



The miracle of motion

Get ready for equine anatomy as you've never seen it before. Gillian Higgins, founder of Horses Inside Out, talks motion, Muybridge and her magnum opus



Let's set the scene. It's 1872, and American businessman Leland Stanford has an axe to grind. He was sure that, since the dawn of time, humans had woefully misunderstood the gaits of horses. Every painting depicting a nag at full gallop showed all four limbs aloft and outstretched, not dissimilar to an old-fashioned rocking horse. Determined to settle the matter once and for all, Leland enlisted the help of photographer Eadweard Muybridge. The Englishman pioneered a ground-breaking new method that would see a line of 12 cameras take a succession of photographs of Leland's racehorse, Sallie Gardiner, at full gallop on the Palo Alto racetrack. The result was not only a huge leap forward for cinematography – you may have seen Eadweard's series of images in a magic lantern at a museum or on a school trip – but provided the world's first and most accurate record of a horse in motion.

"Until now," jokes Gillian Higgins, CEO of Horses Inside Out. She's best known for mapping the internal structures of a horse onto his fur in brightly coloured paint, and her worldwide demos have given riders, trainers and owners invaluable inside into equine locomotion and anatomy since 2006. Now, more than five years in the making, her latest project, *Anatomy in Action* has hit the shelves. It's her most ambitious work, and it'll change what you know about your horse forever.

At the beginning

What makes someone wake up one day and decide their calling is to paint internal structures on an animal's exterior? For Gillian, it was down to a trinity of passions. "All my life the focus has been horses, anatomy and being a little bit arty," she says in a modest summary of her career so far. Pinning down an exact job title for Gillian is no

easy task – the strings to her bow include Advanced eventer, equine therapist, BHS instructor and provider of equine education, not to mention an artist who works on large, not to mention live, canvases.

But the real lightbulb moment came when Gillian practised equine therapy as her day job. "People would always want to know, 'Why does my horse feel this way? What can I do to help him feel more comfortable?' This made me realise just how much people would benefit from an understanding of what goes on inside their horses as they move."

Gillian began teaching workshops at her yard with her then five-year-old gelding, Freddie, painted up to show skeletal and muscular structures – she says it all 'kind of snowballed from there'. Now, aged 24, Freddie features in her latest book, where he's one of 23 painted horses revealing the inner workings of equine movement. ➤

“Behind the book is a message of appreciation, learning and understanding how these wonderful animals work”

Logging locomotion

Gillian credits Eadweard Muybridge's work as a key inspiration for *Anatomy in Action*. But, where Eadweard homed in on a single gait, Gillian covers 28 equine movements.

“I had the idea of capturing each gait with the horses all painted up quite a long time ago.” Gillian tells *H&R*, “but then you think, why stop there? It's one thing to photograph a horse in trot, but that doesn't take the real scope of the pace into consideration. You've got working, medium, extended and collected trot, as well as Western jog and trot with a long, low frame.”

The range within each pace prompted Gillian to produce a digital companion to her book – a series of slow motion videos that capture equine gaits every which way, from short, punchy steps to smooth, lengthy strides, complete with voiceovers for minutely-detailed, stride-by-stride analysis.

DID YOU KNOW?

Anatomy in Action stars some familiar faces, including showjumper Holly Smith and stunt rider and trainer Ben Atkinson.

Beyond dressage

If you think cataloguing equine motion ends with flatwork, guess again. Says Gillian: “Of course we ran through all the variations of walk, trot and canter. We looked at the high-level movements of dressage – passage, piaffe, half-pass and so on – but I felt this barely scratched the surface.”

As Gillian describes it, *Anatomy in Action* became a ‘never-ending project’. Her vision for the book evolved to become something that'll appeal to equestrians across the board, including a study of the horse over fences, Icelandic tölt and, from the ground, the explosive capriole.

“We even did a shoot with a horse on a treadmill, and walking through water,” Gillian adds, “it felt like the more I did, the more I thought and wanted to do.”



Making a difference

While her work has a practical application first and foremost, there's an undeniable beauty about her painted horses. “I wanted to make something that people would like to own, and keep on their coffee table,” she explained. “Something beautiful, but behind it a message of appreciation, learning and understanding how these wonderful animals work. As much as I want people to look at the book for the sake of the pictures, the digital element means there's much to be learned, too.”

Educating horse owners, and thereby helping them better understand and care for their horses, is Gillian's raison d'être. “The best moments of my job are when someone comes up to me after a demo and says ‘I wish I'd known that 20 years ago’. It's then that you know that you've made a real difference to their life, and therefore their horse's life.”

“Horses do so much for us, I'm amazed every day by what they're capable of. We owe it to them to understand them, keep them comfortable and prevent injuries.”

A record of history

Gillian's awe of Eadweard's work is met with no small degree of realism, particularly about his sequence of images showing a horse jumping. “You look at the photographic studies he made of horses and there's a few you cringe at, because that's not how we work with horses anymore. It's a snapshot in time, and shows the true picture of how horses were ridden in the nineteenth century.”

Perhaps *Anatomy in Action* is an example of history repeating itself, and Gillian certainly hopes the work will stand the test of time. “It's exciting to think that, one day, people could be looking back over this book as a record of how we worked alongside horses in the early 21st century.” ■

