




NIC FIDDIAN-GREEN

“At weekends I just want to be at home in the hills near Godalming in Surrey with my wife, Henrietta, and our four children Samuel, 18, Annie Rose, 16, Marigold, 14, and Moses, 12. All six of us have horses and we take them out for miles on a Saturday morning. I think riding is one of the loveliest things you can do with your wife and children. Whatever mood you’re in beforehand is always dramatically improved by the time you get back.”



*Nic Fiddian-Green shares with **The International Race Horse Magazine** a look into his day to day life, a little bit of his history and some of his awe-inspiring work.*

I grew up with horses, which is strange given that my father was in the Navy. We lived in Southsea and my sister and I rode as teenagers. When Henrietta wanted to have horses, it seemed the most natural thing in the world.

I try not to work at weekends but when I have a deadline, I have no choice. I've been a sculptor ever since I left school. It was my only hope, really. I did a foundation course at Chelsea Art School and while I was there I had a chance encounter with the great Horse of Selene, one of the Elgin Marbles at the British Museum taken from the east pediment of the Parthenon.

The encounter paved my future. It was as if lightning had struck twice in the same place. The horse's head was so beautifully made, so considered, so right. It was as if it had been carved by the gods: a lesson in balance and harmony and proportion. Immediately it became my benchmark. For the past 30 years I've focused on capturing the beauty of a horse's head.

I don't think I ever will surpass the Horse of Selene, whose job it was to draw the chariot of the goddess of the moon across the sky. But he leads me in some interesting directions. Coincidentally, I think I must be one of the few people who strongly believes the Elgin Marbles should not be returned to Greece. Treasure is collected and plundered and bought and sold all the time. How can you isolate the Elgin Marbles as being necessary to return?



I used to have a studio at home but recently I've moved to a glorious east-facing shed about half a mile away. When I'm working on Saturdays, I arrive there by 5am. The morning light will be rising over the fields, which I always find pretty inspiring. I often use our own horses as models. In fact, one of my best-known works, the sculpture which stands in Marble Arch in London, is a model of my wife's horse Sebastian. It's a rendition of my "Horse at Water" composition, which I've been experimenting with since 1983, and was intended as a sort of tribute to Sebastian, as six years ago he nearly died and Henrietta nursed him back to health. I left a shed door open and the horses broke in and ate a bag of chicken food, which made them very ill with toxic laminitis, a disease of the hoof. My son's horse died and Sebastian took three years to recover; Henrietta should have been furious with me, but she's one of those wonderful people who is only ever briefly cross.

I was ill myself when it happened. I'd been diagnosed with leukaemia and it was touch and go. But if I hadn't been ill, I don't think the sculpture would have made it to Marble Arch. Just before I was diagnosed in early 2006, I'd been commissioned by Sir Anthony and Lady Bamford to make a 27ft piece for their Daylesford estate. When I went into hospital I was feeling quite well, so I asked Henrietta to bring me some plaster so I could

work on three possible designs for Lady Bamford. Unbeknown to me, Henrietta wrote to Carole [Lady Bamford] and told her I shouldn't be starting the commission because I might not be there to finish it. Carole replied saying "I will pray for him, he will recover, and when he's better he will finish the commission." I have a lot of respect for her for saying that. She was right. I got better. And three years later, I completed the work.

But by this stage – June 2009 – the Bamfords still hadn't got planning permission for their sculpture, so, since I was ill, Henrietta took it upon herself to display it in London during my first exhibition. Westminster City Council agreed it could go on the open ground at Marble Arch for six weeks. On one condition. It had to be in position in time for the unveiling of the redeveloped Marble Arch four days later. We got it there but only after a fraught weekend of logistics.

In the end, Westminster City Council received so many favourable comments about the sculpture that they granted planning consent for a new, larger horse head to remain there. So I made the portrait of Sebastian, which was installed in September 2010, and finally gave Lady Bamford her sculpture.

Since my illness, my attitude to work has changed. I'm braver



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and prepared to take bigger risks to get my pieces into public spaces. I believe it's my duty as a sculptor; it's cool that children climb on them and touch and feel them; that's the whole point. Two years ago I built one of my life's most important works, inspired by Selene, for Artemis, a fund manager; it's taller than the Marble Arch sculpture and a different shape; a Greek head on an enormous plinth. It ended up on Trundle Hill above Goodwood racecourse, and was eventually bought by an Australian as a memorial to her husband and now stands in the Hunter Valley in New South Wales.

I miss the children being in and around the studio on Saturdays and Sundays. But a few weekends ago I had the pleasure of a studio filled with children when I invited pupils from Wellington School to help me finish off a commission of Copenhagen, Wellington's war horse. It's a monumental head about 30ft high which is to stand in the school's main quad. We got into our overalls and worked on it for the day, singing along to the Beatles. My next big project is a piece in lead for Greenwich Park, where the Olympic equestrian events are taking place.

I used to wonder what would happen if I worked abroad. Would it affect my work? Then one day last autumn, as I carried one of my smaller sculptures along Jermyn Street to my gallery in

In short:

Herbal tea or a stiff drink?

Mint tea before bed and a stiff drink before breakfast.

What is your inspiration?

Chitty Chitty Bang Bang.

What advice would you give aspiring sculptors?

If you're passionate about something, it will come through.

In another life, what would you have done?

I'd have been a gardener.

What's your favourite item of clothing?

My tank top

What is your ideal weekend away?

Working in Perugia or watching the sun go down in Norfolk.

What irritates you?

People leaving plastic bags on the plinths of my sculptures.

What's your dream commission?

To make an Angel of the South on the South Downs.

What would be your last supper?

Kidneys on toast followed by Marco's vanilla ice cream.

Nic Fiddian Green's favourite things

My wife and four children, My Land Rover, My bobble hat, My collection of Kinder Surprise models. I've got more than 300, if anyone fancies a swap, The dawn



Mayfair; I was stopped by a man called Count Antonio Bolza who suggested I meet the white Lipizzaner horses he breeds in Perugia. I took him up on the offer and spent a glorious weekend at Castello di Reschio, his estate in the Umbrian hills overlooking the Niccone Valley. It was the first time I'd encountered the Etruscan landscape and it had a profound effect on me. I don't think it's any mistake that Florence became a centre for the arts; there's something in the air, the light. I ended up returning with my materials – my wheel and my clay – and spent 10 days creating a life-size head and shoulders from life of the count's young stallion, Punto, which has been enlarged to 14ft and is going to stand on a plinth beside the racecourse at Glorious Goodwood. I also began a brand new rendition of the "Horse at Water" composition. I know this is impulsive and impractical given I've got four children to consider; but I'm contemplating buying a studio in Italy. I want to spend my weekends following the footsteps of St Francis, and I dream of building a 40ft head to stand above the castle ruins at Reschio. Who says the Renaissance is over?

In the real world back at home, Sundays are fairly kid orientated. We'll hang out together in the morning, have a big lunch, go for a walk, and then suddenly it will be time for them to go back to school; the older three are at Wellington. I shouldn't say it but I feel a slight sense of relief when the house is quiet again. I try to treat my crazy job as an ordinary one and fit it around family life, but I do look forward to the working week. After I was ill I realised that for the first time in my career, I could honestly say I felt as if I was getting somewhere. My work has started to make sense.

