

EQUINEINSPIRATION

Gregory Rankine's haunting, gimmick-free work is informed by the festivals of classical Rome and the chiaroscuro of the Old Masters

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It's that time of year again, when budding young artists have presented the public with the culmination of four years' toil at art school. The degree show is a nerve-wracking situation for both artist and collector. There is a palpable tension in the air at the opening night: artists, some of whom are exhibiting in public for the first time wonder if they will sell any of their work and collectors and gallery owners compete to discover the stars of the future. Gregory Rankine, a graduate of Glasgow School of Art fulfilled all expectations. His degree

show in 1996 sold out completely within 10 minutes and he has gone on to find great success exhibiting in London. After six years Rankine is returning to his hometown of Glasgow for his first solo exhibition since he graduated.

At first glance it is hard to believe that this is the work of a contemporary artist. You might think that you were looking at a Spanish Old Master or a Rembrandt and Rankine looks to these illustrious predecessors for his inspiration. For, like Goya and Velasquez, there are no gimmicks in his work, no special effects or dependency on the camera to encapsulate a moment. Rankine's ability to capture the horse in full flight comes not from an ability to slavishly copy a photograph but from a deep understanding of horses and their anatomy.

For this new exhibition Rankine draws inspiration from classical Rome. He has created a series of eight paintings based on The Equirria; a biannual festival in honour of Mars the god of war. This day had a religious and military significance and rites were performed involving purification of the army. The cavalry would gather at the Campius Martius where the best horses competed in a spectacular race for the right to be religiously sacrificed. The theme of contradiction features greatly in Rankine's work.

We consider the horse to be a noble creature, a symbol of power, strength and movement – and yet we reign in the very characteristics considered valuable. The flat, artificial colours of the blinkers only serve to highlight the flesh of the horse. The organic is juxtaposed with the man-made, reinforcing the power and strength of these wild creatures. Add to this powerful imagery the fact that these paintings are exquisitely executed. Like the Old Masters, Rankine employs the use of chiaroscuro (light and dark), which highlights the musculature of the horses, making them appear even more life-like.

It's always interesting to see how graduates progress and I think it is evident in Rankine's new work that his degree show success wasn't a fluke. His work is included in collections as diverse as *Forbes Magazine* in New York and The Prince's Trust. ■

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