



Daybreak in the Camargue: There's a distinctive ambience in this remote region of southern France—most of it wet.

This is the largest river delta in all of Western Europe, swathed in lakes and marshlands that spill from the Rhone River flood plain. With cultural roots that pre-date the Romans who settled here over 2000 years ago, the whole area reeks of pre-Christian mythology.

But at this moment, Bobbie Goodrich couldn't be less interested in ancient history. She's knee deep in swamp water and seriously wondering if she'll ever again lift the foot of her Gore-Tex® waders from the Camargue's relentless mud. And it's cold—pre-dawn, bonechilling cold. She can already sense the gradual invasion of a virus that, in about 24 hours, will put her in bed with a fever—despite her double-layered cocoon of borrowed jackets, extra scarves and gloves, spare pants, and the thick socks she purchased just yesterday in the nearby village of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer.

Add to all this the constant hassle of protecting a Canon 20D—plus zoom lens, tele-extender, etc.—from a sudden slosh of salt brine. It's fair to ask, why in the world is she doing this? Then, slowly, a pale sun rises over the Camargue, and the "why" soon shows its head.

Heads, to be exact, about 60 of them: a herd of this region's most distinctive native fauna, les chevaux de camargue, the famed, ghostly white horses of the Camargue.

Bobbie Goodrich is by no means the first photographer to record these extraordinary creatures, and for all the physical rigors of this type of shoot, she's not out here raking in a fat day rate for a fall Hummer campaign. In fact, she's paying good money to a photo safari outfitter for the privilege of slogging these marshes for four days. That company, Joseph Van Os (www.photosafaris.com), includes a regular spring Camargue visit in its annual itinerary.

But Goodrich is not your garden-variety photo tourist. She's an award-winning fine art photographer with a growing worldwide clientele, and she has a refreshing take on using packaged tours as a way of getting to her subjects.

"Horses are one of my major passions," she explains. "When you're dealing with wild horses, you need a guide to get you to where the shots are. Otherwise, you spend all your time on logistics with little left over for making the picture—for actually realizing your vision. We've all heard about world-class wildlife shooters who do great long lens close-ups through the fence at some zoo. The final picture doesn't care how you got there."



The muscular Camargue horse is a dream subject for any wildlife photographer. It is, in fact, the first equine subject known to have been recorded by humans. Primitive paintings of these hardy creatures on the walls of the Lascaux Caves date back 17,000 years and depict these horses in full flight, probably from hunters or animal predators. Living off the sparse reeds and hard grasses of their native region, suffering extreme climate changes and the proximity of aggressive, territorial herds of jet-black bulls has infused this species with a blend of caution and courage. These are qualities Goodrich wanted to sculpt into her studies of this remarkable horse.

She describes her first impressions: "You hear them first, pounding toward you, powerful and sure-footed. They're agile and spirited, totally unafraid of humans. But they're still wary prey animals bent on survival, fearless and fearful at the same time. You see it in the furtive way they use their peripheral vision. And there's this sense

of closeness between them—almost humanlike relationships."



The flu bug that accompanied Bobbie and her Epsom portable hard drive from the salt marshes became a kind of villain in this drama. While downloading files from the P2000 to her Power Mac G5, a fever-induced miscalculation managed to corrupt a bunch of her prize captures. Even so, her soggy Camargue adventure yielded a handful of what were to become some of her best-known images.

The portrait "Tender Moment" (page 12) is easily one of the most enduring images ever made of the Camargue horse. It's a perennial bestseller for Goodrich. As with many of her images, this success owes a debt to her background in oil painting, a discipline she pursued long before discovering her love of photography.

Goodrich is a Chicago native who lived, in an earlier incarnation, as a businesswoman and an avid dancer before the breakup of her marriage brought her west.

She first studied painting at the Scottsdale Artists' School in Arizona, where her love of dance helped spark her fascination with the work of Edgar Degas—himself a dabbler in the budding craft of photography during the late 19th century. Like many of the artists of that era—Degas, Ingres, Delacroix—Goodrich adopted the habit of making photographs to use as study models for her paintings. One such project turned out to be propitious. Enticed by her horse fascination, she shot some reference snaps at Cheyenne Frontier Days in Wyoming with plans for a future painting that would capture the earthy mood of the rodeo. The results astounded even her—the dynamic tension between rodeo cowboys and powerful livestock, and the grit of the arena, were all in the film. Here was her rodeo painting. She followed up with a serious shoot at the Calgary Stampede and was soon exhibiting her work at prestigious galleries in Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico, all showplace venues for Western-themed art. Inevitably, her painterly instincts led her to explore the possibilities of the digital world, and the tool that melds photography with a painter's sensibilities—Adobe Photoshop.

The dual Camargue portrait "Tender Moment" illustrates how Goodrich uses Photoshop as an extension of her paint box. The two figures were cropped from a much wider group shot—the original RAW file contains about 25 horses. Then, using CS2's layering, Gaussian Blur and Curves tools, the subjects were subtly vignettted and re-rendered to dramatize the detail and texture in their hides, eye color and the surrounding foliage. The overall scale was compressed and the color palette desaturated to conform with what Goodrich had begun to envision as her final image: a lyrical, early morning tableau that reveals a deep, quiet connection between these stunning animals.



The almost instant acceptance that her early work generated in the Southwestern art world animated Goodrich's interest in pursuing this romantic style of horse imagery. "Ironically," she says, "I spent most of my life scared to death of horses." As a kid, she'd made the proverbial mistake of not getting back up after a minor spill. "Photography," she muses, "finally put me back in the saddle." Shortly after her return from the Camargue, she joined a three-day horse drive from Craig, Colorado, to Steamboat Springs, sponsored by Sombrero Ranch (www.sombrero.com), an equestrian travel organizer she found on the Internet. The experience of mounting up again after so many years was "to say the least, character building." And, it turns out, it was a lucrative experience as well, since it resulted in another of her continuing bestsellers, "Gathering Dust" (page 9, bottom).



Goodrich stresses the value of using professional travel planners to give her access to the really high-quality creatures that photograph so beautifully. The sinewy trio of quarterhorses veiled by volcanic dust in "Copperash" (page 8) charged into an organized photo tour in the Pacific Northwest. Her kinetic series of Peruvian breed images—"Fuego" (page 10) "New Mexico" (page 9) "Peruvian Paseo Morning"—all emerged from an equine photography workshop led by former fashion photographer Tony Stromberg (www.tonystromberg.com) in Santa Fe. "I think of these packaged workshops as just another tool in the gadget bag," says Goodrich.

As for her hardware needs, Goodrich favors the popular Canon EOS Camera system—the 8.2-megapixel 20D and, more recently, the higher-resolution EOS 5D, which features a 12.8-megapixel sensor. As with any shooter of action subjects, Goodrich's need to remain mobile is crucial.

She keeps her lens inventory down to a Canon 70–200mm f/2.8 zoom, frequently augmented by a 2X tele-extender. These days, she often carries a Canon 100–400mm zoom, always trying to improve her capability to accommodate unpredictable changes in subject distance and, at the longer focal lengths, to add that apparent compression of perspective that helps isolate the bold shapes of these powerful animals. Occasionally, a Bogen monopod rounds out her gear, but it's rare that she has the luxury of using it.

The digital revolution has helped restore photography as an intensely personal craft, much as it was for most of its early history. The photographer functions again as his own lab, printer and retoucher. But producing saleable, gallery-quality work at Goodrich's level remains a collaborative process.

Printing is one major function she outsources. "I'm still a painter," she says, "and I love the drama of the broad 'canvas'— 20x30 at the smallest, up to 60x70. Like a lot of us, I'm not set up to print at those sizes with any consistency." Goodrich can manipulate her files in Photoshop and interpolate up to this scale, but the actual print production is done by Image Craft (www.imcraft.com) of Scottsdale, Arizona—her adopted hometown for half the year.



Gallery owners and museum curators are obviously major collaborators. All notions of purely "fine" art aside, the portrayal of romanticized subject matter like the venerable horse, one of mankind's most cliché-ridden icons for power and grace, is largely a decorative craft.

"I've had at least one commission," she remembers, "where the clients brought me an elaborate antique picture frame and wanted a photograph made that would complement the frame." So, decisions about the elements of presentation—mounting, framing, choice of print surface—are always critical. In this respect, Goodrich's collaborators are among the best, especially throughout the Southwest: Magidson Fine Art in Aspen, Colorado, the first gallery to exhibit her Horses of the Camargue series; Norm Clasen Gallery in Basalt, Colorado, which will mount a new show of some recent Goodrich wild horse studies in black-and-white and color; Rinascere Studios, Ltd. of Lake Oswego, Oregon, a firm that provides high-quality art for fundraising events and charity auctions; Es Posible Gallery in Scottsdale, Arizona; Ilene Gartenstein Art Advisory in Phoenix; and the Phoenix Art Museum, which features "Tender Moment" as part of their permanent online collection.

During March and April 2007, her work will be featured by the Desert Caballeros Western Museum in Wickenburg, Arizona. This event will showcase 55 women artists whose work revolves around the Western lifestyle. The museum calls it "art from the other half of the West," but the exhibit's official title couldn't be more appropriate for the little girl who fell out of the saddle all those years ago: "Cowgirl Up."

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