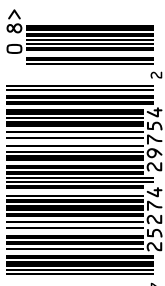


UPSTATE DIARY



HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS

Mickalene Thomas / Sean Kelly / Judy Pfaff / Mary McCartney / Donald Judd's *Casa Perez*
 Terhi Tolvanen / Brice Marden / Letha Wilson / Georgie Hopton / Kirsten Owen

A white horse with a long, flowing mane is the central focus of the image. The horse is positioned in the lower half of the frame, facing right. Its mane is thick and cascades down its neck. The background is a dense field of bright red autumn leaves, creating a stark contrast with the white horse. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the horse's coat and the individual leaves.

The White Horse

Words by [Mary McCartney](#) as told to [Paul Tierney](#)

Photographs courtesy of [Mary McCartney](#)



“As a child we would go to Scotland in the summer, which was very remote, and live in a very, very basic house. When you went outside there was lots of land and hills, so it would just be me, nature, and a horse. The pony was my transport, and it was always an adventure. I would jump on and canter off into the distance — that’s how I learned to ride. The horse would chuck me off — I didn’t know what I was doing and it would get bored of me — and then I would have to walk home. That was my entertainment.

Alejandro is a horse that I ride down at my dad’s — this beautiful white Andalusian stallion I’ve been riding for about the last four years. The photo study started when I was out with him and I had my iPhone in my pocket. I like to see beautiful views, so I took a picture with his ears in the foreground. It was a way of incorporating more landscapes and more nature into my work.

He’s a little bit of a show-off, Alejandro. That’s partly how it started. I’d be taking pictures of him and he started posing for me a bit, like a human would. He would turn his head and give me a couple of angles. I think that’s when I thought, *Actually, maybe we need to do something...* So I took some profile shots of him on my film camera and walked him out to this field, which was very grey, but some light hit him in the foreground, and there were these moody clouds in the background.

He kind of knows that he is beautiful. You can just tell that he knows. He’s got a modesty about him as well, and a kindness when you ride him. You can feel his strength, but he never takes advantage of it. You feel like he’s got a sense of humour. The emotion of the horse can change if you’re not a rider that’s very kind, or quite bossy. I think a horse has its own identity. I think you can affect their mood or what part of their personality they’re going to show you. If you don’t have confidence when you get up on a horse they are going to sense it. They can’t be bothered.

I like to do pictures where I collaborate and get a personal connection with the person. This time, it became about a personal connection with a horse. For me it’s a special relationship. You can’t speak to the horse, although you speak without using words. There’s mutual respect. If you’re going to ride on horseback you have to behave in a certain way that connects. You need to second-guess each other and be in control a certain amount, but not too in control. I think all those elements for me are about getting the balance right.

Riding a horse physically changes your perspective as well. When you get up onto the horse you physically look at things from a different point of view. The horse almost becomes the

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landscape. It’s interesting, shooting him where I did, because he’s not a traditional English breed. It was interesting placing him in these very British landscapes, I wondered what was he was thinking as we were exploring it together.

When I do a project, pretty much all of it is about connecting to the subject, that’s almost the point of it and the excitement for me. I need to know what the subject’s personality is like. What is their story, their journey? This horse comes from Spain and he was in this new country. What is he thinking as he runs through these lush green fields? It’s not so interesting just to place him against a pretty landscape. I needed more. I needed a backstory to keep me intrigued.

The images show all aspects of him. I wanted to capture Alejandro looking beautiful and classy, but not in a classic equestrian way, not trying to make it too static. I also had him rolling in the mud to show how statuesque he is, and then captured him in motion. He looked a bit unicorn-y in the daytime, so I took him out and photographed him at night. I love looking at things at night: it changes everything. When you shine a light on something at night you see details you would miss during the day.

With these images, like many, you’re not in control of what’s happening. But that’s part of what I like, kind of just being there, waiting and observing. If you’re patient, the moment will come. The kind of pictures I find intriguing are the ones where you can tell a photographer just captured the moment, rather than merely producing it in an obvious way.

What did I learn during the process? I learnt that it’s important to make the time to go against your normal schedule and to try and have moments when, even if you don’t have access to the countryside, you go outside and just look up at the sky and acknowledge things other than those we get wrapped up in. I realize we have to look at the bigger picture, beyond man-made elements.

Being with Alejandro, I appreciated the solitude but I also appreciated the bond we have. I like relationships and collaborations. I like connecting with living things. There are ways to do that without talking to people. You can do that with animals and I hadn’t thought to do that before.

The White Horse study is the one I’ve been most immersed in, and spent the most time on. It also has the most depth, because part of it takes me back to my roots, to my childhood. I’m thinking about where I came from, in Scotland, about learning to ride, and the intimacy which riding brings. There are a lot of elements to it. ■

Opening spread: *Red Tree Moment*, Sussex, 2016.
Opposite: *Washed*, Sussex, 2016.

The White Horse by Mary McCartney is published by Rizzoli.
Paul Tierney is on Instagram @paultierneyses.



Marble White, Sussex, 2016.

