

JONATHAN KENWORTHY

(b. 1943 Westmorland)

Afghan Head with Two Riders Fighting for a Carcass

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



Two Chapandaz

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

Provenance:

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

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 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 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 needed to teach a horse not to trample upon 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 their whips rests by their sides.

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.

