

A Creative Journey

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Photos: Rebecca Redding



Alone Thoroughbred stands majestically beside a gnarled tree under a Prussian blue sky marred by brewing storm clouds. A silver Weimaraner with a solemn gaze sits regally, as if posing for a painting were second nature. A powerful Native American intent on capturing a wild horse is forever suspended in time.

All three scenes present a testament to a lifetime of prolific work by renowned Lexington artist Andre Pater. They also are just a few of the paintings and drawings that are on display at Lexington's Headley-Whitney Museum of Art as part of a retrospective on Pater's life, *Andre Pater: An American Journey*.

"Widely known as the finest sporting artist of our time, it is an honor to have an artist of Pater's international acclaim and following featured at the [museum]," said Christina Bell, curator of the Headley-Whitney Museum. "This museum is a treasure in the heart of Bluegrass, and it is perfect synergy to present Andre's stunning artistic portrayals filled with movement and light, as only he can."

The exhibit originally was planned to include 66 paintings—a play on the painter's age and the iconic American highway—but it expanded to nearly 100, thanks to the enthusiasm of Pater's patrons and collectors.

For Pater, who arrived in the United States from Poland in 1981 ("to explore") with an interior design degree from the Krakow Academy of Fine Arts, the exhibit is a chance to present the different periods of

his creativity, spurred by a love of horses that branched off into many facets of artistic work.



“This exhibition is showing how I was shaped here as a person and as an artist,” Pater said. “I didn’t come here as a little boy. I didn’t learn how to paint here, no. But I learned to do things that I would never have had an idea to do.

“Everything is related to horses ... everything. The horse doesn’t exist without landscape. There are people. There are animals.

There is hunting, polo—a zillion other things.”

While working as an interior designer at a Texas architectural firm in 1984, Pater painted in his spare time—primarily his beloved Polish Arabian horses. Word quickly spread about his work. He sold enough paintings and earned enough accolades that he gladly quit his job to paint full time.

“I can design, and I was pretty good,” he said, “but I knew, for me, I can control much better my career by myself.”

It was during that time that Pater’s wife, Kasia, sent Greg Ladd, the founder of Lexington’s Cross Gate Gallery, several images of her husband’s equine paintings.

“They were really tight, just beautifully detailed paintings, which, I guess, would be a result of his architectural training,” Ladd said. “His ability to draw is phenomenal—the light, sense of color, the very basics of drawing skills—he’s as good as it gets.”

A friendship was born, and the Paters eventually moved to a farm near Lexington, which they’ve called

home for the past 31 years.



“I’ve lived in New York and Dallas, and I’m from a big city [Krakow], so for us to move to Lexington, it was a completely different dimension,” Pater said. “When you’re living on the farm, it’s really a great time to switch from city boy to paint in the country.”

As the years progressed, Pater’s fascination with other sporting subjects did as well. He began to paint Thoroughbreds, fox hunting, jockeys—even cattle and dogs—among many other subjects. More recently, he has taken brush to canvas to create paintings of American Indians, a subject he finds intensely fascinating. He and his wife are known to load up their vehicle with art supplies and head to Montana to further study the Native culture.

“When I get fired up about something, it’s good. As many subjects as I can do—it’s better for me,” he said. “I still travel. I still gather information. I still work on ideas that are there, digesting things, and that takes a while. I do what I know, not just what I think I [know].”

All of these subjects are now in the halls and rooms of the Headley-Whitney Museum as part of his retrospective, which opened Sept. 13 and runs through Nov. 17. The event is prompted by the publication of Pater’s first book, *A Matter of Light: The Art of Andre Pater*, and his friendship with Bell.

“I met Andre seven years ago, when he created a piece called ‘Ashland’ for the Henry Clay Estate,” Bell said. “His talent, along with his verve for life, was so infectious. We instantly became friends, and some years later, I was asked by Andre and Kasia to help publish his book. I brought in designer Bill Roughen, and the four of us became a team to produce [the book].”

“This exhibit is the culmination of four years of working on the book. It was a very timely and natural fit to unveil this long-awaited book, and with it, we aimed to tell the story that would illustrate Pater’s artistic journey, which also reflects his life story—where he was and what stirred his imagination at the moment.”

The book and the exhibit illustrate Pater’s journey as well as his passion.

“Texas is four times bigger than Poland ... With this, it’s a different mentality—people see much farther,” he said. “In Europe, you spit and it’s on the other side of the border. This is what makes people here different. There’s a certain energy that’s unbridled, still a young country.”

Capturing that energy in his art has taken Pater down many roads that most artists won’t travel, journeys

he describes as “lonely.”

“Talent is one thing, but it’s a passion that really drives you,” he said. “There are so many things I did or I do now that are against common sense in many ways. You have to be brave enough to take a risk. Without this, there is no purpose. You have to have the desire to be one of the best, not just good enough. But for me, it’s a never-ending journey, and it’s fun.”



About the book

Sporting Art expert Lorian Peralta-Ramos spotlights Andre Pater’s art and life in *A Matter of Light: The Art of Andre Pater*. “Pater’s horses are individual portraits. His patrons know the horse in general, but more importantly, they recognize the unique nature of their particular horses in Pater’s depiction of them.”