



Above: "Rising Stallions," mixed media, 96" high  
Opposite: "Potro," bronze, edition of 12

## THE ARTS

# GRACEFUL EQUINE STRENGTH

*Siri Hollander's sculpture is alive  
with the many moods of the horse.*

*By Gussie Fauntleroy*

Sculptor Siri Hollander strides to the corral behind her house, scoops up and offers armfuls of alfalfa to several waiting horses, among them a mare and two colts with star blazes on their foreheads. Farther down the artist's strip of land, which dips gently into a high-altitude northern New Mexico valley, two more horses graze.

With arms made strong from cutting and welding steel to produce her art, Hollander moves easily among the large, graceful creatures that have played a central role in her

life since childhood. The artist's tanned face, calloused hands, and smudged pants speak, as well, of a life lived in touch with the elements and with physical work. Yet the world conveyed through her sculpture is as sensitive and many-sided as her equine subjects themselves: at times tender, playful, regal, powerful, delicate, prancing, galloping, or reclining in quiet rest.

The horse. While Hollander also creates figures of humans and other animals in steel and bronze, including bison, moose,

or fighting bulls, it is the horse that comes into being most often as she works in the rough-built studio near her home. From countless thin steel rods, precisely cut and welded together, an understructure slowly takes shape in the fluid contours of a horse, sometimes waist-high, other times larger than life.

For the mane and tail—and sometimes for the animal's entire body—Hollander cuts and attaches pieces of rusted sheet steel. "The older the steel, the better—the



*"Jefe," "Luna," and "Rojo" bronze, limited edition*

more pits and character it has," she explains, and then adds, "It's really important to get the shape of the steel right when I do the grid; otherwise when I put the cement on, the shape will be all off."

Most of Hollander's works are covered with a special cement mixture formulated by the artist. The cement's strong and varying texture adds an aliveness to the surface, especially after being finished with mineral pigments in shades of brown, tan, gray, black, or rust. The completed sculpture holds up indefinitely as outdoor art, and everything Hollander creates can also be cast in bronze. From industrial materials and labor, sparked with imagination and years of experience, come delightful and spirited creatures whose equine essence emerges as if they could whinny at any moment, or trot away.

Both the process and the subject of Hollander's art evolved naturally from her early years, when she was steeped in creativity and surrounded by horses she rode and lived with every day. Her father, Gino Hollander, was a documentary filmmaker turned fine art painter in New York City. In 1962, when Siri was three, he moved the family to southern Spain in search of an unspoiled, low-cost environment for making art and raising kids.

In the Spanish province of Andalucía, Siri grew up near a fighting bull ranch, often hanging out in her father's studio and thriving in the creative freedom of an unconventional life. Her mother was (and is) a poet and writer, and her three brothers (one deceased) all became professional photographers. The drama and passion of the bullfight, the majesty of Andalusian horses, and the sun-drenched Spanish countryside all were absorbed into the future sculptor's sensibilities.

As a teen, Hollander began to experiment with constructing three-dimensional animal forms. Her first attempts were five-foot-tall horses made with sticks and baling wire covered with plaster. They fell apart.

"I started doing the big ones first, which was kind of a mistake," the artist remembers with a smile. "Then eventually I bought a welder, and started to roll." In Spain until she was 19, she apprenticed for a time with an elderly sculptor. When she moved to Santa Fe a year later she found and apprenticed with another sculptor, and also worked in foundries to gain knowledge of the bronze process.

Gradually Hollander refined her materials and technique, along the way creating a 20-foot rearing horse for the International Airport in Malaga, Spain, and steel or bronze sculptures in all scales, including charming table-top size, commissioned and



"Quana" and "Lola," bronze, edition of 25, 22" high

collected internationally. Among the homes of her equine creations are the renowned Hotel Boabdilla in Granada, Spain, the Palacio de Congreso in Torremolinos, Spain, and the private collection of Bill Gates, as well as museums and collections around North America and Europe.

Recently the artist has been focusing on horses in groupings or pairs: a spindly-legged colt nuzzling a mare, for example, or two young horses kicking and playing exuberantly. As she feeds, grooms, cares for, and rides her own horses daily, she never lacks for ideas for her art.

Not long ago, her six-year-old daughter

Maggie told Hollander how she looks into the eyes of a horse and "they tell you everything," Siri recounts. Maggie's words inspired the artist's own succinct description of her favorite creature: "They're big and strong," she muses, "their eyes are honest, and their breath is sweet."

*Siri Hollander's sculpture may be seen at Canyon Road Fine Art, 621 Canyon Road, where on February 20 and 21, 2004, she is the gallery's featured artist during the Santa Fe Gallery Association's annual Edible Art Tour. Hours: 10:00-5:00 daily. (505) 988-9511. [www.canyonroadfineart.net](http://www.canyonroadfineart.net).*

horses during a childhood that by most standards would be considered idyllic. Born in New York in 1959, Siri moved to Spain at age 3 with her father, a painter, and her mother, a writer. The family lived in a relatively isolated part of Andalusia, a region famed for its horses, gypsies and fighting bulls.

"My younger brother and I rode horses for four and five hours a day," Siri remembers. "There really wasn't anything else to do, so we just rode around the countryside on our horses. We were schooled at home. I didn't go to a school until high school, so I thought going to school was really exciting."

For many years, Siri spoke Spanish almost exclusively, although her parents used some English in the home. Much of the social life of her community revolved around horses, and the fairs and fiestas were a sight to behold.

"When you have a fiesta there, basically what you do is cruise around on your horse, showing how good you and your horse look. It isn't like a rodeo where you have to do certain events. You just ride around, drinking wine and showing off how well you have your horse trained and how good the two of you look and move together.

"Whenever there was a fiesta, there were literally hundreds of people on the roads dressed in full regalia, riding back and forth,

visiting with each other. Horses are a tremendous source of pride there."

When the auburn-haired, freckle-spangled expatriate returned to America, her first stop was Goddard College in Vermont. She attended one day of her sculpture class, then ended up working in the studio instead of matriculating.

"The project for the semester was to do a bust," she says. "This project was supposed to take up a semester's time. Right from the start I realized that my personality led to a more spontaneous style."

So Siri spent her semester at Goddard working in the studio, watching other artists, learning by doing. After her semester at college, she returned to Spain with a new sense of purpose. Siri apprenticed to a sculptor there and began to learn the craft in the way she learns best—hands on. Early in her career, she began doing large pieces five and six feet tall.

However, a slight problem arose with the chicken wire and papier mache armatures she was using for these pieces. After a while, ants would feast on the papier mache supporting materials and pieces of her sculpture would crumble to the floor. Plainly, a new approach was needed.

During this time, Siri had returned to the States and ended up for a while in California

where she encountered "massive culture shock," she says. A friend told her about a quiet, laid-back place called Santa Fe, so she headed for the desert. She arrived in 1980 and has made her home here since.

Siri presently lives just outside the village of Cerrillos, in a home she shares with her two small children, her husband who is a homebuilder, and a menagerie of animals, including five horses, three dogs, and assorted cats and chickens.

For a while after settling here, she assisted other artists in Santa Fe. She eventually bought a welder and life took a wide new turn.

"That was my big breakthrough," she recalls. "Once I could weld steel armature, things really began to change. I began developing (my work) so the armature was a part of the actual piece, not just on the inside, but a visible part of its structure. This effect is similar to the bone beneath the skin, which actually gives it life.

"Usually the armature is covered with other materials and just provides the strength. But I wanted mine to be the strength and the movement as well."

Surprisingly, none of Siri's pieces, the bronzes or mixed media works, begins with a sketch. Although her horses have been a primary focus of her work, she also sculpts



"Yequa," mixed media, 8'H x 5'L, original