



"One Dark Horse"

Unbridled

Painter Diana Tremain explores life and art through the eyes of a horse

BY MICHELE CORRIEL

Filtering life through the symbol of a horse is not only Diana Tremain's method of exploration for her art and but of herself, as well. Her paintings are windows lit from within, through the steady, discerning eye of a horse.

Scattered across the white walls of her work studio, Diana's portraits vary in degrees of emotions, but her subject matter remains stable. Using limited palettes, she evokes starkness and honesty, surrender and curiosity. It is almost as if she is holding back, in order to expand.

how they achieve certain things," Richardson said. "Instead of just saying here's a still life, go. We're looking at it for a reason. She gives you an idea of what she want, but she doesn't tell you how to paint."

Teaching is an important part of Diana's life as an artist. It seems as though she's always taught. From university level to teaching art at a corrections facility in Los Angeles.

"Her students just rave about her," Gallatin River Gallery owner Julie Gustafson said. "She's very articulate and encouraging. Very perceptive. It's a big part of who she is."

Gustafson has represented Diana's work for the last three years at the gallery in Big Sky.

"I think she's really a talented painter," Gustafson said. "She merges western and contemporary style really well; her figures and animals are just stunning."

Gustafson appreciates the way Diana crops and

frames her compositions.

"They're a little bit unexpected," Gustafson said. "You only get fragments, and it adds a nice layer to her work. They come across as not straightforward renditions of horses but have a much more spiritual and emotional quality to them.

"She has an interesting color palette," she said. "She's pushed that, so some of them almost look like a negative. She is just so good at rendering, that's part of her talent. When she overlaps and layers, those images of horses and figures turn into something that is very complex. They're loose and lively; up close, and from a distance, her paintings are really exciting."

Diana is represented by several galleries: The Center Street Gallery in Jackson Hole, Shack Up in Bozeman, Visions West in Livingston and The Gallatin River Gallery in Big Sky.



"Ananda"



"Santosha"

The high ceilings and lack of furniture echo the tones and fill the space like water into a void. Images of horses peer out from everywhere.

"The idea for me is that horses and the female figure represent the same spirit," she explains. "Horses are that unbridled passionate side, and the female represents a more quiet and contemplative side. I don't see them as separate, but manifestations of the same thing."

Diana stands, almost boxed in with her work setup. On one side is a three-tiered, stainless-steel shelf on wheels; behind her, and on her other side, are small wood folding tables scattered with photographs and Xeroxes of horses. And she doesn't use an easel, but instead hangs her paintings on the wall.

"I don't like to paint on easels," she says, delicately making a thin yellow-green line along the edge of a shadow. "There's always an angle with an easel. Working on the wall is more true to how it will look when it's hung."

After lining her fine track of green, she takes a fat, square brush and blurs the contrast, creating a deliberate softness. Speaking of her limited palette style, she says she does that to integrate and unite the positive and negative space in a painting.

"The monochromatic palette holds the painting

together," she says. "So it's not just a horse, but something more than that."

But on Monday mornings, Diana puts her own work away and turns her studio into a classroom. It is here she gathers with her students, a handful of women who are eager to absorb the expertise that Diana is more than willing to share.

"I think she's a wonderful teacher," Molly Richardson said on her way out of the house to art class. Richardson has been a student of Diana's for over two years. "She was my first serious teacher of painting, and I love what she does."

Each week Diana sets up a different challenge for her students.

"It's a constantly interesting class," Richardson said. "We've done paintings of food, tomatoes for instance, and Diana asks for us to complete it in an hour. Other times, we had to paint from the inside looking out, from a door or a window, to the landscape. An interior

view looking out."

Each challenge's goal is to teach the painters different aspects of contemporary art. Not only does Diana demonstrate various styles, but she also educates her students in art history.

"She's very knowledgeable about painting and painters



"Suhka 2"

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"My work evolves very rapidly," Diana says, poking at her plastic, take-out lid palette with a small paintbrush. "You can feel the continuity, but the body of work keeps moving. I paint either horses or figures. When I unite them they're psychological, an emotion I'm trying, coming through the figure of a horse."

Although she shuns the idea of working on a series, there are about half a dozen paintings, like portals on the wall. They are approximately the same size, very square, using a horse's face, exposing only one eye. They vary only in the emotional impact and the changing color scheme.

"I find the image very important to me," she says. "I



artist portrait by Thomas Lee



"Mind's Eye"

respond to horses because I think of them as timeless recorders of our history. They've been with us in battle and in triumph, alongside men through it all. For now, I'm interested in trying to create an image that will stop people in their tracks."

On that count she has succeeded.

Because it's not the horse that attracts the viewer, but the steadfast eye, a searching, beckoning eye, a magnet that seems to tug on a truth, catching the moment, unawares.

"For me, when I look at a horse's eye I kind of see every emotion under the sun — from joy, kinship, sorrow, everything. Everything humankind has been through, I see it through the eye of the horse."

She wants to create at least 20 paintings using this same style.

"I want to see what's become important and what's faded out," Diana says.

Playing with the idea of high definition contrast, Diana takes a photograph of a horse and then Xeroxes it, the blacks get deeper, and the lighter colors disappear. It is that disappearing that she's striving for — she's reaching for the expansion point when she can erase as much as she can, without losing the image.

A smooth folk-like ballad washes across Diana's studio.