



MARIAN DUNCAN

ARABIAN ART FROM DOWN UNDER



■ *by Judith Wich-Wenning*

The Australian artist Marian Duncan is a household name for Arabian horse enthusiasts. Her impressive artworks in bold colours painted in her unique style are immediate eye-catchers. Marian's striking design is typical for her work. Her paintings can be found in collections worldwide and are regularly published in international magazines. But who is the lady behind the imposing works of art?

Since she was a little girl, Marian Duncan had a deep passion for horses. "I was born in Orange, a city in New South Wales, located in the east of Australia", explains Marian. "I grew up there in a large family of nine children. My older sister and I would draw and paint throughout our childhood. My mother always made sure we had lots of art supplies to

use. When I was a child I would sit under our big old pine trees and draw my neighbours' horses and dream of owning a horse." Then she remembers with a smile: "I saw my first Arabian horse in a newspaper my father had bought. It was a small black and white photo of a chestnut, neck arched, and tail up. I thought Wow!!! I had never seen a horse that looked like that before, as I already loved horses. Then I searched for more in books and magazines. I saw my first live ones at a show, when I was a teenager. I still remember an iridescent chestnut stallion, I think his name was Golden Band, I have been hooked ever since."

Marian Duncan continues: "I started working as a Showcard & Ticket writer in a Myer store. Myer is Australia's largest



"The Silver Mare and Foal", matte acrylic.



"Mare and Foal 2", pastel / gouache.





"Mare and Foal", pastel / gouache.



"The Silver Stallion", matte acrylic.



"Princess of the Nile", finished sketch, matte acrylic on handmade paper.

chain of department stores. Then I worked as a graphic artist at a TV Station in Orange. I married my husband David and today we have three children and six grandchildren." Marian and her husband live in a 100 year old mud and straw brick home in the small quite town Manildra in New South Wales. Manildra is situated not far away from the area where Marian was born and grew up.

As an artist her three years of learning her trade in signwriting and design had been a big influence. "In my art, mainly with brush control, I started out as being self-taught, but I went on to do three years of drawing and then three years of Advanced Painting", Marian Duncan explains. In 1986 fate struck when Marian broke a leg and was finally forced to spend some spare time. At this point she decided to take her artistic abilities to a new level. She sent one of her paintings of an Arabian horse to an Australian magazine. She was all excited when it was published. This inspired Marian to bring her art to a professional level. She enrolled in art courses and spent a lot of time talking to fellow artists and visiting exhibitions.

"I have visited many studs here in Australia, Bremervale, Hideaway Farm, Forrest Hill, many more, shows in

Queensland and New South Wales", relates Marian Duncan. "Mostly now I just go to the Australian National Arabian Championships once a year, I take my art and my Nikon, so I can photograph them for more ideas for my art, I like to use my own photos plus my imagination."

Marian Duncan loves to use different mediums; traditional oil is her favourite. "Matte acrylic, acrylic, gouache water colour, pastel, pen and ink, drawing or painting, each medium have their own special properties", she explains. "Oils take the longest to do. Sometimes I like to experiment, using real silk tassels beads, or fabrics, or different textured hand-made papers, iridescent paints, I love doing decorative pieces. Ottoman style saddles and bridles, or Egyptian inspire me, all of the desert tack is fascinating. I love to study the early Orientalist artists, for inspiration and most of all the history, and old photographs. My favourites are the Orientalist artists Adolf Schreyer, Carle Vernet, Alfred de Dreux, Victor Adam, to name some. I have also always loved Sir Alfred Munnings (1878 – 1959). Alfred Munnings was known as one of England's finest painters of horses."

She continues thoughtfully: "I have not travelled internationally, but I am pleased to say my art does. I love



"Ancient Heritage", oil painting.



"Exquisite Silver", oil painting.



"The New Foal", oil painting.

everything about Arabian Horses, their looks, movement, attitude and personality. They are drinkers of the wind with heads held high, nostrils flared, large dark intelligent eyes, arched necks, smooth silken coats, tails flagged, there is nothing else like watching them float across the ground when they move. I could choose to paint something else, sometimes I do, but my love for Arabians is too strong. They inspire me, they are so special, so ancient, and noble, some thing to be cared for and treasured for the future. They are in my soul. Arabian horses can take your breath away."

Many of Marian's designs and artwork were used through the years for different promotions. Marian designed also the 2019 WAHO (World Arabian Horse Organization) Conference logo. This event will be held in Australia. Moreover, she was responsible for the logo of the International Arabian Horse Show in Milan in 2017.

Asked about her preferences regarding Arabians, Marian Duncan relates: "I have many favourites like for example Dassefa, Klass, Simeon Sadik, Ralvon Pilgrim, Simeon Sehabi etc. I could go on and on, many many more, but my favourite is my own darling girl Delraki Saakifa. She was



"Desert Horse", pen/ink white pastel on paper.



"Desert Queens", oil with kind permission from Jenni Ogden's photo.



"Thaqib Al Nasser", gouache, beads, silk tassels.



"Serenity", oil painting.

my daughter's pony club mare, she did everything, fulfilled all our dreams and more, she was my trusted trail riding horse. She is now 25 years old and retired. There are many more, much more beautiful, but she is still pretty. She had the smoothest canter, and was so beautiful to ride."

Regarding her own horses, Marian Duncan is very enthusiastic. "Over the years they have been my pleasure riding horses, my daughter's pony club and camp draft horses (a unique Australian sport in which a rider isolates a bullock from a group of cattle and drives it around a set



"Waiting for Companions", oil painting.



"Princess of the Nile", finished sketch, matte acrylic on handmade paper.

course). They are my source of inspiration, my income from my art, and they bring me joy. I have made great friendships through the shared love that other people have for them. I think I am very lucky to enjoy my job, painting the horses that I love. At the moment I have four purebred Arabian horses: two Crabbet bred mares Delraki Saakifa, and Danjera Shaania, a Dassefa granddaughter called Hideaway Farm Just Imagine, and a one year old pretty gelding by Echos of Marwan."

Regarding her plans for the future, Marian Duncan ponders: "My hope is always to make a better painting than the last one. Art is a journey, a whole lifetime of learning, evolving, changing. I am always excited to start a new painting or drawing; I just love to create art. I hope to just keep going with my art, enjoy my family and my grandchildren. I look forward to going to the next WAHO Conference being held here in Australia, meeting new people who love Arabians, and of course I always enjoy seeing the magnificent Arabian Horses." □



About the author

Judith Wich-Wenning is a well-known prolific journalist from Germany. She has published the highly appreciated book "Jewels of the Desert" as well as numerous articles and photos in various international Arabian horse magazines. The Arabian horse in art is one of her most favourite subjects. Her travels have taken her around the world and especially to the Middle East. Judith Wich-Wenning breeds fine Arabians of straight Egyptian bloodlines at her stud farm "Orienta Arabians".