of Painted Ponies collectable series is the hottest collectable in the nation as reported by trade magazines. The merchandising of The Trail of Painted Ponies continues to expand and now includes horsehead busts, plaques, coasters, coffee mugs, and magnets.

Media coverage of The Trail of Painted Ponies, including a PBS documentary, has been pumping new life into the art world. Scottsdale stands to benefit from the attention and economic support the project is receiving. The future of The Trail of Painted Ponies looks as bright and shiny as the glorious ponies themselves. **sm**

Editor’s Note: The Trail of Painted Ponies is not related to the Scottsdale Stampede project that took place in Downtown Scottsdale three years ago.



Where to see The Trail of Painted Ponies:

Visit the award-winning website: www.trailofpaintedponies.com or call 480.361.5341

Seven Painted Ponies are on display in the lobby of the Dodge Theatre. For more information visit www.dodgetheatre.com.

“Anasazi Spirit Horse” by Robert Rivera is gracing the lobby of the Grace Chapel, home of the Scottsdale Symphony Orchestra, located at 8524 E. Thomas Road.

Two special Signature Ponies featuring the autographs of athletes and celebrities will be auctioned off for charity. One is located in Dodge Theatre and the other can be viewed at America West Arena.

The Trail of Painted Ponies will participate in Celebrity Fight Night at the JW Marriott Desert Ridge Resort and Spa on March 27. Call 602.956.1121 for more details.

VIRTUAL GALLERY

The enterprising duo of Rodney Barker and Karlynn Keyes has created an exciting new venue for experiencing fine art. A new website, www.verybestinthewest.com was launched on Valentine’s Day and features the photos, bios and works of 100 of the very best artists in the West.