

SEEING THE INVISIBLE

Maán Abdul-Hafeedh

Horses are always moving, seemingly dancing in Susan Friedman's work. In the Bay Area, 40 miles south of San Francisco where the photographer lives, she works on simultaneous projects in a huge open studio space. Perhaps it's the expansive working space that gives rise to the creative movement.

"Movement, ballet, the horse at liberty . . . unbridled horses for me in their natural element are more evocative", Susan says.

After college Susan was shown the works of French iconic photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson by a friend. Inspired by his mastery, she then took a trip across the country, borrowed her sister's camera and photographed what she saw. Susan eventually ended up in filmmaking but found herself gravitating back to photography. As a child she was obsessed with horses and had 45 plastic horses in her room. The fascination with horses stayed with Susan as she grew up but her exploration of the subject and how she viewed horses had changed.

"From Paleolithic cave paintings to stone sculptures, the horse has occupied a singular place in world mythology", Susan says.

"The horse is revered in most countries of the world but horses, of course, embody more than that. Gentleness, tenderness and a highly developed ability to communicate. They are sometimes blunt and always unmistakable. They have inspired artists throughout history."

The connection between humans and horses is one that Susan is also interested in when it comes to her practice. Their presence in our collective history, what they symbolise and the manner of how Susan photographs them, reminds us of the horse's true natural state as well as our own.

"There is something in the idea of the horse that evokes what I feel we as humans have lost: our connection to spirit, sense of wildness, and our spontaneity. In the horse we see our sacred history and our passage through time. Horses take us into our own dim past and show us our darker self. I began working with horses in 2007 and I'm still exploring." However vast the symbolic and historical references we share with horses are, there is also another connection, a personal one that is a great source of inspiration for Susan's work.

"It's really about love. I owned an old Thoroughbred ex-racehorse named

Susan Friedman started her career working in the world of filmmaking but there was something about the still image that always attracted her. She now works as a teacher at the University of California, Santa Cruz and has just returned from Portugal with an arresting series of work from inspired by her greatest muse, the horse.

Clyde, who lived on a ranch and in exchange for keeping my horse I did ranch work. Clyde was a great jumper and I loved working with him and when he died of old age, I was heartbroken and did not ride again until recently on my friend Jane's Arabian, Carly."

Like all muses there is an element that artists must return to again and again to explore further. The aim is not to find an answer, but simply to continue this dialogue and the investigation of a specific subject matter.

"All horses are beautiful, but some, just beg to be filmed. I get inspired when I see a horse that moves me. Like when I met Vito, a four year old Lusitano stallion, I charged over to his owner and told her I'd like to follow her anywhere to work with him. Many times I work with the same horse over and over

again. Backgrounds and locations are always a problem, but that is part of the challenge. And I really need to get to know the horse, so just one visit usually won't do."

In Susan's latest series, *Portugal 2014*, we see that her preoccupied with horses in movement against white cemented walls or worn out, cracked old walls.

"I had no idea what I was going to find in Portugal", Susan says. "When I was wandering around the small towns I was attracted to the walls with old bullfight posters torn off."

The Portugal series reveal a sharp contrast between the sensual lines of the horse's form and the whip of his mane. The subtle but strong focus on light shows the horse's in movement, that yes, have an association with dance, but are in some instances aggressive and wild. We are confronted with a forceful stare, almost challenging and audacious, as though the horse is ready to charge right at us.

The challenges for Susan can range from the right background, to lighting issues or to a horse simply being uncooperative. But within these challenges is where the magic can really happen.

"I am interested in blurring lines, crossing boundaries, and taking risks. I feel that the life of an artist cannot be a matter of indifference. It is a matter of investigation. It is important to see what is invisible to others. If my work leaves an image on the mind, something has been accomplished."

www.susanfriedmanphoto.com

PORTUGAL 2014

"Lusitanos are hot horses with a beautiful, light, floating style", says Susan Friedman of the subjects of this series. "They are sexy dancers with powerful arched necks. The soulful eyes of these horses who have seen the suffering of their own kind in the bullring is reflected in the history of the crumbling walls, the architecture and the strains of Fado music. "I didn't plan this series but one of the breeding farms had white walls. I somehow wanted to figure out how to incorporate the walls and the horses and that became the aim of the work in Portugal."

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portfolio









