Capturing the moment

To say Lindsay Robertson is just a photographer is like describing Turner as just a painter. But, when he took on a challenge to apply his fine art attention to capturing studio portraits of horses, the results were breathtaking.

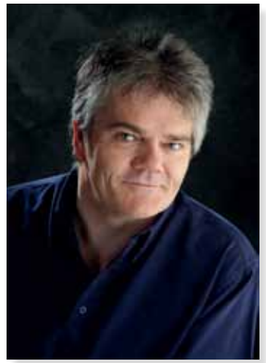
BY **JANE O'CONNOR**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **LINDSAY ROBERTSON**

LINDSAY ROBERTSON IS no stranger to top level art photography. Renowned for his inspiring black and white landscapes that capture not only the rugged beauty of Scotland, but the vast subject of American wilderness areas, Lindsay's works have been exhibited with the best.

As he says, he found himself 'injected onto this photographic mountaintop,' but he is forever looking for new and personal challenges that give him a levelling perspective 'on the way back down'. Lindsay's equine challenge came via a chance conversation about how difficult it would be to photographically capture the statuesque and noble animal that has inspired artists for thousands of years in a photographic studio context. But, to have horses pose on a studio stage - sometimes for hours - is taking equine art photography to a whole new level.

This was a case where the 'models' weren't going to come to him at his Edinburgh base. But first, he needed to test his considerable technical skills with his artistic eye to determine whether he could achieve what he was aiming for. Once satisfied with initial results, he then turned his attention to creating an intricate and expensive mobile studio that fits in the back of a van and travels throughout the UK. Not only did the equestrian world find his work inspiring, but the fine art sector sat up and took notice as well. Lindsay confesses that horses were an enigma when he began. "I was not a horsey person and in fact found them quite frightening. Now, I believe they rather like posing for me," he says. »

> “To have a horse pose on a studio stage - sometimes for hours - is no mean feat.”



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LINDSAY ROBERTSON

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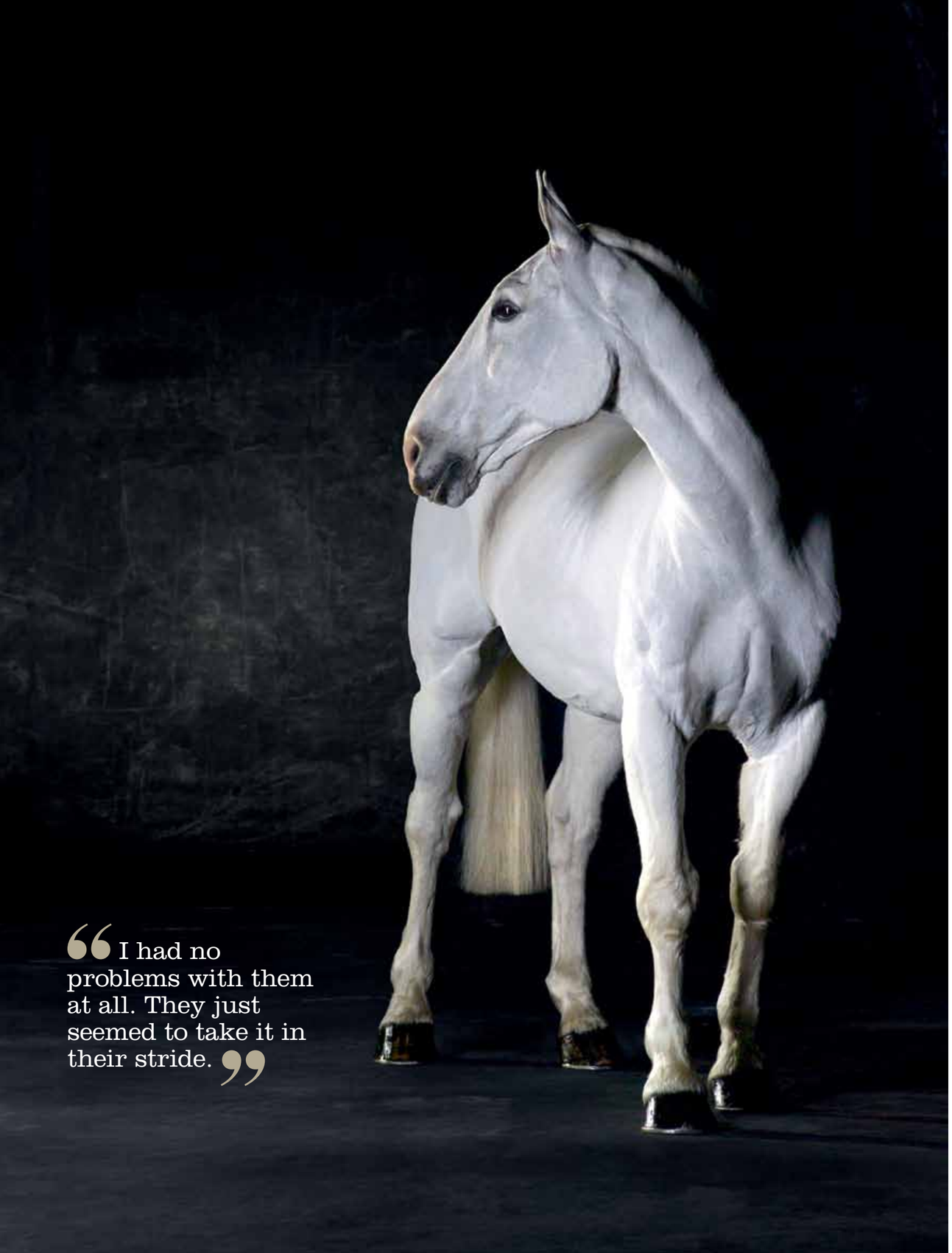
» Lindsay's photographic career began straight from school and at a time when apprenticeships had to be served in a classic studio. "I think I was the last of the photographic apprentices," he says. He went on to a career in advertising and commercial work, which in itself requires a high level of technical skill, with successful studios in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The digital revolution arrived and, as Lindsay puts it, 'knocked everything for a six' in that original studio context. He decided to regroup, give up the studio and work from home. He followed a passion for much finer art, but it had nothing to do with horses.

His 'canvas' was enormous. It was a personal project about Scots-born environmentalist, John Muir, who became known as the father of national parks. The 'master' of environmental photography was Ansel Adams who dominated the genre from the 1920s to the 1960s. Few mainstream fine art galleries displayed photography alongside paintings until the 1960s.

Lindsay's pursuit of black and white landscape photography also saw him open an art gallery in Edinburgh. He achieved the singular honour of being recognised by the Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film in New York, who entrusted him to take Ansel's works to the Scottish city – achieving one of the highest ever gallery attendances in Scotland. Lindsay's 'personal work' was also being recognised by the Royal Scottish Society and he was the first photographer to be exhibited next to Ansel.

But, when the gallery building underwent redevelopment and »



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ended a lease after five years, Lindsay, ever ready for a photographic challenge, began running a series of landscape photography workshops. A chance meeting and conversation at one of these saw him pronounce that a great challenge would be to try capturing the ultimate horse portraits in a studio setting given the difficulty of such a shoot. This was far loftier than the notion of hanging a sheet behind a horse and snapping away. Lindsay was after the 'statuesque' portrait of the horse connecting with the viewer. It was a profound approach that he would aim to capture with every individual horse subject.

One of the workshop participants bred Arabians and with 35 of them on his property, Lindsay was welcome to set up in his barn and try it out. First though, Lindsay needed to feel comfortable being around the horses and vice versa. Getting an Arabian stallion to stand still in a studio setting for however long it took and without any equipment to restrain it, plus handle unknown occurrences such as lighting, flashes and whirring cameras was a big ask. Lindsay was expecting a lot of a very large flight animal while he sought to combine a fine art approach with technical studio skills. He honed the technique with the Arabians, posing and photographing a dozen of them - and earning their trust.

From the first shoot people were amazed by the results and the patience and perseverance required. Lindsay too was surprised by how quickly he got the results he was looking for. "I was amazed that we could get a horse to just stand 'naked and unfettered'. It was a very calm atmosphere. I was intrigued," Lindsay says. Not content, he wanted to push the concept further. Was it possible to have a rider sit on such a horse and be able to capture both perfectly? Again, patience and perseverance won the day. "It was about me pushing myself rather than being related to client demand," Lindsay says. He also extended shoots to include two Arabian stallions together. "I had no problems with them at all. They just seemed to take it in their stride." As he progressed, Lindsay noticed that within his quest for that statuesque equine portrait, he came up with a variety of other angles, but always with the noble look. “It is quite a test of patience to get all the elements right.”

But, to fund the project he needed commissions and the horses weren't going to come to him. Instead, he devised a complex mobile studio. It involved an enormous backdrop of painted muslin that had to be sewn together in a spacious railway station carpark. No one had attempted anything like it. Lindsay spent a month painting it with mops and sponges. To raise it required large poles. Lindsay began travelling to major horse events and showing his work. The Equine Series began to generate commissions from horse owners and to sell as limited editions. He is now expanding globally with a presence in the United States and plans to expand to Australia as well. And, the Royal Scottish Academy has already exhibited the equine series. EQ

For further information visit www.lindsayrobertson.com