

A Picture of a Horse is Not a Critique of a Horse
Francis Whorral-Campbell
Friday January 31, 2025; 5 - 8pm; reading at 6pm,
Until March 2, 2025. Open Sundays 2 - 5 pm
and by appointment



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The works in *A Picture of a Horse is Not a Critique of a Horse* relate to signs that foretell and herald events. Produced by greater and lesser degrees of fabrication, objects found, purchased, and created take the figure of the horse as a cipher for personal and collective feelings of aspiration or anticipation.

Blood Meridian (2025) consists of a series of four printed cards, available in unstated edition. Based on the format of antique cigarette or visiting cards, the prints are placed by the door at the entrance where they are available to visitors. Hand cut on textured white card stock, the cards measure 75x40mm, smaller than a contemporary business or playing card. These objects reference collectible items that can accrue value in combination with a social or recreational value. As with all commodities, rarity and exclusivity can be produced through an understanding of its position within a class structure. One side displays a mirrored graphic representation of a horse, the other a repeat pattern of interlocking lassos.

There is no identifying text. The title refers to a Western novel by author Cormac McCarthy in which allusions to tarot and card games play a central role in the lore off the book, yet what these cards portend – or how they might be used – is unclear.

All The Pretty Horses (2024) is a series of ceramic horses developed by the artist while in residency at La Becque. Clustered around a desk lamp on a scrap piece of yellow marmoleum, their arrangement suggests that they are in play. Modelled after 'My Little Pony' figurines, their rough-hewn imitation and careful glazing present an attitude to the pursuit of reproduction and the suggestive possibility of a reference or ideal. The factory-produced original figurines might be used as toys but are also collectible in pristine packaging. Also the intellectual property of an animated TV series, the ponies model a romantic affective script of love and friendship. Marketed for children, a significant subculture of adult male fans also exists online. Fandom and

identification with groups based on material possession suggests the possible interiorisation of rhetoric, and thus transformation of the subject, or the transmuting of the ideology, leaving intact the potential for this script to be diverted or abandoned.

In *Escaped Army Horses Run Wild in Central London During Rush Hour* (Reuters) (2025), a TV plays looped newscast footage of two Army horses which escaped from their central London barracks in April 2024. A black gelding runs through an empty city street, followed by a second white mount, its front stained with blood. The found footage slows down a passage of their gallop, as though a shift in temporality might reveal more information to the viewer. Referring to the essay that accompanies the show, the scene might recall the text of *Revelation 6*, Chapter 8 – 'behold a pale horse' – also the title of an influential 1991 book by American conspiracy theorist Milton William 'Bill' Cooper. The video is accompanied intermittently by a cover of the Rolling Stones' *Wild Horses* sung by Susan Boyle. Boyle won the third season of reality TV contest 'Britain's Got Talent' in 2009, achieving international fame at odds with her humble beginnings.

Final Demand (2025) consists of a bet placed on a horse of the same name to win the 13:20 at Cheltenham on 11th March. The betting slip itself, purchased on the 27th of January 2025, is placed within the artist's wallet. With the race to be run after the closing of the exhibition, the result of the bet will not be known for the duration of the show, nor will it be revealed to visitors afterwards.

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‘And I looked, and behold a pale horse ...’

In Chapter Six of the *Book of Revelation*, John of Patmos introduces his prophetic vision of the end of the world with the image of four horses and their riders. The eight beings are summoned when the Lamb of God breaks open the first four seals on the seven-sealed scroll held in God’s right hand, and are conventionally understood within Christian theology as harbingers both of John’s prophesy and of the eventual end of the world itself. The horses and their riders are thus doubled signs, intra-textual allegories subject to a diegetic moment of interpretation which is mirrored in the act of reading. In passing from the visual format of John’s presage, to its textual account, and then back again into images formed in the mind of the reader, these Biblical heralds inaugurate not only the end of times but the start of a system of representation, an aesthetic order to pattern all future images as signs, or the threshold of signs – the horse as porter and frame.

The neologism ‘A Picture of a Horse is Not a Critique of a Horse’, drawn through the artist’s personal vocabulary from some unknown source, provides an addendum to this aesthetic revelation. Referring to what might be added to, rather than inherent in, an image via interpretation, the idiosyncratic aphorism reminds the reader that it is impulsive to take the idea of horse as symbolic herald on its face, and that its status as a caryatid bearing the weight of semiosis is perhaps suspect.

Imaginatively inserted between John’s vision and this eccentric rejoinder, this exhibition both proposes the horse as a vehicle of an aesthetic order and asks that this role be interrogated. In so doing, the works depart from a Biblical setting in order to reconstruct an earthly logic of apparition. This movement from heaven to earth in some way mimics millenarian treatments of scripture, which use the book as an accurate material description of the apocalypse. Yet the question of critique destabilises a one-to-one relationship and suggests viewing

this instead as setting in motion frames of aestheticization which herald a more prosaic end of the world.

In Revelation Six, the four horses are not the first of John’s visions, but they are the first to alert him to the visions’ content. The beasts are accompanied by four riders, each of whom enact a different eschatological event: the earth’s conquest by Christ (or the anti-Christ); the end of peace; judgement; and Death. Such as a sign carries its meaning, these horses bear their riders, whose portable attributes (crown, sword, and scales) not only allow them to be recognised but also produce their function. In this, the horses fulfil their first role in the aesthetic order: that of the *substrate* of representation.

Death is the only rider without an attribute. Instead, he is tailed by another personification: ‘And I looked, and behold a pale horse and his name that sat upon him was Death, and Hell followed with him.’ Not only does John’s vision unfold sequentially, but within the vision itself there is a linear order. The horses carry their riders, meanings are layered one on top of the other, yet the final horse (the one which could be perceived most significantly as an imminent threshold) comes *before* and *beside* another symbolic figure, Hell. Death is the event which precedes, and through which one passes into, eternal damnation, and this temporal relation is respected. However, to this is added a spatial one. John’s vision unfolds less like a movie, to employ a modern metaphor, than a scroll: rather than an accretive logic, images appear next to each other in order to convey narrative flow. Death is on Hell’s cusp, arriving just before but waiting in the wings of the sentence, always in sight, conjured first and held by the verb and preposition: ‘followed with’. This provides the horse’s second role, as margin or as *frame*.

One more grammatical point is worthy of note. The first, third and fourth horses are all introduced to the reader by John through some variant of the following phrase: ‘I looked, and behold’. In the Greek which precedes the King James translation, the distinction between these two verbs is clear. ‘I looked’ presents the act of seeing in the first person singular indicative, referring to a definitive witnessing of real events. ‘Behold’ introduces the second person singular imperative, commanding the reader to look upon what John is about to describe. The reader’s vision is directed towards a particular object or occurrence, which, as shown above, is not simply a thing to be seen but holds and inculcates a way of seeing. With this in mind, it is possible to imagine the horse as carrier and frame as a model for representation, an available structure which appears to arise intuitively or inevitably but is rather subtly compelled.