



Power and Softness:

The Image of the Horse as a Vehicle for New Representations of Power

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this thesis was to analyse representations of the horse in art history and examine ways in which representations of the horse could be used to posit new positive representations of power.

The theoretical section explored the lineage of horse imagery in art history; this section also explored power imagery as well. The portrayal of the horse in Western art was analysed from the Renaissance onwards in order to have a firm historical understanding. From this base of understanding, the potential for new image creation was discussed. Paintings and statues were the primary focus of the thesis for its analysis. Possibilities for new and more positive images of power were explored through visuals featuring horses.

The analysis suggested that because of the horse's roots in art history as well as its powerful physical strength, status as a prey animal, and its gentle sensitivity, the horse was an image eminently suited for use in positing new and positive non-toxic images of power. Further, the analysis suggested that these new explorations stand in opposition to power images and power conceptualisations based in toxic masculinity and patriarchy. This contrast of new imagery and socially constructed expectations provided the starting point for critiquing current power imagery and moving beyond toxic imagery.

Key words: fine art, art history, equine art, horse art, power dynamics in art

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1 INTRODUCTION

Horses have inspired art of all kinds for thousands of years, and its meanings and associations have shifted through time. Can equine imagery—images of horses—be used as a fulcrum lens through which to posit new images of power in art? Can new and positive images of power be created through representing the intersection of power and softness as embodied in the horse? These are important and worthy questions. But as these questions are considered, it is useful to also examine why the horse—and not some other creature—might be best-suited to this endeavour. This question “Why the horse?” is the question explored within the first portion of this thesis and then the practical painting process is considered and analysed in the latter.

It is useful to clarify why the horse has been chosen rather than some other animal. Is there something about the horse that makes it more suitable than other animals for the positing of new images of power? The research of this thesis suggests the answer is yes—and for many reasons. In the following pages, this thesis will briefly discuss some of the historic bases and reasons for the use of the horse in this investigation of power image construction.

Before beginning a true exploration, it is important to acknowledge the scope of this research and the historical focus. The focus of this research limits itself to the bounds of Western art history from roughly the Renaissance onwards. The horse has a long and varied history outside of Western art traditions. And of course even within Western art history, the image of the horse has varied uses and meanings going back far further than the Renaissance. However, for the scope and purposes of this thesis, the entirety of the horse’s history in art cannot and will not be covered; it is far too large a subject and not entirely relevant to the object of this thesis.

So again, why the horse? Historically, many animals have been depicted in Western art. What makes the horse so special and useful for new power images is its art-historical connections to power, and also its historical connections to a wide array of symbology and even a wide array of social standings. The horse has been depicted for thousands of years, and in a very wide variety of ways that show off different aspects of its power and beauty (Hendricks 2018). This observation prompts one to remember that the horse itself is—quite literally—a very powerful animal. To this day, the term “horsepower” is used to describe and measure power. What one might not know, is just how much power that is. The unit horsepower refers to “33,000 foot-pounds of work per minute—that is, the power necessary to lift a total mass of 33,000 pounds one foot in one minute” (Horsepower n.d.). The horse’s symbolic relationship with power, coupled with its symbolic versatility and literal bodily strength, make it a perfect choice for the construction of new images of power.

Power will be defined in a certain way within this thesis. When discussing the term “power,” here it is meant in a very literal sense. “Power” in the sense of this thesis refers to strength and the ability to enact an action, whether physical or otherwise. It is simply the power to do something, rather than the power to dominate something. As terms are slippery, this thesis will not attempt to tie this term down too closely beyond this definition, as that would require another full essay in which to be even slightly successful in such an endeavour. Power is not meant in terms of the domination of others, but rather it is meant in terms of its potential for enacting positive action.

To return to the horse’s long lineage within Western art, here it is useful to discuss the horse’s presence throughout art history. This historical background is useful for understanding and grounding new images within their historic context. No image springs from nothing and even an image created in ignorance of history is still a participant in its context—although blindly. But here, working in ignorance is not the purpose. Due to the constraints of this thesis, the history of the horse and horse imagery in art will not be covered in

exhaustive detail; this thesis will only touch upon some important points of representation throughout Western art history—beginning with the Renaissance.

2 RENAISSANCE DEPICTIONS AND EARLIER

2.1 The statue of Marcus Aurelius

Much of Renaissance art was based on the rediscovery and appreciation of images of antiquity. This visual heritage is also noticeable in the depictions of horses—especially in terms of sculpture (Fémelat 2019, 196). Already, the images of horses are drawing on a pre-established artistic tradition surrounding horse images. Additionally, many equestrian statues are reminiscent of the beautiful equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius from 175 C.E. (Hendricks 2018). The horse's position in this sculptural tradition is one of subservience; the horse is not the main subject of the sculpture (Picture 1). Instead, the horse is what one might call part of the trappings of power. It is a status symbol and a pedestal.

The beauty of the horse adds grandeur, height, and a kind of unassailability to the figure sitting astride its powerful body. The historian Peter Stewart (2012, 266) mentions that although this additional figure is now lost, one of the horse's back feet originally rested on the body of a conquered foe. This figure subdued beneath the horse would have lent further to the statue's purpose of displaying power and domination. There is some speculation that perhaps the horse is also a portrait modelled off of an individual horse, due to the fine level of detail on the statue (Stewart 2012, 266). If it is a portrait of an individual horse, that would have very interesting ramifications for the understanding and depiction of individual horses in art even when the horse was not the main focus of the artwork. It would mean that the individuality of the horse was taken into consideration very early in Western art, even if this consideration may have fluctuated in importance during the following centuries. However, as this statue predates the focus of this thesis, a full investigation of this statue will not be undertaken here.



PICTURE 1. Statue of Marcus Aurelius, bronze with gold gilding, 175 C.E. (photograph: Rosco~commonswiki 2006)

2.2 Frescoes in the Hall of the Horses

Depictions of horses in paintings must also be considered. The frescoes in the Hall of the Horses (completed in 1528) in the Palazzo Te in Mantua depict intentional and careful portraits of specific horses (Hall of the Horses n.d.). Even the names of some of the horses depicted are still visible on the walls. These horses do not feature riders, and are depicted merely with bridles and reins, but no saddle or rider (Picture 2). Here, the focus is only on the horses—or is it?

Could these depictions—life-size, high-up, and situated in such a way that they tower over the viewer—be read as just another show of power? The commissioners of the frescoes, the Gonzagas, were very famous for their horses and their horse breeding (Fémelat 2019, 196). Additionally, it has been pointed out that “the portrayal of horses always seems to have been motivated by the desire to celebrate the owner of the animals depicted” (Fémelat 2019, 199). To devote an entire hall to life-sized frescoes of horses that represent the family’s fame as breeders of fine horses does suggest that the horses are there to display the family’s power—although in a way much different than an equestrian statue would. Whether an overt display of power or not, there is intentional insistence on the individuality of the horses and an appreciation of equine beauty and form. However, this acceptance of the horse as a central figure is not universal within art.



PICTURE 2. Giulio Romano: Hall of the Horses, Northern Wall, fresco, 1525-1528 (Palazzo Te n.d.)

2.3 Caravaggio's painting of St. Paul

In marked contrast, the 1601 painting *The Conversion on the Way to Damascus* (sometimes also called *The Conversion of Saint Paul*), by Caravaggio may be considered (Picture 3). In this painting, located in the Church of Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome, a large portion of its composition is taken up by the horse. So much so that the work was criticised for how much of the work is just the horse (Hendricks 2018). The horse is quite literally the centre of the painting. This criticism helps one understand what the place and purpose of a horse is often assumed to be.



PICTURE 3. Caravaggio: *The Conversion on the Road to Damascus*, oil on canvas, 1601 (Wikimedia n.d.)

The fact that the horse is a major feature in the image is a problem (for some, it seems). It has—for some viewers—seemingly stepped outside the bounds of the horse's understood and accepted place in art as an accoutrement of power. Of course, that could indeed be one of the points of the image. One could interpret the image as Paul being displaced from his high position at the moment of his conversion; the moment in which he is humbled by God is shown visually through his placement in relation to the horse. However, it is the reaction to the horse's image that is the most germane to this analysis. Having seemingly stepped out of its accepted place within art, the horse in this work was criticised.

The understood purpose of a work should of course be considered as well. The purpose of the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius is different from the purpose of the Palazzo Te's frescoes. Or are the purposes really that different? Both relate to power, and both are meant to display power. The horse continues its association as a prop of power in the equestrian portraits created by Anthony van Dyck and others.

3 THE EQUESTRIAN PORTRAIT AND THE HORSE PORTRAIT

3.1 The equestrian portraits of Anthony van Dyck

As already mentioned, the horse has long been associated with power throughout Western art history. However, the painted equestrian portrait is essential in giving a comprehensive understanding of the horse in its historical context. As observed by researchers Walter A. Liedtke and John F. Moffitt (1981, 529), “For a monarch to be mounted on a horse seems as natural to the modern eye, and evidently to the seventeenth-century viewer as well, as the image of a king on a throne.” The horse is certainly not out of place in portraits depicting the wealthy and the powerful. Indeed, as pointed out, the horse is as normal as a throne. In a way, a horse can be seen as a living throne, a powerful vehicle for a politically powerful personage. In instances of equestrian portraiture however, the horse is not the focus on the image. The horse is like a throne; it is an accoutrement of power. A pedestal.

Like the inanimate throne, the animate horse is there to make the person upon them seem more powerful. This throne-like use can be seen, for example, in the case of Anthony van Dyck’s 1627 painting *Portrait of Anton Giulio Brignole-Sale* (Picture 4). In this image, one can see Brignole-Sale seated upon the horse, making direct eye contact with the viewer. He confidently guides the horse directly towards the viewer with one hand while holding his hat in his other hand. The horse can be read as a way of depicting Brignole-Sale’s leadership abilities or ability to control others. However, Van Dyck’s depictions of horses also show a sympathetic and careful depiction of the equine figure. This careful attention to portraying the horse is one of the things that sets this painting—as well as other paintings by Van Dyck—apart from other equestrian portraiture which focuses on the person upon the horse.



PICTURE 4. Anthony van Dyck: Portrait of Anton Giulio Brignole-Sale, oil on canvas, 1627 (The Yorck Project 2002)

3.2 George Stubbs's portrait of Whistlejacket

In contrast to the equestrian portrait of Brignole-Sale, in which the horse is merely a beautifully rendered prop, George Stubbs's 1762 painting *Whistlejacket* focuses on just the horse (Picture 5). There is literally nothing else depicted on the gigantic canvas aside from the essentially life-sized figure of the rear-

ing horse. As observed by the National Gallery London's Mathew Morgan (2017), "[Whistlejacket] has character. He's not an idealised horse. He's not a stock figure. This is a specific horse, and if you look closely at his face — — you can see that there is something individual — — he is not just 'a' horse." In this painting, not only is the horse the main focus, but it is a particular horse. The obvious difference in focus and purpose of this painting contrasts sharply with Van Dyck's painting. In Stubbs's painting, the focus is on the appreciation of equine beauty (Morgan 2017). There is also an individualistic element to this portrait, as it is not simply the appreciation of the concept of equine beauty, but rather the depiction and appreciation of one specific horse.

This focus on the horse can be seen as a huge shift in the purpose—or even just potential—of the horse within portraiture. However, it is equally possible to suggest that this image is merely a return to the horse portraiture supported by the Gonzagas. After all, Whistlejacket was a very famous racehorse and owned by a British aristocrat—the 2nd Marquess of Rockingham (Hyland & Roberts 2018, 55). As such, it is not unthinkable that it is a return to horse portraits as a boast of the wealth and power of their owners. However, *Whistlejacket* is still a remarkable portrait in its attention to individual identity and the riderless depiction of a horse amid a tradition of equine portraiture that treats the horse as merely a prop for the rider.



PICTURE 5. George Stubbs: Whistlejacket, oil on canvas, 1762 (National Gallery London n.d.)

3.3 Further notes on equestrian portraiture

Naturally, the rider is a central aspect in much of equine portraiture. This continues as a clear trend from the seventeenth century through into the nineteenth

century—and even further. This continued trend can be seen in the royal portraits painted by Anthony Van Dyck, Goya, or in the easily recognisable painting *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* by Jacques-Louis David. As discussed by historian Lucy Worsley (*Lucy Worsley's Reins of Power* 2015), being shown on a horse displays the sitter's skill as a leader; not only is the horse an accoutrement of power, but the horse can also function as a stand-in for other things such as a country, people, or lands. Thus, the sitter on the horse is portrayed as deftly guiding their country (or whatever they oversee) with a firm hand. The rearing pose of the horse—the *levade* position—is a movement that requires immense skill and training for both the horse and the rider (*Lucy Worsley's Reins of Power* 2015). As powerful and skilled as the horse is, the horse in these portraits is often still simply a prop of power.

4 SHIFTS IN THE HORSE'S PLACE IN SOCIETY AND THE LEGACY OF EQUESTRIAN PORTRAITURE

4.1 Shifts in the horse's place in society and art

With the industrial revolution, successively more powerful and horseless modes of power generation are created and the place of the horse changes significantly. Further, the culmination or tipping point for the horse occurs around the first World War and this shift is dramatised within such novels as *Radetzky March*, written by Joseph Roth in 1932 (Niland & Murgatroyd 2016, 151). The horse is less central in the power structures of industry and the military as machines become more powerful and useful. These machines of course were easier to dominate and control than horses, and these specific advantages were actively discussed during that time (Niland & Murgatroyd 2016, 151). The image of the horse, as successive artistic movements come and go, becomes acceptable beyond use as a simple pedestal or prop for power. As powerful new technology shifted the purpose of horses, it seems that there was also a shift within art as well—the blue horses of Franz Marc or the paintings of René Magritte come to mind. However, correlation cannot so easily be called a causation in such a shift. History is far too complicated for such a neat and tidy explanation.

Although causation cannot be confirmed at any significant level, it can be observed that the purpose of equine imagery in art fragments throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; its representation seems freed into infinite forms of representation. Due to this fact, it is impossible to cover such a range of equine imagery here. So what can be said? Throughout these representations, it is possible to say that a horse remains a source of inspiration for many artists, and it is also possible to say that the horse manages to retain its associations with power, even as it gains a host of many other associations as well. This continued association is important but it is equally important to point out that this

power association also comes hand-in-hand with its use as a prop rather than an individual living animal.

4.2 The legacy of the equestrian portrait in art of the twenty-first century

One contemporary work operating in the tradition of the equestrian portrait is the enormous 2010 portrait of Michael Jackson, *Equestrian Portrait of King Philip II (Michael Jackson)* painted by Kehinde Wiley (Picture 6). Looking at this image, one can see that it very deliberately places itself in the context of art history, and especially equestrian portraiture. The painting's scale is of the same hugeness as the Baroque equestrian portraits, and even the title alerts the viewer to the painting's references to the past. Wiley (2017) describes historic equestrian portraiture as one in which the commissioner says to the artist "Make a god of me." In an interview, Wiley (2015) discussed the commissioning process and creation of the piece and describes it as mostly about the theatricality and the purpose of the armour as something that both protects and contains. Interestingly, the horse is mentioned even less than the armour in this interview, and retains its place as a prop of power. However, the painter is highly aware of what this thesis terms the "toxic" power connotations associated with equestrian portraiture. Such imagery focuses on domination and makes violence and domination look beautiful and Wiley (2017) himself says "Equestrian portraiture is the money shot of war." He speaks fluently and skilfully about the less-than-positive history and connotations that can be read into equestrian portraits:

There is the sense in which the body on top of—astride—an animal is controlling the irrational. Many have postulated that equestrian portraiture became such a phenomenon because it represented man's domination over — — nature, and by extension women. (Wiley, 2017).

It is clear that Wiley is aware of the domination aspect of such imagery, and such imagery's continued ability to move those who see it. With this understanding of the horse's historic association with power images, it is now pos-

sible to discuss the formulation of new images of power as informed by the horse's art-historical context. In my own work I seek a shift from images of power based in domination to images based in the positive gentle power to effect positive changes through the portrayal of horse imagery.



PICTURE 6. Kehinde Wiley: Equestrian Portrait of King Philip II (Michael Jackson), oil on canvas, 2010 (Wiley n.d.)

5 TOXIC MASCULINITY

5.1 Toxic masculinity as a term

Toxic masculinity is an important factor in this investigation of new power imagery, because power and harmful patriarchal structures often go hand in hand. When thinking about and exploring new types of power imagery, it is important to be aware of these associations and the impact of toxic masculinity, in order to avoid carrying it over into new forms of expression. Toxic masculinity is defined in this thesis in the same way the academic Kathleen Elliott (2018, 17) defines it in her article as “masculinity based on simplified norms and understandings of traditionally masculine characteristics such as violence, physical strength, suppression of emotion and devaluation of women.” In contrast, Andrea Waling, in her article “Problematizing ‘Toxic’ and ‘Healthy’ Masculinity for Addressing Gender Inequalities” notes that to her, health and toxic masculinity are simply restrictive hierarchical boxes that only further complicate the issue (2019, 363-364). However, while this may also be a valid way to consider toxic masculinity, my own work disagrees with Waling’s position and instead aligns itself with Elliott’s viewpoint. For the purposes of this thesis and its use and understanding of the term, toxic masculinity is not a limitation or a box, but rather a descriptor of harmful elements which are centred around harmful patriarchal structures.

5.2 Confronting toxic masculinity

Confronting something as widespread as toxic masculinity is not an easy task, but it is a very important one. Confronting toxic masculinity is something that men should—and I would say must—take an active part in. Through my thesis, I seek to be a part of this active process. Toxic masculinity affects all areas of life, from the public to the private. Misogyny affects lives daily. As posited by

researcher Kathleen Elliot, “Successfully resisting toxic masculinity on a cultural level requires the participation of men committed to being allies in the fight against gender inequality” (2018, 19). Additionally, she underscores how important it is to provide positive examples and lead by example when seeking for real change (2018, 20). Similarly, this thesis focuses on positing and exploring the possibilities of new power imagery as a way to lead by example.

5.3 Power imagery of the horse in opposition to toxic masculinity

The constraints of this thesis do not allow for a full exploration of the current power imagery being generated through the lens of toxic masculinity, especially as such a subject is so enormous that it could easily fill many books. Instead, the existence of toxic masculinity within power imagery is a fact that is acknowledged in this thesis and then moved beyond; this is a necessary step to begin to explore new positive alternatives rather than getting fixated on debating the existence of toxic masculinity and its influence on power imagery. This thesis focuses on the questions of what can be done, how to start, and how viable horse imagery is for such an endeavour; in short, the object of this thesis is to start doing something about the problem rather than simply pointing at the problem and doing nothing. As Kathleen Elliott notes, “for students who have grown up in a culture saturated with sexist images (of women and men), language and patterns of behaviour, it can be difficult to identify them as anything other than normal or, even, natural” (2018, 20). This inability to recognise toxicity is not limited to students only. For anyone who has grown up in a society with harmful stereotypes of masculinity, it can be difficult to identify when images are saturated with toxic masculinity; it can be tough for those who are used to such imagery to notice the harmful elements. Positioning peaceful horse imagery as power imagery provides a strong contrast to these harmful elements, allowing these toxic elements to be more easily identified through this contrast. As a result, self reflection and reevaluation of one’s own understanding of power, and toxic masculinity can occur.

When one thinks of power imagery, a peaceful horse eye probably is not what springs to most people's minds. Simply in the act of declaring a large peaceful eye an exploration of new power imagery, it confronts whatever preconceptions the viewer has of what power imagery can or "should" be. The declaration places the thesis images in conversation with other power imagery. As already discussed, horses are not wholly disconnected to previous iterations of power imagery which allows a continuity between past and present imagery without the perpetuation of toxic forms of masculinity or toxic forms of power.

6 PAINTING THE ANTI-PANOPTICON FIELD

6.1 Starting points

My process started with the conceptual and material challenges. What could new visual conceptions of power look like, and what materials could be used? These challenges and my process through them was careful and illuminating. In terms of both, I learned a lot and discovered even more new avenues of exploration and divergent issues that are still worthy of exploration. It was an exciting and challenging project at both the intellectual and practical levels. In the first instance, as we have already seen, horses have a long history with power imagery and makes for an apt visual subject with which to begin a new direction. Although the horse has been associated with power imagery in the past, it had only served as a pedestal or accessory to power—a status symbol. The actual possessor of the power was—almost always—the person astride the horse or the person who had paid to display the horse as a status symbol. My thesis seeks to change the horse from an accessory to the focus, and place the horse as the possessor of power. At the material level, the questions and challenges centred around what materials and what technique should be employed in order to reach the desired effect.

6.2 Conceptual process - From pedestal to focus on interiority

An image of a human on a horse does not centre the power in the horse, but rather the one upon its back. It is not always automatically this way, but as has been demonstrated in this thesis's exploration of horse imagery in art history, it is very often the case. So when parsing the needs of the image and how to portray power, the human was the first thing that needed to be removed. Of course, I must note that I do not seek to critique the literal human and horse relationship. A powerful and overwhelmingly positive symbiosis between rider

and horse can be achieved, with many positive physical and mental health benefits (Kokko 2019, 7; Acri, Hoagwood, Morrissey & Zhang 2016, 605). However, for the purposes of this preliminary exploration into new forms of power imagery, the human figure was removed from the equation.

Sadly, much of the world is judged through its relation to humans or its usefulness to humans. Removing the human figure was a necessary step to seeing images of power in a new way. The starting place is not human power, but the power—the pure capability—of another animal. The tendency of humans to measure all things in relation to themselves can become an asset, if it is reimagined as a mode towards sympathy, symbiosis, and understanding rather than as a mode of comparison aimed towards hierarchical categorisation. When we consider that we can use this tendency towards comparison as a way to see ourselves in relation to all other things through our simple existence, we can also acknowledge the connection we share as fellow animals on a single living planet, spinning through space. We are connected, but our ways of looking and ways of comparison shift as the figure of the human is removed from the visual equation. Is the horse us? Is the viewer meant to identify with the horse? What extends beyond the eyes portrayed on the canvases? These are questions that may come to the fore.

Dynamics of the gaze are the next to consider. The works have a powerful focus on looking and gazing. Power images are meant to be looked at, admired, and—both figuratively and literally—looked up to. Who looks and who watches is also an important part of power dynamics. Here, the scale of the works seeks to flip that balance—to create a dynamic in which the soft watching eye of a prey animal can contend with the gaze of its human viewer. The title of these works, *The Anti-Panopticon Field*, alludes to this particular issue of looking as well. Though my piece does not seek to centre itself in a Michel Foucault-based framework, it is nearly impossible to discuss power relationships and the gaze without at least a nod to this philosopher's work.

When the term “soft power” is used in the context of this thesis, it is not meant to reference a form of controlling power that relies on fear, self-policing, and surveillance. Power that is unseen, and exercised or perpetrated secretly from those it affects is not at all the meaning or purpose of the “positive” types of power I have hoped to elucidate throughout this text. This hidden unseen power through fear—a topic explored notably by Foucault (but by many others as well)—is one of the types of power that the thesis work seeks to buck off and leave in the dust. The “panopticon” is a type of carceral architecture and term coined by Jeremy Bentham. As originally designed, the panopticon was a prison design with the guard tower positioned in the middle, creating a scenario of self policing in the inmates encircling this tower; constantly unsure of whether they are actively being watched or not, the inmates self-police themselves in a constant state of uncertainty (Ethics Explainer: The Panopticon 2017). This architectural fear-based model results in the guards doing less work and the inmates performing a self-perpetuated self-policing upon themselves (Ethics Explainer: The Panopticon 2017). My thesis, in its use of eyes, seeks to do something different, something that is not about fear or self-policing. Thus, the thesis is titled *The Anti-Panopticon Field*.

The use of eyes in this work does bring the theme of the gaze into the conversation. The gaze presented in the thesis work however, seeks to be something very different from the male patriarchal gaze. The work is a series of soft eyes—eyes that look back, soft, open, half-closed, and closed. Sometimes these eyes intentionally do not even read as eyes at first. These eyes are the eyes of a prey animal, an animal that looks—not for hunting, but for food and self preservation. In a way, the gaze of a horse is about life and preservation—a wish to continue to grow and thrive. Of course, one could say this is true of all animals, prey and predator alike. But the stare of a predator is quite different than the stare of a prey animal. Some viewers may feel inclined point out that a prey animal’s gaze has an unfortunate tie back to the fear-based model the thesis work attempts to confront and leave behind. However, the eyes in the thesis work are intended—due to their large size and calm expression—to

present a calm gaze in which fear has no place. Some of the eyes are closed as well—comfortable and unworried by the surroundings. Expanding beyond the canvas, the horses of these eyes would be monumental in their proportions. The eyes of the horses are left bright, with most of the base layer of gessoed canvas shining through. This bright space is an entrance and an exit—a way to enter the painting, but also a way to enter an interior and contemplative state within oneself as well. One looks, but in the process of looking outward at the paintings, one may also begin looking inwards in contemplation as well.

The calm and contemplative eyes of the horses suggest a larger being beyond the constraints of the canvas. The eyes themselves become a synecdoche for the uncontainable body but also the uncontainable spirit. The canvases are windows, much as the eyes within them are windows, through which to enter beyond the mere representations on the canvas into concepts, ideas, and questions beyond. In presenting the eye, it becomes much more personal and interior. One could, conceivably, imagine a rider beyond the frame of the canvas, but to do so does prompt one to confront the question “Why?” Why, when there is no hint of bridle or any other constraint upon the horse, would one willingly imagine those things beyond the scope of the canvas? As one imagines the image beyond the bounds of the canvas, one is confronted by one’s own preconceptions. What is presented is what can be concretely be engaged with—which is the calm eyes of the horses. The viewer is looked at and perceived, but they are perceived by a calm creature that asks nothing of them; the eye does not challenge them for supremacy or beg for mercy. The eyes are beyond the scope of what the viewer can affect. The eyes are there, existing to be perceived. However, the only participant who can react to the interchange of perceptions is the audience. These horses—in a way—are immune to any fear, threat or force of toxic power the viewer could threaten with. They are merely pigment and oil on canvas—but in this state of being there is the fearless existence of a thing unaware of the eyes upon it, unable to feel fear of any kind.

The viewer may look, but this is accompanied by the understanding that the thing looked at is even bigger—and more powerful. This reliance on size is a double-edged sword. Although the largeness of a work often (in my opinion) means it is more “respected” or “impressive,” this form of respect seems tied to the less-than-positive tendency of masculinity to want to take up space—a “mine is bigger” kind of ridiculous macho chase towards largeness as an automatic signifier of something that is impressive and to be respected. This issue of size is something which Kehinde Wiley has also mentioned during lectures in relation to some of his larger works (2017). On the other hand, the fact that the viewer must contend with the size and scale of the work allows it to be viewed differently. With canvases so big, they seem almost like people. They are not small intimate paintings, but neither are they going to dominate a huge room. In fact, I like to think of them as friend-sized; the paintings feel roughly person sized in an engaging and personal way. They do not tower over the viewer (unless perhaps the viewer is a small child), and the viewer does not tower over the paintings.

6.3 Material process – From construction to completion

This discussion of the size leads to the material choices of the work, its size, medium, construction, and so on. In terms of size, I wanted to challenge myself by working at a large scale. As the scale of the work increases, so do the challenges involved. These challenges begin at the very base level of construction, and continue through the image making process to completion.

The size of each individual canvas is 100 by 120 centimetres, and there are four of them. At this size, the work is large, but not too large. It is still a manageable size, while also taking into consideration my goals for the overall work. The size of each dimension was chosen because—in a way—the works are like “portraits” of a sort, and so a portrait orientation was an easy choice to make.

The size was perfect for the working conditions and working space constraints. It was a happy balance of my needs and the constraints of my studio space.

As the size of a work increases, the constraints of what materials are best also increase. An MDF board (medium-density fibreboard) of such a size would be quite heavy, and the delicacy of the corners of such a material would be compounded by these factors. Fragile corners were not something I wanted to stress about, especially knowing that the pieces would be transported several times. Paper was not particularly attractive, as I knew I wanted to work at a large size, with oils, and in a style that would need a lot of solvents. Thin-cut plywood affixed to a frame would also have been an option, but availability and uncertainty about the effect the grain might have on the overall image lead me to decide on stretched canvas. This option fit best, as it also helped centre the works in the tradition of portraiture and Western art history which my work is closely situated in conversation with.

The construction proved more challenging than expected in several ways. The original stretchers that were ordered, were not thick enough, and so the canvas corners could not remain level under the tension of the stretched canvas. The second set of stretchers ordered were strong enough to allow the canvas to remain level, but were ironically thinner in one dimension than the previous stretchers and so the canvases began to bow inwards on the sides, like an hourglass. Finally, crossbars were obtained, and the last of the issues was mitigated. As all of this ordering, testing, and reordering occurred during the Covid-19 Pandemic, the shipping took longer than usual, which delayed the timeline of the work in a fairly distressing way. However, because I had allowed a large enough cushion time in my artwork completion timeline, I was able to finish the works in time.

Size was not the only challenge I set myself in these works. The medium and technique were challenges I set for myself as well. I decided to work with oils, but attempt to achieve a watercolour effect using the oil paint. Oil is a medium

that has a long drying time, but it is also a medium that can attain a large degree of depth and transparency through the many layers it allows for. I wanted to push that transparency to its limits and attempt a watercolour-like look with the paint. Layer after thin layer was applied to give a soft glowing image that suggests the horse and eye forms without fully spelling out these depictions. As might be noted by some, using something such as turpentine or turpenoid to thin out the paints also thins out the pigments of the paint. This was not an issue in my case as I prefer a desaturated colour pallet for my works.

The representational style I chose was based partly on the ways in which I wanted to challenge myself, but also partly because of the works that mine share a conversation with—portraits, baroque paintings, and equestrian portraiture in the Western tradition of painting. These works use various instances of a more “realistic” and “representational” style, seeking to represent things in a concrete and recognisable way. These works seek to communicate concrete images of people and things; they are not conceptual or abstract in their representations. In my exploration of what new power imagery could be, I did not want to simply follow in the same exact style, nor did I want to go into a fully abstract mode. I wanted to suggest rather than dictate, and suggest without giving an entirely free rein to the viewer with no anchoring reference point in the representation of recognisable objects.

The style of the works, in a way, allows for further exploration in either direction along the stylistic spectrum. The conversation can be steered towards the more representational or the more abstract. As my work is an initial exploration, a “What if...” and “If so, then how?” My work is a beginning and a starting point from which other works could further explore along various venues of representation or abstraction. My level of representation allows for the distinct recognition of the equine eye, and then allows for self reflection beyond this glimpsed misty representation. This technique allows for the horse to be the landscape and for the landscape to be the horse. This blending of forms speaks

to the healthy symbiosis of when power is used to promote growth and the good of all rather than power that is hoarded and used for domination over others.

The colours were another element that speaks to the work's ties to growth and the natural world. Earthy pigments were used in the making of the palette rather than brighter more vibrant colour options. In the initial test paintings done in gouache, I explored a much different colour palette for the project (Picture 7). In these small gouache paintings, the predominant colours are blues, greens, and greys. These images conveyed feelings I deemed too sad and somewhat eerie. Although I liked the visual effect and the colour palette, it was not what I wanted for the atmosphere of my larger works. I wanted the works to be bright, happy, and earthy. Yellow ochre, burnt sienna, and burnt umber were the dominating colours of the pieces. These colours were meant to situate the piece in conversation with the joy of the earth, brightness, and the sun (Picture 8, 9, 10 & 11).



PICTURE 7. Aramis September: Preliminary paintings, gouache on paper, 2020 (scans: September 2020)



PICTURE 8. Aramis September: The Anti-Panopticon Field I, oil on canvas, 2020-2021 (photograph: Harjula & September 2021)



PICTURE 9. Aramis September: The Anti-Panopticon Field II, oil on canvas, 2020-2021 (photograph: Harjula & September 2021)



PICTURE 10. Aramis September: The Anti-Panopticon Field III, oil on canvas, 2020-2021 (photograph: Harjula & September 2021)



PICTURE 11. Aramis September: The Anti-Panopticon Field IV, oil on canvas, 2020-2021 (photograph: Harjula & September 2021)

Although I deem my colour selection efforts to be quite successful, there is room for interpretation. In conversations and feedback sessions with my peers, there were several differing interpretations of the colours. One thought it was intentionally the colour of rust—which, as I thought about it further, would be an interesting tie to the symbolic dismantling of the patriarchal machine. Another peer interpreted the burnt sienna as too much like red, and thus speaking too closely to the themes of blood and war to effectively escape the influence of patriarchal and violence in its imagery. In contrast, another student found them to be very comforting paintings free of such violence. I am happy that the works are not immutable or single-note, and that they can be interpreted in different ways by the viewer and allow the viewer to explore their own “conversation” between themselves and the pieces. I tend to consider burnt sienna a very earthy colour, as that is the colour of the soil in the land where I grew up.

In order to achieve the thin misty layers of colour, I discovered I had to abandon brushes quite early in the process. The technique used to spread the pigment and build up the layers involved the use of cloth rags. This technique helped me to produce the effects I wanted, and also helped me develop a closer more tactile relationship with the works. I quickly made the connection between carefully wiping and stroking the paint across the canvases and the movements one makes when grooming a horse. Working on the pieces meant pulling paint across large surfaces, brushing and stroking—almost the way one would with a real horse. This process once again brought home the interplay between art and care, and between concept and the physical. The wear and work of the process was visible in my working tools as well; as the work continued, holes began to open up on my rags, a physical manifestation of the many strokes and paint layers that went into the creation of the works (Picture 12).



PICTURE 12. Working rag with holes worn in it from the painting process (photograph: September 2021)

This use of rags instead of brushes also aided in another challenge I had set myself: to attempt a more intuitive approach to my works. Usually I plan every single line and shape of a piece before beginning. In this work, I challenged myself to work in a looser style, allowing the works to develop intuitively. I wanted to attempt this different approach, as it is an approach that many of my peers find the most fulfilling for them. Knowing that I wanted to go for a misty representational style, I thought it would go perfectly with an intuitive approach that is somewhat non-codifiable in nature. This approach insists on a certain level of letting go of tight control. As these pieces were meant to fight against control and domination, it seemed appropriate to use an approach which is predicated on the need to let go and give up tight control in exchange for a spontaneity in the image creation process.

The final challenge of this project was to know when the paintings were finished. Because of the use of oil paint, in conjunction with the use of such thin layers, the image continued to give and give. Every time I entered to studio I felt an immense sense of happiness and satisfaction with the paintings. However, this constant satisfaction was slightly unnerving in some ways. I am used to the artist process being somewhat of a struggle and used to paintings going through a scary “ugly stage” somewhere in the middle of the creation process. There were no tears, no ugly stage, only an immense sense of fulfilment, fun, and play when working on these pieces. Whenever I left the studio, I left feeling a sense of confidence and accomplishment.

However, this sense of fulfilment also had an unexpected downside. Because of the constant sense of accomplishment, as well as the stylistic choice to keep the images misty and vague, it was very difficult to know when the paintings were completed. This uncertainty was further complicated by the use of oil paints which allow for an almost infinite number of layers and additions to a work. Eventually, I had to simply decide for myself when the works were finished. This involved a great amount of simply looking and contemplating the forms on the canvases.

6.4 Display

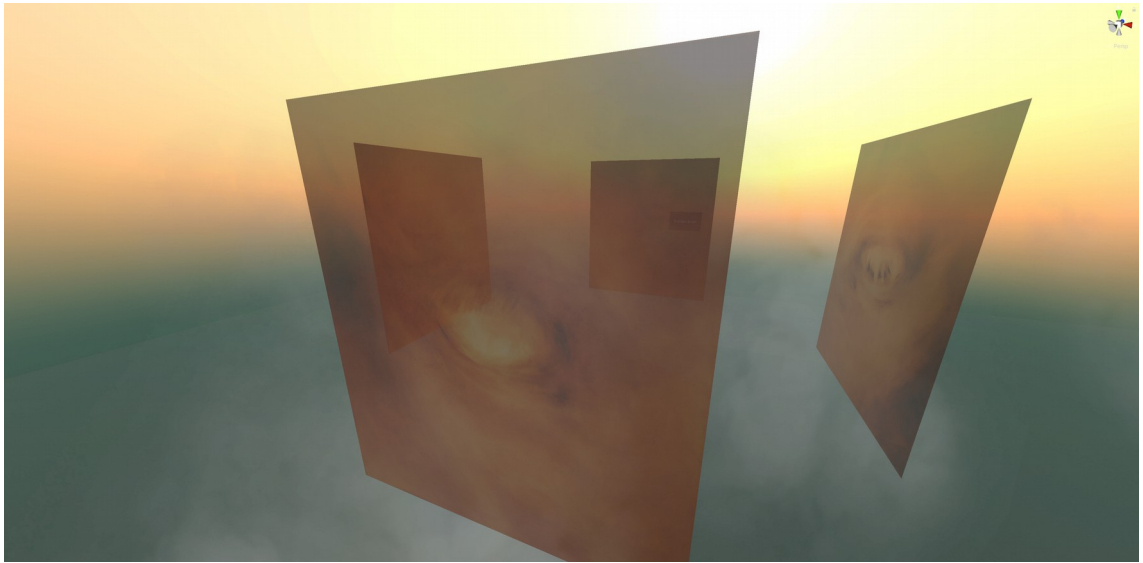
In terms of displaying the paintings, the goal is to have them placed side-by-side (but not touching) on a wall. Two of the paintings face to the left, and two face to the right (Picture 13). The placement of the eye in each composition is slightly varied, so as to lead the viewer’s eye from canvas to canvas. The works themselves are not to be understood as a single continual image split between several canvases. Rather, the works are meant to be understood as a series of semi-abstract representational works that can be viewed as a series or as individual works. Although they are meant to be placed as a series in a row, the

works can be displayed in a variety of configurations without losing the work's message or impact.



PICTURE 13. Aramis September: The Anti-Panopticon Field I-IV, oil on canvas, exhibition plan (photographs: Harjula & September 2021)

In addition to the planned physical gallery exhibition, a virtual gallery was created for the graduating fine art students. This additional gallery space allowed for a different configuration of the works. In the VR gallery, the works are situated in a square facing each other (Picture 14). The environment is an empty misty field-like space. In this configuration, the viewer must face each of the paintings individually. The paintings become more of an environment in which the viewer can walk around and between the paintings. The works are not seen in a linear sequence on a wall. This variation does not affect the meaning of the works, but does allow a different experience with the work.



PICTURE 14. Tommi Mäkeläinen: Kaleidoscopers VR Gallery, screenshot (Screenshot: Mäkeläinen 2021)

One compositional thing I learned from this overall project was the importance of an artwork series working well both individually and together. In feedback from my overseeing professor, it was mentioned that perhaps there is not enough variation in the eye placements on the canvases to lead the eye in a sufficiently interesting way. This was a very useful lesson to learn, which I can incorporate into future works. The VR gallery allows a different way to display the works. This difference in display format made the issue of the eye placement from work to work less of an issue, since the works were no longer viewed in a linear fashion. From these two different iterations of the artwork's presentation, I learned more about the extra elements involved in multi-canvas projects.

Overall, I consider the paintings a success. The works were completed to the best of my ability and—based on the feedback received from my peers and the professors overseeing my thesis—others also consider the paintings a success. The paintings achieve some, if not all, of what I wished for them to. Additionally, they leave plenty of room for further exploration of new images and the positing of new representations of power. They encompass my goals without blocking

room for growth. The paintings themselves almost ask for further exploration, their forms extending beyond the confines of the canvases, inviting all who see them to imagine further—image beyond the current confines both literally and conceptually.

7 DISCUSSION

What is the difference between toxic and non-toxic images of power? Why does this distinction even matter? As defined in this thesis, a “toxic” power image refers to an image that frames power in terms of inequality—in terms of domination or superiority through force or financial means. Such toxic images frame these destructive aspects of power as desirable and attractive. This kind of power is the kind this thesis seeks to reject in its exploration of new (positive) power imagery. To return to the question of this thesis, can the horse then be used to posit new positive images of power?

The object of this work is not to attempt to somehow rehabilitate the image of the horse as this is entirely unnecessary. As has been evident throughout the analysis of the horse in association with power throughout Western art, the horse has been a prop or accoutrement of power rather than possessing the power itself. The horse is not a gun, the horse is not a manmade object meant only for killing things. The horse is also not a machine; it is a living and breathing piece of the natural world. Although it has been very clearly associated with power images, the horse in and of itself is not what directly represents or embodies that power—often quite the opposite. The horse is usually portrayed as the thing dominated by the rider—or by the breeder who shapes their bloodlines. Yet the tangential association with power persists.

The horse is an almost perfect subject for positing new depictions of power because of its association with power throughout art history coupled with its real and physically powerful body. Power in itself (the ability to make things happen) is not necessarily a bad thing. The power to help people, the power to grow food, the power to do things is not necessarily the problem; rather, the problem rests in that many images of power often—just like much of equestrian portraiture—focus on domination and carry elements of toxic masculinity. The horse’s status in art history, as well as its physical aspects are equal parts of what

seems to make such a creature suitable for new explorations of power imagery that do not depend on domination. Rather, the image of the horse has proved ripe for fresh and new explorations of power. The horse, once only associated with power through its subservience, can now become an embodiment of constructive non-toxic power. These new depictions of power—firmly rooted in a rich art-historical past—can seek to posit new constructive images of power as embodied in the powerful yet peacefully non-predatory image of the horse.

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Pictures

PICTURE 1.

Statue of Marcus Aurelius, Bronze with gilding. 175 C.E. Capitoline Museums. Rome. Photograph: Rosco~commonswiki (2006)

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Statua_Marco_Aurelio_Musei_Capitolini.JPG

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PICTURE 2.

Giulio Romano. Hall of the Horses, Fresco. 1525-1528. Palazzo Te. Mantua. Photograph: Palazzo Te n.d.

<http://www.palazzote.it/index.php/en/te-palace/monumental-rooms/hall-of-the-horses>

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PICTURE 3.

Caravaggio. The Conversion on the Road to Damascus, oil on canvas. 1601. 230x175 cm. Church of Santa Maria del Popolo. Rome. Photograph: Wikimedia n.d.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Conversion_on_the_Way_to_Damascus-Caravaggio_\(c.1600-1\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Conversion_on_the_Way_to_Damascus-Caravaggio_(c.1600-1).jpg)

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PICTURE 4.

Anthony van Dyck. Anton Giulio Brignole-Sale on Horseback, oil on canvas. 1627. 282x198 cm. Strada Nuova Museums. Genoa. Image source: The Yorck Project (2002)

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PICTURE 5.

George Stubbs. Whistlejacket, oil canvas. 1762. 296.1x248 cm. The National Gallery. London. Image source: National Gallery (n.d.)

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/george-stubbs-whistlejacket>

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PICTURE 6.

Kehinde Wiley. Equestrian Portrait of King Philip II (Michael Jackson), oil on canvas. 128x112 in. Private Collection. Image source: Kehinde Wiley Official Website (n.d.)

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PICTURE 7.

Aramis September. Preliminary paintings, gouache on paper, 2020. Scans: Aramis September (2020)

PICTURE 8.

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PICTURE 9.

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PICTURE 10.

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PICTURE 11.

Aramis September. The Anti-Panopticon Field IV, oil on canvas. 100x120 cm. 2020-2021. Photograph: Yu-Hsuan Harjula & Aramis September (2021)

PICTURE 12.

Aramis September. Working rag with holes worn in it from the painting process Photograph: Aramis September (2021)

PICTURE 13.

Aramis September. The Anti-Panopticon Field I-IV, oil on canvas, exhibition plan, 2020-2021. Photographs: Yu-Hsuan Harjula & Aramis September (2021)

PICTURE 14.

Tommi Mäkeläinen. VR Gallery Screen Shot. 2021.