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TM Davy: *Horses*
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11R
195 Chrystie Street
New York, NY

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TM Davy, Horse (x), 2016, Oil on canvas, 79 x 98 inches (200.7 x 248.9 cm), All images are courtesy the artist and 11R, New York.

From the Paleolithic to the present, mankind has painted representations of the horse, an elegant symbol of wealth, power, strength and speed which is more than capable of transporting us from here to there. In his current show at 11R, TM Davy exhibits eight equine portraits, five large-scale full body works along with three smaller grazing portraits. These realist paintings of Davy's (all from 2016) are also meant to transport us in time, but by means of very personal baggage delivered in a note found by the artist on the back of photograph written by an ancestor and dated 1880. In fact, all of these paintings, with their pristine academic surfaces, feel as if they could have been easily executed a hundred and forty years ago.

But this stable of horse portraits resides at 195 Chrystie Street in New York at 11R and that knowledge provides us with a key to a far different doorway. The address just so happens to be the exact same location where Davy's great-great-great grandfather worked in horse stables after emigrating from Germany in the mid-19th century.

Add in the fact that Davy in his previous show at 11R, *Candela*, exhibited a group of intimate smaller paintings, where his subjects were illuminated solely by candlelight; candle as both light source and thematic transmitter and one can't help but attach another layer of mysticism to the exhibition. Whether he is measuring units of light or speed and power, Davy manages to load his subject with the intimacy of his own personal history.

Originally, my thought was to candlelit séances and convening with the dead, but the ghostly apparitions in these paintings don't ride in on these horses, instead their spirits are embodied by them. The transmigration of souls fills these four legged vessels of ancestry with a charge of history that is both personal and to some extent art historical. Consider that the birth of Abstract Expressionism, the first truly American style of painting, was fostered at the Stable Gallery, a converted livery stable on 58th Street by Eleanor Ward in the Fifties and you have yet another doorway to open in Davy's time portal.



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The first two paintings in the show, *horses (xo)*, of a mare and her foal and *horse (x)*, of a stallion, are separated and stabled parallel to each other. Like a family divided, they stand motionless in their light flooded stables and face Chrystie Street. The mare and foal in *horses (xo)* gaze out a shoulder height window opening. The wall of their stall is aglow in a shaft of prismatic light. Davy's search for scientific fact is married to an odd sense of humor as is evidenced in the spectral, sculptural cast shadows on the walls in both paintings. Across the barrel of the black and white mare, I couldn't help but notice a reflected pattern in the sheen of light that hauntingly appears to resemble the exterior view of a gothic cathedral with its repetitive series of darkened lancet windows (ribs to ribbed vault).

The white stallion with black mane and tail in *horse (x)* however, glares with a sparkling and defiant light blue, almost anthropomorphic, eye at the viewer and away from the light source emanating from the direction of Chrystie Street. He feels as if he had escaped from one of William Blake's tinted watercolor illustrations for Dante's *Inferno*. The horses in both paintings appear to be suspended in a beam of rainbow colored amber; each trapped inside a refracted light dispersed by a prism as if it were designed by Dan Flavin.



TM Davy, *Horse (xox)*, 2016, Oil on linen, 79 x 99 inches (200.7 x 251.5 cm), All images are courtesy the artist and 11R, New York.

The surface of both paintings feels more groomed and polished than a gathering of brushstrokes. The smooth glassy surfaces seem barely touched by a brush, and upon closer inspection, I noticed fingerprints along the gessoed side of the canvas giving me the impression that Davy might in fact rub his wet surfaces with his hands and fingers. Even the longer fur of the foal is more about manipulation of surface than additive marks.

The two stalls are virtually spotless. No hint to service is presented with the horses. Are they stabled for labor or for sport? But for all the care to depicting their surfaces, Davy portrays the horses in an artificial setting. The shallow, shadow box spaces of these stables give the viewer no choice but to confront the horses. It wouldn't surprise me to find out that these were horses modeled after some type of figurine; lit in boxes, like Nicholas Poussin with his clay model classicism.

In the next gallery, a single mischievous brown and white spotted pony, *horse (xx)*, with a parted white blaze down the middle of its forehead the shape of an upside down drip releases a stream of urine more steady than its own legs. Somehow that urine doesn't disrupt, with so much as a single drip or splash, its dark and

immaculate space. In *horse (xxx)*, the head and neck portrait of a grazing light chestnut mare whose mane is punctuated by two dangling, blonde braids that appear almost human. In another head and neck portrait, *horse (xoox)*, the subject grazes in a field while wearing a fuchsia fly mask which has a distended eye patch with a wayward erect iris/nipple pointing off to the left.



TM Davy, *Horses (xoo)*, 2016, Oil on linen, 79 x 99 inches (200.7 x 251.5 cm). All images are courtesy the artist and 11R, New York.

In a second separate gallery space down the hall, we have another matching pair of large scale paintings, *horses (xoo)* and *horse (xox)*. They also occupy two parallel walls. In *horses (xoo)*, a mare and her foal share a grassy pathway covered by a barrel vault made of sassafras. The whole shape bears a strong resemblance to a pharynx and has the feel of Fragonard's French Rococo heart-shaped foliage. The arch is visually anchored in the center of the foreground by a button of manure spouting mushrooms. On the foal's rear left leg, a delicate pink vaginal gash disturbs its otherwise smooth coat.

Directly across from the pair is a brown stallion wearing hooded blinders in a shallow, dark stained plywood container. The horse bows its head and extends its tongue to lick a block of salt; whose circular "eye" stares back out at the viewer. Davy returns to his spectral light theme in this painting, but this time the rainbow of color moves off the wall and now resides across the barrel of the stallion, looking to this eye like a slightly convex Turner marine painting. The ship is now trapped in a bottle shape that is the barrel of the horse. As this captured seascape prism reflects on the horse's belly, I thought of how I had just completed a journey across the Atlantic from sea salt to salt lick.