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# Kentucky Derby

OFFICIAL PROGRAM

KENTUCKY DERBY

137<sup>th</sup>

CHURCHILL DOWNS

5.7.11



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# PAINT ON THE TRACK:

## *Humphrey's Horses Capture the Energy of Life*



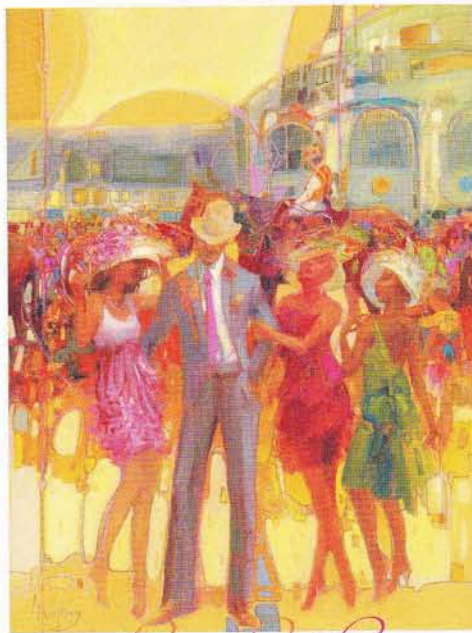
Photo courtesy of © Linda Graham/Anuleto VO

On its final stretch, the horse kicks up dust from the track that explodes into color. Fans and owners pour onto the racetrack, and the dust envelops the horse as though he's already draped in roses—as if the horse and jockey have already been crowned winners of the Kentucky Derby.

The viewer becomes the finish line in the official painting of the 2011 Kentucky Derby. Internationally known equine artist Lesley Humphrey painted the Derby poster artwork on hardboard panels coated with gold gesso, which lends a vibrant glow to the horse haloed in a large "O"—only one letter from a word etched directly into the gold: "Won!"

Messages of hope are scrawled into the gesso of all three paintings Humphrey created. The Oaks painting depicts hat-wearing revelers in the Churchill Downs paddock, and barely visible in arches of cloud and shifts of color above their heads is the word "Health." In a limited edition extended painting of the paddock, thrilled owners gather around their prize filly, the word "Love" hovering in the sky.

"I inscribed and designed around the word 'Love' because I have never met anyone more passionate about anything than the owners, jockeys and trainers have for the athletes and the sport of racing,"



*Kentucky Oaks*  
Churchill Downs July 6, 2011

***"Lesley herself is extremely colorful. She's extremely passionate, and that just spills and bubbles up in her work."***

Humphrey said.

But love permeates all of Humphrey's works—beginning with the first horses she ever drew.

"I cannot ever remember a moment that I was not drawing horses," said Humphrey, who spent her childhood in Lancashire, England, dropping out of trees onto the backs of cart horses on a farm near her house.

"This field contained an old stream, which wound all through a corner of it. The bed contained a rough, grainy clay, and I would create fat little sleeping horses (always lying down because I knew nothing of armatures back then, and the legs would snap off). The gentle, old farm horses, often curious, would come and see what I was doing in case I was making carrots," Humphrey said.

From her youth in Britain's Pony Club to show jumping, fox hunting, dressage and eventing as an adult, Humphrey has experienced nearly every type of horse event—and has witnessed hundreds.

"She has traveled the world studying firsthand all kinds of equine events, getting up close and personal," said Julie Buchanan-Springer, who was serving as executive director of the American Academy of Equine Art in Georgetown, Kentucky, when she first met Humphrey. Capturing the

look of an event isn't enough for Humphrey, Buchanan-Springer insisted.

"She creates what she sees, what she feels and what she takes from the event—meaning the entire atmosphere surrounding the event," she said.

But when Humphrey was being considered to create the official artwork for the 2011 Derby, she was faced with a challenge: she had to capture the heart and soul of the Derby and Oaks—but she had never attended either.

Her solution? Total immersion. Humphrey checked into Louisville's Brown Hotel, (where Derby society has congregated since the hotel was built in 1923), ate a Kentucky Hot Brown and early the next morning arrived at a training barn at Churchill Downs to watch the horses warm up. The enthusiasm of the owners and trainers channeled the spirit she wanted to capture.

"It dawned on me that these were the people who live the Derby dream 24/7, 365 days a year. It flows through their blood like fine Kentucky bourbon, fuels their dreams and infects them with passion," Humphrey said.

Humphrey was also inspired that day by the story of a jockey, Justin Vitek, whose friends rallied to support his family after he died of leukemia in 2010.

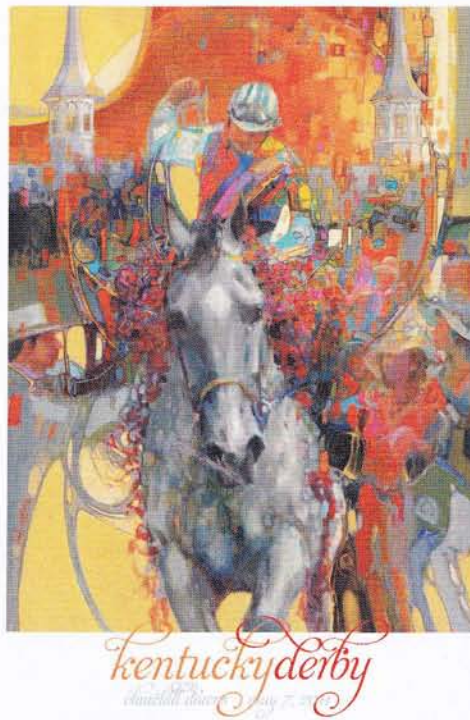
That story became the inspiration for the Oaks painting, titled "Horses & Hope." Humphrey's own family populates the piece, in which she has named every character: Lilly, the stargazer, reminds Humphrey of her daughter, Lauren, while Jim, with a bourbon-flavored "Beam" in his eye, was modeled after Humphrey's husband, Larry, and son, Chris. Proceeds from its sale will go to the painting's namesake charity organized by Kentucky first lady Jane Beshear to benefit cancer victims and their families in Kentucky's horse racing industry.

The theme of hope came to permeate all three works Humphrey produced for the Derby—and it went far beyond the words etched behind the paint.

"I thought, if there was only one more painting left to do in my life, what would I want it to say? What last message would I want my kids to know? The words literally hit me: 'Don't give up.'"

The grey horse in the Derby painting "Victory" was inspired by past Derby winners Silver Charm and Monarchos, while the jockey was modeled after three-time Derby winner Gary Stevens. "Victory" communicates the exhilaration of succeeding against all odds, Humphrey said—something she hopes everyone can relate to.

Yet the painting also portrays a moment few people ever experience: "How many of us can ever know what it feels like to win the Derby? Very few, and yet I wanted to create a painting that would capture what it feels like to have won," said Humphrey.



And it seems she's succeeded.

"Lesley herself is extremely colorful. She's extremely passionate, and that just spills and bubbles up in her work," said Clare Jett, president of JettStream Productions, which has published the Derby art series for 11 years running. "Racing fans and the casual fan have absolutely embraced it like we've never seen before."

In more than 20 years as a professional artist, Humphrey's work has been displayed in such venues as Lexington's International Museum of the Horse, the Marietta-Cobb Museum in Atlanta and Christie's in Britain. In 2006, she was presented to the Queen of England after painting the Grenadier Guards' Brigadier General in honor of her uncle, Norman Ball, and the soldiers who served with him during World War II. Today, Humphrey splits her time between Magnolia, Texas, and Charlotte, North Carolina, but her "love for the Bluegrass" draws her back to Kentucky again and again.

So the opportunity to attend the Derby and Oaks this year, where Humphrey will sign posters, is a pleasure that's long overdue.

"This is a dream come true for me. The real payback is my family and I will see the Derby together. My Derby, Derby 137," she said.

There could be no better place for an artist whose passion for horses and for painting combines into a "perfect storm," according to Jett.

"I know how a horse feels, whether I'm trotting children around with a pony and buggy around my neighborhood, or feeling what it's like to fly like the wind on a massive athlete, or take a leap of faith into a water jump. I know what it's like to win, and I certainly know what it's like to lose. I know what it takes to keep on trying, no matter what," Humphrey said. "The energy of life is my inspiration, and horses are my representative for the spirit of life."

## Lesley Humphrey will be signing on track.

**Kentucky Oaks Day**  
2 p.m. - 3 p.m. at Gate 18  
3:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. at  
Millionaires Row 4

**Kentucky Derby Day**  
2 p.m. - 4 p.m. at Gate 18

JettStream Productions  
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