

Equestrian Art at the Palm Beach Jewelry & Antique Show



Bill Underwood



February 17-21, Palm Beach County Convention Center

Horse lovers will have a field day at the upcoming Palm Beach Jewelry & Antique Show, scheduled for President's Day weekend, February 17-21, at the Palm Beach County Convention Center.

Equestrian-inspired art and jewelry will be on display, along with an exciting mix of rare and precious treasures from around the world, presented by over two-hundred top-tier international exhibitors.

Among the artists on display will be American painter **Frank B. Hoffman** (1888 - 1958) and noted French sculptor **Pierre Jules Mene** (1810 - 1877). Equestrian themed jewelry will also be plentiful, including some lovely miniature pieces from **Hamshere Gallery**, a London firm specializing in fine canine, equestrian and sporting period / antique jewelry.

Anyone who loves horses will appreciate artist Frank Hoffman, who spent much of his boyhood in New Orleans where his father owned racing stables. He developed an interest in drawing at an early age, and studied privately for five years with J. Wellington Reynolds, the well-known portrait and figure painter. Through a family friend, Hoffman was hired to create sketches for the *Chicago American*, later becoming head of the art department. In 1916, Hoffman went West to paint, where he witnessed a buffalo roundup and even lived among the

cowboys and some of the local tribes, learning their language and customs. During that time, he also worked as public relations director for Glacier National Park, where he met noted artist John Singer Sargent.

In 1920, Hoffman joined the newly established art colony in Taos, New Mexico. He studied with Leon Gaspard, learning the use of color. Although focusing on his fine art, Hoffman also painted for corporate advertising campaigns and illustrated Western subjects for the leading national magazines of the 1920s.



"Rider Up" by Frank B. Hoffman
image courtesy The Greenwich Gallery

Hoffman became the best-known illustrator of the time. As his success grew, he bought his own *Hobby Horse Rancho*, where he raised quarter horses and kept as live models longhorns, dogs, eagles, burros - and even a bear!

Later, beginning with 1940, Hoffman was under exclusive contract to *Brown and Bigelow* for calendar art, producing more than 150 Western paintings. He died in Taos, New Mexico in 1958, surrounded by the life he painted.

French sculptor Pierre Jules Mene (1810 - 1877) was the most successful and prolific *animalier* of his day, enjoying a great deal of commercial success. His bronzes were widely sold throughout Europe and America, and in 1861 he was awarded the *Cross of the Legion d'Honneur* for his contributions to art.

Mene was truly a man of his art, being just as comfortable entertaining the intellectuals of Paris as he was with his apron on among his foundry workers. His bronzes were cast with the highest quality, detail and workmanship - literally setting a new standard that all other foundries tried to meet.

Mene cast his works in large editions, but took personal care to make sure that all of the models and casts were kept in perfect condition throughout the edition so that even the last bronze cast in an edition was just as sharp and detailed as the first one that was produced. He did not seek public commissions and he declined many offers to do monuments. Instead he concentrated on his successful business of producing and marketing his very popular bronze sculptures.

Horses Shaped China's Future

Also on display at the show will be ancient Chinese Art, including a fine Sancai Glazed Caparisoned Pottery Horse dating to the Tang Dynasty (618 - 907 AD), courtesy of China Gallery in New York. Throughout China's long and storied past, no animal has impacted its history as greatly as the horse.

From its domestication in northeastern China around 5000 years ago, the horse has been an integral figure in the creation and survival of the Middle Kingdom. Its significance was such that as early as the Shang dynasty (circa 1600-1100 BC), horses were entombed with their owners so as to be with them in the next life. That practice would later change, with the horses themselves being replaced by figurines, which were buried alongside people of importance. This was done as much for practical reasons as anything else, as domestic breeding programs were not altogether successful.



Sculpture such as this piece by French sculptor Pierre Jules Mene will be available at the show

image courtesy The Greenwich Gallery

The love of the Tang Chinese nobility for their proud mounts is legendary, and aristocrats often owned thousands of horses. Originally used to draw chariots into battle, they were later used for leisure activities such as hunting and polo. Horse riding became so popular that the Tang court passed a law in 667 which only allowed members of the elite to ride, thereby ensuring it remained an exclusive past time. The love of the Tang Chinese nobility for their proud mounts is legendary, and aristocrats often owned thousands of horses. Originally used to draw chariots into battle, they were later used for leisure activities such as hunting and polo. Horse riding became so popular that the Tang court passed a law in 667 which only allowed members of the elite to ride, thereby ensuring it remained an exclusive past time.

As the military significance of the horse increased, so too did its role in leisure and recreational activities. “Dancing” dressage horses delighted emperors in court ceremonies as early as the Han dynasty (206 BC-220 AD), and reached their zenith with the elaborate performances of the Tang dynasty.

One of the great paradoxes of Chinese history is that despite the horse’s significance to the survival of the empire, domestic horse breeding programs



*Sancai Glazed Caparisoned Pottery Horse
dating to the Tang Dynasty (618 - 907 AD)*

image courtesy of China Gallery

were rarely successful. As a result, China was forced to spend vast sums to purchase horses from its nomadic neighbors throughout most all of the imperial period. The Tang - the first dynasty in China to be initiated by a people with a strong equestrian heritage - did make strong attempts to increase both the quantity and the quality of their horses. They established an intricate structure for managing their herds and enacted strict laws governing the treatment of the royal steeds

If you love horses, and appreciate their history, a trip to the Palm Beach Jewelry & Antique Show will surely be an enlightening and enjoyable experience.

If you go:

What: Palm Beach Jewelry & Antique Show

When: February 17-21, 2006 (Presidents' Day Weekend)

Where: Palm Beach County Convention Center / 650 Okeechobee Blvd. (across from City Place)

Hours: *Private Preview Party Opening Night Friday, February 17, 2006

Sat., Feb. 18 - Mon., Feb. 20 ... 11 am - 7 pm

Tues, Feb. 2111 am - 6 pm

Ticket information: \$15 daily, \$25 for a 4-day pass / Phone: 561-822-5440

***Private Preview Party benefits United Way of Palm Beach County. Tickets \$175**

For more information about the Preview Party, contact Chere Brodi at United Way of Palm Beach County (561) 375-6600 or contact the show offices at (561) 822-5440.

Editor's note: items mentioned in this article are subject to prior sale.