

The Bridle Suite

A collection of new works by David Blyth

David's research has focussed on the North East phenomenon known as *The Horseman's Word* – a magical word known to have a subduing effect upon both Horses and Women alike. Taking this as a starting point, the work interweaves themes such as gymnastics, marriage and equine sports to convey notions of control, restraint and willing participation. On reading the work, these ideas can be interpreted on a number of diverse levels from the physical, ergonomic limits of the human body to the boundaries between humans and animals; from the emotional acrobatics performed in married life to the social restrictions placed on a developed sense of promiscuity.

The Bridle Suite is a dreamy vision filled with fabrics, forms and textures. The customised vault horses are constructed from solid hard woods and incorporate fine textiles such as brocade and silk in a beautiful, upholstered finish. Genuine horse tails and Olympic standard handles compliment the overall sculptural aesthetic. The 'suggestive' interaction between the work and the viewer implies a sense of highly skilled bodily participation or perhaps even an invitation to act out some Equine Fairytale upon the sumptuous platforms. In addition, the pony-size proportions of the works force us to constantly re-evaluate their true function as fantasy tactile objects, contemporary sculpture, bedroom furniture or customised gymnastic equipment. This difficulty to 'pin the tail' is a sculptural conundrum which is fun and, at once, pleasing to the senses. We thank you for visiting the exhibition.

What's the use in a broken horse?

A development of ideas by David Blyth

The original pommel horse design is a highly crafted, specialised structure recognised internationally for its primary function as a gymnastic armature and for its dynamic, interactive relationship with the human figure. With its ergonomic proportions, wooden legs and upholstered features, this 'friendly' piece of exercise equipment creates a presence in the sports hall that is both docile, yet challenging to the individual. For the vault horse suggests a level of physical aptitude, mental agility and bodily exertion that leaves many of us feeling physically cold. Like its living counterpart, The Pommel Horse can always sense fear from those not 'initiated' into the gymnastic world.

However, for the specialist gymnast the pommel horse is a 'Temple' with the capacity for projecting the athlete into another 'realm' beyond the accepted physical boundaries and limitations of the human body. Moving from arm to arm, handle to handle, the gymnast manoeuvres his body with circular, gyroscopic movements with increasing speed until perpetual motion is achieved. Weightlessness, of course, being the ultimate (spiritual) goal. The synchronised choreography shown between man and horse at Olympic level is perhaps a mere representation of the perfect motion or 'spiritual equilibrium' the gymnast perceives in his mind. The balance here between mental aspirations and the 'meaty' capability of the body may only be reconciled through practice, sacrifice and dedication to the Sublime Armature.

THE BRIDLE SUITE has developed from a period of personal research into the phenomenon known as *The Horseman's Word* – a secret society of Horsemen and Ploughboys active up until the late 1800's in Scotland, England and Breton regions. Initiates of this clandestine organisation were taught words, potions and behaviours which were known to have a magical effect upon the Horse and so have control over it. Young lads always welcomed the invitation to join as these powers would help in daily working life but also because *The Word* was reputed to have effect upon the ladies.

I will not reveal here what the secret words actually are - there are many books and internet sites on the subject which fully explain its uses and meanings. However, it was a term which reflected the notion of the equal relationship between the ploughman and horse. The horsemen did not believe in 'breaking-in' young horses to prepare them for work, as the horseman's saying goes, "*What's the use in a Broken Horse?*". Through befriending the animal and treating it with gentility and great respect, the ploughman was then able to perform actions which appeared as Magic to the passer-by. These are the roots of modern day Horse Whispering.

There was also spiritual aspect in the workings of the group with ceremonies and rituals bearing similarities with the practices of Freemasonry and other 19th century Secret organisations. The Secret Society of Horsemen were known to utilise Occult mind-control principles, Sympathetic magic and Herbal remedies to impress upon new initiates the importance of secrecy and the sacred nature of the hidden code. The ritual of *Shakin' the Deil's Hand* and the preparation of the *Toadbone* will attest to this.

THE BRIDLE SUITE is a personal interpretation responding to my research into the secret activities of Mystery Organisations, Aristocratic furnishings and the Elite world of Specialist Gymnastics. Combining themes of Dominance, Control, Participation and Submission, the work is a collection which intends to intrigue its audience with its profane invitation to sacred play.