

Student brings animals onto canvas

Wietje Nolte (26) does her doctorate about cattle but her heart beats for painting horses.

Already at the age of two years Wietje Nolte could not put down the pencil anymore. That's what her parents let her know. Born in Stralsund [northern Germany], she started horse riding at the age of 12. And somehow both hobbies merged together.

In 2014 the 26-year old started painting horses on a professional level. At the time she had just moved to Rostock and with her connections to local barns it was easy for her to find customers for commission animal portraits. "At first I just wanted to earn a little extra on the side during my studies", says Nolte. But with her detailed and true to life paintings/ drawings of horses (and riders), the customer base grows rather quickly. The well-known State Stud in Redefin remains her "golden source of inspiration".

Since horses do not like to pose for portraits hours on end, Wietje Nolte gets photographs from her customers. "Ideally, I get pictures from different perspectives to get a better idea of the animal and its personality." After all, she does not get to know most of the four legged fellows in reality. Every tendon, every skin fold and even the eye lashes have to be right. "I want the rider/ owner to truly recognize his or her horse in the painting." That why, in her opinion, also irregularities are important to the final picture. According to her every aspect or body part has its challenges. "Only the eyes are more tricky and need a lot of skill, because they're so expressive and have to look lively", says Nolte about her self-expectations.

She has also taken a scientific approach towards horses. She did her Bachelor degree in Animal Husbandry in the Netherlands. In Rostock she continued with a Master degree – but now, for the doctorate, she has turned towards cattle. "But not because I wanted a change of species necessarily, but because there was no equine topic available here", she says. Automatic side-effect: as a PhD-candidate she works in the research institute in Dummerstorf, only a few kilometers from the barn where she has her own horse. Another place where she people approach her for commission pieces. But most of the commissions come in via Facebook.

Next two mares and stallions she paints lots of other animals as well. Either with pencil or with oil on canvas. She acquired most of her technical skills from books. "I didn't attend special courses." She also portraits people. "A while ago an acquaintance of mine commissioned a portrait of a friend of hers in the Andy-Warhol-style." Cars and helicopters are the only things she refuses to paint.

Depending on size and technique she works up to a few months on a single piece. "That's mainly because I paint in the evening and on weekends, next to my PhD-position." That's why she's happy about the days getting longer: "Daylight is the best light for painting."

Original text by Claudia Tupeit.