

# PAINTER IN THE PADDOCK

Artist Peter Williams captured the pulse of Keeneland

**F**or decades artist Peter Williams was a familiar presence in the Keeneland paddock, capturing the pulse of racing with his paintbrush. His countless scenes of horses being saddled and paraded to the post as well as his depictions of the yearling sales have made Williams' work — and Keeneland — instantly recognizable.

Williams died Aug. 13 at his home in Goshen, Kentucky, after a lengthy illness. He was 84.

Born in 1934 in Ruatoria, New Zealand, Williams grew up in the family business of raising livestock on expansive sheep stations near Gisborne. His natural abilities as an artist were developed and fine-tuned at Hereworth School, Wanganui Collegiate School, and Canterbury School of Art.

As he began to win awards and exhibit in New Zealand and Australia, Qantas Airlines invited him as a guest on its inaugural 747 flight to the United States in 1971. Ten years later he returned to the U.S. when a chance encounter with Richard Stone Reeves led to a commission to paint racing scenes and to the beginning of a prolific career as an equine artist. He was widely considered to be the unofficial artist-in-residence at Keeneland, Churchill Downs, and Saratoga Race Course.

Williams is best known for his equine-themed work, but he was equally adept at painting landscapes, flowers, homes,



vintage automobiles, cityscapes, nautical scenes, and figural compositions, always from life and always executed in oil. He was commissioned by royalty, art collectors, and equine organizations around the world and was twice invited by Great Britain's Queen Elizabeth II to paint the Sandringham Estate Carriage Trials.

While Kentucky was Williams' adopted home for more than 25 years, there was no mistaking his New Zealand origins. He chose to host a retrospective exhibit in his homeland in November 2012 for the launch of the book *Peter Williams Retrospective: Paintings and People Dear to Me*. He had dozens of one-man shows and exhibitions in

New Zealand, England, Australia, and the U.S.

Williams' family said he loved life and had a terrific sense of humor. Despite being very well known as an artist, when introductions were made, he often quipped he was an unemployed shepherd from New Zealand. As talented as he was, his greatest gift was his penchant for friendship. No one worked harder at staying in touch with his friends and family. He treasured each relationship equally and was a world-class friend to many, according to those closest to him.

A retrospective of his work, *Peter Williams: Painted From Life*, is on view at the Headley-Whitney Museum in Lexington through Nov. 11. **KM**



Above, the artist greeted Queen Elizabeth II during her 1984 visit to Keeneland. Left, Williams painted on the scene at the world's major racetracks.



The Keeneland paddock was a favorite subject. Above, *Opening Day*; right, *Spring Fever*

