

# Andre Pater

Pam Maley

Photos by Bill Roughen

**Standing before an Andre Pater, you know you're in the presence of extraordinary talent. His use of light, the vibrant colors, and the palpable energy and movement reach out to you. It's easy to see why his works are treasured possessions to those fortunate enough to own one. The leading living artist in the genre of Sporting Art, Pater has moved quite naturally into the place vacated by the death of Sir Alfred Munnings.**

As a young boy in his native Poland in the 1950s, Pater was inexorably drawn to horses. When he was very young, six or seven years old, he would go with his grandmother to the farmer's market. "It was a long time ago," he says, "everything then was delivered by horses. The farmers would bring their wagons and arrange them in a circle. While my grandmother was inside the circle doing her shopping, I would be outside the circle with the horses. The sights, the smells — for me it was heaven"

But he was a city boy, in Krakow. "My real contact with horses was summer vacation, when my family went to stay the summer and early fall in the countryside. I still remember at a very young

age, learning to drive the horse and wagon. When we harvested potatoes, I would move the wagon from one pile of potatoes to the next; and I also drove the wagon to spread manure. I was so proud of myself! Each summer, wherever we went, I'd look for an opportunity to be close with horses."

Following the footsteps of his father and grandfather, he entered the Architectural Division of the Krakow Academy of Fine Arts. As we would expect, he found that he was good at architectural drawings. "It was then that I started doing horses. I would spend my summers riding them, drawing and painting them. I never thought at that time that this would be my occupation."

In the first collection of his paintings put into print, his recently released book, *A Matter of Light, The Art of Andre Pater*, he wrote, "The horse as an animal is an already beautiful, physically finished composition. There's nothing you can add or take from it. So, any kind of approach to change it from a contemporary point of view doesn't work. A horse must be a horse."

After graduating Summa Cum Laude, Pater decided to come to New York. When asked why New York, his answer was "Why not?" He came with a lot of pluck and courage, but not a lot of money. "We were an intelligentsia family."

He was in America only three weeks when Poland declared martial law, in December 1981. "I didn't come to stay; I was 28 years old, and had a pretty good life in Poland," he tells us, "My family was from Eastern Poland, now Ukraine, and when my mother advised me not to come home, my world was turned completely upside-down." He found a job in a restaurant in Manhattan, but since he didn't yet speak English, he couldn't be out front. "So I hung out in the kitchen, and after a few months, I became a pretty good sous chef. I learned about cooking not as a profession, but as a creative process. I was learning with open eyes, like a boy. I learned a lot, and I still like to cook."



"Racing Stable No. 2," 2016, oil on board, 36 x 24 inches



“Before the Race,” 1997, oil on canvas, 28 x 34 inches



“Late February,” 1993, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches.

Out of the blue, and facing a personal emergency one day, the owner asked him if he could run the kitchen. Once again, his answer was, “Why not?” Pater lived on the East Side, and worked on the West Side. It was a long commute, but he didn't have to go to work until 3:00 pm; so he went every morning to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to study. One morning someone stopped him and asked who he was and what he was doing there. She told him that the surveillance cameras saw him every day. “It's exactly what you see,” he told her. “I come, I study, I draw. I'm from Poland, and I'm an artist.”

He showed her his sketchbook, with written observations of the paintings — how the artist solves the problem of a nostril, or an eye, for example. It turns out, she was the main curator, and, saying she wanted to show him something, she took him to the top floor that housed a whole magazine of screens of all the paintings and the art — a complete library. When she asked what he was interested in, ‘the horse’ was his answer, and she pointed him in that direction, telling him that he no longer needed to buy a ticket. “It was the only thing that kept me in the right mental state,” he says with feeling. “I felt safe there. It kept me growing. It still holds a special place in my heart. Whenever my wife Kasia and I, and now our two adult children, are in New York, we always go to the Met.”

When he had been in New York for a while, a friend from academia, now living in Dallas, encouraged him to come there and take a job as an architect. “Though I loved New York — it was a fabulous journey — I realized that if I stayed there, I would end up just another immigrant. It's really a cruel system that grinds people down. I knew I didn't want to make a career as a chef, and living was too costly in New York.” So he moved to Dallas.

In July 1988, Pater and Kasia moved to Lexington. “Texas wasn't a good environment for me. It was so hot and dry, I felt I would lose my mind; we had to protect ourselves nonstop from annoying things like chiggers; and I missed the four seasons.” He had come to Lexington in connection with his Egyptian Collection, a series of paintings of Arabian horses and nomadic life that he had done for the Pyramid Society at the Horse Park. On his way into town, Pater took a wrong turn and found himself in the center of thoroughbred horse farm country. The lush countryside and the magnificent fall colors — not to mention the horses — spoke to him. When Phil Rice, a Lexington gallery owner, encouraged him to relocate, Pater said, “If you can find me a place to live, we can do business.”

Rice picked up his phone and called Hilary Boone, Jr., owner of Wimbledon Farm, one of Lexington's premier stud farms. Yes, there was a cottage available on the farm. Pater met Boone in May, and two months later, he and Kasia arrived a half day after the movers had been there. “It was late afternoon, and we went for a walk that evening. There was a beautiful sunset, and the grass, about a foot tall, was wet.

I thought, 'If this is the last moment of my life, let it be. This is right; I feel safe and comfortable.' It was my moment of wow!"

They quickly were embraced by the Boone family, in particular the younger Boone and his wife Cabby, who brought them into their circle of friends . Early on, the Paters invited the younger Boones to lunch. That morning, Pater was jogging and Boone was exercising his polo ponies. As they crossed paths, they agreed to a 12:00 lunch. "They came at 12:00 noon and left at 12:00 midnight. We were all young and crazy, and it was a great party!" A close friendship was forged.

The move to Lexington introduced Andre to other aspects of horse sports and life on the farm, and he began to branch out to paint hounds, cows, fowl, polo, jockeys, foxes . . . He was commissioned to paint the Boones, father and son, in their scarlet coats, mounted on their foxhunters with hounds at the horses' feet.

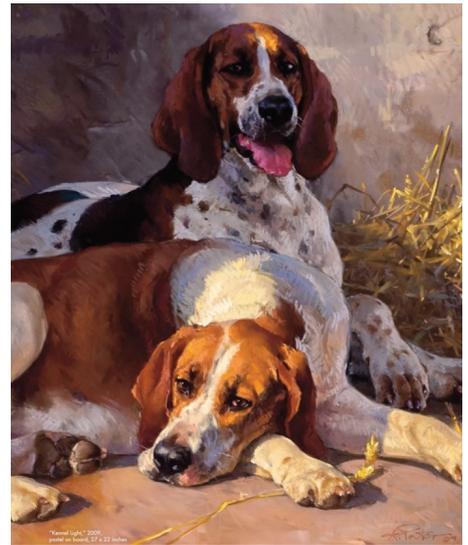
At about that same time, another young man in Lexington was gaining a name for himself in the art world. Greg Ladd, with his discerning eye for quality art, had opened Cross Gate Gallery. With his gregarious personality, his love for what he does shows, and he is now regarded as arguably the premier international expert in Sporting Art.

Pater had heard about Ladd, and had taken a polo painting to Cross Gate to show to him. Ladd thought it too contemporary. Much later, he took the painting of the Boones on their horses to the gallery to be framed, and it caught Ladd's eye. "Who did that?" asked Ladd. "It's signed," answered Pater. "The painting was so detailed, so beautifully done," says Ladd. After a bit of discussion, a handshake cemented an informal partnership and a longstanding friendship (now nearly three decades).

Pater speaks with great enthusiasm about entering a new phase in his subject matter. He has been visiting the Crow Nation in south central Montana on shooting (camera) trips. His first visit was in 2016 to see the 140th anniversary reenactment of the Battle of Little Big Horn. "Scenes rife with stories to be told unfolded before my eyes. With native models wearing historic costumes and mounted on painted horses, I got to see the tribe as it was one hundred fifty years ago." (from his book)

On subsequent trips, Andre and his native guide would share ideas and come up with a specific subject. "Then we make a movie with me as director. The participants (models) share their ideas as well. I always learn something that I didn't know. Very few artists come and work this way."

Most recently, he has been commissioned to do a large painting of Native Americans. With real feeling, he explained, "I want to show them as people. We are overrun with historic paintings of them as savages, fighting. They love like us, have fun like us, love their children as we do. And it would be hard to find a more handsome people." He has chosen to do a wedding scene, with the bride and groom moving toward the viewer, flanked by the wedding party, all on horses, with people and horses in beautiful



"Kennel Light," 2009, pastel on board,  
27 x 22 inches



"Red Arrow," 2016, pastel on board,  
36 x 24 inches

costumes.



“Hounds Off the Scent,” 1998, oil on canvas, 40 x 50 inches

Alongside the wedding party is a loose herd of horses. This is a matriarchal society; the groom joins the bride's family. So the first part of the ceremony is with his family. The mother of the groom gives the bride a lovely ceremonial blanket to symbolize warmth and closeness. Then they travel to the bride's family with the groom's gift of 200 horses for the father of the bride. That journey is what Andre is depicting.

He had talked with his contacts on the reservation to discuss details, costumes, colors. When he arrived, models had been chosen, and there were boxes and boxes marked ‘Andre.’ “The best thing that happened was when she [the young woman playing the role of the bride] put her dress on,” he remembers. “Suddenly, it was her wedding. Oh, the way she looked at him! When I zoomed in on her face, she made the painting for me. If I can capture that aura — it was wonderful” And there's no doubt that he will.

“I am the typical American success story; I did it in a unique way, and I did it well,” he said as we parted. “I adopted this country. Some people live in a place, and others just have an address. I'm proud to be Andre Pater from Kentucky. It has been 30 years, half my life. I'm proud of my Polish culture and heritage, but my home is Kentucky now. It's a beautiful feeling when the plane lands in Lexington, to say, ‘Thank God, I'm home!’”

With hard work, courage, and immense talent, he has forged a brilliant career that continues to gain momentum. His work is so sought after, that people will buy paintings sight unseen. All of us who deeply admire his work hope that the future holds much more of his stunning art. It is, after all, “a matter of light,” and we want to keep it in our lives. HsS

To learn more about the artist, or to purchase A Matter of Light, the Art of Andre Pater, go to [andrepat.com](http://andrepat.com)