

**KIMBELL ACQUIRES MASTERPIECE BY GEORGE STUBBS**

*Mares and Foals Belonging to the 2nd Viscount Bolingbroke*, considered one of the greatest works by the eighteenth-century British painter, is acquired in memory of Ben J. Fortson (1932–2024).

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

June 28, 2024

FORT WORTH, TX—The Kimbell Art Museum today announced the acquisition of George Stubbs’s *Mares and Foals Belonging to the 2nd Viscount Bolingbroke*, painted between about 1761 and 1762. Widely regarded as the finest painter of animals in the history of European art, Stubbs is best known for his paintings of horses, which transcend historical genres to achieve rare pictorial refinement and emotional resonance. The painting entering the Kimbell’s collection is one of the principal, and likely earliest, in a celebrated, innovative series that has been called the artist’s crowning achievement: paintings depicting friezes of brood mares and their offspring. The acquisition, along with that of Thomas Gainsborough’s painting *Going to Market, Early Morning* (c. 1773), purchased by the Kimbell in 2023, significantly elevates the Kimbell’s holdings of eighteenth-century British paintings, which Velma and Kay Kimbell favored when initially building their collection. The painting will be on view in the Kimbell’s Louis I. Kahn Building beginning June 28, 2024.

“With a mandate to collect only works of major historical and aesthetic importance, the Kimbell is the natural home for this masterpiece,” said Eric Lee, director of the Kimbell Art Museum. “I am sure that it will become an audience favorite. Visitors to the museum will relish the multidimensional depiction of mares and foals—alive with subtle drama, imbued with tenderness, and fascinating in its expression of the individual personalities of each horse.”

In this picture, which is slightly more than six feet long by three feet tall, a mature bay mare commands the center of a group of two other mares and three foals, who nuzzle close to their mothers. The composition is set within a springtime landscape at what is probably the viscount’s family estate of Lydiard Tregoze, Wiltshire, now Borough of Swindon, with verdant green parkland, cloudy sky, and a broad, dark gray stretch of water providing spatial interest beyond the long, slender legs of the horses. Highly naturalistic, the horses are lifelike in their anatomical forms and poses. While the overall mood is tranquil and domestic as the horses gently commune with each other, the cloudy sky and the wide, sparkling eyes of the mares add an element of drama and nobility to the composition.

The titular 2nd Viscount Bolingbroke, Frederick St. John (1732–1787), was one of Stubbs's most important early patrons. The Kimbell painting seems to be the earliest commission of this virtually unprecedented subject; it is probably the work that Stubbs exhibited at the Society of Artists in 1762. Soon, other members of Bolingbroke's circle of aristocratic horse enthusiasts and fellow statesmen of the Whig political party commissioned similar compositions on the theme of brood mares and their offspring, many doubtless depicting the patrons' own horses. Stubbs's equestrian paintings—along with his portrayals of rural life and of other animals—were an especially delightful and sophisticated expression of the pastimes of the British nobility and landed gentry. Patrons could hang such works alongside fashionable portraits and Old Master paintings in their town or country houses, where vast fields, parklands, stables, and studs reflected their love of hunting and sporting life.

Stubbs was then, and is today, recognized for his unrivaled understanding of equine anatomy and unsurpassed ability to record not only the appearance of individual animals but also their temperaments. His genius in understanding the horse arose from anatomical study and from his apparent empathy for the character of each horse and his ability to express its exquisite beauty. His skill extended to landscapes that enhanced the mood, composition, and legibility of the animal subjects.

*Mares and Foals Belonging to the 2nd Viscount Bolingbroke* remained in the family collection at Lydiard Tregoze until it was sold at auction in 1943 and shortly thereafter entered the collection of Mrs. John Arthur Dewar, of the whisky distillery family, who also owned Henry Raeburn's *Allen Brothers (Portrait of James and John Lee Allen)*, which entered the Kimbell collection in 2002. The Kimbell acquired *Mares and Foals Belonging to the 2nd Viscount Bolingbroke* from a private collection through London-based art dealers Simon C. Dickinson Ltd. At the museum, the painting joins Stubbs's *Lord Grosvenor's Arabian Stallion with a Groom*, a work acquired by the Kimbell in 1981. *Mares and Foals Belonging to the 2nd Viscount Bolingbroke* was previously on view at the Kimbell in 2004–05, when it was on loan to the exhibition *Stubbs and the Horse*.

The Kimbell Art Foundation acquired *Mares and Foals Belonging to the 2nd Viscount Bolingbroke* in memory of Ben J. Fortson (1932–2024), who passed away in May and whose leadership was instrumental in the Kimbell's growth. Mr. Fortson served on the Board of Directors of the Kimbell Art Foundation from 1964 until his death and was the Foundation's longtime Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer. He will be forever remembered for stewarding the Kimbell's investments and finances and for being the driving force behind the building of the museum's Renzo Piano Pavilion, which opened in 2013 and houses the museum's temporary exhibitions and permanent collections of Asian, African, and ancient American art.

### ABOUT STUBBS

The protracted and exacting early training of George Stubbs (1724–1806) laid the groundwork for his extraordinarily sensitive and refined paintings, drawings, and prints. Born in Liverpool, Stubbs was adept at drawing from a young age. Largely self-taught, he painted portraits, moving to York in 1745. He studied and taught anatomy, drawing, and perspective and traveled to Rome in the spring of 1754 before returning to Liverpool for a few years. Working in the village of Horkstow, North Lincolnshire, from 1756 to 1758, he embarked on an intensive period studying the physical structure and workings of the horse, dissecting specimens, assisted by his common-law wife, Mary Spenser, and making elegant and precisely detailed drawings that were the basis for his seminal publication on the horse’s anatomy, a volume of etchings that appeared in 1766. When he moved to London in late 1758 or early 1759, these extraordinary drawings were not only an entrée to patronage from horse-loving aristocrats but also the crucible for Stubbs’s ambitions to explore a range of new pictorial subjects and techniques. These would include his portraits of individual racehorses, as well as his series of mares and foals; paintings of domestic dogs—both those bred for sport and as pets; and depictions of wild, exotic animals, sometimes in combat. His paintings of men and women include portraits, conversation pieces, scenes of rural life, and even mythological subjects. An innovative master printmaker, Stubbs produced the etchings for *The Anatomy of the Horse* himself in order to achieve the quality he demanded. He experimented with enamel painting and collaborated with Josiah Wedgwood to pioneer new and more permanent techniques. Stubbs’s naturalistic approach to art is characterized by an exquisite grace and harmonious balance. This seemingly intuitive approach to classicizing compositions may be associated with his experience viewing antiquities in Rome, his empirical processes, and his exposure to the ideas of the Age of Enlightenment.

### IMAGE CAPTION

George Stubbs, *Mares and Foals Belonging to the 2nd Viscount Bolingbroke*, c. 1761–62. Oil on canvas, 39 x 74 in. (99 x 187 cm). Kimbell Art Museum. Acquired in memory of Ben J. Fortson (1932–2024)

### SUPPORT

Promotional support for the Kimbell Art Museum and its exhibitions is provided by American Airlines, PaperCity, and NBC 5. Additional support is provided by Arts Fort Worth and the Texas Commission on the Arts.

### VISITOR INFORMATION

Admission to the museum’s permanent collection is always free. Admission is half-price all day on Tuesdays and after 5 p.m. on Fridays.

The Kimbell Art Museum is open Tuesdays through Thursdays and Saturdays, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Fridays, noon–8 p.m.; Sundays, noon–5 p.m.; closed Mondays, New Year’s Day, Juneteenth, July 4, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. For general information, call 817-332-8451.

**ABOUT THE KIMBELL ART MUSEUM**

The Kimbell Art Museum, owned and operated by the Kimbell Art Foundation, is internationally renowned for both its collections and its architecture. The Kimbell’s collections range in period from antiquity to the twentieth century and include European masterpieces by artists such as Fra Angelico, Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Bernini, Velázquez, Vigée Le Brun, Monet, Cézanne, Picasso, and Matisse; important collections of Egyptian and classical antiquities; and the art of Asia, Africa, and the ancient Americas.

The museum’s 1972 building, designed by the American architect Louis I. Kahn, is widely regarded as one of the outstanding architectural achievements of the modern era. A second building, designed by Italian architect Renzo Piano, opened in 2013 and now provides space for special exhibitions, dedicated classrooms, and a 289-seat auditorium with excellent acoustics for music. For more information, visit [kimbellart.org](http://kimbellart.org).

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**IMAGES**

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**FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

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