



Professor Stephen W. Hawking



Isabel Allende



Joyce Carol Oates

Juliet van Otteren, Photographer

Housed in the collections of major museums on three continents, her work captures the spirit, heart and emotion of all her subjects.

Story by Terri Schexnayder
Photos by Juliet van Otteren

JULIET VAN OTTEREN MOVED LITHELY THROUGH HER northwest Austin home-studio, enthusiastically describing the subjects of her photographs and the printing techniques she had developed over the years. The photos in the gallery represented her private portrait commissions, as well as the fine art housed in the collections of major museums on three continents. The clients included in her *Authors* portfolio series, read like a list from "Who's Who of America," of which van Otteren herself is a member: Professor Stephen Hawking, Joyce Carol Oates, Isabel Allende, Harold Bloom, Billy Collins and Kathleen Jesse Raine.

Her most heartwarming photography experience came from capturing on film the creatures she is most passionate about: horses. Her eyes welled up as she spoke about one special horse, Uther, an Andalusia, who showcased the cover of her book, *Heart of the Horse*, published in 2004. "I've been riding since I was five years old, usually bareback, in the Michigan countryside where I grew up. Horses taught me so much, and through the work I did for my book, I tried to actually help the horses," said van Otteren. "Uther was dying of malignant melanoma and



his owner told me, after 1 1/2 years of working on the book, that the horse was feeling much better."

Her clients praise van Otteren's ability to find a spiritual connection with her subjects. "The rarest of all photographers, one who captures the spirit of the horse and the heart of authentic emotion," wrote Linda Kohanov, author of *The Tao of Equus*. Stanley Kunitz, U.S. Poet Laureate 2000-2001, said, "Juliet van Otteren is the poet of photographers." Dr. Jane Goodall, who provided the foreword for van Otteren's book, once said of the artist's work, "I can see the very souls in the eyes of some of the individuals she has photographed."

Her own spiritual journey began when van Otteren was in her 20s, after a series of bad car and horse accidents. "I was told I would spend my life in a wheelchair, which was unacceptable to me. The Eastern philosophy dealing with 'mind over body' was one of the philosophies I had been studying at the university, so I went to the Middle East to study," she said. "I eventually healed and have never stopped doing meditation and yoga," van Otteren said.

It was during her exploration of various philosophical disciplines in Nepal and India that van Otteren first embraced portrait photography. She went on

to establish her reputation as a highly sought-after commercial photographer in Manhattan, but eventually her heart spoke to her again, and van Otteren left the fast-paced world of advertising to pursue her artwork in the peaceful English countryside. "There was no way I could live strictly as an artist and maintain my lifestyle. Imagine moving from the photo district in Manhattan, where I worked 24/7, to Sussex Downs, where sheep were my neighbors," van Otteren recalled with a laugh.

She soon attracted the attention of the National Portrait Gallery in London, which began to acquire her work. Van Otteren holds the distinction of becoming the first photographer granted a working visa to the UK as an artist. From England, she moved to France, where her artwork was exhibited in a castle. "I fell in love with the man who owned that castle and we married," she said. Although no longer married to him, she still considers him her best friend.

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Her personal style of photography is one that "puts anyone at ease, and then who they are starts coming out. I don't tell them to turn this way or that. Joyce Carol Oates commented to me during our session, 'You act like you are doing nothing, but you are willing everything out of us.' That is so true. I use all my energy when I am photographing, so I go right to sleep after my shoot," said van Otteren.

It is rare for an internationally-known photographer to make her own prints, but van Otteren continues to bring her work to life in her darkroom. "In there, I paint with my hands, using the full palate of whites, grays and blacks that are my means of expression," she said.

With photographs located in collections around the world, including those at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, District of Columbia; Brooklyn Museum of Art, NY; National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, Australia; National Portrait Gallery, London and Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris; a busy, international travel schedule and the possibility of living just about anywhere, van Otteren has found peace and purpose in Austin. "I've lived in England, France, Asia, the Middle East, Manhattan and California, and I had wonderful experiences in all those places. But, I love Austin, my neighbors and the people I've met since moving here in 2005."

Howard Brunson, past president of the West Austin Rotary Club and van Otteren's Rotarian sponsor, said her contributions as a member of the club have been invaluable. "Juliet got involved right away and chose, as chair of our environmental committee, to re-beautify Mayfield Park through the creation of a butterfly garden," said Brunson. "She is dynamic and imaginative." ★

MORE INFO

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