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# BAROQUE BEAUTY AND THE ARTIST'S IMAGINATION

*A scholar of all things Morgan, our author offers an essay on the close relationship of Baroque type and Morgan type and their depiction in the eyes of artists.*

**T**he Baroque period in the history of Western art in Europe occurred for approximately two hundred years between the late 1500s and the mid 1700s. It was preceded by, and an extension of, the Renaissance which had ushered in an awakening of artistic spirit and creativity in Europe. The Baroque age was characterized by elaborate architecture, absolute monarchies, the emergence of a powerful middle class (the nobility), the building of grand palaces like Versailles, and great paintings by masters

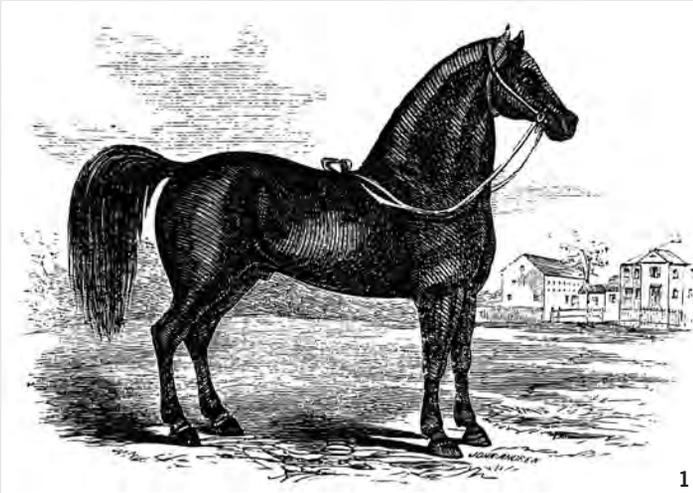
**By Helen Herold**

like Van Dyke, Rubens, and Vermeer. The arts of classical riding and equitation regained popularity (the Spanish Riding School in Vienna was built during this time) and the horse was more widely used than ever before as subject matter for important works of art.

Human creative instincts have been inspired by the power and beauty of the horse throughout the history of mankind. Beginning with prehistoric cave drawings, through Greek and Roman times, to the last 500 years leading into the modern era,

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**ABOVE:** *The Duke of Buckingham* by Peter Paul Rubens, oil on wood, 1625 (courtesy of Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas). A classic equine image from the Baroque period. Kings, queens, and nobles favored this elegant equine form that was depicted in many portraits during this era. This image also appeared on the original marketing materials for the film *The Artist's Horse*.



**ABOVE:** Throughout history artists have had a love affair with the Morgan horse, clearly portraying its “Baroque breed” features. This is shown in **1**. The early woodcut from D.C. Linsley’s 1857 book *Morgan Horses* of a very upright Granite State Morgan (#765); **2**. The painting of an animated *Flying Cloud Returning From The Fair*; **3**. The famous statue of Justin Morgan that resides at the University of Vermont Morgan Horse Farm; **4**. Jeanne Mellin Herrick’s portrait of one of her great favorites, Pecos; and **5**. A recent sculpture, *Justin & Figure* by Maretta Kennedy shows how the Baroque form has completely captured the artist’s imagination.

the horse has been front and center in the dramatic depictions of historical events and the enjoyments of everyday life. This has been true of both Eastern and Western cultures. From the writings of Xenophon, to the war horses of Genghis Khan, to the bronze flying horses of the Chinese Han dynasty, to modern era public statuary in Washington, DC or London, the classic form of an “Artist’s Horse” has perpetuated. Opulence was a key word of the Baroque period and the classic, full-bodied, up headed horses that became the preferred mounts of European nobility were the embodiment of that description.

Today, the European Baroque horse is represented by a group of breeds that are descended from, or have characteristics of, the particular type of horse that rose to prominence during the Baroque era and whose development often began in the Middle Ages. They were and are agile with strong bodies that have powerful hindquarters and arched necks. They are well suited to the discipline of classical dressage. Some of these breeds are: Andalusian (originated in Spain on the Iberian Peninsula in the 15<sup>th</sup> century); Friesian (originated in the Netherlands); Frederksborger (from Denmark); Kladriber (from Czechoslovakia and are very

rare today); Lipizzaner (originated in Austria/Hungary in the 16<sup>th</sup> century); Murgesse (originated in Italy from primarily Barb and Arabian stock); Lusitano (originated in Portugal and named after the word “Lusitania” which is the Roman word for Portugal); and the Menorquin (originated on the island of Menorca, part of the Balearic Islands of Spain). Wikipedia describes the Menorquin as “always black, obedient, noble, elegant, having a slightly convex profile, having a round and lively eye, and suited to any type of saddle or driving use.”

The Morgan horse is the living embodiment of the classical qualities and versatility found in the European Baroque equine image, and many of the physical characteristics used to describe that image are shared by the Morgan breed:

- Proud carriage
- Upright, graceful necks
- Elegant heads with expressive eyes and large nostrils
- Small, alert ears
- Sweeping manes and tails
- Deep compact bodies
- A natural talent for collection



**LEFT TO RIGHT:** Two examples of European public statuary: Statue of George III on London Road, Liverpool (photo by John Bradley 2009, Creative Commons); Statue of William III by John Michael Rysbrack in Queen Square, Bristol, 1736 (photo by Steinsky 2007, Creative Commons). Public statuary in Europe and the United States has been an inspiration to artists over several centuries, including Angela Connor Bulmer who was inspired by their similarities to the Morgan breed.

It is interesting to note that soon after Figure's birth, in 1789, in America; the popularity of the Baroque type of horse in many parts of Europe was beginning to be replaced by a leaner, sleeker, more horizontal body type of horse.

Various individuals over the course of history of the Morgan breed have reinforced the reputation of the Morgan as being "America's Baroque Breed." While other groups or breeds try to lay claim to this designation, it is clear that the Morgan horse is the first and only of those to have originated in and be native to North America. Their appearance and natural talents make this an easy conclusion. The traditions and culture of our breed show many examples of how numerous individuals have over time, knowingly or unknowingly, contributed to this reputation. The first material in evidence is from D.C. Linsley's *Morgan Horses* written in 1857. In the first few chapters, he provides a physical description of the Morgan breed which is very closely aligned with accepted physical characteristics of the Baroque type of horse—"...fine and beautiful head like no other except through-bred or Arabian, broad between the eyes which are prominent and lively, ears small and well-shaped, heavy mane and tale...back is often a little depressed behind the withers, plumpness of general contour with a deep chest and well contoured shoulders and hips...." He writes extensively about the various other breeds and types of horses in Europe, and in particular, the drastic transformation of body type and height that happened as a result of the increasing popularity of horse racing there. What had been more vertical and plump became much more horizontal and lean as this new type of Thoroughbred evolved. As speed increased, endurance and bone strength decreased. These changes extended to the working hunters as well (especially in England) and can be seen clearly as one examines equine art through the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. While

the Baroque body type of horse was losing popularity in Europe, it was gaining favor here in America through the Morgan horse.

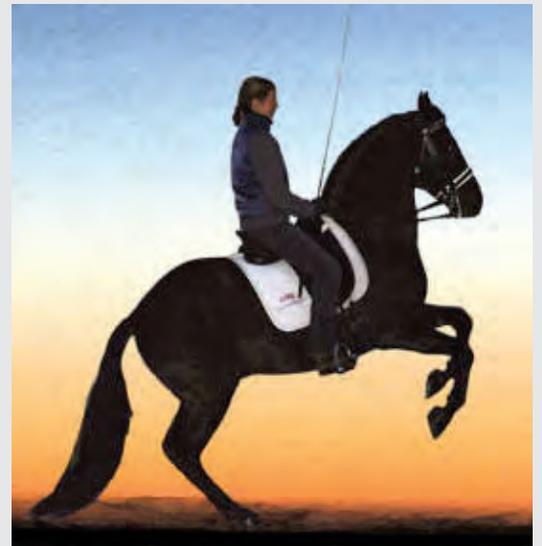
Next, Col. Joseph Battell chose an image entitled "Thoroughbred" to appear on page one of Volume 1 of *The Morgan Horse Register* which was published in 1892. The artist, Heywood Hardy (1842-1933), was English and worked as a painter and engraver in a style known as Naturalism. The image whose head and expression so closely resemble that of a Morgan horse is actually an example of the Baroque type of horse that had been so popular in Europe. (Refer to *The Morgan Horse*, February/March 2015, Memorabilia, page 112, by Helen Herold) Col. Battell could not possibly have guessed that we would be referring to this image from 125 years ago as evidence of the Morgan as America's Baroque horse.

The most magnificent riding hall in the world was built in 1735 by the Austrian Baroque architect, Fischer von Erlach, for Emperor Charles VI in Vienna. It housed the Spanish Court Riding School and the Lipizzaner horses that had been bred by Hapsburg royalty since 1562. The foundation for the Baroque-looking Lipizzans had been the Andalusian horses brought to Austria from Spain that were known to be suitable for the Classical style of riding that was popular with Austrian and Hungarian nobles. Both the Spanish Riding School and the Lipizzaner breeding program survived several wars and the upheavals during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and continue to perpetuate to this day the discipline of classical Baroque dressage. Mr. and Mrs. J. Cecil Ferguson of Broadwall Farm in Greene, Rhode Island, may have been well-known in Morgan circles for their Broadwall four-in-hand, but their two famous stallions Parade (Cornwallis x Mansphyllis) and Broadwall Drum Major (Parade x Debubansque) also made quite a splash in the dressage world. The Fergusons first visited The Spanish

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**ABOVE:** *Thoroughbred*. This iconic image by British artist Heywood Hardy was chosen by Col. Joseph Battell for page one of the first registry volume and shows the uncanny resemblance between the Morgan horse and this example of the Baroque type of horse that had been so popular in Europe. **RIGHT:** Pluto Theodorosta, the famous Lipizzan stallion who performed in Madison Square Garden with Col. Podhajsky in 1964. Lipizzans are one of the most well known Baroque breeds, having originated in the mid 1500s and still performing the discipline of Classical Dressage at the Spanish Riding School in Vienna and around the world.



**ABOVE:** Morgan Stallion Rainstorm Shadow performing a Levade shows a classic Baroque silhouette and the suitability of some modern day Morgan to the discipline of classical dressage.



Court Riding School in 1937 and became acquainted with Colonel Alois Podhajsky 17 years later. A relationship developed, and Mr. and Mrs. Ferguson made several more visits. Their horses Parade and Broadwell Drum Major had the great honor of performing at Madison Square Garden with the Lipizzaners while they were on tour in the United States. Col. Podhajsky had the opportunity to ride these Morgans as well and was reported to be very impressed with their athletic ability and keen minds. Once again, the Morgan horse met the challenge.

*The Artist's Horse* is a film originally produced by the British Art Society that was directed by the award winning director and British Morgan breeder John Bulmer, featuring equestrian art shown comparatively with footage of Morgan horses in motion. These comparisons illustrated the suitability of the Morgan breed to be the newest "classical" horse to be depicted in Western art and as a result, have a new historical importance. The "classical qualities of beauty, strength, and majesty" were incorporated into the film's themes to show how the equine form has been the object of artist's



**TOP:** *Louis XIV Victorious* by Antoine Coysevox, stucco bas-relief, in the War Room, Versailles Palace, France, completed in 1686 (Jebulon 2011, Wikimedia France). This masterpiece is one of the most elegant creations of an image of a Baroque era horse and rider and was created for Versailles as Louis XIV was transforming it from a chateau to a magnificent Baroque palace. Notice the vertical neck, small ears, tail carriage, and flat croup.

**BOTTOM:** A recent bronze sculpture by Douwe Blumberg known as *The Horse Soldier or De Oppresso Liber (To Free the Oppressed)*, located at Ground Zero, depicts a soldier from Afghanistan mounted on a horse. This modern day subject reflects current events in our modern world but is still influenced by the classic form of the Artist's Horse as it has appeared in public statuary for centuries.

expression since ancient times. Bulmer successfully demonstrated how the Morgan breed was helping to revive this “equine type” and that Morgans are truly “the artist’s horse.” This film had previously been available through the American Morgan Horse Institute and the National Museum of the Morgan Horse. Perhaps it is now time for a re-release?

Angela Connor Bulmer is the famous British sculptor and artist who is also a master promoter of Morgan horses both in England and the United States. She brings the ultimate artist’s eye to her appreciation of the Morgan as artist’s horse. “An American Horse, A British Journey,” *The Morgan Horse*, April/May 2016 by Stephen Kinney, gives the reader insight to understanding her great love and appreciation of the Morgan breed and what originally attracted her interest. Apparently, the Morgans she was introduced to in the United States reminded her of the type of horses depicted in the large public statues she was familiar with in Europe—historic royal and military figures mounted on horses with high set cresty necks, fine heads and long flat croups—that had long since disappeared from use in Europe. She said “her mission was to bring this type of horse back to England” and goes on to express “the importance of an upright neck as a distinguishing factor of the Morgan breed, the thing that sets its silhouette apart from other breeds and something we must never take for granted.” Angela is famous for her large kinetic sculptures incorporating natural elements. However, a much smaller two foot high bronze sculpture done by Angela of a Morgan stallion being run in hand has an equally important home with the Holbeins and Van Dycks at the famous Stately Home, Chatsworth, the seat of the Duke of Devonshire.

Classical dressage originated with several historic masters who lived in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and became developed to a high art during the Baroque period. The book *Ecole de Cavalerie* was one of the first training books for this discipline and was written by King Loius XV’s Riding Master, Francois R. de la Gu rini re. Many of the moves in its original form were based on one-handed riding versus the modern two-handed riding. Today, a stated goal of classical dressage is to achieve a complete unity of the spirit and body of horse and rider with minimum use of aids and maximum harmony. There are many examples of the Morgan breed being particularly suited to these endeavors.

My first exposure to the concept of the Morgan Horse as America’s Baroque horse was in a conversation with Eitan and Debbie Beth Halachmy of Wolf Creek Ranch in Grass Valley, California. This was many years ago when they were featured at the Equine Affaire in West Springfield, Massachusetts, with Santa Fe Renegade. As a clinician and demonstrator, attendees were awed by his knowledge and philosophy and were unbelievably impressed by the beauty and talent of Renegade. I heard many comments expressing surprise at the fact that Renegade was a Morgan. The concept of Eitan’s Cowboy Dressage is a combination of traditional Western and classical horsemanship. It uses the principles of dressage as the foundation for “lightness.” Eitan was born in Israel and attended the University of Vienna where he had the opportunity to observe sessions at the Spanish Riding School. He is also an artist—a sculptor—(once again the artist’s eye influences the process), and received training in classical horsemanship. He



**LEFT:** Elm Hill Charter Oak, with Jeanne Mellin Herrick, shows the physical characteristics of a beautiful and correct Morgan horse and their similarity to those of the classic “Artist’s Horse” depicted by John Bulmer’s film of the same name. **RIGHT:** Holiday Compadre and Eitan Beth-Halachmy in Wyoming, 2002. The great versatility of the Morgan breed is the foundation for the innovative new concept of combining the traditions of the Baroque Horse, Classical Dressage, and Western horsemanship.

had always used dressage in his training programs. His finished horses are often described as having a “round, Baroque look.” This was a new, innovative concept created in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that was made possible by combining the century’s old traditions of the Baroque horse, classical dressage, Western horsemanship, and the Morgan horse.

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I was quite surprised that I found no mention of the Morgan horse being referred to as “Baroque” in any of the research from general sources that I had done on this topic. The Baroque description was only present in material directly associated with the Morgan breed, like *The Morgan Horse* magazine, or a particular Morgan horse or group. Perhaps this is a topic that should find its way into more marketing materials for our breed, as the Morgan horse is helping to keep these classic, timeless traditions alive. ■

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