

The very first portraits of horses – drawn on walls of prehistoric caves showed horse mostly as a rare game animal to hunt for, then – through the centuries – as an object of use for transport, work, production – kind of usual part of humans life. Nowadays in most of the countries horse becomes again a rare, exclusive and often expensive part of our life – more for pleasure than for survival. His photography catches the moment of horse's history nowadays – the way we came to variety of breeds, their different look, beauty and process and purposes of breeding. These characteristic pictures – beautiful but sometimes fiddly provoking show approximation of the facial movements, gestures and details of the anatomy of animals which we normally don't pay attention to, the photos of flying birds, herds of horses, jellyfish shoals create amazing paintings. Last year Discovery's Animal Planet accompanied him with cameras to document his amazing way of work with Iceland ponies. Desert Heritage is introducing Tim Flach – the wizard of camera in the world of animals.

Desert Heritage: What does photography mean to you and what it adds in your life?

Tim Flach: Well, I think that I need photography because I can naturally see the efficiency, it is more a question of what I can do with photography, what it means: it's really the opportunity to engage people in ideas, effectively, a way of sharing experiences and hopefully bringing questions to bear – about how we experience the world. This is also my way of communication with people – but while I'm not very good with words, my photography is like a portrait about what I am in the world.

DH: You are most known for your animal, equine focused art – but you have also some human pictures in your portfolio – who is a better model to work with – man or animal?

TF: In my opinion at least the animals don't talk that much... I think that in an interesting way – in animals we accept a certain degree of uncertainty. We like to have some uncertainty, I think it's just more evident with an animal and we have to accept it. I like that element and I enjoy being engaged in the moment, so with everything you can have a strategy.

Animals behave in a more natural way and one has to accept it as a part of condition of work with animals. We also have people behaving in such a way but I prefer this

degree of uncertainty with an animal and I go with it – you observe what is thought, what you feel.

DH: Anyway in your photography you sometimes anthropomorphize animals – let's see the monkey picture combined next to human one posed the same way or fruit-bats inverted heads up, looking almost like a little human-like trolls, sitting horses or the ones wearing different kinds of head protection caps...

TF: That's right, I think that what interests me when I take animal pictures isn't that so much being nature but according to animal behaviour in their natural habitat as well as in their natural landscape, I reckon this is not easy. But looking at animals I ask the question: what do they say about us? How can we project our own human values – we have a tendency to try to impose our human values on animals and I find it really interesting... But only the unintent exposes what is triggered, apparent. For example the gestures – when we start looking at the two bats we start having empathy for their lives, for everything that is telling us what their life is all about, we start engaging in a theatre of the bats. With a monkey you relate to the eyes it is looking at you in a similar way than the human. I think it is fascinating, it really shows the engagement, the relationship we have with animals – through photography.

DH: Is it your intention to make people more sensitive and careful about animals if they see these similarities?

TF: I think through these photos people see what is the role animals play in our world, this reminds people of what kind of place animals have in this world. Yes, it also shows that we come from one root, let's say – a common departure.

DH: You used to work with well known equine horsemen

■ by Urszula Leczycka "Arabhorsepromotion.com"

THE WIZARD OF CAMERA



H O R S E . T O N G U E

Tongue

IN THE WORLD OF HORSES

– as Monty Roberts before shooting mustangs in the United States – to increase your knowledge about a certain horse behaviors. How did it influence your photography?
TF: Clearly, I need people who are experienced, knowledgeable who dedicated their life to the subject, horse in this case.

Images have to catch the eye of the viewer, all the potential meaning and experience that the subject brings forth. So if I had to photograph a horse, I would have to know all the potential meaning that would come through that subject matter, so for example when I first grabbed the mustang, I noticed a lot of cowboy dressout, that were fascinated about the hooves and the condition of the hooves. The details I got to be interested in is also the history and heritage of the breed. Talking particularly about Arabian horses – I've got to ask people who lives in Arabian countries including the Bedouins that are a mystery... Visiting Ajman I asked Sheik Ammar: "Please tell me what you look for in your horses?" He answered: "I look for a kind eye, I look for a dishd face and crested neck of an Arab. I'd like my horses to be like this". If I just take a picture it's MY relation to the experience and then the picture may not have much potentiality, if I ask a direct question – I know what it means to other people...

I penetrate through their experiences their life journeys and keeping that in mind – that is what is most important in taking pictures. It's incredible how quickly you can learn it because I can imagine it took the whole years of learning for those people to specialize in their beloved breeds and as a photographer you have to catch it in a moment. I'm trying to have understanding of what is relevant to the pictures, realize pictures right... I'm not challenged like a judge in an Arabian competition. I'm just taking what is necessary to create the view.

DH: In your photography everything seems to have a reason and is carefully planned long before the object appears in front of your camera. You seem to take much care of showing different animal species in their typical environment – natural or the one created by its human owner – but on the other hand you are provoking taking animal body or its parts and showing it not necessarily as animals one... – Let's take the genius series called "Horse Mountains" – showing horse necks and withers twisted and craned, cropped the way the withers resembles peak of a mountain and the mane hair like a mountain ravines. Usually placed on a blank background or mountain one it gives an impression of horse power and mountain-like majesty while the other observer may not even realize he is looking on a horse! What would you personally like people to see in your pictures, how you would like your art to influence the observer?

TF: I think that when I take pictures of horses I often think of what may be relevant to their breed that the landscape was pretty scarce. The landscape is almost a



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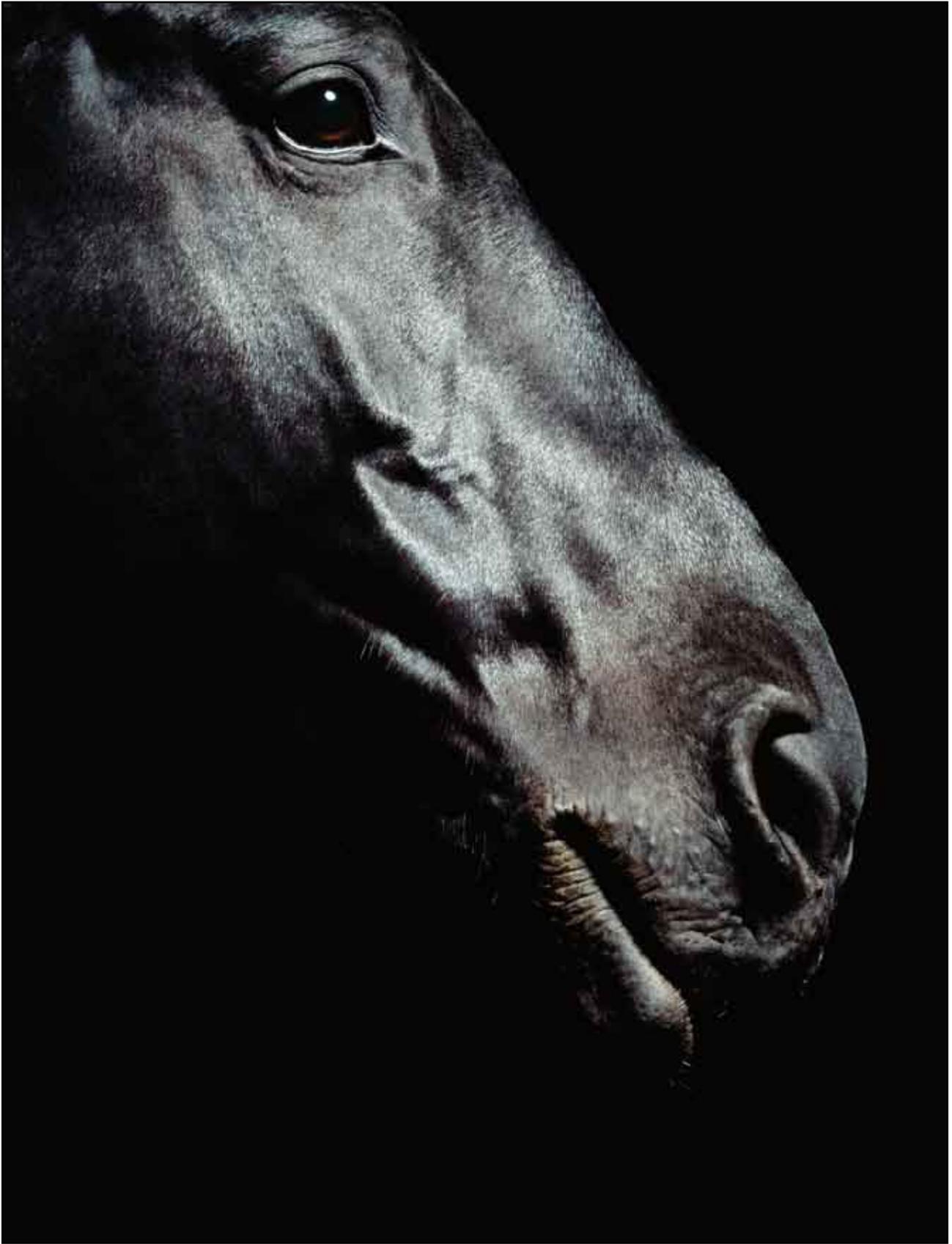
H O R S E . M O U N T A I N

document of their relationship with the mountain in this case. The idea is that the picture can really be ambiguous, it can have more than one meaning – it can be a neck of a horse or it can remind you of a peak of a mountain. This is more interesting to have a picture that you can get the meaning of immediately or you can come back and there is something else to be offered. When the picture has layers the most interesting is that different people will find the layer according to their natural experience about the subject. When I do it I try to layer the picture, to get the potential meaning that different people might gain through that image. Each picture is mystified by one person and is mystified by all quite differently and I look for pictures that have a stronger meaning for more people. We have richness in the images and not just the literal interpretation – what you come up with initially you can say the “form” of the horse but it’s the horse that reminds you of a human

back, it reminds you of a wonderful location or it takes you somewhere else. It gives you more and I think that is important if you are not interested in the subject how can you possibly understand or create any depths to the world. I would like it to be more involved – then it may offer more. I think being a photographer you got the intrigue, passionate, share people’s passion being interested in it and the intrigue of how people make meaning out of the images or any form of communication if you want to develop it.

DH: One of the most moving series of your photos is the one of equine embryo development – what was the idea of it?

TF: I’m just trying to find a right point of adopt them. Well, if I have a book I want pictures that extend the view of the viewer so the reader could be anybody and I wanted it not only to be geographic so if somebody has never been to



D A N T E ' S . P A R O F I L E

India or Mongolia or Shetland Islands but not only that to take the perspective from a different angle but horse as an embryo is the [Many people are involved in the industry of breeding process, transferring embryos, implantation, so I also show something that is very kind in a different world. But not only I think they are beautiful – when the horse embryo is 10 days it's quite similar to human one – it shifts back to the idea of oneness of the nature and I think my reason was one of those ethical questions about how embryos are transferred but more fundamentally – I just wanted to show the beauty of nature, I find it wonderful and I want to share that.

DH: Is each of your photo sessions carefully planned in advance to tell the particular story or you also have some pictures that you took just by chance because you were somewhere in the right place catching the right moment?

TF: I think it is a fundamental question about creativity – do we reason everything? How much you read things, how much engagement of the moment you take, how much is it about thinking of a strategy and then going and realising it, is it so? When I think of a photo session I prepare for it. I have to get a certain image – usually my best images are the ones that I tricked over well that's intriguing. Last week we were having a dog shaking session – I saw the black dogs shaking the water off the coat, and I thought "let's just try it" and when the dog shook it looked like a galaxy, like the milky way with those water drops looking like stars everywhere – this was what I could never have envisaged until I got there. Going back to your question – originally do I always know what I'm going to shoot? I have a strategy, I have a plan but when I get there I must see and not only look.

DH: And can you tell us more about the reasons and ideas of your Arabian horse photos?

TF: I thought the best thing to do is to go to the Emirates to do the Arabian in the palaces and so I thought it would be important to get some fine examples of those racing ones too. Before the session I went to meet people from the yard to talk about the horses and the potential shots, what they talked about it gave me ideas. I worked with people's suggestions and after I did the pictures.

DH: You were also impressed by the Muslims myth of creating an Arabian horse from the wind and sand...

TF: I got conscious of that myth, the fact that it was created from the sand and the West wind. I just thought that if I take pictures in such a symbolic landscape I also consider that heritage. So when I saw the horse running in the sea with some sand on his back I was reminded of that Beduin legend and I was hoping that when Arabian people see the photo of a horse with a sand on its back they will also be reminded of their heritage.



F O S S



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D A N A F . R E A R I N G



W I N D O W . G A R E Y

DH: Do you find Arabian horse being especially expressive to take pictures of, do they have any special advantages considering photographer's point of view?

TF: I think it's frequent. When I was starting a book about horses the first thing I knew is that of the Arabian because it's the key breed to the animal world and so it's almost like heritage of the horse. You have half of the equine lines going back to the Arabian, it's respective of the animals, it has more diversity, more expression that's why it is such an important thing for me.

DH: On the other hand you were photographing also for Sheik Ammar in Ajman – you shoot his horses in a quite unusual places and poses. What kind of experience was it for you? Did you treat the show champions different way than the other horses?

TF: I found the people in Ajman Stud very helpful,

I approached them and Sheik Ammar was very accommodating – they let me do what I wanted to do. That was very successful session – I wasn't dictated anything, the Sheikh just helped me, supported me and gave me the opportunity to work in the yards of Ajman. I asked him what he looked for in an Arabian horse and when I was taking the pictures I had this understanding of what Arabian horse means to him and the other people there. I recognize that he came to the dominant horses in the show; he was the natural person to go to. To get the best example of the show horse I chosen to create pictures like a shot from the window of the stable, to create the display of the idea of the supermodel equine well painting with the background.

DH: Let's talk about "photoshopping". In an Arabian horse community this kind of processing photos seems to

reach sometimes the point of exaggeration – hiding the real shapes of a horse to make it looking as close to the fashionable imagination – the “perfection” as possible. The description “photo unaltered” got a big value in Arabian horse industry last times. What do you think about it and do you also use Photoshop in your art and for what purpose?

TF: I do, but when you make the picture the most important aspect for me it's a document of something that existed in front of the camera. I don't change the image; I just upgrade tones and values around it. I want to find certain details but in a sense Photoshop boosts the chance to craft the image in the same way a photographer would have done it in a darkroom even to a greater extent. The important thing is to understand the appropriateness of the document, to observe and notice the details. I think it is inappropriate to construct the illustration as I was expecting of photography something that existed in a reality, I mean truth, and so I create very star-like images which you might question the reality but I'm going at great length to catch those pictures. I believe that it's very important to shot with a camera but to use photoshop to emphasize and harden the picture, not to add extra elements, to be truthful. Actually it's pointless to alter the pictures, it's very dangerous making your own form because when you are doing it it's not giving evidence anymore – it's constructing an illustration. It's about being truthful in a way or another. But that's just my choice – I wouldn't moralize about, I'm not saying what one should or shouldn't do, I just value it because I want pictures that are reliable and people might be confident about what they see.

DH: Your photography catches the moment of the horse history nowadays – the way we came to a variety of breeds, their look, beauty and different purposes of breeding. What do you think will be a destination of a horse and equine photography in the future?

TF: Inevitably, the question you asked me earlier about the manipulation – clearly there will be more manipulation because people have more opportunities, there will be more democratisation of the beauty norms that catch eye in pictures. In terms of casting the pictures of horses there will be many changes in the values of the way we think of an animal. We are going to try to control the starlight and one distinctive breed from another, and I hope that expense will help the animal and the future will offer the healthy one. In terms of photography I think it will become more and more fluid and more accessible and that more people will be attracted to the art realizing what the images show. I think that in a sense my work is about having a job (laughter), the distinction I'd like to maintain in my work is that it's a philosophical one rather than the technical one and I still can make a contribution to it. It's not that I don't want to be technical but I want to be more interested in humanistic matters, something on the verge of

the very nature of photography. I want people to reconsider more fundamental questions about what photography as a medium can offer and how to treat it. Photography has become a very distinctive medium nowadays.

DH: And what was the most incredible photography task that you had so far?

TF: Oh I'll never forget the bat cave, something like eight million bats or so, they even peed upon trying to do all lights up and having headlights coming down on me and flashing on details trying not to break my feet. Bats don't perceive the flashlight actually, I went to the cave with millions of bats and it was just such a frightening moment, we really had to get out quick but we got an amazing picture of the bat wall and I do feel very fortunate I've been given this opportunity.

DH: Your books – like “Equus” used to take an observer into the journeys through the world of animal species. What kind of journey will be or is your next book?

TF: There will be one regarding dogs and within that I want to show many ways in which we engage with animals and thus how we are. Looking forward to showing animals, animals celebrated as great heroes, I'm looking for an overcomplete relationship between the man and the dog in a sense that this is a symbol of how we engage with nature. There will be some extraordinary ethics but I think there will be a development in photography as a miracle of asking questions and understanding. Well, I look at the symbolism, like with the horses, and try to take advantage of it to show things, arrange contrast. I will really explore how I can see the matter of dogs in our life through different stories, ideas, through the dogs.

DH: If a camera didn't exist in this world – who would be Tim Flach now?

TF: I think Tim Flach would still want to deal with visual things. Painting them, building, I would clearly work to high up, I wouldn't work to my weaknesses. In the most natural way I would be happy to take a camera but... it still would have to be something visual. It might be art work, architecture, something where I can use my visual effects and be able to make a contribution. I wouldn't be worried, if camera didn't exist – I would come up with something. □

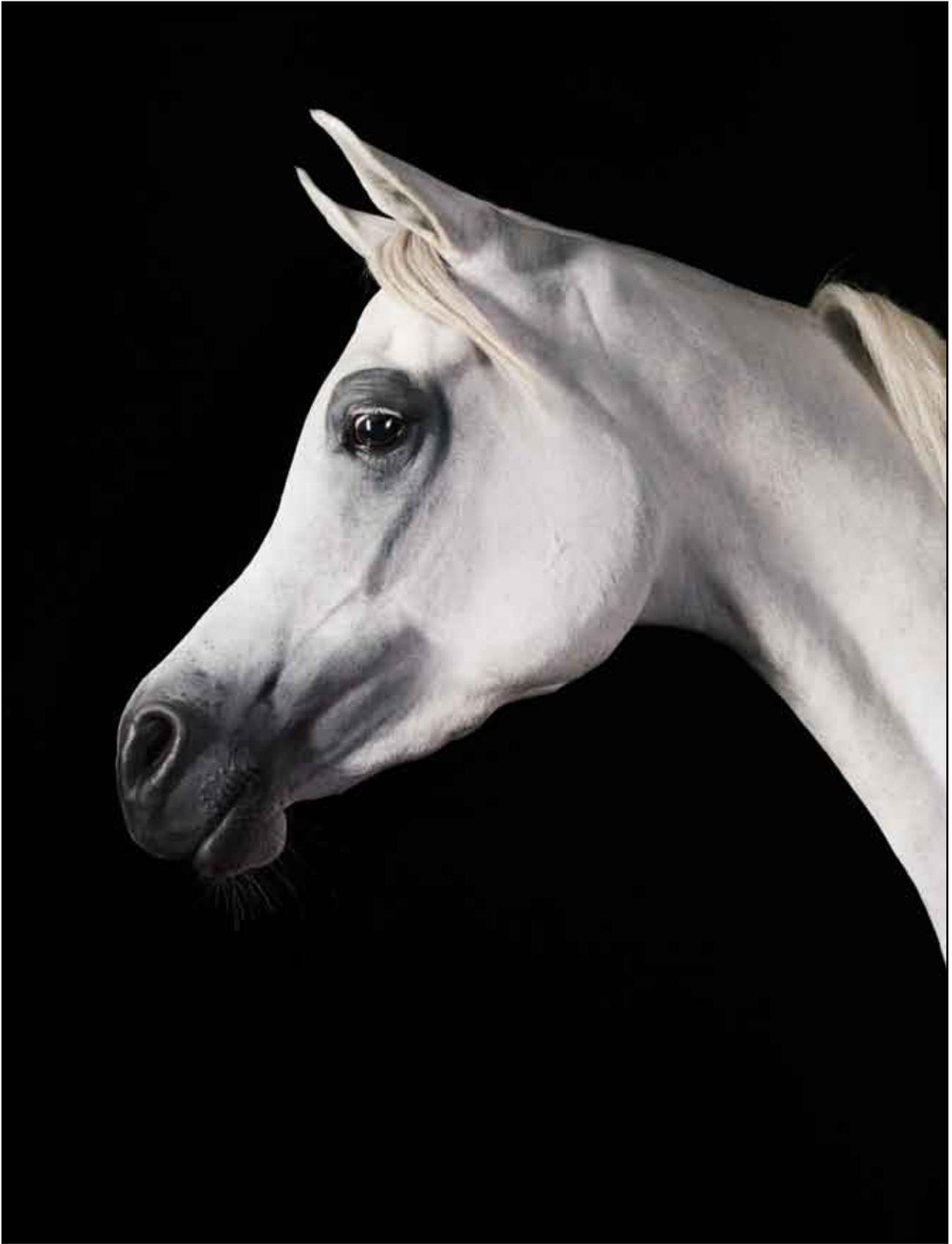
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