



The Vernet Bronzes



A FASCINATING CELEBRATION OF THREE CENTURIES OF EQUINE ART

by Cynthia Culbertson

In the eyes of man, the horse has always been a magical animal. But long before he humbled himself to be ridden, he was first an inspiration for the creation of art. From the earliest equine images painted on the walls of caves, to thousands of paintings and sculptures that grace present day museums, the horse remains a beloved subject for artists. Yet of all the horses that have galloped across time, it is the beauty and nobility of the Arabian that has captured the imaginations of the finest artists the world has known.

When Karen Kasper first encountered the Arabian horse her heart sang. She embarked on a lifetime of study of these

classic desert horses as well as the works of artists before her who had been similarly inspired. By 1981, Karen established her studio and began earning international acclaim for her exquisite portraits of many of the most influential Arabian horses in the world. Passionate about portraying horses from life, she has traveled thousands of miles to study her subjects, ensuring her work captures not only their defining physical attributes, but their spiritual essence as well.

It was in 1989, however, that a vivid dream changed Karen's life forever. When I awoke," she explains, "I saw a collection of nine sculptures and understood that my hands



Contemporary artist Karen Kasper has created nine extraordinary sculptures celebrating three centuries of equine art.

were to create them." Over the years that followed, this dream evolved into reality, to become one of the most fascinating art endeavors ever inspired by the Arabian horse.

The Concept

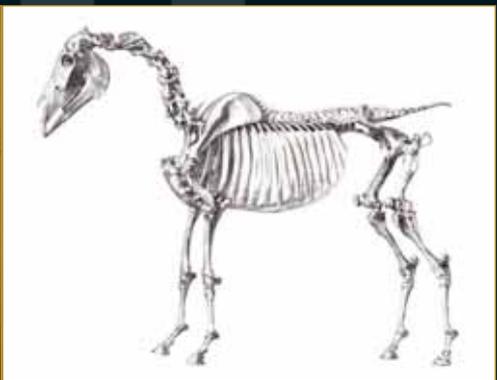
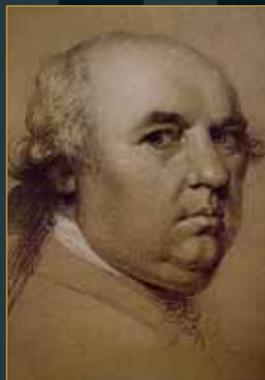
The 19th Century French Artist, Carle Vernet

The Arabian horse is a favorite subject in the lavish orientalist art of the 18th and 19th centuries and these works have enthralled generations of Arabian horse enthusiasts. Many contemporary breeders readily admit visualizing these classic images when striving to breed their ideal Arabian. Among the most compelling of these works are Carle Vernet's exquisite renderings of the horses of the Mamelukes, inspired by the beautiful Arabians brought back to Europe from Egypt during the Napoleonic era.

Karen Kasper has always felt a deep bond with Carle Vernet. "He was a master at drawing details, expressions and body lan-



The sculpture collection entitled "The Vernet Bronzes" portrays nine of the classic Arabian horse drawings of the 19th century French artist, Carle Vernet



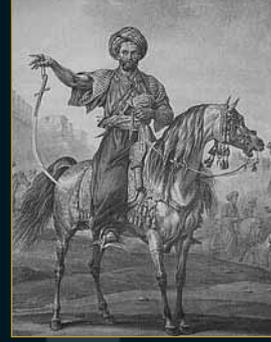
All of the sculptures were created by meticulously following the landmark anatomy studies of the 18th century British artist, George Stubbs



I. The Invitation



II. The Resistance



III. The Sword of Truth



IV. The Conscience



V. The Charge



VI. The Dance



VII. The Visionary



VIII. Genuine Wealth



IX. The Tree of Life

After studying Carle Vernet's many depictions of the Arabian horse, Karen Kasper chose these nine images to be sculpted. Because his art inspired the collection, she titled them "The Vernet Bronzes" in his honor. As she began her sculptures, she gave each of the nine its own special name based on her interpretation of the image.

guage," she relates, "and taught a number of young students who went on to become famous artists themselves, including Gericault." When Karen saw a portrait of the young Carle at age 14, she immediately sensed a deep personal connection. "I intimately understood his expression: a sense of awareness and devotion to one's creative gift."

Then something truly magical happened. As Karen stud-

ied the drawings of Carle Vernet, nine of his many images sprang to life in her mind. She visualized them beyond their two-dimensional state, becoming life-like fully dimensional sculptures. "Although Vernet was never known to have sculpted," Karen explains, "it was his art that inspired me to create 'The Vernet Bronzes', which I titled in his honor. In fact, they would not exist without him."



Karen Kasper began her work by first studying the exquisite details and expressions of Carle Vernet's Arabian horses



Karen then similarly posed a sculpted skeleton, based on her exacting study of the skeleton of Bairacter, a famous Arabian stallion that lived during Vernet's lifetime.



The process of creating "The Vernet Bronzes" continued as Karen developed each horse, layer by layer, following the sequential anatomy charts drawn by George Stubbs more than 200 years ago.



Each sculpture was further enhanced with realistic details observed throughout Karen's lifetime of study of the Arabian breed. The finished sculptures were then molded and cast into bronze, the most enduring art medium known to mankind.

The 18th Century British Artist, George Stubbs

The story of "The Vernet Bronzes" had begun, and Karen's studies soon convinced her that Carle Vernet had gained much of his knowledge of equine anatomy from another artist who preceded him – George Stubbs. "Stubbs revolutionized equine art," states Karen, "by combining his creative abilities with extraordinary scientific talent. He truly believed that nature was the greatest teacher; and

spent more than a decade dissecting the horse, and meticulously recording its anatomy. He published 'The Anatomy of the Horse' to educate other artists and horsemen in an understanding of 'what lies beneath the skin.'

Stubbs demonstrated his genius by developing three key views of the horse, with six different layers of anatomy dissection for each view. Along with their respective mirror images, Stubbs' drawings provide a complete reference

to the form of the horse, at each anatomy level. "I began my first sculpture from Stubbs' skeleton chart," Karen relates, "and developed it following the sequence of his anatomy levels. This was an incredibly profound experience, and proved that this was the method I was to follow in creating 'The Vernet Bronzes.'"

The Historic Arabian Stallion Bairactar

Once Karen realized that she would create 'The Vernet Bronzes' from the skeleton up, she realized that Stubbs' charts were based on an English horse, and not on an



"The Invitation" was unveiled in Paris, at the 2007 Championnat du Monde du Cheval Arabe

Arabian. She then sought an authentic Arabian skeleton, with the breed's characteristic five lumbar vertebrae, upon which to base her sculptures.

"Deep in the heart of Germany, I found the preserved skeleton of Bairactar in the museum of the Marbach State Stud," Karen explains. "Bairactar was born in the desert in 1814, and imported to Germany in 1817 where he founded a sire line that continues to the present day. At my first sight of this skeleton, I knew immediately that a new dimension of realism was possible. My sculptures could now be accurately founded on the proportions of an

Arabian stallion that actually lived during Carle Vernet's lifetime."

The Creation

The 20th Century American Artist, Karen Kasper

Upon finding the skeleton of Bairactar, Karen's vision of the process she would use to create "The Vernet Bronzes" was complete. She was graciously allowed to make a study of each bone of the skeleton and returned to her studio to



"The Dance" was unveiled in Lexington, Kentucky at the 2007 Egyptian Event

sculpt an exact scale model. She then replicated this skeleton nine times, and posed each in the position of the Arabian horse of the nine Vernet images she had chosen.

As she continued the process of completing the sculptures layer by layer, she realized that her personal passion for life studies of the horse would be her own artistic contribution to "The Vernet Bronzes." "I understood that I was to incorporate the truth, as I saw it, of the beauty of the equine form and expression from my own studies of living horses," she explains. To further my understanding and interpretation of Stubbs' drawings I participated in horse

dissections with a veterinarian to learn the exact form and dimensions of flesh over bone." Karen also mapped the arteries and veins of a living Arabian stallion, as his heart beat with excitement, to further add to the realism of her completed sculptures.

"Though I began following Carle Vernet's nine lithographs as accurately as possible," says Karen, "my own life observations sometimes revealed additional details, which I then incorporated from living horses."

The Collection

This original and unprecedented sculpture collection is a result of blending the talents of three centuries of equine art, and Karen Kasper is adamant in her belief that artists, through their work, are inexplicably linked across time. "Those of us who have learned from the artists of the past share a responsibility to pass our knowledge forward to the artists of the future," she relates. "To this end, I have kept a diary of my work on these sculptures, and chronicled their progression in thousands of images."



"The Resistance" was presented in Lanaken, Belgium at the 2007 Egyptian Event Europe

Throughout the many years since Karen first envisioned "The Vernet Bronzes" she has followed a personal quest to seek the knowledge, skills, and techniques necessary to transform her vision into a reality. "Looking back," she explains, "nearly everything I have experienced has been necessary to complete this art. I have traveled extensively, visiting libraries, museums and private art collections throughout the United States, Europe and the Middle East. From studying the ornate trappings of the Mameluke tack and saddlery, to the period of history that was portrayed by the Orientalist art movement, to standing in the actual locations where this history took place, all

of these experiences have truly enriched 'The Vernet Bronzes.'"

Although each sculpture began from the single view of Carle Vernet's lithographs, Karen discovered a number of details previously unnoticed in his images as she completed her process. "My sculpting them in three dimensions has created an infinite number of new views of these subjects, never before seen in the world." The Vernet Bronzes are now being presented, one by one, in a series of international unveilings. To date, four of the nine bronzes have been introduced to the public at Arabian horse celebrations



"The Tree of Life" was unveiled in Egypt at a celebration hosted at Al Khaled Farm by Sheikh Khaled Ahmed Bagedo, a patron of "The Vernet Bronzes."

in four different countries – Egypt, the United States, Belgium and France. As each sculpture is revealed, the response of the audience is a profound sense of wonderment and awe, as these new views of a familiar image are experienced for the first time.

Like many artists, Karen expresses her heartfelt appreciation to the patrons of her art. "I am especially grateful to Count Federico Zichy-Thyssen," she states, "who was the first patron of 'The Vernet Bronzes,' as well as to Sheikh Khaled Ahmed Bagedo and my other patrons, who are

private collectors. They have patiently supported this life-work and shared my joy of watching "The Vernet Bronzes" come to life. I also have to thank my husband, Ray, whose steadfast support and assistance throughout my career has been invaluable."

To Karen, the story of "The Vernet Bronzes" continues to unfold, from artists of the past, to her own contribution, and onward to artists of the future. "It all began with my love of the Arabian horse," she reminisces, "and has followed a wondrous path, transcending cultures and countries, history and art..." □