



Cross Gate Gallery continues to expand  
its global influence with the annual  
Sporting Art Auction at Keeneland





# MARKET LEADER

By Rena Baer / Photos by Jonathan Palmer



In the course of 40-plus years, Greg Ladd has nurtured Cross Gate Gallery into an international source of the finest sporting art.





Greg Ladd seems almost self-conscious when asked about the success of Cross Gate Gallery, an endeavor he started in his parents' garage framing and selling Tony Leonard photos and Paul Sawyier prints while attending the University of Kentucky. "We are recognized internationally, but it's sort of embarrassing to say that," said Ladd. "It's just something I've always liked doing."

And from an early age he had a receptive audience among the people he'd grown up with in Lexington.

"My friends didn't have any money, but their parents did," said Ladd, who as a youngster had admired the sporting art his friends' parents displayed in their homes.

More than 40 years later Ladd's sporting art collection fills a good portion of his sunny, contemporary 11,000-square-foot gallery/home with high vaulted ceilings, located off Main Street in the Bell Court area of Lexington.

"I never imagined I would need this much space," he said, his big golden retriever, George, who despite the room to roam chooses to loll contentedly at Ladd's feet.



Dealing mostly in equine-related sporting art, Ladd has assembled an inventory that stretches from 19th and 20th century works by artists such as Sir Alfred Munnings, Henry Stull, John Skeaping, and Edward Troye to the more contemporary Andre Pater, Peter Howell, Larry Wheeler, Sandra Oppegard, Valery Hinz, and others. He has traveled the world, particularly the United States and England, in search of sporting art and has been asked to do exhibitions in locations as far away as China.

Said Oppegard: "Greg and I have worked together for nearly 25 years, and I have never known a more hardworking individual. His enthusiasm and energy are remarkable, and he treats everyone with kindness and respect. He loves art and artists and displays the highest integrity in his dealings with clients and artists. I have him to thank for the successful, happy life I enjoy as a sporting artist."

Ladd also is constantly on the lookout for new talent, artists such as Quang Ho and Jean-Bernard Lalanne (see



Opposite, from left, Cross Gate's Bill Meng, Field Ladd, and Greg Ladd display works featured in the upcoming Sporting Art Auction. This page, the gallery's luminous interior belies its past as a fraternity house-turned-antique shop.



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sidebar), whom he discovered online and invited to Keeneland to participate in a new artists' program.

Ladd's own eye for quality art developed while working at a high-end gift shop/art gallery before starting out on his own. It was there he said he learned the basics.

"If you have a good product, you don't have to sell it; people will buy it," he said. "Quality will always sell."

It also helps to make connections and keep them, he said.

Though Ladd started with friends, Cross Gate's clients now span the six degrees of separation, though many have become repeat customers and friends over time, as have the artists with whom he works. "Good will is a slow process, but bad will multiplies," he said.

Ladd also appreciatively acknowledged having many friends in the horse industry who have been loyal customers.

"I went to school here and know a lot of horse people, and they support me," he said. "They know I work hard, am honest, and love what I do."

### A family affair

Ladd had set out at the University of Kentucky planning to study architecture. His father had been a builder and wanted the next rung up the proverbial ladder for him, he said. And Ladd was interested in design and drawing.

The idea of being sequestered inside day and night working on projects while his friends enjoyed college life, though, changed his mind. He switched majors and instead earned a degree in animal science.

He also married his wife, Laura, the day he graduated and decided to open a gallery on High Street, eventually buying the building next door as

## GOING THE EXTRA KILOMETER

Searching "Jean-Bernard Lalanne" on the Internet, the artist's name will pop up before typing any further than "Jean-Bernard." Though not Michelangelo, this recognition is quite amazing considering that just a few years ago Cross Gate Gallery owner Greg Ladd spent months trying to uncover any information about him — including his hometown.

Ladd had discovered Lalanne's bullfighting paintings online, posted from an auction in coastal France. And although the paintings' subjects were not horses, the sporting art gallery owner didn't retreat. The artist's talent intrigued him — as did his potential ... perhaps painting horses.

"The best sporting painters are artists first; they have training and know the technique," said Ladd.

After eight months of making periodic attempts to track Lalanne down (even the auction company had no contact information), Ladd located him in the village of Saint-Girons in southwest France near the border of Spain. And, while Ladd speaks no French and Lalanne almost no English, the two communicated via email through translation software. Ladd learned the artist sold most of his work locally to villagers, an occasional group show in Paris, and a few paintings here and there at auctions.

On a trip to London, Ladd said he decided to detour and visit Lalanne to meet him face to face. He emailed Lalanne, who said he would love to see him but he had nothing for sale at the time. When Ladd arrived at the Toulouse airport, he said a small, conservative-looking man picked him up in a tiny car, asked him if he was "ready for adventure," and drove him about two hours south to his studio/home in the Pyrenees. Though Ladd had asked to stay in a hotel, Lalanne insisted he stay with him, giving away his own bed in his loft and sleeping on a cot in his studio below. The studio contained only a single finished painting, one of a bullfight, which Lalanne told Ladd he had already sold to a local magistrate.

The two men forged a quick friendship over French wine, cheese, and baguettes.



*Horse and Groom in Keeneland Paddock*

They found ways to communicate during Ladd's two-day stay as they went sightseeing in Albi, taking in the city's historic architecture and the Toulouse-Lautrec Museum. Before they headed back to the airport the next day, the artist told Ladd "if you like the painting, you can take it." Surprised, Ladd said he thought Lalanne had nothing for sale, so he brought no euros and had also left his checkbook in London. Lalanne brushed it off, saying "next time." They carefully rolled up the painting for transit back to Lexington, to Ladd's gallery.

When he arrived home, Ladd took out the painting so it could be re-stretched and framed. No sooner had it been unfurled than a client happened to walk in, saw it, and bought it, Ladd recalled.

Ladd, eager to bring Lalanne to Lexington to see Keeneland and horse country, invited him to be the first artist in a new program under his purview where artists stay for a week free of charge at an old, refurbished "artist's cabin" on the Keeneland grounds near Keene Place.

"Good artists are few and far between; we want to expose them to horses," said Ladd. "And who's not going to enjoy a week at Keeneland? The idea is to introduce them to what Keeneland and Kentucky have to offer."

Lalanne took Ladd up on his offer and came to Lexington in spring 2015 to stay in the cabin, which has a glass room/studio overlooking the track's expansive, rolling grounds. And, he took to painting racing scenes using an earthy palette energized by burnt orange, red, and gold hues.

"He has three pieces in the auction this year," said Ladd, of the Fourth Annual Sporting Art Auction on Nov. 21 at 4 p.m. at the Keeneland Sales Pavilion. "Two sold through the roof last year. He loved it and has been back since."

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business grew. “Because I was in Lexington — a sporting art, Thoroughbred mecca — it was easy for me to decide what I wanted to specialize in,” Ladd said.

He moved to the current gallery 20 years ago. It was a space renovated from a fraternity house to an antique store, Zee Faulkner’s Antiques. When Faulkner retired, Laura Ladd encouraged her husband to take a look, especially with Cross Gate outgrowing its High Street location. Though it was a little bit beyond their financial reach at the time, the voluminous space held what seemed like unlimited potential to grow. They sold their home and their High Street business location and moved in.

Ladd is half serious and half joking when he says they are now running out of space.

He and his son Field, 35, with whom he works, are constantly scouring the Internet, looking for new talent to add to their inventory.

“It’s a passion,” said Ladd. “We look all the time. Sometimes Field is on the computer all night. He is much more Internet-oriented than I am. He has gotten searching auctions down to a science.”

Field, the second oldest of the Ladds’ four children, joined his father after running his own gallery as he attended the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. After Field graduated and before he realized his plans of opening a new gallery elsewhere, Ladd asked his son if he’d help him with a very large undertaking.

The Masters of Foxhounds Association, MFHA, was celebrating its centennial anniversary in 2007 and had asked Ladd to organize a traveling foxhound art exhibition at special events such as hunt



Field Ladd is following in his father's footsteps.



In addition to gallery space and gardens, the distinctive building on East Main Street provides living quarters for the Ladds.

balls to commemorate the centennial, taking place as far north as Toronto, as far south as Palm Beach and as far west as Denver. All told, there were 15 events not only to travel to but also to gather inventory for.

“I got him to come home and take it on the road for me,” said Ladd. “He would load everything up in a gooseneck trailer, drive, unload, set everything up, and I would fly in for the weekend.

“When it was all over, he came home and went to work for me and continues to do so. He has really good ideas.”

Ladd said his daughter Catherine Kenneally, who is married to Thoroughbred trainer Eddie Kenneally, also helps out. Though busy with two children, she pitches in when Ladd exhibits in Saratoga during the summer meet, which he has been doing almost continuously since 1978.

### Keeneland Sporting Art auction

The idea of holding a sporting art auction in partnership with Keeneland had been floating around for several years, said Ladd. But it wasn’t until four years ago it became a reality, one that has turned out to be very successful.

“The collaboration between Keeneland and Cross Gate Gallery is a natural fit and one that makes this auction so unique,” Keeneland President and CEO Bill Thomason said. “We exhibit the



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*Wishing everyone Happy Holidays,  
Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year!*

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DAVID COYLE PHOTOS

A bidder awaits the start of the Sporting Art Auction. Below, art enthusiasts admire the auction offerings before the sale.

artwork in the Sales Pavilion during the months leading up to the auction, and our clients and guests enjoy browsing the collection during the fall sales and race meet."

Said Ladd: "It lends you credibility when you have a partnership with Keeneland."

Last year an outstanding 89 percent of the art sold, a percentage unmatched in sporting art, not even by Sotheby's and Christie's auction houses. "That's pretty much unheard of in an auction," said Ladd, who credits Keeneland with excellence in promoting and running the show. "It's all about getting the word out and letting people know."

This year, 175 lots that have been displayed since September will be offered at the Fourth Annual Sporting Art Auction on Nov. 21 at 4 p.m. at the Keeneland Sales Pavilion. Following on the tail of Keeneland's premiere November breeding stock sale, the sporting art auction will entice many of the same world-class Thoroughbred buyers and owners to stay an extra day to buy art.



"I am taking the art to the people; they don't have to travel to New York or London to see quality work," he said.

And, it's an audience tailor-made for Ladd and Cross Gate Gallery.

"My job is to find the best artists and get them in front of buyers who can appreciate, and afford, their work," said Ladd. **KM**



## ANOTHER WATER FOWL ON JEFFERSON STREET

Blue Heron Steakhouse, Lexington's grown up, chic cocktail bar is serving up local favorites and 'big food': Two can do the 40oz Porterhouse - served with your choice of 4 sides. Settle in by the bar or watch the buzz in this historic neighborhood from the perch patio.

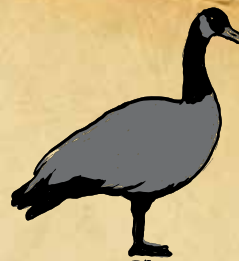


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## Creative KITCHEN & BATH

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