



M.C. Churchill-Nash



'till the cows come home...

Despite detours and distractions M.C. Churchill-Nash has continued to create and develop her visual vocabulary by incorporating all those diversions into her current style. From an early age she was surrounded by creative people and a variety of art forms – paintings, mobiles, music and books – gave her a well-rounded taste of the arts. Her paternal grandfather was a draftsman, movie theater designer, and self-taught painter.

As an only child there was plenty of alone time... time spent making things (drawing, mud pies...), playing with pets, riding any horse anyone would let her on, reading, gardening, collecting rocks. During family trips to stay with her grandparents in Kentucky, Churchill-Nash took riding lessons, and visited the big horse farms around Lexington. Horses were among her first drawing subjects, and at various times both a distraction and a detour. The first 'horse' was a donkey for Christmas at age five. The life-long love for horses became cemented with the first real horse at age eight. Unable to give up either passion – "While too many competing interests have jockeyed for position, often distracting me when I should be creating, they have also enhanced my love of art, and taught me to see the beauty and design in everything."

In grade school Churchill-Nash doodled horses on her notebooks, loved 'art' time, and would choose to draw during

free time in class. Her father, a general contractor (hobby photographer and painter), taught her basics of drawing, perspective, and oil painting. During her public school years classes in pastel at the Knoxville YWCA and night painting classes at nearby Maryville College filled out her early instruction. At age 14 a trip to NYC included a visit to the Met where a large exhibit of Monet's Cathedrals and Haystacks impressed her so much she began to consider art as a career... well that and a horrible experience with Algebra II that steered her away from a parallel interest in the natural sciences (geology or biology).

While in high school she ran into her first **detour**. His name was Casperone and he could jump large fences in a single bound. After taking her first jumping lessons on Casper, Churchill-Nash fell in love with the four year old Thoroughbred/Standardbred cross. Luckily he came up for sale that summer and a life-long partnership ensued. Art took a back burner until it was time to apply for college. With luck the perfect school was found.

Sullins College in Bristol, Virginia, had both a wonderful fine art curriculum AND a two-year horsemanship program. The small campus (the art department was in the attic floor of her dorm) was ideal to pursue both interests without neglecting one over the other. A two year women's college, Sullins

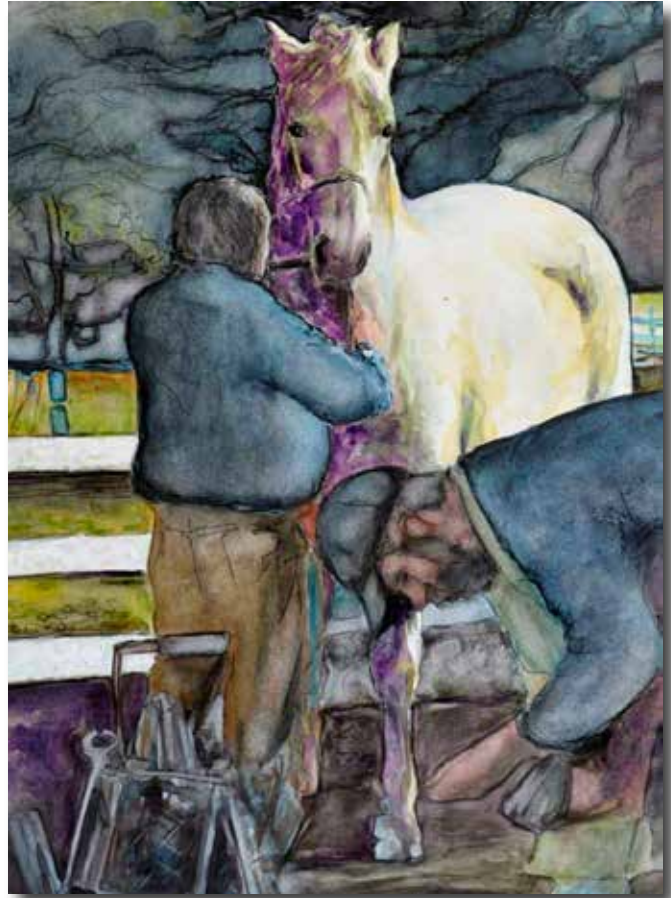
had good basics in both studio courses (drawing, painting, sculpture, and fabric design) and art history, which were further reinforced with a sophomore year interim study trip to Europe where Churchill-Nash was able to see so many major works in person.... Rijksmuseum, Louvre, Prado... The work of Goya in the Prado and Rembrandt's *Jewish Bride* in the Rijksmuseum made a big impact and led to research on old master painting methods and materials.

"While too many competing interests have jockeyed for position, often distracting me when I should be creating, they have also enhanced my love of art, and taught me to see the beauty and design in everything."

Finances being a consideration, transfer to hometown University of Tennessee was the only choice to complete her BFA. There Churchill-Nash continued to dip into various mediums not previously available (watercolor and stone lithography), plus many specialized art history courses. After taking her first watercolor classes she changed her concentration from oil painting to a combo of oil and watercolor. Watercolor instructor, Carl Sublet, taught various techniques using mixed media with watercolor that greatly influenced all her work on paper. Experience with layout and paste-up in high school journalism got her a student job in the graphic arts department at UT. After pasting up senior standing sheets day after



The Lounger (watercolor on Yupo)



Farrier Day (transparent watercolor and white gouache)

day...she swore she'd never work in commercial art ("Never say never.") Art majors were required to take electives outside their specialty, and, of course, Light Horse Management in the ag school was one such elective, Casper still being a large part of her life, even though he wasn't ridden much during college years.

After graduation the family construction business needed an office person. Churchill-Nash needed studio space. The combination worked out for plenty of creative time, plus hands on learning about running a business, taxes, and (back to the math phobia!) learning to estimate painting and concrete for jobs. Doing some drafting and drawing elevations for remodel projects led to a brief fascination with architecture... until she realized the vast majority of architects designed warehouses, not FLW's *Falling Water House*.



Giles and the Girls (watercolor)

Meanwhile she worked to improve her drawing and painting skills, reading, visiting museums, along with entering local and national juried shows, and doing local art fairs. Churchill-Nash found a niche in miniature work and entered miniature and small works shows, winning some awards and making sales. The study of old masters oil painting techniques led to teaching classes in beginning and intermediate oil painting for the Tennessee Artists Association, local arts group. Casper continued to be a distraction... along with seeing a handspinning demonstration and developing in interest in both spinning and fiber arts. While working in construction, painting, and spinning (charter member of TN Valley Handspinners Guild), she took a riding vacation at a school in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. There as well as riding she got to see interesting archeological sites, met local artists creating beautiful silver work, and was amazed at the bright



The Red Mile (watercolor and prismacolor pencil)

color palette of the Mexican crafts. At the riding school she met some riders from Florida that increased her interest in competitive dressage – minor detour to concentrate more on riding skills and traveling to horse shows.

During this period there were two critical events that helped shape the course of Churchill-Nash's subject matter. The Harness Tracks of America started an art competition and auction to promote fine art depicting Standardbreds and harness racing. In the inaugural show Churchill-Nash won 3rd place in the drawing category for her pen & ink "The Red Mile" and sold pieces in that and several other HTA auctions. Around the same time she was invited to do live dog portraits for a joint Humane Society and Purina program to ID tattoo dogs for a national data base to find lost pets. Drawing squirming dogs at the animal shelter honed her animal portraiture skills. That plus a local gallery owner that bought paintings outright and funneled commission work her way were the beginnings of an animal portrait business that continues today.



Calvin (transparent watercolor and white gouache)

The studio in the construction office allowed Churchill-Nash to work simultaneously in oil, watercolor, and pen & ink. The pen and ink work, influenced by the gray tones achieved with stone lithography and the work of M.C. Eicher, often won awards and accolades from other artists. For the animal commission work, watercolor was preferable due to the preference for color over black and white, and shorter turn around than oil, so more and more work was in watercolor or watercolor with mixed media.

A chance meeting with a brahma bull on a ranch in Florida began a series of watercolor paintings of that bull which has lasted for decades. "I was fascinated by his size, color, and the multiple neck folds...when he came right up to the fence to have his face scratched I was in love!" Her first painting of the bull won a purchase award. Many of the farms where Casper was stabled also ran cattle so other cows of various breeds and colors have been added to her body of work.

The Big Detour – marriage and move to Charlotte, NC. Of course, Casper moved too. Here Churchill-Nash joined the two local visual arts organizations and began to enter their juried shows, continued to enter miniature and other out of town/state shows, and build up her commission business. Another turn came when the then president of the Guild of Charlotte Artists saw her pen & ink work at a show, hired her to illustrate the Duke Endowment's annual report, and offered her a full time graphics job. From there staff/contract/freelance graphic design and illustration took up more time, but created a steady income. The switch over to computer graphics happened shortly before her son was born, which made freelancing from home a welcome option.

Still actively participating in shows with the local arts groups, she began to promote animal paintings at pet expos, horse shows, and dog shows. In order to hone her human portrait skills Churchill-Nash took portrait courses at the local community college with Rita Reed, and workshops with fresco and classical painter, Charles Kapsner.



Another Brahma Bull (watercolor)

Her husband's 'day job' (by night a musician) offices moved across the state line to SC at about the same time the family was looking for a bigger house – with land for horses. A move 15 miles south gave some breathing room both for horses and for art. A two story detached workshop was remodeled for both computer/office space and studio space upstairs overlooking the horse pasture.



"I have several pieces of MC's artwork in my house – pieces that I have bought just because I loved them, and paintings that I commissioned specifically for me – my beloved Golden, Rory; my horses, Jack and Dolly; mares and foals that brighten my baby's room. Even after years of having these pieces, a total of fourteen, I still love to take a "gallery crawl" and soak them in. It warms my soul."

– Sarah H.

"Baa Baa" 8x8 watercolor on Yupo
(top left)

South Carolina Watermedia Show Award

I think this is the perfect example that size should not matter when you are judging a piece. This is a small work, but there is a lot going on inside it. The texture of the paint is handled at the scale of the piece, so when you come up to it there is a lot to reward you looking into the surface. It is also just a charming portrait of the animal – there's some personality there. I love the use of color that is not just naturalistic, not exactly what is there, but the artist has made some color decisions for personal reasons of her own. I think a little piece like this is a gem and it stands against the larger works.

– Juror, Marc Taro Holmes



Farm Series (watercolor on Yupo)

Churchill-Nash's recent activity has included several group shows and a solo gallery show in Charleston, SC; acceptance to ArtFields, a nine day juried festival open to artists in all media who live in the twelve Southeastern states; becoming a *Member in Excellence* in the South Carolina Watermedia Society; and juried in to the South Carolina Artisans Center. Participation in local Arts Council projects has covered exhibits, teaching workshops, and on-site demonstrations at AG+ART – an April event that pairs artists and crafts people with area farms for a multi-county self-guided tour. In order to break out of her natural hermit habit, she joined a group of younger area artists, Friday Arts Project, that have two monthly drawing nights (still life and portrait) as well as occasional Plein Air get-togethers at local farms and parks.

Lately Churchill-Nash has been developing her watercolor and mixed media techniques, and while the subject matter is still primarily animals and people, the compositions are tighter cropped – breaking things down into basic shapes. Her color palette has become less realistic and more vibrant. Working on plate surface paper or board she likes to remove

paint, reworking areas in a very un-traditional method from traditional watercolor. There is still a back and forth with the commission work where more realism in color and textures is often required, but the compositions are becoming similar. Whether animal or human subjects... the eyes are still the primary focal point. Discovery of Yupo as a base for pure watercolor has led to experimentation with fluid/pigment interactions on the non-absorbent surface and ever more intense color. ■



mccn@mccn-fineart.com
Rock Hill, South Carolina
P: 803.327.9301
C: 803.417-4539