

STEEL HORSES

Drinker of the Winds

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The Wind

The Ecuadorian photographer Pablo Corral once said, “The true lord of the Andes is the wind. In Patagonia and Bolivia’s High Plateau, in the mossy moors of Venezuela and the foothills of Ecuador’s volcanoes, random winds blow:

The history of the Andes is one of the winds.
We are all huairapamuska, sons of the wind.”

My horse-sculpture also seeks that wind. Its structure is that of a musical instrument. It seeks that wind in order to sound in the high Andes.

It seeks the wind at Las Llaretas, a borderline plateau and one of the best wind-catching chutes in the Andes. Three thousand three hundred and sixty one meters above sea level, between mount Aconcagua and mount Mercedario, the highest summits of the Andes.

“On May 4, 1899, we climbed to the plateau” the geographer Luis Risopatrón tells us, adding: “...and the force of the wind was such that we had to struggle to remain seated on our mules. Stones two and three centimeters in size flew right by us.”

So I named my horse-sculpture ‘Drinker of the Winds.’
Beyond the sound of the stones carried by the waters of its rivers and the creaking and cracking of its glaciers in the night, beyond its thunder the sound, nay, the voice of the Andes is the sound of the wind.

These winds are born far away, in the middle of the South Pacific, between Australia and Polynesia. After days of travel, they blow onto the shores of America and race up the Andes where convection increases their speed, crossing over to the other side only to dissipate in the heart of the Argentine Pampa. The winter cyclones turn into white winds made all the more deadly by their force and the ice that they carry.

The Place—Las Llaretas Plateau

This mountain crossing is undoubtedly the best in the central zone as you come from the north. It forms part of the ancient Inca Trail, whose itinerary from north to south was: Cuzco - Oruro - Potosí - Quebrada de Humahuaca - Salta - Tinogasta - Pampa de Yaguaraz - Barrial - Los Manantiales - Espinacito - Paso las Llaretas - Alto del Cuzco - Putaendo.

The route was first laid down by nature through its geological faults and later it was the immigration route for the first inhabitants of America, twenty thousand years before the Inca.

The plateau has the best sample of Llaretas (*laretia-acaulis*) I have ever found in my travels through the Andes, some eight hundred hectares distributed among the small valleys nearby.

Because of fertile soil in this sector of the Inca Trail and also because of its well-trodden track, the greater part of the army of liberation, approximately 1,800 men, 5,000 horses and mules, crossed the Andes here in 1817, with O'Higgins himself and San Martin leading the way.

I have placed my sculpture there because of the quality of its histories, geology and vegetation. It is through these qualities that this place earned for itself its cultural status.

Horses

Drinkers of the Winds are a secret breed of horse that has twice the capacity of other horses to absorb oxygen, as each orifice in their nose is individually connected to its respective lung.

I decided to make a sculpture based on the idea of these horses open to the winds and during the two years it took me to make them, I followed a route opposite to that of Ulysses in the construction of the Trojan Horse, whose interior was built to conceal. All horses after that, the great horses of sculpture, that of Marcus Aurelius in Campidoglio, the Coleone and Gattamelata follow the same constructive scheme. The only horse whose surface reveals its interior stands 50 cm tall at the Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago, Chile. It is the equestrian monument to General Lynch by Rodin, which was never executed.

Unable to find referents of open horses in the greater history of sculpture, I decided to experiment with my own horses, which I might describe as belonging to the Creole-Andean breed.

The real life models I used were: Rey de Bastos and Buen Amigo. These two horses live and pasture in the hills surrounding my studio and usually watch me as I work.

"The artist must be obsessive, he has to live, think and dream sculpture," my friend Anthony Caro told me not so long ago in a letter.

This obsession also affects the referents of sculpture.

Thus I lived horse, I thought horse, and I dreamed horse, and I also rode them along the thousand equestrian tracks of the Andes.

In these horses there is a mix of all breeds and also the wisdom of five hundred years of genetic adaptation to the mountain ranges.

Very little is known about this breed. In my life with them, I have realized that they contradict all theories about horse species, such as those that assign horses a "flight ceiling" of 3,500 meters above sea level. In March 2003, we rode them practically to the summit of El Plomo, which is at 5,200 meters.

I can say that they are as fine and sure-footed as the mule but with the same discretion and loyalty of all horses. Also, they tread lightly and are as easily governed as the Chilean horses of the valleys.

I have also seen them withstand temperatures of -10°C in high altitudes, resist powerful winds and carry loads of up to one hundred kilos on journeys ten to fifteen days long.

Perhaps not too beautiful according to established canons of equine beauty, short-legged and very strong, they are best described as useful work animals rather than the "spirited stallions" of Rubén Darío.

Accustomed to eating anything, they are born and bred at an altitude of between 2,000 and 3,000 meters in the Andean high plateau. They are tamed by the road and their price is never beyond 140 U.S. dollars, although I would not sell my own for even a thousand.

After all these years of our mutual acquaintance, I can say that they are the true 'drinkers of the winds'.

The Sculpture

A steel horse weighing two tons, 5 meters tall and 2.5 meters wide. It began to be conceived three years ago, gradually developing in the 24 sculptures comprising the collection "Steel Horses." Its current form is the result of the work process. The self-imposed limitations I faced in the process were:

Models:	Two horses: Rey de Bastos and Buen Amigo.
Subject:	a sculpture of a horse that at the same time makes sounds like a musical instrument.
Sound advisor:	José Pérez de Arce.
Material:	Forged and welded steel
Technique:	Construction in modules for disassembly into 30 pieces.
Size:	Large, visible in the mountains.
Weight:	Maximum 2 tons as it must be carried in 30 parts weighing 70 kilos each, using a 30-mule train on a 2-day journey along a mountain track.
Structural Calculations:	Steel plates and welding technique, reinforced to resist wind speeds of up to 200 km/hr., four 1-m ³ foundations, each one weighing approximately 2 tons.

Work Process

Considering the final objective, I began working on the idea of an open horse. For this purpose, I produced approximately 30 small-scale sculptures whose form provided greater or lesser resistance to the wind and which somehow produced sounds through vibration:

Three wire-mesh horses completely open to the wind.

Six versions made of forged steel plate, opened up.

One version in steel cable

Five versions in forged steel

Three versions with a laminated structure (Origami)

Three versions in which the steel is used in large masses to oppose its physicality to the wind.

Three versions in heavy forged steel following the actual structure of a horse.

One version in oxyacetylene-cut steel designed to make the wind whistle through its cracks.

One version made of steel sheets.

Two hanging sculptures, very light.

Three versions of 'Drinker of the Winds' combining structure with plates that can be adjusted according to the direction and force of the wind.

Subject Matter

I mentioned in the beginning that the subject matter of this equestrian sculpture was the figure of a horse placed in the middle of the Andes and designed to make sounds as a wind instrument. However, the deepest referent is a cultural horse: that impossible horse that all we old Chileans carry inside of us and which we will never own, regardless of how many real horses we may own or have owned. A horse that is only possible in the form of a sculpture.

I also said that the referent for this sculpture was The Andes. However, the deepest referent is the enigma of the Andes, an enigma "such that we may die from its absence" (Gabriela Mistral).

However, on the same level as these unattainable referents and with the same intensity, the referent of this sculpture is sculpture itself. That sculpture I have lived all of my life, that which can only be had by making it, and which one never has.

I agree with my master Anthony Caro: "a sculptor must be obsessive with sculpture, live sculpture..." and God knows I have been and I have...

In the course of this work, it finally became clear to me that a sculptor must not only be obsessive with sculpture but he must also be obsessive about his ultimate referents. If he is, somehow, at some point in his life, he may begin to put together things from outside and things from within, the history of sculpture with his own personal history. Great sculpture has always been created like this: on the fringes of art.