

CAPTURING THE NATURE OF *Arabian Horses*



*There is a new sculptor on the scene:
Nicole Sachs creates refreshingly naturalistic bronze
sculptures of Arabian horses.*

■ *by Monika Savier*

The beauty and nobility of Arabian horses has always attracted artists. Yet there are not that many sculptors worldwide who adopt a naturalistic approach with these horses, as doing that requires good knowledge of the anatomic details in combination with an emotional understanding of their unique character and attitude. Maybe it's for the benefit of diversity in Equine artists' work that there is now a new sculptor on the scene: Nicole Sachs has been attracted by Arabian horses for more or less 30 years, and despite of her full-time law job, has been much engaged with horse photography, written articles about the Straight Egyptians every now and then, and traveled a lot to learn as much as possible about the breeding of Arabian horses. During the last years, she has started to produce some startlingly naturalistic bronze sculptures of them.

Monika Savier: Nicole, what is your connection with the Arabian Horse, and what is your special interest?

Nicole Sachs: Of course it's the natural beauty of the Arabian horse. And there is that special thing; that the fascination for the horses is inseparably connected with meeting the most interesting personalities, the people who breed and own these marvelous creatures.

Making new friends within the Arabian horse community worldwide is a fantastic experience. Over the years I visited breeders and farms in Qatar, Egypt, Kuwait, Bahrain and of course Europe. I am very much interested in breeding and

it is fascinating to study how breeders build up their studs, continue their breeding programs, and develop in their own directions. I have great respect for those who manage to create their own typical look and/or preserve the classic Arabian Horse. I am fortunate because my hometown of Hannover is not far away from Großenkneten, where the world-famous studs Katharinenhof, Dr. Nagel, and El Thayeba, Cornelia Tauschke and Klaus Beste, are located. So from 1989 on I tracked their developments in the course of the years.

At my first visit in El Zahraa I saw Adl, Adalat, and Bint

1. When the idea for the SE mares - almost flying - was born...



2. Al Safinat mare as plasticine draft



3. Zahia's mold



4. Wax, when finished by the artist



5. This complex system is necessary for leading melted hot bronze into the mold and at the same time the air out of it



6. Mr. Barth Senior working on the wax



7. wax before a new mold will be build around it

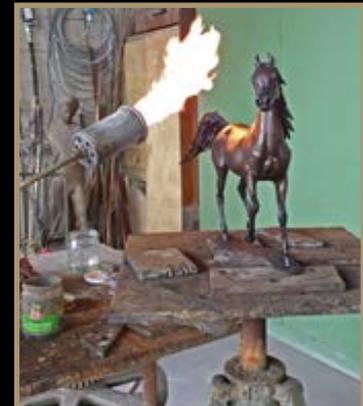


8. Fresh out of the oven...

10. Heating the bronze for the process of patinating



9. After the casting ... all this needs to be removed by careful handwork



WORKING PROCESS



Nicole, meeting the Bait Al Arab mares.
photo Carola Toischel

Nicole finishing the wax in the foundry



Ibtisam - horses you never forget. My first visit in Kuwait was in 2005, so over the past 14 years I witnessed a good deal of the renaissance of the Arabian Horse there. That's absolutely fascinating in my eyes! I restrain from mentioning particular studs, because there are too many equally worth mentioning, but I think it's okay to emphasize how much I admire the development of Bait Al Arab state stud. The classic type of horse that has carefully been selected there and is now preserved, is a very good example of what I thoroughly enjoy.

Monika Savier: *Nicole, what made you change from dedicated photographer to sculptor all of a sudden?*

Nicole Sachs: If you are very passionate about Arabian horses, that passion needs to come out somehow. If you stare at these horses with admiration for 30 years, study their fascinating exterior and interior, know how great it

feels to ride them - then all you need is a bit of artistic skill and a lot of patience for working it out.

I tried out all kinds of art techniques, focusing on Arabian horses. Painting and drawing was nice, but wide-spread already. Photography was very satisfying because of the quick results for a while. With sculpting things have always been more difficult and thereby a new challenge. It's not just that three dimensions are harder to handle than two. It is the need for a foundry that makes creating bronze sculptures so difficult. And unfortunately, there is also extensive cost involved.

Monika Savier: *When did you start sculpting?*

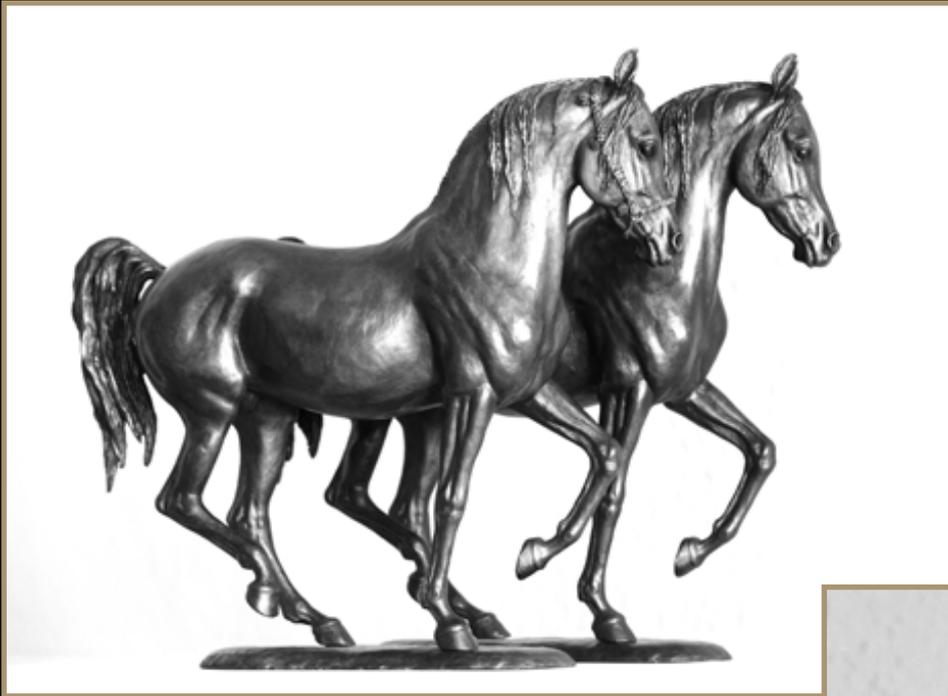
Nicole Sachs: At the end of the 1990ies I had the opportunity to produce a first small bronze sculpture, an Arabian stallion called "Ibn El Mameluk" to be offered at the All Nations Cup in Aachen. To my delight the response was good and thus the first edition of bronzes found their way to Arabian horse lovers' homes quickly.

Monika Savier: *Producing a bronze sculpture appears to be not as easy as we non-sculptors think - what does it take?*

Nicole Sachs: Well, firstly, the artists sculpts the model in plasticine, or clay, or some other suitable material. This is where his or her talent shows. Then this draft model needs to be transferred into metal - bronze in this case. So as a first step, the metal-working company - the foundry - will build a mold around the original plasticine draft. That's very tricky work when the object is so rich in extremely fine details as I prefer to have for my objects. The mold is then used to make wax copies of the sculpture. In the so-called



Nicole riding Emiratus B by El Thay Mameluk, owned by the von Elm family



Arabian stallions prancing, trophies at the Kuwait Arabian Horse Festival



Andalusian stallion Indiano XIV, patina variations



lost wax process, for each cast of a sculpture a wax model is needed which gets destroyed in the process of casting. Each wax will be individually worked on by the artist to make sure that all details are expressed as desired. So now another mold will be built around the wax. The mold will be put into the oven, so that the wax melts, flowing out of the mold or burning away. In the next step the bronze material is melted - 1200 degrees Celsius of heat are necessary for that! - and then poured into the empty

mold. What comes out of the oven after cooling looks like a piece of waste metal rather than art. The foundry will then spend hours of chiseling on that piece of metal to turn it into the final shape.

That done, there is need for a patina. Patina does not simply mean paint. Adding patina onto a sculpture is a complicated chemical process. The knowledge of specialists, the right mix of chemical fluids, and a lot of heat are required to make the bronze finally shine in the desired patina.

Al Safinat mare,
23 cm tall bronze sculpture



Habiba, 25 cm tall
bronze sculpture

the 3rd generation Barth Foundry in Germany. Both Mr. Barth junior and senior have a deep understanding for animal bronzes and do a wonderful job, taking care of each single tip of an ear (so important for Arabian horses) or tiny detail of muzzle.

Of course this careful work influences the sculptures' prices. Taking the effort in the foundry into account, I assume this is only fair. Yet I regret that it is not possible to make high quality bronzes available for more horse lovers. They will always be an item of luxury.

Monika Savier: What happened with your career as an artist over the past 20 years?

All of this takes an immense amount of time, knowledge, and patience. Any artist is lucky if he finds a foundry that is capable of such quality work at all and understands the artist's wishes. I tried foundries in the 90ies, but they would either produce disappointing bronzes or flatly refuse to work on such demanding objects as entire, detailed horses. For this reason I stopped sculpting for some 20 years. Until 2017, when I couldn't resist and made one last attempt and then by sheer chance found my congenial match in

Nicole Sachs: The sculpture that started my career as an artist was the tiny "Ibn El Mameluk" bronze I mentioned earlier. This sculpture was born out of the deep admiration for that chestnut stallion, who is El Thay Mameluk by Ibn Nazeema and out of El Thay Mansoura, to whom I had a special bond. I photographed him extensively, was allowed to ride him a few times at his long-time home at the von Elm family, and visited him during his stays in Babolna and as an aged sire in Kuwait at Aljazira Stud.



NK Nabhan, 29 cm tall bronze sculpture



Portrait of NK Nabhan



NK Nabhan at the Noble Festival 2018, the picture that inspired the sculpture



The dream of being a sculptor ended all of a sudden when my former foundry refused to do more horse sculptures. So that was the end of the story for a long time.

However, sometimes in life passions don't fade. In 2017, during one of my visits to Kuwait, I learned that there were plans for an art contest. This triggered me to make one more final attempt at sculpting and finding a new foundry. The art contest was never realized in the end, however, I feel like being a contest winner, because without this

motivation I probably wouldn't have tried to work with the Barth foundry.

Monika Savier: So you say that in 2017, your first bronze was finished. How did things develop? What does your portfolio comprise up to now?

Nicole Sachs: The moment when the Barth foundry presented the first finished bronze Arabian horse head to me was one of the happiest moments ever. Suddenly



The tiny sculpture
Ibn El Mameluk

Portrait of Zahia El Adiyat
30cm tall bronze sculpture

the way was free for transferring many more of my ideas into reality - at least the ones that are within the range of affordability.

So I made a series of trials to find out how the foundry would succeed with added detail such as a traditional Arabian halter on a horse's head, or a sculpture of a complete horse. Finally the challenge was horses in full motion with flying mane and tail. It all turned out to be possible - owing to the brilliant craftsmanship at the Barth foundry.

So meanwhile there are more than a dozen sculptures, featuring horses from foal to mature stallion. Arabian horses mainly, but there is also a pair of rearing Iberian horses - a breed that I also admire and maybe understand quite a bit. Camels have also always been an object of great interest for me, having seen many different camel breeds during travels to Rajasthan in India, and to Egypt and the Middle East. So there is actually a draft existing for a camel mare and her foal, that I wish to complete sooner or later.

Monika Savier: You told me that last year your work appeared on TV, in a documentary about the Barth foundry. Was this a stepping stone for you?

Nicole Sachs: Well yes, that was nice. Moreover the year 2018 provided three particular highlights. There were four of my sculptures that went to Kuwait to become trophies at one of the prestigious Arabian horse Festivals there. Then



the Marbach-bred mare Napirai was my first commission for a portrait sculpture. And finally, a group of Arabian horse breeders and friends kindly financed the casting of a triptych of three Arabian youngsters' heads and made it a gift to Dr. Nagel for the 50-years-anniversary of his stud farm. A lot of detailed work went into this small "NK Youngsters" piece, as I sought to mirror the refinement and type that the NK Arabians are so famous for.

Monika Savier: What are the characteristics of a good sculpture of an Arabian horse from your point of view?

Nicole Sachs: Refinement, type, and details - in my opinion these are the key words. The fascination for these noble

Portrait of Napirai (NK Bolbol x Nari)



Napirai combined with foal

horses centers much on their chiseled appearance and overall balance, elegant lines and a soulful eye. So this is what I strive to capture in my sculptures. I put great emphasis on giving the horses the best possible natural appearance. The Arabian horse is beautiful as it is, so that there is no need to exaggerate the shape of the head, enlarge the eyes or lengthen neck, legs and mane, I strongly believe. Much artwork is spoiled by overdoing this to the point of an unnatural sticky sweetness. Or on the other hand, sometimes sculptures are so much simplified that their legs are merely straight sticks. If I succeed, my works are far away from both of these extremes – that’s how I can describe my aims. I strive to go back to the classic equine bronze sculpture, the European style from the period between about 1840 to 1920. Even if that is not today’s mainstream of much too perfect Disney style horses.

Monika Savier: *Do you have a particular opinion on portraying?*

Nicole Sachs: I don’t see myself so much as a portraitist. Even though portraying seems to be more in demand than free works. So far I did two portraits: “Napirai” and “Ahabb” were done as commissions, and it was a great pleasure when the owners recognized their horses in the plasticine models and gave their okay for handing it in to the foundry for casting. However, I have to take into account that my time

is quite limited, as sculpting is not my bread and butter business; I do it with great dedication in my free time. That is also why 2 or 3 commissions a year will be the limit along with hopefully some projects of my own.

Monika Savier: *You seem to like creating sculptures that consist of more than just one horse, like the “Arabian horse youngsters” you mentioned. Is that a special preference that you may wish to continue?*

Nicole Sachs: Yes, indeed it is. My ambitious future plans feature complex sculpture groups, such as several broodmares with foals, maybe the typical horses of a certain stud. They will demand an awful lot of time and patience in the making. The same goes for a “circle of life” featuring a newborn, a yearling, an alert young mare and an elderly broodmare. I am going to work on these projects simply because I want to see what they look like. Although it is pretty clear that there will not be any customers for such immensely expensive sculpture groups, the idea is so much in my head and heart that it needs to come out and become bronze. At least plasticine at first, and maybe bronze later, one by one...

Recently finished is a trio of trotting mares, called “Straight Egyptian mares - almost flying”. Each mare features her own type and way of movement: there is Zahia El Adiyat with her fairy tale aura and showy trot; an Al Safinat mare



NK Youngsters

displaying their wonderful combination of dynamic, well balanced movement and type; and one inspired by NK Habiba as a young mare in flying trot, with her lovely way to move.

Monika Savier: *What are your favorite subjects?*

Nicole Sachs: There is no denying I have an affection for the Straight Egyptian Arabian horse, for highly chiseled type, for exotic type. Working on neat tippy ears and dry legs gives me particular pleasure, as does giving mane and tail



Head Portrait of an Arabian Horse



Dr. Hans Nagel and his wife Nawal unpacking the sculpture NK Youngster

the final “coiffeur’s” touch, because this adds so much to the charisma and dynamics of a sculpture. Doing a sketch without mane and tail is a good test to see if the sculpture is going to be correct.

Monika Savier: Do you have an atelier and a gallery? Are there dozens of sculptures waiting for customers?

Nicole Sachs: My home is in the city of Hanover, in northern Germany. I am simply sculpting at home. No atelier, no gallery that promotes my sculptures. My bronzes are usually offered in limited editions of 10 to 15 pieces. There are no bronzes in store, only a few sculptures for exhibition purposes. So if a customer orders a bronze, he will have to wait for some months until his individual cast is produced. As foundry and artist have to lay hands on each cast individually, each is a unique piece. This is hard for impatient customers, but makes it possible to chose a patina. I wish I could keep two copies of each sculpture for myself at home: one with light golden patina, the other one with dark patina; it makes such a difference. But then I would have a proper museum.

Monika Savier: *You give the impression that you are deeply in love with your sculpting work, indeed.*

Nicole Sachs: Nothing connected with horses has given me such a deep satisfaction so far as sculpting. I always felt that even if I am not a breeder or horse owner, nor working in horse business, I would like to make - like so many others - my own special contribution to the Arabian Horse community. With sculpting, I hope I can do so.

Monika Savier: *Nicole, thank you very much for giving us so many fascinating insights into casting a bronze and into sculpting naturalistic Arabian horses.*