

Caparisoned Horse, A Study

Gabriel Drozdov
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By definition, a caparisoned horse is a riderless horse covered with a garment purposed for protection or decoration. An earthenware sculpture from the Tang dynasty depicts a caparisoned horse in its simplistic beauty, with the figure coated in *sancai*, or three-color, glazes. The work does not have a date of creation, originating sometime between the 7th and 8th centuries C.E., nor does it have a credited artist or a name other than *Caparisoned Horse*. Utilizing a realistic approach, the work conveys the motifs of value and beauty through its precise use of color, line, shape, and symmetry, all of which are shown to reveal the domestication of the creature.

The coloring of the figure grants the sculpture realism. The glazes avoid any unnatural colors, presenting the horse as a live creature. The colors do not venture out of the earthy realm, providing a mostly brownish, natural hue to the horse's skin. The saddle, head, and statue base are depicted in white, contrasting with the black ornaments atop of the sculpture. Amongst these ornaments are flowers depicted as part of the horse's caparison. The black hue of the flowers separates them from nature because you would expect them to have colorful shades or at least white petals. Regardless, the flowers do not detract from the overall realism present on the horse, as they are very clearly part of the horse's caparison. The one part of the caparison that bears similarity to the horse is the saddle, which is glazed with the same white as the figure's hooves and face.

The curvature that pervades the piece further contributes to the horse's realism. The motion of the figure is very smooth and round, mimicking the curves that a muscular horse has. Especially on the horse's neck, the muscles can be seen digging into the figure. The lines are only jagged and harsh in a few areas, consisting mostly around the bones of the horse's legs and

the ornaments on the horse. Along with the color, the lines help to convey a realistic picture of the caparisoned horse.

When considering shape, the realism fades due to several attributes of the figure. The sculpture appears to be near symmetrical, almost too perfectly so. The only nonsymmetrical part of the horse is its slightly tilted posture, which is significant in that it conveys movement and gives life to the piece. The hind legs and head show that the horse seems as if it is ready to move forward, with the hind legs slightly bent forward in an awkward manner and the head tilted to the left, as if the horse is perhaps looking in the direction it is traveling.

The motion is very obvious, even though the figure is still. The horse's movement is emphasized by its face, as the figure is especially detailed around its nostrils, mouth, eyes, and muscles. Yet, the emotion in the sculpture's expression is held back by the harness. The constraint of motion directly relates to the concept of captivity, in which the horse is ready to move, but cannot in its restricted, permanent form. Furthermore, the horse's hooves are attached to the statue base so that it appears the feet of the animal are melted into the sculpture's support. Since the horse is attached to what is essentially the earth, it is unable to move.

The captivity of the horse is emphasized by the contrasting use of texture . Although the representation of the figure is realistic, the body is completely smooth, and the only aspect of the animal with intricate detailing is the head. Regardless, there are several details related exclusively to the caparison, with the flower ornaments on the hind of the creature standing out the most. Thus, the ornaments can be seen as another representation of the sculptural quality that possesses the creature, since nature's flowers have been turned into a caparison just as the horse has been turned into a sculpture.

Overall, the sculpture conveys strength, though the figure's aggression is counteracted with themes of captivity and domesticity. The animal's garments appear to represent the figure as a sort of battle horse, whose fury is felt but reserved for the battlefield. The creature is restrained by its harness, as well as the physical immobility of statues, yet the motion is felt through nuanced sculpting.

The intent of the sculpture is related to the what it may have been commissioned for, in regards to the emotions conveyed by the figure. While the statue seems fit for a noble's home, the horse's purpose transcends basic symbolic decoration. Rather, the *Caparisoned Horse* may have been commissioned as a device used to harness the creature's wild power, placing it under the individual's control. Thus, the creature is unexpectedly small, which emphasizes that this statue was built by humans who have the power to harness such great forces.