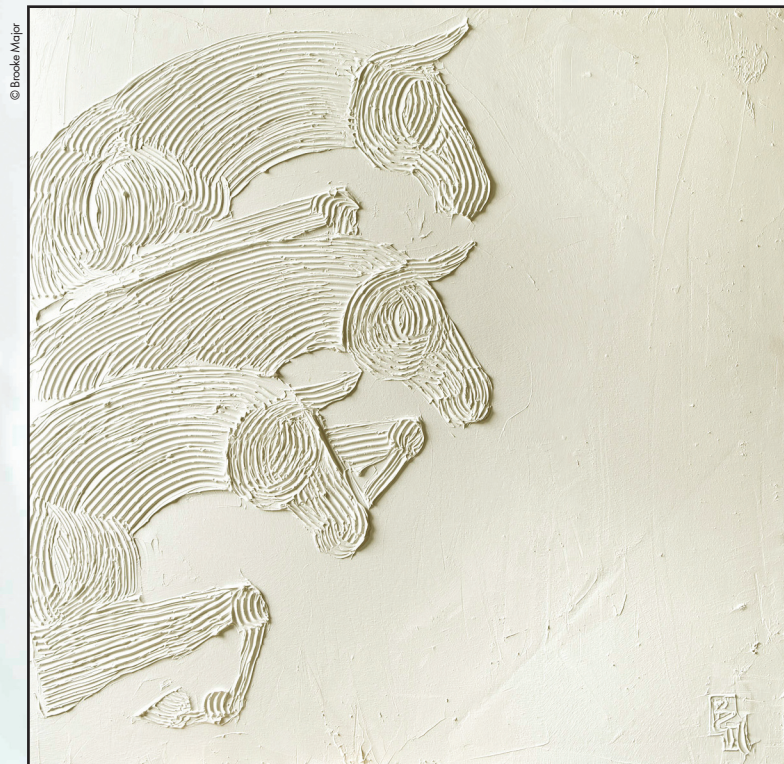



'LIVING SCULPTURES': BROOKE MAJOR BLENDS ART AND BREEDING

By Hannah Sherk - © Courtesy Of Brooke Major



Above: "Showjumpers," by Brooke Major, is sculpted titanium white oil paint on canvas, 30 x 30 inches.



In her grain-loft studio in Normandy, France, Brooke Major adds oil paint to oil paint, building up layers until the surface begins to take on dimension—a sculpture on canvas. The topography rises from the surface, joining forms to shape the arc of a loose mane, the knock knees of a foal, the curve of a cowhand's rope.

Canvas after canvas shows horses rendered in white—sometimes accented with gold leaf—where, absent of color, texture conveys motion. As the light shifts, so do the shadows. Ridge-lines of paint rise and fall, suggesting aliveness of forms that seem to breathe.

With paint still wet on her hands, Major might then step away from her clean white canvases to muck out straw bedding or check on a mare close to foaling. The same hands that build delicate, sculptural forms on canvas she puts to work in the daily chores of farm life. In Normandy, her 18th-century farm is home to both her art practice and the horses who make up her show jumping breeding operation, Dada Farm.

At Dada Sport Horses, Brooke Major spends her days between the mares and foals of her breeding program and immortalizing her horse muses on canvas in her sculptural paintings.

© Courtesy Of Brooke Major

“ALL I WANTED
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—BROOKE MAJOR

The name—like her life—merges art and horses, nodding to the Dada art movement and her desire to break from convention, and also a play on “dada,” the French word for a hobby horse.

“If I didn’t have my art, I couldn’t do the farm—and if I didn’t do the farm, I couldn’t do my art,” Major said. “It kind of is working together, interwoven. Basically, the horses that I breed allow me to understand the paintings that I paint.”

The American rider and artist, originally from Atlanta, Georgia, got her start riding at her grandfather’s trail horse operation before taking lessons in the city. She moved through the hunter ranks but ultimately found that her heart was in the jumper ring.

“I started doing that when I was about 6 or 7, doing the hunters, until going around eight fences and always the ‘1-2-3, 1-2-3’ thing got boring,” Major said. “So I had to move on, and I wanted to do the jumpers. I liked the time, and I liked the speed.”

From an early age, Major was as drawn to making art as she was to horses. As she neared the end of high school, she hadn’t outgrown her two big interests, yet neither passion offered a clear career path.

“All I wanted to do was art and horses, and art and horses,” Major said. “And my mom just thought to herself, ‘She’s never going to make any money doing either thing, so what are we going to do about this kid?’



Opposite: “He just, from a standstill, jumped over this 2.10-meter gate,” Brooke Major said of Seringat as a young horse. “We looked at each other with these gigantic eyes, like, ‘This one—maybe we shouldn’t sell it!’” The horse went on to compete successfully in international grand prix classes with numerous riders, including Spain’s Eduardo Alvarez Aznar (pictured).

At her mother’s suggestion, Major looked into school abroad. She initially moved to Paris, France, to study political science at the American University of Paris, and she interned at the U.S. Embassy. But she also spent her days roaming the museums and galleries, absorbing the city’s French and gothic architecture, and auditing classes at the École des Beaux-Arts, a prestigious school of fine arts.

Even with all the city had to offer in terms of culture, Major was increasingly drawn out of the city back to the countryside and to horses. On a trip to Normandy to buy a horse, she found herself on the grounds of an old castle. She got into a conversation with the stud farm owner that proved life changing.

“We got to talking, and he’s like, ‘Oh, do you want to take over my stud? There’s no one to take care of them,’” she said. “I was like, ‘OK, that sounds interesting. I can live in a castle with horses like a 7-year-old princess.’”

The question didn’t linger: Her answer was a quick yes. “I moved into this place, and I took six horses, and in five years, I turned it into 30 horses,” Major said.

‘IT WAS LIKE A RODEO’

The Selle Français had long captured her interest, so when Major arrived in Normandy, the birthplace of the breed, it felt like she had found home. And the offer to run the stud farm, Martinvast, felt like fate.

The stud owner told her the few dozen horses on his property had little handling and were more like mustangs, untouched in their pastures. She got to work training the horses, brin-

ging them into stalls and putting starts on the nearly feral animals. One colt in particular stood out for a wildness he matched with athleticism.

"This horse would literally climb up walls when I went to put his saddle on," Major said. "I was like, 'How am I going to break this horse? This is crazy.' It was like a rodeo."

She set up a makeshift roundpen in a field to start the horses and, slowly, she made progress with Seringat (Chef Rouge—Diane Du Bois, Guillaume Tell). One day, she and the farm owner set up a few crossrails and small verticals to try free jumping the horse. After the session, she went to catch him, but the colt stuck himself in a corner and pinned his ears.

In her training program, Major liked the horses to get their show foundation in the slower, softer pace of the hunter ring. But even in those early days, she could see that Seringat had grand prix talent. He would go on to fulfill that potential in a successful international career, competing at the top level and winning multiple Nations Cups with Irish rider Cian O'Connor. Now at nearly 20, the horse is still competing—a longevity and trajectory that, for Major, underscores the robustness of the breed and the value of his slow, correct start.

horses during World War II, going to extremes to prevent their horses from being seized by Nazis. Compared to the more dominant Dutch and German warmbloods, she sees modern-day French lines as both distinct and overlooked—a gap she believes traces back to the disruption the war caused to breeding programs in France. Today, she tries to hold onto what farmers from earlier generations worked fiercely to protect.

Below: "Horse and Heart," by Brooke Major, is sculpted titanium white oil paint on canvas, 30 x 40 inches.



"He just, from a standstill, jumped over this 2.10-meter gate," Major said. "We looked at each other with these gigantic eyes, like, 'This one—maybe we shouldn't sell it.'"

Living amid Normandy's history deepened Major's appreciation for the Selle Français, she said. She has learned how local farmers protected their

"[One man], he hid in the forest for a week, and he just lived on leaves and the river, so [the Germans] wouldn't take his horse," she said of the stories of midcentury farmers, passed down by locals.

The breed's history also became personal in an unexpected way. Riding along the road from the castle one day, she struck up a conversation with a "cute dairy farmer." That chance encounter turned into something more. The farmer, Julien Frigot, would eventually become her husband, and his family, she later learned, "is one of the founders of the French saddle horse breed," she said.

After they married, Major tried her hand at dairy farming, but the round-the-clock milking proved unsustainable for making art, breeding horses, and for motherhood after the couple welcomed their son. In 2025, the family found a horse farm near the beach in Normandy and purchased the property and its horses, establishing Dada Farm on their own land.

"He's really into farming, and he's really good at making crops," Major said of her husband. "I can't drive a tractor, like I'll just knock my house down. We complement each other."

The new incarnation of Dada Farm started with three mares from her previous stud and expanded that foundation to about 15, largely using the stallion Air Jordan Z (Argentinus—Mandoline, Matador). She appreciates the sire's tendency to throw fillies—11 of her 12 have been female—as she builds up a strong broodmare band.

A HORSEWOMAN'S EYE

When Ilka Gansera-Léveque first came across Major's paintings, she recognized the rider as a kindred spirit. They were both horsewomen in the art world—Major as a breeder and artist, Gansera-Léveque as a race horse trainer, veterinarian, and a gallery owner who established the Art & Horse Racing Gallery out of the Newmarket Racing Stable (England).

Below: Brooke Major and her family moved to their own farm in Normandy, France, in 2025 to run Dada Sport Horses.

Gansera-Léveque had never seen anything quite like Major's distinctive, sculptural style. It was an approach that Major had developed gradually. In her early 20s, she began experimenting with the bas-relief method, building the painting outward and scraping away to reveal bits of color. But she said she had an "aha moment" when she turned to an all-white palette, finding a freedom to explore architecture and equestrian scenes within monochrome.

"If you have it in a room [where] the light changes throughout the day, the painting changes with it, in a way, because you have different shadows," Gansera-Léveque said.

At the Art & Racing Gallery, where people step into the showroom directly from the stables, she says that Major's dual identity as both horsewoman and artist shapes how her work is both made and received. It's clear to other equestrians that the artist behind these forms has a deep understanding and appreciation for the anatomy and movement of the horse.



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Above: "New Beginnings" by Brooke Major is sculpted titanium white oil paint on canvas, 16 x 40 inches. **Below:** "The Great Escape" by Brooke Major is sculpted titanium white oil paint on canvas, 36 x 36 inches.

"She's a really hands-on horse person," Gansera-Léveque her said. "A lot of people paint horses, but they're not actually in it every day. She really understands what she's drawing."

Major's work has gained traction on the international art circuit. Alongside commissions from clients, her paintings are now represented by about 15 galleries across the U.S., with growing interest abroad. But even as her reach expands, her process remains rooted in the same daily rhythm: feeding the horses first, checking on the mares and foals, then heading to the studio. Each part of her life informs the other.

"When it's really something unique and handmade, it has its own energy," Gansera-Léveque said of Major's work. "It's almost like it's living; it has its own energy. You can feel the difference."

For Major, the horses she breeds are not just subjects. She sometimes refers to her horses as her "living sculptures," and she sees her breeding program as an extension of her artistic practice.

In her ideal world, those two paths would converge completely. Major has imagined a day when a horse might be presented and sold in a gallery setting, alongside her work on the walls, "to sell the horses as living sculptures through art galleries," she said. In that sense, it also reflects the ethos behind Dada Farm itself: a breaking of boundaries between disciplines, where art and life are part of the same creative process.

For now, a distinction remains between her literal and flesh-and-blood artwork. But on her farm in Normandy, it's already blurred. ■

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