

PRESS RELEASE

JOHN REARDON
(after) Whistlejacket
An Exhibition of Contemporary Equine Photographs

2 June – 1 July 2023



MMX Gallery is proud to present “*(after) Whistlejacket*”, an exhibition of work by the late British photographer, John Reardon.

The racehorse series of images was commissioned by the Darley Stud and some of them were used for their sales catalogues. The show explores an artistic way of photographing horses, on its own for example a hoof becomes a fashion statement, just like a Christian Louboutin in Vogue, alongside beautiful portraits of winning stallions. There are colour and black and white prints including a selection of original gelatin silver prints. It is the first time these images have been exhibited.

“These photographs of thoroughbred stallions, began as a half-derided summer job – ‘Just commercial work!’ John would wince, appalled by the revolting vulgarity of privilege and prosperity. It lasted 16 years, almost until his death at 66, five years ago. Back when it all began – on the eve of his 50th birthday and after photographing 14 wars and untold natural disasters for news pages and Sunday supplements, the kind of stark, stylish foreign forays that newspaper budgets would less and less stretch to – he might have feared that he was retiring to grass. In fact, it was to be one last wild ride.

For weeks at a stretch, it took him to Ireland and France, Kentucky and Japan, Australia and, of course, Newmarket.

Every year, Reardon re-invented his challenge. He photographed stallions with a special 70mm panoramic Leica, turning the line of neck, withers, back and quarters into lush landscapes. He created a portable studio of all-white walls and had the stallions stare into his lens as if they were movie stars. One year, he went to photograph every major race, wherever it was run, anywhere in the world: he’d unfailingly find the story and tell it in a few startling frames – ever eclectic, ever hectic. He was out at dawn. He was there at dusk. He climbed trees to get a better view and once inadvertently buzzed the Sheikh in his private swimming pool while hanging out of a helicopter.

Thousands of rolls of film. And when you look at one or two of them – spread out on a lightbox, through a Lupe, yellow Chinagraph poised: the way he insisted we all did for as long as he could hold the digital world at bay – you see what an extraordinary gift he had. 36 exposures, at least 20-25 different scenes or set-ups. Yes, he’d work a shot; but mostly he got what he wanted first time and that was that, he’d moved on, gone, tirelessly creative, his imagination fizzing like a lit fuse.

Racehorses, and the people in their realm, turned out to be his ideal subjects. Reardon’s eye found the elegance, power, and plaintive vulnerability of whatever settled before his camera, and the thoroughbred is abound with elegance, power and vulnerability. He stared down from his rakish 6ft 3in with the most humane, even sentimental, of gazes. You see it across his work, across the years: people – and horses – rarely look better than in their John Reardon portrait. Click, duck, move, click. It might have started out as a job, but eventually it became his oeuvre.” *

John Reardon – (1951 - 2018) was a British photographer, born in Cape Town. He studied film and photography at Birmingham University. In 1979, he was part of the photographer's group who set up *Ten 8* magazine – a seminal quarterly that focused on British photography, and lasted until 1993. Reardon collaborated to publish *Home Front* in 1984, published by Random House and later exhibited at The Photographer's Gallery. He began as a freelance photojournalist and picture editor in 1979.

He started shooting for *The Observer* in the mid 1980s, beginning a distinguished career in photojournalism that saw him photographing war and humanitarian stories in Sri Lanka, Kuwait, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, to name a few.

In 1993, he joined the prestigious Independent Photographers Group set up by John Easterby. The same year, he left for war-torn Kabul, Afghanistan, and the outstanding results, displayed sumptuously in the *Observer Magazine*, saw his work gain global recognition at the World Press Awards. Reardon was invited to apply to join Magnum Photos; he refused, the story goes, because his portfolio "wasn't ready".

He continued to produce photo essays for the paper; including the war in Kosovo, and the aftermath of 9/11. In 2001, he began to produce ground-breaking portraits of chefs. His work is part of Autograph ABP (*Handsworth Self Portraits, 1979* series) and the National Portrait Gallery collection in London including a famous 'Last Supper' shot with 12 Michelin-starred chefs featuring Gordon Ramsay, Marcus Wareing, Michel Roux Jr or Raymond Blanc. This coincided with his experimental work for the Darley Stud in 2001.

Addendum: *An Essay by journalist, adviser and an expert on Thoroughbred Bloodlines, Jocelyn Targett, accompanying the exhibition is available on the gallery website

The exhibition has been made in collaboration with Sacha Lehrfreund and the John Reardon Archive

Images: *King's Best* (top), *Noverre* (panoramic colour), Further page: *Mark of Esteem*; 'Silhouette', 2001-2017



LISTING INFORMATION

(after) Whistlejacket
**- An Exhibition of Contemporary
Equine Photographs by John
Reardon**

2 June – 1 July 2023

www.mmxgallery.com

448 New Cross Rd, London

SE14 6TY, Opening Times:

Wed – Fri 12 - 6 pm,

Sat 12 - 5pm, Sun Closed, All other
times by appointment

PRESS INFORMATION

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