

# Making His Mark with His Hands

## The Art of Tom Chapman

By Steven Baird

An artist's hands connect him to the world, giving form to self expression. A jockey's hands connect him to his mount, guiding 1,100 pounds of muscle and speed around the track. Combine those experiences, and the result is art that captures the brilliance of the Thoroughbred, in a way that speaks to the world beyond racing. That's where Tom Chapman is now making his mark with his hands.

Chapman's journey began in the small town of Cut Bank, Montana with a love of art, athletics, and animals. In 1972, he wrestled his way to a Montana State High School title as a senior in the 101-pound weight class. More interested in animals than school, after graduation Chapman went to work for a family friend who trained quarter horses.

In 1973 Chapman headed to California, chasing opportunity and a change of scenery. He worked his way up from hot walker and got his first mount at

Santa Anita on February 17, 1977, finishing fourth on a Henry Moreno trained filly named Zulla Road. Chapman went on to earn top apprentice honors for Southern California in 1978.

He moved to Northern California in 1979 and commenced a career that resulted in 2,560 wins, including multiple stakes and both a Kentucky Derby mount and a world record aboard the brilliant Hoedown's Day.

One of Chapman's riding victories turned out to be more than just another win. After winning his first Bay Meadows Handicap aboard Slew of Damascus in 1993, he did a painting of the horse for himself. Once the owners saw it, they made Chapman an offer he couldn't resist, and he sold them the painting – and two others he would subsequently paint of the horse. Although Chapman admits, "nothing really compares to race riding; it was addictive," in 1996 he eventually hung up his tack to begin his second career, as an artist.

Chapman believes his riding experience gives him "an inside track to knowing how people will react to the art, but



*Del Mar, Where the Turf Meets the Surf*



*Lost in the Fog*

also whether it's saleable, and whether it's authentic." This insight into racing authenticity – combined with a unique use of color, light, shadow, and composition – conveys both a tangible reality of racing and a legendary larger-than-life quality that helps draw fans to the sport. A perfect example of this attraction is his painting of 2005 Eclipse Award winner *Lost in the Fog*. A striking racing shot of the horse and jockey framed by the Golden Gate Bridge and the rolling fog synonymous with San Francisco, the picture reflects Chapman's ability to compose an artistic scene beyond traditional racing trappings, while still paying homage to the real and brilliant race horse.

Chapman's style has garnered a following both locally and nationally. Each year, his work is included in the prestigious

of the Beresford Gallery, noted that the artist's appeal stems in part from his "perspective and understanding of racing that is really first hand."

For Northern Californians, Chapman's work is featured at the Alameda County Fair Simulcast building in the form of two striking murals. He also designed the imagery for the Sonoma County Fair, Bay Meadows, California Cup at Santa Anita, and is featured in turf clubs and galleries throughout the country. Samples of his artwork currently adorn the walls of the TOC Northern California offices and the Owner/Trainer lounge at Golden Gate Fields.

*For pricing and more information about Chapman and his work go to [www.chapman-arts.com](http://www.chapman-arts.com).*



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