

S P H I N X F I N E A R T



Jonathan Kenworthy (Westmoreland, England 1943 -)

Afghan Head with Two Riders Fighting for a Carcass

signed 'Kenworthy' (lower right)
pen, crayon, ink and wash on paper
27 x 37 cm (10⁵/₈ x 14¹/₂ in)

&

Two Chapandaz

signed 'Kenworthy' (lower left)
pen, ink and wash on paper
20.1 x 28.6 cm (7⁷/₈ x 11¹/₄ in)

The present two drawings relate to Jonathan Kenworthy's trip to the Steppes of the Hindu Kush in 1977 where he watched Afghan horsemen play the game of Buzkashi, which bears very similarities to the Kazakh game of Kokpar. This trip led to the first of three New York exhibitions, entitled *Horsemen of the Hindu Kush*, in 1979 at the Coe Kerr Gallery.

The first engaging study shows the head of an Afghan man, his eyes gazing out towards the viewer. Most probably a rider in the game of Buzkashi, he shows no fear, and displays boldness and a competitive spirit, essential characteristics for this vicious sport. At his left is a study of two horsemen, captured in a dramatic moment during the game. The rapid pen marks only add to the excitement of the moment, as the figures collide with each other vying over the heavy carcass. *Afghan Head with Two Riders Fighting for a Carcass* appears to be the study for the sculpture of two almost identical Buzkashi horsemen, which Kenworthy exhibited at the Coe Kerr Gallery in 1979.

Buzkashi, which literally means 'goat dragging', is a game where a carcass, usually a calf due to its better resistance and weight, is used to score points. The object of the game is to drop the calf into the scoring

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circle. Seldom played according to official rules, as many as 500 riders may participate in one game, though for championship Buzkashi in Kabul, teams are limited to ten riders each.

Two main rules apply to every Buzkashi contest, a rider may never strike an opponent with his whip, nor deliberately unseat an opponent. Variations of the game include *darya-yi-Buzkashi*, which is played in a river or stream.

A rider's mount is considered to be the key element in a game, and there is an Afghan saying: 'better a poor rider on a good horse than a good rider on a poor horse'. Years of training are need to teach a horse not to trample an unseated rider, and how to aide the chapandaz to pick the carcass up. Good Buzkashi horses will play for up to twenty years.

The accompanying study of *Two Chapandaz* better illustrates two riders and their attire. The *chapandaz* 'master players' are wearing high leather boots, which help protect them from flying hooves. The boots have extremely high heels, which can be locked into the stirrups to prevent falls. On their heads they wear the prized Buzkashi cap, and beside them, their whip rests by their side.

To become a *chapandaz* requires great experience, courage, physical strength, and an extremely high degree of horsemanship. The origins of the game are thought to date back to the time of Alexander the Great, when the nomadic horsemen of northern Afghanistan fought against Alexander's army. The game is also sometimes associated with Genghis Khan and his Mongol horsemen, who would gallop through enemy campsites swooping up sheep, goats, and other pillage without dismounting, and it is possible that the defence mounted by the inhabitants of northern Afghanistan somehow developed into the game of Buzkashi.

Provenance:

Coe Kerr Gallery, New York
Gerald Peters Gallery, New York
Private Collection, New York

Artist description:

Jonathan Kenworthy is known for his wild animal bronzes, many inspired by his safaris in the Serengeti/Mara.

Aged eleven Kenworthy was invited to attend the Royal College of Art by John Skeaping, then Professor of the Department of Sculpture. Later Skeaping wrote of him: "He is, to my mind, the best sculptor of animals to make an appearance this century". Since then he has been widely acknowledged as the leading sculptor in his field.

He studied at the College from 1954-59 and then at the Royal Academy Schools from 1961-64. He won ten scholarships, including the Royal Academy Gold Medal in 1964. During this time he also studied animal

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anatomy at the Royal Veterinary College, before going on to dissect wild animals in the Anatomy Department of University College in Nairobi under the guidance of Prof.R.R. Hoffman.

In 1993 he was commissioned by the Duke of Westminster to create a sculpture to be placed on a lake in the gardens at Eaton Hall, in Cheshire. A second casting of the piece, depicting a lioness chasing a lesser kudu, was placed in Upper Grovesnor Gardens, in Central London. The thirty foot bronze was dedicated by the Duke to mark the opening of the gardens for the people of Westminster in June 2000.

Kenworthy is fascinated by the way both people and creatures survive in the world's great wilderness. Hence his enduring love of Africa. Here amongst the vast, remote horizons of the continent, he continues to find his subjects. He works from extensive sketchbooks. He made several appearances on British television and the BBC's cameras followed him on safari and filmed him in the studio and foundry for an hour long documentary entitled "Kenworthy's Kenya" and shown in 1974/75. In a later programme he was filmed working on his Afghan sculptures by independent television.

His African safaris over a forty year period have been punctuated by travels in Asia. In 1977 he watched Afghan horsemen play the savage game of Buzkashi on the Steppes of the Hindu Kush. This led to the first of his three New York exhibitions: "Horsemen of the Hindu Kush" 1979, followed by the "People of the Desert" 1985 and "Survival in the Serengeti" 1991. His last major exhibition was in October 2002 in New York at the Gerald Peters Gallery.

The subjects ranged from Asia, Afghanistan and Nepal, to East Africa and Egypt from the desert to savannah.