



Harrie Fasher, *Unknown (Jimmys Twin)* 2017, mild steel plate and rod, 800 x 1000 x 350mm. Photo: Silversalt



Harrie Fasher, *The Last Charge (maquette)* 2017, mild steel sheet and rod, 640 x 1340 x 1070mm. Photo: Silversalt



Harrie Fasher with Dusty and Evie, 2015. Photo: Red Moon Creative



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HARRIE FASHER is represented by King Street Gallery on William, Sydney

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COVER IMAGE: Harrie Fasher, *The Last Charge* 2017, installation view, Sculpture by the Sea, Bondi 2017. Photo: Jessica Wylde

## ARTIST STATEMENT

This sculpture captures the roar audible as the light horse set off with their history making battle cry. The partnership between the light horseman and his mount was second to none. The horse and rider operated as one; each dependent on the other for survival.

*The Last Charge* distills the raw emotion of the last charge of the light horse, with the intimidating vision of eight horses engaged in battle.

As in all of my work, the horse embodies the human, depicts man's voice, narrating the violence and

determination that led to the victory at Beersheba.

Vertical steel shards are key to the construction of the sculpture. They convey the violent, unimaginable destruction of modern warfare and occupy the space of the rider armed with lance, bayonet and rifle, whilst providing structural support to the horses arrested mid flight.

Facing the sculpture, the viewer stands in the position of the enemy, witnessing wave after wave of fearless assault. The sculpture depicts the strain of horses at full gallop

in the chaos of war. Their ghostly appearance embodies the courage and otherworldly strength of the light horse partnership, presenting human emotion through the equine form.

One figure lies prone, struggling in their wake. It completes the sculptures formal composition, and illustrates the reality and futility of war.

Harrie Fasher  
September 2017

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

A recipient of the Helen Lempriere Scholarship in 2017, HARRIE FASHER is an Australian artist engaged in sculpture and drawing.

Working from Oberon, NSW, her studio is a hive of activity, producing large scale steel sculptures that embody tension and movement.

Fasher utilises both abstraction and figurative form, predominately the horse, to convey her message. Working with steel as her primary medium, the sculptures are three dimensional drawings that illicit an emotional response from the viewer.

The mental and physical power of the horse is core to Fasher's work, and belies her history as an equestrian athlete. Her sculptures display an innate knowledge of the physical and gestural nuances of the horse, and the unique bond between horse and human.

Fasher has work in public and private collections both within Australia and internationally. She has an extensive exhibition history, including a seminal sculpture central to the National Museum of Australia's *Spirited: Australia's Horse Story* exhibition in 2014. Critical acclaim, appointment to

the National Art School's teaching staff, and numerous scholarships and residencies reiterate the strength and vitality of Fasher's work and the continued development of her creative practice.

HARRIE FASHER is represented by King Street Gallery on William, Sydney.

[www.kingstreetgallery.com.au](http://www.kingstreetgallery.com.au)  
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HARRIE FASHER: THE LAST CHARGE

2 FEBRUARY - 2 APRIL 2018



Harrie Fasher, *The Last Charge* 2017, Corten plate, reclaimed steel and mild steel rod, five of six pieces, installation view, BRAG. Photo: Silversalt

## THE LAST CHARGE

How many artists can look back on their careers and identify an ‘I have arrived’ moment? For Picasso that moment came in 1907 with *Les Femmes d’Alger*, for Sidney Nolan, it was the first Ned Kelly series of 1946-47. Damien Hirst exhibited his dead shark in formaldehyde in 1991, the following year Jeff Koons showed his first version of *Puppy*.

***It was a narrative that went to the core of who I am in the world. For an Australian and a horsewoman it was a no brainer. The story was mine to tell.***

For Harrie Fasher the turning point came in October, 2017, when she exhibited *The Last Charge* in the 21st *Sculpture by the Sea* (SXS) at Bondi. With one extraordinary work Fasher staked a claim to be seen as a major Australian sculptor. It wasn’t just the scale of the piece that was so impressive, it was the level of artistic ambition and the mind-boggling amount of labour involved. No-one could look upon that ensemble of twisted steel without recognising the many hours it must have taken to bring the project to fruition.

The work was given extra *gravitas* as a commemoration of what is

possibly the greatest military victory in Australian history: the charge of the 4th Light Horse Brigade at Beersheba in the Israeli desert on 31 October, 1917. One hundred years to the day, visitors to *Sculpture by the Sea* were reminded of the significance of a battle that has traditionally enjoyed far less prominence than the disastrous Anzac landing of 25 April, 1915.

On that first day at Gallipoli 747 Australians died, setting the scene for a protracted and futile campaign that would drag on for 8 months and end in retreat, at a cost of a further 8,000 Australian lives. At the battle of Beersheba, the Light Horse lost 31 men and 70 horses, winning the day with one memorable attack.

It says something (perhaps something good) about the Australian character that we memorialise a defeat rather than a victory. The Anzacs’ “baptism of blood” has taken on mythical status as the moment a young nation came of age, as if our legitimacy as a sovereign state required some fearful act of



Harrie Fasher, *The Last Charge* 2017, Corten plate, reclaimed steel and mild steel rod, fallen horse, installation view, BRAG. Photo: Silversalt

martyrdom. By the time the 4th Light Horse Brigade had overrun the enemy at Beersheba, the Australians had nothing to prove. They were respected, battle-hardened soldiers.

The Charge of the 4th Light Horse Brigade has been immortalised by Charles Chauvel’s *Forty Thousand Horsemen* (1940), the greatest propaganda film in Australian cinematic history. It was designed to inspire feelings of patriotism and assist with recruiting during World War Two. At the very least it proved a raging success at the box office.

Fasher’s intentions in *The Last Charge* were anything but propagandistic. She began by wanting to make a sculpture of a group of nine tense and straining horses inspired by George Lambert’s iconic painting, *Across the Black Soil Plains* (1899). She was also thinking about Eadweard Muybridge’s photographic studies of the horse in motion, Degas’s small horse sculptures, and the confronting state required some fearful act of

de Bruyckere. She also admits a lasting passion for Eduard Detailles’ grand Salon painting, *Vive L’Empereur* (1891), in the Art Gallery of NSW, which shows a cavalry charge by Napoleon’s 4th Hussars at the Battle of Friedland, where the French inflicted a heavy defeat on the Russians.

Fasher would have a sudden change of heart when SXS Director, David Handley, mentioned that 2017 was the centenary of the battle of Beersheba. “I thought about it overnight,” she recalls, “and the more I explored the idea, the more it came alive. It was a narrative that went to the core of who I am in the world. For an Australian and a horsewoman it was a no brainer. The story was mine to tell.”

With seed funding and further support from SXS patrons, Jane and David Duncan, Fasher immersed herself in the tale of the Light Horse Brigade in Beersheba – said to be the last successful cavalry charge in military history. At the beginning of her endurance test she didn’t know

Having decided on a subject for her *Sculpture by the Sea* submission, Fasher had to figure out how many horses she needed. As there were 800 horses in the actual charge, she felt that the least she could make would be eight. “This is where I tricked myself,” she says. “When you put eight against 800 it doesn’t sound like a lot. It’s only when I got started on the work that I thought: “This is ridiculous!”

At the end of May Fasher returned from an artists’ tour of the battlefields of the Western Front and went immediately to work. She had less than five months to make the piece, which meant working impossibly long hours. Her long-term assistant, Nicole O’Regan, was obliged to work four days a week instead of two, with other friends brought in to help when required. Allan Wilding from Metaland, Bathurst, supplied her with steel, and the use of a truck.

When a painter makes a mistake she can paint over the problem area or scrub everything out and start again. For a sculptor the process is much harder. Working in three dimensions means that a piece has to succeed from many different angles. Every correction, every change of mind has a massive physical cost, and - as all artists know - works have a habit of evolving in the studio. The most precise and detailed maquettes are ultimately nothing more than provisional sketches when it comes to producing a large-scale sculpture.

The toughest challenge may not have been the fabrication of the work but the complexity of the composition which required thinking through the individual poses of seven galloping horses and one lying dead on the ground, along with the way each component related to the others. There was also the question of how to get the piece to stand up - a problem solved by an ingenious set of tilted struts that are essentially abstract but make one think of banners held aloft,

or the lances of mounted knights in armour.

“During construction they began to feel like bomb blasts,” says Fasher, “with the horses dodging between them. I wanted the audience to hear the explosions and feel the adrenaline. I was constantly analysing them formally as relationships between line and form which interrupted space. The dead one, on a formal level, is a full stop.”

The strips of metal that guaranteed a secure base were buried in the ground, heightening the impression of rapid motion.

Fasher always intended the sculpture to be placed on top of a ridge at Marks Park. She wanted to see the rising sun behind the sculpture, and let viewers approach the work from the perspective of the enemy soldiers in the trenches. She imagined what it must have been like for the Turks who realised they couldn’t adjust the range of their machine guns quickly enough to forestall the charge. They would have heard the thunder of the horses’ hooves, the whistling of bullets, and the bloodcurdling roars from the riders excited to be finally in action after a twelve-hour trek through the desert. In war, as in sport, momentum is everything, and by riding to the trenches rather than dismounting and attacking on foot, the Australians had caught their opponents off guard.

The horses were driven, not just by their riders, but by the smell of water on the other side of enemy lines.

Described like this, the sculpture may sound like an old-fashioned celebration of a famous victory, but that’s not the feeling one gets from these stark, skeletal figures. Fleshless and riderless, Fasher’s horses have a ghostly quality. They act as a memorial to the brutality of the battle, but also to their own fate.

During the campaign soldiers and horses had formed the closest bonds of trust and affection. In battle each depended on the other for survival. Some of the soldiers imagined riding those horses down the main street of an Australian city in a great victory parade. Instead, when the war had been won, the men were told that 3,000 horses were to be destroyed. Tails and manes were to be trimmed, shoes removed, and the hides tanned for leather. Soldiers were sent to shoot the horses, with each victim being allotted seven pounds of salt for the tanning. A more romantic version of the story has each man being sent to shoot his own horse, but this is almost certainly an embellishment.

When Fasher read about this terrible epilogue, she thought how painful it must have been, not for the horses who died quickly and silently, but for the men who had grown so attached to them in the cauldron of battle. It must have felt like the ultimate betrayal of trust, like shooting a friend in cold blood.

It’s a reminder that however glorious the victory, in war there are few genuine winners. In 1940 Charles Chauvel made a heroic romance from the Australian Light Horse Brigades when the nation needed to be inspired to fight another conflict. Today, in an era where war is fought by drones in lands far removed from the imaginings of most Australians, we tend to view every military engagement as a tragedy. In commemorating a significant event in Australian history Fasher’s eight, apocalyptic horses remind us of the bloodshed, barbarism and sacrifice that underpins every noble sentiment.

**John McDonald  
January 2018**

John McDonald is art critic for the Sydney Morning Herald and film critic for the Australian Financial Review

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Harrie Fasher, *The Last Charge* (detail) 2017, installation view, Sculpture by the Sea, Bondi 2017. Photo: Jessica Wylid