

Miriam von Jankó-Bohn, Animal Paintings

"Before I start painting an animal I seek to find its soul. There is no point otherwise."

Animal paintings are as ancient as the history of mankind itself. As soon as man established his control over the animal kingdom he began to depict it. In this new relationship between man and beast, one creature immediately assumes a special role: the horse. Its power, its grace, and not least its versatility makes it, along with the dog, through all times and in all regions the oldest companion of mankind. Thus the horse becomes one of the most important motives in the history of art.

Prehistoric civilisations depict the horse as deities. Celts in Gaul worship Epona, goddess of fertility and the Divine Mother herself on horseback. In Hinduism and Buddhism alike, Hayagriva, a horse-headed deity, is worshiped as the God of knowledge and wisdom.

As early as the classical period the depiction of the horse loses its mystical character and is used purely for decoration a symbol of wealth and power.

In the 14th and 15th century, Antonio Pisanello (1395-1455) and Albrecht Dürer(1471-1528) introduce the realistic depiction of animals and pave the way for the rise of the "Tierstück" as a genre. During the 17th century, both the German painter Johann Heinrich Roos (1631-1685) and the Frenchman Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686-1755) raise this genre to a new level of perfection and come to influence the works of George Stubbs (1724-1806) whose drawings "The Anatomy of the Horse" are published in 1766. To this day, Stubbs' portrait "Whistlejacket" of a chestnut stallion is seen as a paradigm of the flawless beauty of the Arabian thoroughbred. Stubbs' attention to every little detail of the horse's motion and his ambition to capture on canvas not just the moving body but the personality of the animal make "Whistlejacket" more than a "Tierstück". It is a portrait.

Much more than for George Stubbs painting animal portraits is a lucrative genre for his fellow Englishman Sir Edwin Henry Landseer (1802-1873). Following the example set by the young Queen Victoria it becomes fashionable among the British aristocracy to have their most precious horses and most beloved dogs portrayed by the society painter Landseer.

The works of Hamburg artist Miriam von Jankó-Bohn follow directly in the tradition of Stubbs and Landseer – school. Growing up in an artistic family with artists, art historians and museum curators around her, von Jankó-Bohn's talent was recognised long before she was trained at the Art Academy. Her love for animals, especially horses and dogs made animal portraits an obvious genre for her.

An excellent horsewoman with many years of experience in dressage, von Jankó-Bohn understands the movement of a horse's physiology like few other contemporary animal painters. The results are portraits that are not just technically perfect but also have an enormous physical presence in which the artist captures the individuality and personality of the animal.

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