

THE TAIL END

THE HORSEY SET



PHOTOS BY AARON PENNOCK / POST-DISPATCH

Spirit War Pony, by Tavlos, was inspired in part by the Illini Indians of the artist's Illinois childhood. All pictured ponies are \$19.99 each at the Humane Society of Missouri Gift Shop, 1201 Macklind Avenue.



Mosaic Appaloosa, by painter Bob Coonts, turns a traditional pony into a contemporary horse of a different color.



Artist Ellen Sokoloff drew inspiration for her colorful **Route 66 Horse** from childhood memories of Western road trips before the days of motel chains and fast-food franchises.



QuarterHorse, by New Jersey artist Kathy Morawski, includes a quarter's design elements.



War Pony, by Rance Hood, reflects the vibrant spirit of a Comanche war horse.

Horses of different colors

Painted Ponies figurines are attracting fans and collectors

BY SARAH CASEY NEWMAN
Of the Post-Dispatch

AT SOME POINT in their lives, most children want a pony as a pet. Now a lot of adults want ponies, too. Painted ponies. Not the "painted horse" of the movie "Hidalgo," but the colorfully captivating Trail of Painted Ponies figurines.

People passionate for these particular Painted Ponies have followed their trail to the Humane Society of Missouri Gift Shop, which has been selling — and selling out of — the figurines since they were introduced last spring.

The tale behind the Trail of Painted Ponies collection began in the summer of 2000. Inspired by Chicago's Parade of Cows and similar public art projects in cities around the country, New Mexico rounded up more than a hundred of its top artists to transform life-sized fiberglass horses into imaginative works of art.

Nine communities signed on to host herds of these eye-catching equines, and by the following summer, visitors to The Land of Enchantment were following the Trail of Painted Ponies from Albuquerque to Los Alamos, Carlsbad to Tucumcari.

At the end of the year, 120 ponies were auctioned off for charity, raising hundreds of thousands of dollars for a spectrum of social, cultural, environmental and animal organizations.

The pony project was so popular and so successful that in 2002, a new herd appeared, again inspiring statewide trail drives and earning big bucks for charity. This time, artists from all over the country participated.



A look at the other side of Sokoloff's Route 66-inspired pony.

Now the project's trail masters have begun joining with communities and organizations in other states to create a whole new breed of Painted Pony exhibits.

Another new chapter to the pony tale was added last spring with the introduction of the figurines. The reproductions are being released in groups of 12 two times a year. The third group was released on Monday, and the ponies are already showing up in stores.

Jan DeFranco, manager of the Humane Society gift shop, said that as soon as she saw the ponies, she knew she had to stock them. "We're always looking for good horse items for the gift shop, and these are really spectacular," she said.

The original Painted Ponies have been described as individual art exhibits, and the intricately detailed replicas are art shows in miniature. The figurines are 6 inches high and made of either ceramic or resin. The Humane Society sells them for \$19.99, \$24.99 and \$28.99, depending on the style. DeFranco said that the gift shop sold out of the original grouping twice, and she will soon have to reorder again.

Joan Bengston is the St. Louis representative for Westland Giftware, the California-based company that produces the Painted Ponies, along with many other popular collectibles. She said the ponies are Westland's top-selling product. "The Painted Ponies have taken off even faster than the Parade of Cows," she said. And that's without the national exposure that Chicago's traveling cow exhibit generated.

Of the first 24 Painted Pony designs, the most popular seller at the Humane Society has been War Pony, DeFranco said. The original War Pony was done by Comanche artist Rance Hood and is an authentic representation of a traditional Comanche war horse.

Most of the ponies in the collection are more fanciful creatures. Some are humorous, such as Carla Slusher's Boot Scootin' Horsey with its cowboy hat, painted-on jeans and matching cowboy boots. Some ponies, such as Lightning Bolt Colt by Dyanne Strongbow, a Choctaw, have a mystical or spiritual quality about them. Many, such as the intricate mosaic Caballo Brillante by Roger Montoya, are almost mesmerizing.

"The ponies seem to touch people on every emotional and spiritual level," said Rod Barker, founder and director of the Trail of Painted Ponies project.

Indeed, the kaleidoscopic collection is so unusual, so attention-getting and in some cases so addictive that DeFranco has customers who order complete groupings sight-unseen.

Collecting these compelling creatures has become a little less costly, thanks to



An eagle's wings morph into the mane on QuarterHorse.

the new Painted Pony ornaments. The first grouping of 12 designs arrived this week at the Humane Society, which sells the 3-inch ornaments for \$8.95 each.

The Trail of Painted Ponies project has also led to "The Trail of Painted Ponies" book (\$19.95, softcover), which is now in its third edition. New this year are "The Trail of Painted Ponies" DVD (\$26.95) and video (\$22.95). The production is narrated by actress Ali McGraw, who painted one of the original ponies. McGraw designed her golden fantasy pony to symbolize humankind's connection to the animals. Its name, Karuna, is Sanskrit for compassion.

Other new products in the Painted Pony stable include magnets, coasters and plaques. The line is available locally in several gift shops, including Gifts N Things in Chesterfield, St. Louis Mills and South County malls, and The Gift Nook in St. Charles.

Proceeds from the Painted Ponies sold

at the Humane Society benefit the organization's homeless animals, including the 54 horses and ponies at its Longmeadow Rescue Ranch in Union. Farm animals rescued from abuse and neglect are taken to the large-animal rehabilitation center, where they are nursed back to health and placed up for adoption.

More information about Longmeadow Rescue Ranch, including its Barn Buddies animal-sponsorship program, is available at www.longmeadowrescue-ranch.org or by calling 314-951-1542.

The Humane Society of Missouri Gift Shop is located at the organization's headquarters at 1201 Macklind Avenue. The phone number is 314-647-8800, Ext. 566.

For more information about the Trail of Painted Ponies project, visit its Web site at www.gopaintedponies.com.

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BREED OF THE WEEK

Meet the Dachshund

ORIGINALLY BRED in Germany to hunt badgers, dachshunds have such a distinctive shape they are often referred to as wiener dogs. The breed

zoomed in popularity from 28th place to 6th place in the decade before World War II and has remained in the top 10 ever since. One of the reasons for the dachshund's continuing popularity may be that it is generally free of doggy odor.



Temperament

Lively and clever, dachshunds tend to be brave to the point of foolhardiness. A shy dachshund is a rare thing.

General appearance

Dachshunds have a long, straight trunk with a strong, muscular chest and shoulders and short legs that keep them close to the ground. Although wire-haired and long-haired varieties exist, the smooth, short-haired type is the most common.

Source: *American Kennel Club Web site: www.akc.org*

— Compiled by J. Stephen Bolhafner

PET CALENDAR

Greyhound Meet and Greet: Today, noon to 3 p.m., PetsMart, 4451 Lemay Ferry, Mehlville. Sponsored by Rescued Racers (www.rescuedracers.com).

Shetland Sheepdog Specialty Dog Show: Today and Sunday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Grant's Shelter, Jefferson Barracks Park. Includes obedience and conformation classes. Free. Sponsored by the Greater St. Louis Shetland Sheepdog Club.

Greyhound Meet and Greet: March 27, 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., PetsMart, Glen Carbon. Sponsored by Greyhound Companions (www.gcmo.org).

Garage Sale: March 27, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Living World, St. Louis Zoo. Sponsored by the Museum Store Association; benefits the Zoo, the Humane Society of Missouri, the Wild Canid Center (Wolf Sanctuary), Butterfly House and more.

St. Louis Pet Expo: March 27 and 28, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Greensfelder Recreational Complex, Queeny Park, 550 Weidman Road, west St. Louis County. Animals available for adoption from local shelters and rescue groups; demonstrations; contests; education booths; microchipping by Avid for \$20, with \$10 going to a local spay/neuter program. Admission, \$4 for adults, no charge for children 12 and under. Information and discount coupon: www.stlouispetexpo.com.

— Compiled by Sarah Casey Newman