Art Works

Virtuoso

ANDRE PATER'S MASTERFUL USE OF LIGHT BRINGS EQUINES TO LIFE ON CANVAS

By **JULIE JUNE STEWART** / *Photos by* **KIRK SCHLEA**

IMAGINE THE JOY that 6-year-old Andre Pater felt when he was handed the reins to drive a wagon pulled by powerful horses at a countryside market in Poland. "I was fascinated. The smell was the best perfume for me. I was obsessed with spending time in the barn. Just to feel the warmth of it in the fall." He says that moment in life "dragged me to do what I do right now."

This started his lifelong fascination with horses. Today he is internationally acclaimed as the world's finest sporting artist of our time and is considered the heir to Sir Alfred Munnings. He was born in 1953 in Wroclaw, Poland, and raised in Krakow. To support his way through school, he sold architecture drawings. He recognized that scenes involving horses, sleighs, and history were more commercial and sold his art to tourists. He graduated with a degree in International Design (summa cum laude) from the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow. He moved to Dallas in 1981 and was a designer at a Texas architecture firm. He was delighted to discover that the Arabian horse breed was immensely popular in Texas. He painted on the weekends and achieved great success within the Arabian horse circuit with his exquisite paintings.

When it comes to brushes, the artist's motto is, the older, the better

It was simply a wrong turn that changed his destiny. While at an Arabian show in Lexington, he found himself on Paris Pike on a beautiful fall day and realized that it was where he was meant to be. He and his family moved to Kentucky in 1988.

His world expanded as he discovered "The Sporting Life." He paints Thoroughbreds, jockeys, hunting dogs, cattle, roosters, and Native Americans. He began a relationship with Lexington's Cross Gate Gallery which featured more than 70 of his paintings at their annual Keeneland Sporting Art Auction. His painting "Red Arrow" of a Lakota warrior sold for a record-breaking $276,000 in 2016. During the 2025 auction, his painting "Breeders' Cup 1999" sold for $141,000, and his "Watermelon

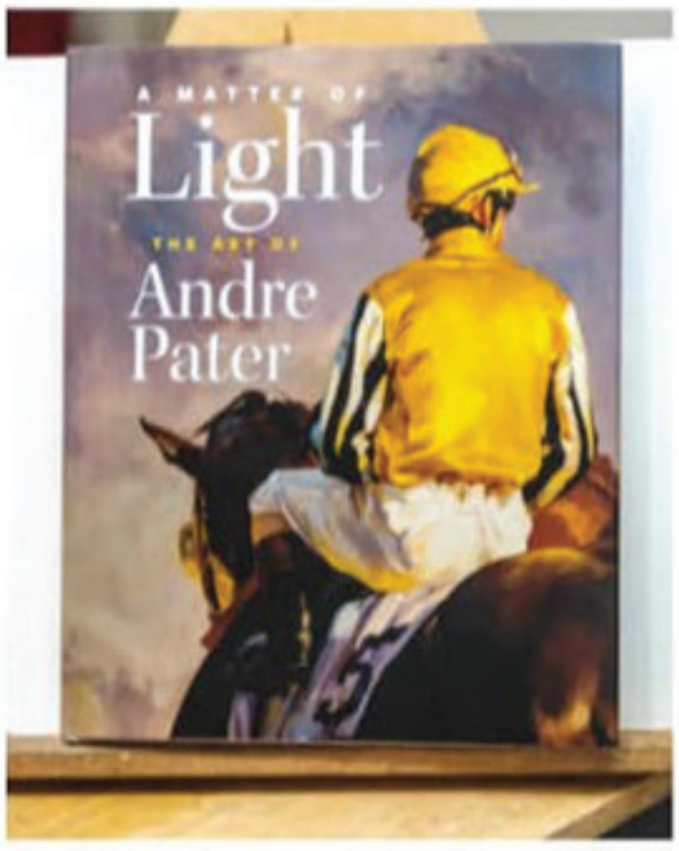
Intrigued by Smarty Jones' color, Pater painted four portraits of the champion

Jockey" pastel sold for $117,500.

He has had numerous one-man shows including one at the celebrated Sladmore Gallery in London in 2002 where 31 pieces were sold within 21 minutes. Two of the pieces went for $75,000 each.

Pater is world renowned for his portraits of horses. "I paint because of my love with horses. A horse is a fabulous subject to paint. I do horses because it was the best way for me to express myself. I didn't see the beauty. I saw their size and power. I was amazed with this later when I was capable to figure out what the beauty was. But at the beginning I was simply fascinated with the power."

He was the official Breeders' Cup artist in 1999 and 2004. Keeneland commissioned him in 1999 to paint a series of jockeys wearing the silks of Keeneland owners. His paintings were featured on the Maker's Mark Bourbon Keeneland commemorative bottles in 2021-23. He has had numerous exhibitions including at the Headley-Whitney Museum and the National Sporting Library & Museum in Middleburg, Va.



Pater's book garnered accolades as a finalist in the Next Generation Indie Book Awards, the largest international awards program for indie authors and independent publishers

Pater has painted five portraits of Kentucky Derby (G1) winners: Secretariat (1973), Foolish Pleasure (1975), Smarty Jones (2004), Barbaro (2006), and Justify (2018). He recently completed a stunning portrait of Auguste Rodin (his grandsire is Sunday Silence who won the 1989 Kentucky Derby) and City of Troy, a son of Justify.

Pater loves to spend time with the horses when he paints them. "The first impression is important. I see them through my life experience." He starts by seeing the horse in person then views his photographic images. He loves the little moments of how a horse turns its head and how they express themselves.

"I like doing portraits of horses. There are things that I don't see at the beginning that I discover at the end. I get to another dimension. Going through the layers, I pull out those specific features that this horse has."

Pater was friends with Secretariat's owner, Penny Chenery. He had a studio on her farm, and they had many pleasant afternoon visits as he painted. He visited Barbaro in Pennsylvania after his accident in the Preakness Stakes (G1) and remembers that "he still looked magnificent." He has painted Justify twice. "He made a tremendous impression on me. He is big and looks like a champion!" He has painted four Smarty Jones pastels. "He has a fascinating color and I loved it. He was on the edge of chestnut and liver chestnut."

Pater is accomplished in many mediums but primarily works in oil and pastels. As for brushes? "They have to be worn out. I always look for a new one and then I throw it away and get the old one. You feel nice when you get the new one, but when you start to paint, it doesn't give you what you are looking for. A good worn-out brush is priceless."

His book "A Matter of Light: the Art of Andre Pater" (Fincastle Publishing) was a finalist in the 2020 Next Generation Indie Book Awards. With his architecture background, he is masterful in directing how and where a viewer should focus when looking at his paintings. He considers angles and curves and often presents an uncluttered background, or he adds a historic reference such as

Equine artist Andre Pater has an affinity for capturing his subjects in their truest form

▲ Justify is one of five Kentucky Derby winners painted by Pater, who also did a portrait of the 2018 Triple Crown winner's son, City of Troy

▶ Through his use of color, the native of Poland surrounds his subjects in a soft light without distracting backgrounds

the well-known oak tree at Ballydoyle's training center in Ireland. He is a virtuoso in the way that he portrays light in his paintings. He uses light to show the movement of the horses, their muscles, the softness of the jockey silks, the sunshine, and the shadows extending beyond the horses. Light is his strength and through that, he gifts the world with the beauty of a horse. BH

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