

LIVING SCULPTURES

British photographer Tim Flach is known for his unusual portrayal of animals. His horse images manage to convey the relationship between man and steed without including any human subjects. Though domesticated over 5000 years ago, Tim Flach's perspectives present the noble beast in an entirely new light. Trailblazing images between motion and repose.



PHOTOS: TIM FLACH

Tim Flach considers this shot of the Andalusian, Farol XXIX (above), one of the ultimate horse images. With this extreme close-up (right), Flach wants to encourage the viewer's eye to wander



To make the Lusitano, Unico II, shake his head dynamically, Tim Flach's assistant rubbed foam over the animal's head. The photo shoot took all day





Eye to eye with Hassan – a white Arabian (left). His back (above) transforms into an abstract sculpture, producing a large variety of shades of white

Flach let the breeder decide on the exact background for the cremello-colored Lusitano stallion, Idolo. The result was a setting where horse and backdrop blended perfectly





A closer look in needed to discover the condensed breath of the thoroughbred, Montpelier (left). With the Lusitano, Dante (right), Flach wanted to show muscles and structure rather than the whole horse



Destined for glamor: Cassia's mane is elaborately and lovingly plaited before British photographer Tim Flach transforms the proud curve of the mare's neck into a monumental landscape



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TIM FLACH

Born in London, England in 1958. Flach studied communications design from 1977 to 1980 at the University of East London (UEL), and then photography at the renowned Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London from 1982 to 1983. Soon he was assisting photographer Brian Worth on major hotel brochure photo shoots and other PR work. Apart from the practical experience Worth provided him with the opportunity to use the studio for his own works. Flach's work has been recognised with awards from the Association of Photography and British Design & Art Direction. Flach has had solo exhibitions in Dubai, Shanghai, Tokyo, Berlin and Houston, Texas, and lectures all over the world. His clients include Lavazza and British Royal Mail.

Whether face to face or eye to eye – even when you look really close it's hard to tell exactly what you're seeing. Despite the vividness of his pictures, British photographer Tim Flach loves to confuse the imaginative viewer. "I like to bring unexpected elements to people, show them the less familiar," Flach explains, speaking about his particular way of seeing and capturing things.

In his case, the 'things' are animals and, above all, horses. Flach was given his first professional photographic assignment at age 18 when he was still a student. The project involved an 18-foot-long python. In his foundation course he was again photographing animals at the London Zoo. He hasn't looked back, "You can't expect rational behavior when you're dealing with animals – they're totally unpredictable. It leads to a tension between existing structures and a contrast between chaos and order."

This tension creates the ideal conditions for the photographer's work. He likes to take portraits of animals as though they were people – sometimes face to face, sometimes in profile. As a result, the intuitive perspective becomes one of his stylistic elements. "People tend to project human attributes onto animals, and that's fascinating,"



Flach realizes. His work is also often quite abstract – the perfect antithesis to anthropomorphism. Flach's super-sharp images are close-up impressions of four-legged, hooved animals and other mammals, reptiles and fish. It's goosebumps material. Deep furrows in the skin appear like rocky gorges, pores like craters and feathers like trees.

Flach likes to condense incredible proximity even further, reducing everything to the basics, transforming a living being into nothing more than color and structure. The animal's body seems to disappear altogether. Flach turns the familiar

into something odd by his choice of unusual perspectives and angles, thus showing it in a completely new light. It has earned him a number of international awards. "My pictures also reveal how we read things, how they astound us and how they become emotionally transformed," he explains.

It was six years ago when he photographed a horse for the first time, together with other exotic animals such as Chinese pigs, bats, elephants and monkeys. He started this particular project by asking himself a simple question: "What does a horse symbolize to me?" The answer turned out to be a lot more complicated, for the relationship between man and horse, and the depictions thereof, have existed for thousands of years. It's a coexistence that has been constantly evolving. For centuries, horses were man's beast of burden, used for hunting, agriculture and even defence. It is only recently that they've found their place in the world of recreation. This has led to new businesses where horses are objects of speculation – highly appreciated investments, running into the millions.

Through the ages, people have been developing equipment and accessories for a variety of horse-related activities culminating today



in high-tech horse racing gear. The sums can be quite spectacular: an Irish group once invested approximately 13.4 million euros for a two-year old race horse that has yet to see the starting line – a cost that doesn't even include the required expensive equipment. The long list of equipment includes: nylon suits designed to give the horse a shiny coat after shampooing and drying; transport masks that make the

animal look like a boxer about to step into the ring; and even contraptions to measure the horse's breathing during training. "You don't know it's function, but you immediately start to search for a meaning," Flach explains with a grin that betrays his own confusion at seeing all the equipment. It clearly says something about the significance horses have for human beings, evident also in the various breeding programs.

Tim Flach wants to show today's relationship between horses and people, free from clichés. Human figures are absent in his pictures. His chief interest is in paying homage to the steed's visual form. With this in mind, he goes as far as to take the horses out of their natural habitat – at a cost of 1,500 English pounds for two, for example – and relocates them in the sterile setting of his London studio. It is in this studio, located in Shoreditch, a former industrial area and now up-and-coming neighborhood brimming with artists' studios and hip restaurants. In the studio Flach shoots his famous photographs, expertly switching between cameras or, more specifically, between his three Hasselblads: a Hasselblad 553ELX with a 150mm lens, a Hasselblad H1 camera with an Ixpress 132C digital back and with HC 100mm and 120mm lenses and a Hasselblad H2D-39 with HC 50–110mm lens.

Flach also draws upon the lighting techniques of fashion photography, using a special ring flash system for



linear, direct light, and he prefers to photograph the animals in front of a black backdrop. However, Flach spares no expense when it comes to adjusting the background to achieve the right effect. For example, in order to create the perfect blend between the rare cremello-colored coat of the Lusitano stallion, Idolo, and the background (page 46), Tim Flach sent the breeder a color palette to pinpoint the subtle color changes

arising in the stall in different light. With the exception of a few rare cases, this perfectionist photographer avoids post-processing his work in Photoshop. Flach's pictures convey a sense of "less is more", aiming to give the viewers enough room for their own personal interpretation of the subjects. For this reason, certain details only become apparent after repeated viewings: the triangular shape, the hint of an ear seems to suggest that the abstract sculpture may, in fact, be breathing horse.

It's a surreal and suggestive type of photography that has gradually evolved into Flach's life mission, and he intends to continue in the same direction. "I have spent twenty years or more solving other people's problems: photography is often used to communicate ideas. It was a very creative journey, and it took me all this time to get on the right track," Flach says, as he moves off into a universe still bursting with possibilities. There is no doubt that he intends to convey these visions in his own special way – starting with his very first book project titled 'Equus'. Therefore he was travelling the globe, in the search for equines in their natural environment. The opus will be published in October 2008 by PQ Blackwell of Auckland, New Zealand. CARLA SUSANNE ERDMANN



Masquerade (from left): Wildest Dream, an Arabian wearing a fly protector; Al Patra, an Arabian sporting a post-op mask; the thoroughbred fitted with oxygen-measuring mask; Hotspur, an Irish sports horse, protected by sixteenth century armour; a British pony wearing a hair straightener