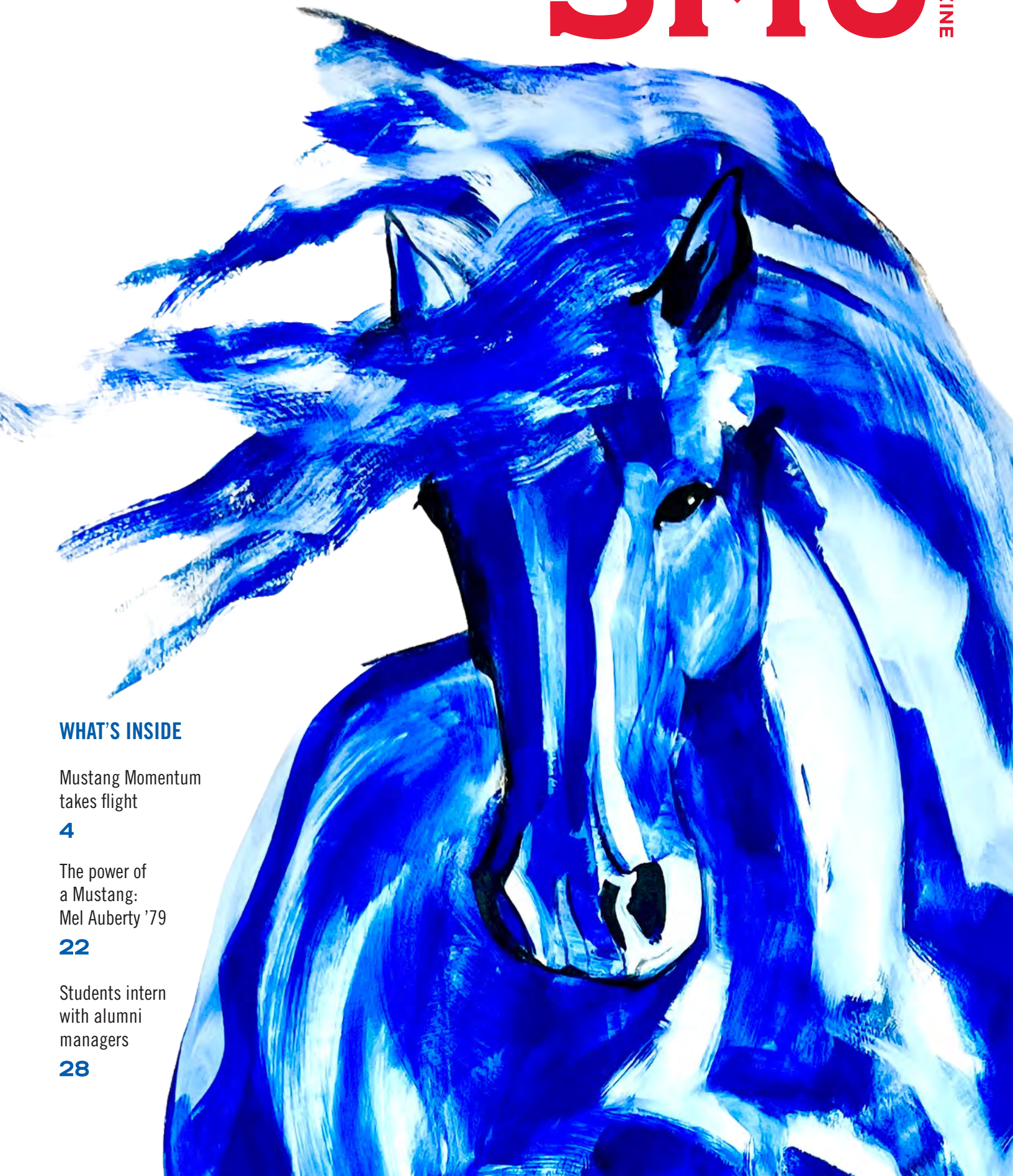


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THE UNDENIABLE POWER OF A MUSTANG

Mel Auberty's new exhibition reckons with the *spirit* and *movement* of powerful horses.

By: Madison Ford

Artist Mel Auberty '79 has spent a year painting nothing but horses. While the subject is not a new figure in her life – Auberty was raised around horses and runs Blue Horse Sanctuary – she had never focused on them so exclusively in her practice. Her signature blue horses still feature prominently in this ode to the horse and its formidable Chinese zodiac. Her works are presented in the exhibition, *Year of the Horse*, which opened on Lunar New Year at Gallery 123 in Dallas and will continue through the summer.

SMU: What drew you to horses as a subject?

MA: I had a three-woman show in 2000. I had painted three blue horses, and those were just a whim. I've always had horses. I rode horses as a kid, and I think the iconography of a horse – it's not just a Texas thing. It's got a lot of spiritual, emotional power.



SMU: What does that mean to you as an artist and horse owner?

MA: The fact that they're prey animals makes them very wary of outside influence, because they're ready to run for the hills, fight or flight. So when they're used in therapy, they mirror our emotions. One has to learn to breathe slower, calm down and be less active. Every motion means something to them, and as you calm down, they calm down.

SMU: What drew you to blue?

MA: I've always been attracted to blue. I think most people are. It's the sky; it's the ocean; it's a symbolic color as well. It has a serenity to it, but it also has a power to it.

SMU: How does your work tie into the theme of "Year of the Horse"?

MA: I was born in the Year of the Horse. It's



"I challenged myself. I painted for a full year. I thought 'I'm going to paint one year of nothing but horses,' and that's what I've done."

MA: My style changed a little bit. I do oil on canvas, but I started working a little more realistically, which I try very hard not to do.

I try to keep it really loose and not get too focused on any particular piece of the anatomy. I was drawn more to the eyes of the horses, and so the faces and the eyes have become a little more intense or realistic.



almost like there's been this lifeline rooted in having horses as a kid. About two or three years ago, I knew it was approaching again and I thought, "You know, I've been painting horses pretty seriously for 25 years; what a wonderful opportunity to celebrate horses." It was the Year of the Snake last year. They say that with the snake, you shed it all and then comes the horse to where you're powering forward and moving forward. I challenged myself. I painted for a full year. I thought "I'm going to paint one year of nothing but horses," and that's what I've done.

SMU: Have there been any artistic revelations from that in your practice?

SMU: What else have you learned from this process?

MA: It's been intensive. Like any art form, it's like saying, "OK, this is the year I'm writing my book," or "This is the year that, at long last, I'm scoring an opera." It has that kind of intensity where you just put yourself all in. I'm hoping the show has the power to give people something that moves them. 🐾

For more information, visit melauberty.com

