
Harmonic Convergence

Laurie Kersey fuses her love of art and horses on canvas

BY ELIZABETH L. DELANEY





▲ **Cooling Off, oil, 24 x 36.**
 ◀ **Spring Sun, oil, 20 x 24.**

WHEN ASKED how long she has been an artist, Laurie Kersey always answers, “Since crayons.” The resolute acceptance that art was part of her from the beginning fuels her creativity as well as a drive to persevere in all of her passionate pursuits.

Kersey spent her formative years in Ohio, where she grew up in a house filled with the creative spirit. Her mother painted in her free time, and young Laurie joined in with her crayons. When she was 13, she started to accompany her mom to art fairs, where the two exhibited their work together.

Kersey continued to make art throughout high school, and after graduation she enrolled at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh to study commercial art. That led to a 15-year career as an art director and illustrator. She especially enjoyed the tangible aspects of that work, such

as drawing by hand and lettering. (To this day, she hand-renders a typographic signature on each of her canvases, which many people mistake for a stamp.)

Then, as her industry began to undergo a paradigm shift, she decided to create a shift of her own. The commercial art world was rapidly moving toward computer-based rendering and digital media, and Kersey didn’t want to give up her tactile processes. So she turned back to her first love: fine art. She had been painting as a self-taught artist for eight years at that point and felt called to pursue the path full time.

Not feeling like she was getting the education she needed from studying on her own, she relocated to San Francisco to attend the Academy of Art University. “I realized there were things those artists I saw in magazines and books knew that I didn’t [know],” she says. “I knew



representation

Jones & Terwilliger Galleries, Carmel-by-the-Sea and Palm Desert, CA;
Mountain Trails Fine Art, Santa Fe, NM;
K. Nathan Gallery, La Jolla, CA;
www.lauriekersey.com.

upcoming shows

California Art Club Gold Medal Exhibition, Bowers Museum, Santa Ana, CA, July 17-August 21.
Cheyenne Frontier Days Western Art Show & Sale, Cheyenne, WY, July.



Cinching Up, oil, 18 x 24.



Harmony, oil, 24 x 30.

I needed to get more of an education in painting.” Pulling up stakes and moving to California was, perhaps, prescient on several levels. In addition to bolstering her fine-art training at the academy, she also met her future husband, fellow painter Brian Blood.

While at the academy, Kersey painted a variety of subjects, including cityscapes, still lifes, and florals. Landscapes took center stage in her work when she and Blood moved to Pebble Beach nearly two decades ago. “The landscape is spectacularly gorgeous,” she says of her California home. “That’s when the landscape painting really kicked in. I would see things everywhere crying out to be painted.”

True to form, Kersey was inspired by her surroundings. “I enjoy painting just about anything, but the subject tends to follow wherever my life goes,” she explains. And even though she continued to immerse herself in the gleaming light and colors of the California coast, it wouldn’t be long until another of her first loves—horses—permeated her field of vision.

KERSEY HAS SPENT much of her life around horses, in one capacity or another. Her father and grandfather trained and raced harness horses when she was a child, and she had the opportunity to hang out around the barn or at the race-track and help tend to the animals. She rode a little back then, as well—nothing too serious, she says—and at the same time, she began to forge a connection with the horses.

Kersey's path took her away from horses during her college and early professional days, as she moved from city to city seeking her next adventure. It was the act of finally settling in California, however, that reunited Kersey with her

old equine friends. She started riding again, this time pursuing it with new vigor. In fact, her love of riding equaled her passion for painting, although at that point, they were two very distinct facets of her life. "I had my art life, which was landscape and floral, and then my horse life, which was riding, and they were completely separate," she says.

It wasn't until some time later, when circumstances prevented her from riding, that Kersey began to fuse her passions together. Temporarily out of the saddle, she nevertheless felt drawn to the stable, to be near the horses and bask in their presence. Soon, she started to sketch. It was challenging at first; she

had to get used to mobile subjects with minds of their own. But she persisted, and one day her horse sketches evolved into a painting. "That's when I became obsessed," she says.

When she returned to riding, Kersey had come full circle with her creative practice, having found a way to realize her love for horses through visual expression. "I really feel like I've found my thing," she says. "It combines all my favorite things: It's got the art, it's got the horses, and I'm outside." She says the only other thing she needs is music, but the visual and emotional harmony she brings to her paintings has all the elements of a moving song.



Quality Time, oil, 30 x 20.



The Crossing, oil, 14 x 11.



Stillness, oil, 18 x 24.

TODAY, KERSEY continues the same practice that started it all. She frequently visits two nearby stables—one where she rides and another where she just observes the horses. Spending time with the animals inspires almost all of her paintings. Something as simple as one movement or interaction between horses could send her rushing off for her camera to capture the scene while it plays out. Other times, she might notice a light pattern falling across the space, or a certain collection of shapes within a grouping of animals.

Kersey deeply loves the act of riding a horse—the freedom and excitement it brings—but she equally, if not more so, loves getting to know the horses. She studies their relationships while building



Hot Pursuit, oil, 18 x 24.



Summer Days, oil, 18 x 24.

a rapport of her own with them at the same time. She feels like she can visually translate their body language, gestures, and interactions, both with other horses and with humans. “I focus on the relationships, whether it’s the relationship between horses or there’s a human in there,” she says. “It’s that part of it that I enjoy the most, and that I try and get into a painting.”

Ultimately, Kersey strives to evoke the intimate connections and bonds among the horses—the things people fail to see or aren’t paying attention to. Her close observation and careful, empathetic translation of what lies just under the surface breathe life into her compositions.

Executing a naturalistic interpretation of the horses is important for Kersey, and she goes to great lengths to study and understand their anatomy. In addition to looking through books, the artist gains physical understanding of equine body

structure from riding and brushing the animals.

Her extensive knowledge of both anatomy and personality also comes from the sheer number of horses she has met over the years. She has been able to sketch and ride many breeds with many different temperaments. In fact, she has purposely never owned her own horse, which allows her to get to know myriad individual characters.

Kersey’s painting process is a methodical one, and she’s deliberate in her approach to each piece. Once something catches her eye, she takes reference photos. From there, she makes value studies in pencil or on her iPad. Color studies come next, in the form of plein-air oil sketches she uses only for color reference. Then, she focuses on arranging the composition before completing a flurry of additional sketches and checkpoints for precision. Finally, she’s ready to paint.

Once the paint application begins, however, Kersey has an “anything goes” approach. The meticulous advance preparation allows her the freedom to paint in whatever way works for that piece. She has already drawn on her years of training and experience in the field to build a solid foundation from which the charm and essence of the painting can grow. In all, each painting is a manifestation of the artist’s separate passions, converged into one harmonious arrangement of light, color, and exquisite figure. ❖

Elizabeth L. Delaney is a freelance arts writer and publications editor based in Charlotte, NC.

See more of Kersey’s work at
[www.southwestart.com/featured/
kersey-l-jun2022](http://www.southwestart.com/featured/kersey-l-jun2022).