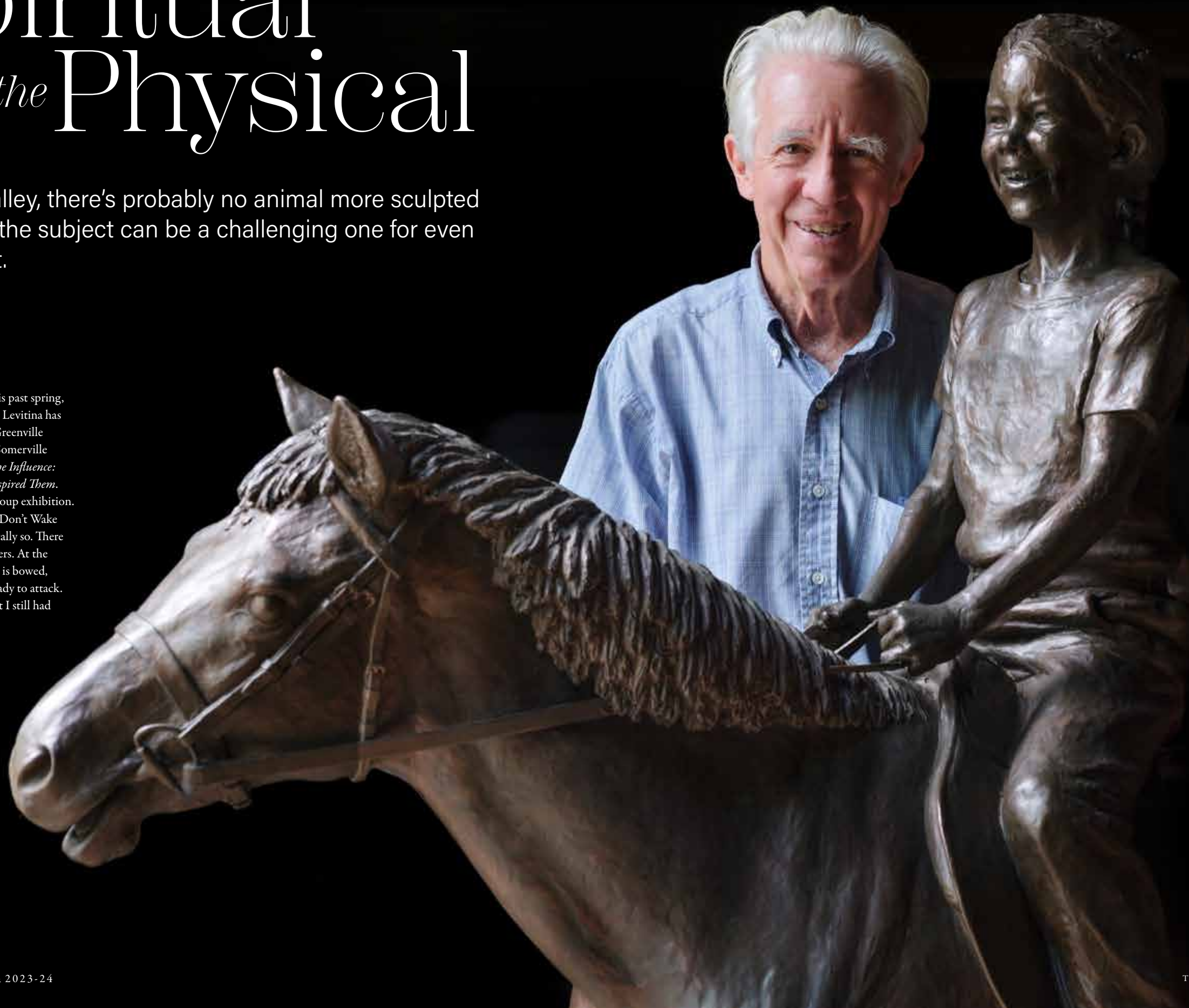


# The Spiritual and the Physical

In the Brandywine Valley, there's probably no animal more sculpted than the horse—and the subject can be a challenging one for even the most skilled artist.

BY ROGER MORRIS  
PHOTOS BY JIM GRAHAM

**O**n a hazy Saturday morning this past spring, Ukrainian-born sculptor Julia Levitina has driven from Philadelphia to Greenville to take part in a reception at Somerville Manning Gallery for *Under the Influence: Contemporary Artists and the Masters Who Inspired Them*. Levitina has multiple works featured in the group exhibition. She pauses beside two pieces, the larger one, "Don't Wake Juniper," depicting a horse at rest—yet not totally so. There are small angled wings on the animal's shoulders. At the end of an exaggerated, looping neck, the head is bowed, ears jutting forward like the horns of a bull ready to attack. "I realized when I was working in the wax that I still had something to say," Levitina says.







When Unionville artist J. Clayton Bright first started sculpting in the 1970s, he was spending the first five hours of his day working with horses. “As anyone who’s done the same can tell you, each horse, like every hound or person, is unique—both spiritually and physically,” he notes.

And so came the second piece—Juniper’s neck and head mounted on a pedestal with one small, solitary wing. “As my interests include quantum physics and relativity, I imagine this horse as a singularity—both a particle and a wave until disturbed or awakened,” Levitina says. “It’s about living in, and being grateful for, a moment in time with neither attachment nor regret.”

Levitina isn’t the only sculptor with horses in the Somerville Manning exhibit. There are several in different styles by other artists, all with some connection to the region. The subject matter is a universal one—especially in the Brandywine Valley, where there’s probably no animal more sculpted than the horse. For riders, the horse moving under them is like a fluid, living piece of sculpture come alive. Margery Torrey has had a love affair with horses for as long as she can remember. “I brought one home, and my mother let me keep it,” says Torrey, who grew

up on a farm on Long Island, New York, and today rides to the hounds in Unionville. “Toby became my mentor—a cute bay from Amarillo, Texas, that had fallen on hard times, a rescue from a horse-rental stable.”

For an artist, there are many things that guide them in capturing a horse’s form and spirit. Cochranville’s Rikki Morley Saunders sculpts only from “real life.” For years, her muse was a horse named Volant. “Volant was extraordinary, the horse of a lifetime. We competed in the long format of three-day eventing in England and the United States. At Rolex in Lexington, Kentucky, we came in fifth, which landed us on the long list for the 1984 Olympic Games,” says Saunders, who’s represented at the Brandywine Museum of Art, among other venues. “Volant and I went foxhunting after I retired him from competition. It was such a thrill to still go cross-country with this magnificent creature—so many fond memories. He lived to be 29.”







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For Olivia Musgrave, it began with an interest in Greek mythology and the relationship between Amazons and their horses. Born in Dublin to an Irish father and a Greek mother, the sculptor is represented by Somerville Manning. “The Amazons were a warrior race of women in ancient times, and I primarily wanted to depict them at rest or at play, rather than in battle,” she says. “This is a theme I return to time and time again.”

Of course, not all sculptors own horses or even ride. “Sadly, horse ownership and riding would entail a degree of leisure time my studio work and other activities don’t allow,” says Andy Scott, who has a studio in Philadelphia and is a graduate of Scotland’s Glasgow School of Art. “For the time being, I admire their esthetic beauty from ground level only.”

All the equine sculptors mentioned here would generally be considered realists, but their styles and relationships to the medium vary considerably. “I work in clay, and I cast in bronze,” Levitina says. “I work representationally from life, but I look for the extraordinary in the ordinary. I strive to communicate the sense of wonder I seek by way of my art.”

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Finished works await their owners at Rikki Morley Saunders' home.

structural challenge more than specific points of anatomy—the weight of the body supported on relatively small steel hooves and pasterns means some very challenging engineering at times,” Scott says. “Clydesdales are easier in that regard, as those huge feathered fetlocks serve as great structural supports in steel. I sometimes have to make some artistic compromises with anatomy to allow for the limitations of the welded steel. But there’s a knack for making that work visually.”

Levitina recalls the first time she sculpted a horse from life. “I was astounded by the slim profile of my Percheron model’s strong neck and his massive barrel chest held up on four legs that felt like sticks in comparison,” she says.

For her winged horses, the subjects were a pair of Percherons belonging to some friends on a farm in Lyme, Connecticut. “They were fairly docile but also very social and curious, with their snouts often right in my sketchbooks as I attempted to draw them,” she recalls. “To get the neck right, I would offer one an apple, then watch the muscles on his neck move while I guided the treat away from him and to the side, doing my best to hold his chest stationary against mine to prevent the rest of the horse from moving.”

Musgrave’s horses are often paired with Amazon riders or keepers. She seeks a more stylized look, so getting the anatomy right has never been a priority. “It’s more a sense and feel of their relationship with their Amazon riders that appeals to me,” she says. “Their vitality and versatility through movement and the composition of horse and rider together are what I find interesting to try and depict in a contemporary manner.”

Torrey may well be speaking for all her colleagues working in bronze, marble or steel when she notes that nothing beats the real thing. “Watching horses move, and having them handy to reference as I work gives my work a freshness and accuracy that nature inspires,” she says. “There’s elegance, grace, movement and strength in nature. That’s my muse.”

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A common thread throughout Levitina’s work is a sense of fluidity in her animal subjects. Torrey, by contrast, is known for her absolute realism, as though each horse is a commission of some doting owner—as it may well be. “My style is a classic blend of carefully studied anatomy, movement and striking silhouettes,” she says.

Scott’s horses sport classic poses reminiscent of the generals mounted on their steeds found in many city parks. Often outdoors in international settings, his subjects are sometimes supersized. “I usually use a

welded-steel technique I’ve honed over the years,” he says. “It involves assembling the sculptures from thousands of small segments of steel, building the sculptures up almost like a three-dimensional mosaic.”

Bright always works from a live model. “Whether the subject is about a young rider’s love of her pony, a race horse skimming a brush fence or a pony grazing, the horse’s individuality is essential to the sculpture’s success,” he says.

Horses can pose challenges for sculptors—logistical as much as artistic. “For me, it’s a

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