

# TARIQ DAJANI'S ASIL: PHOTOGRAPHIC STUDIES OF THE PUREBRED ARABIAN HORSE

*ASIL: PHOTOGRAPHIC STUDIES OF THE PUREBRED ARABIAN HORSE IS A WORK OF ART IN EVERY SENSE. THE RESULT OF TARIQ DAJANI'S LIFE-LONG FASCINATION WITH THE ARABIAN HORSE, IT CAPTURES THE ESSENCE OF THE BREED IN BEAUTIFULLY OBSERVED AND MASTERED PHOTOGRAPHS WHICH HAVE BEEN REPRODUCED TO AN EXTREMELY HIGH STANDARD. INSIDE AND OUT, THIS BOOK CARRIES THE SUBTLE MESSAGE: 'THIS IS ART; THIS IS CLASS'.*

The Arabic word 'Asil' signifies purity, nobility and authenticity. It is a word used to describe the purebred Arabian horse, and one that could equally describe Tariq Dajani's photographs.

Originally bred by the Bedouin tribes for battle, the pure-blooded Arabian evolved over centuries into a creature of beauty and strength. The care of the Bedu for their horses, coupled with the harsh environment, produced an animal of distinctive intelligence and sensitivity, whose power and stamina enabled it to endure the harshest conditions and demands. While the usefulness of the horse gradually declined with the advent of mechanised transport, the Arabian horse remains a symbol of pride and of historical and cultural importance for the Arabs of the Middle East.

For as long as Dajani can remember, he has been drawn to this fascinating breed. He is not simply interested in documenting its appearance, nor in photographing it in romantic settings, but in expressing the elements of the horse's personality, intelligence, pride and self-esteem, its sense

of calm or strength.

Dajani's deep connection with his subject shows in every portrait, and there is something instantly recognisable about his photographs. They contain an elusive quality that draws the eye as he delves into the personality of each horse. They ask questions of his audience: questions about identity, the definition of beauty, the nature of art. They can be appreciated on many levels, from the visually pleasing to the intellectually challenging to the spiritually satisfying, but all bear the hallmark of Dajani's outstanding talent.

The foreword is written by HRH Princess Alia Al Hussein, whose knowledge and understanding of the Arabian horse is well known and who is personally acquainted with some of Dajani's subjects; she says: "... His photographs also capture the personalities of the horses. We not only see *Hlayyil Ramadan*, for instance, portrayed as a beautiful stallion, we also see his casual and benevolently mischievous mood. His work honestly represents an individual essence. That is perhaps what is most remarkable."

The book also carries a fascinating preface by John Wood, the internationally-renowned poet and photographic historian, describing Dajani's work in the context of art, literature and Islam through the ages. His essay is illustrated with examples of some of Dajani's other subjects – falcons, cityscapes and portraits – which show the same acute observation and technical mastery. Wood writes:

*"And so Tariq Dajani with history, culture, tradition, and asil all woven into the fabric of his art has come to the horse with a fresh eye – an eye as fresh as Vermeer's looking at an interior, or Cézanne's gaze upon an apple. How has he done that? The answer is simple: through the discipline of art. A serious photograph is like any other serious work of art – a painting, a poem, a symphony, a dance.*

*"A serious photograph not only sets itself apart from all other moments but also captures the particularity of its subject – a horse, a horse's eye, a human face, a landscape, tree, store front, tool, cigarette butt, pattern of ice crystals – while*











at the same time revealing the universality of those things. That is what art does. That is what art demands and requires. Without particularity a photograph is but a meaningless generality.

“Dajani’s art confronts us with questions and amazes us with his deeply humane insights. As beautiful as the reproductions are in this book, they only begin to suggest an actual Dajani print. The first time I saw his prints, goose flesh literally rose in excitement on my arms – and I have looked at thousands upon thousands of photographs. Though Dajani mastered the traditional crafts of the darkroom photographer, for *Asil* he wisely chose to work digitally in colour. Today it is no longer a matter of darkroom versus digital; the only question is darkroom or digital, and the decision depends upon the subject matter. Mohanna Durra, Dajani’s mentor, once said to him, “The pencil is a tool which

the hand guides according to instructions from the mind and the eye, but it is the heart that feels what you want to draw; so let go, and go with your heart.” And that is what Dajani does. He, unlike many contemporary photographers, is unafraid of beauty. He understands that it is something the human spirit needs – that it is essential to life, or at least to a full life.”

Born in England, Dajani spent his formative years moving between the Middle East and Europe, gaining an understanding and appreciation of different cultures and traditions. A passion for art and music lead him to explore various outlets for creative expression, until he eventually chose a career in photography. His time and experiences of living and working in London, Stockholm, Dubai and Amman continued to inspire and shape his ideas. In 2012, Dajani and his wife Siets relocated to the Alpujarran Mountains of Spain

with their family – two salukis and two purebred Arabian horses.

*Asil* is a book of rare quality, one to treasure, and one that should form part of the collection of all lovers of the horse, photography and art. 📖

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