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National College of Art & Design

Faculty of Design

Department of Visual Communications

Canvas and Turf

*A comparison of the racing art of
Alfred Munnings and Peter Curling*

by

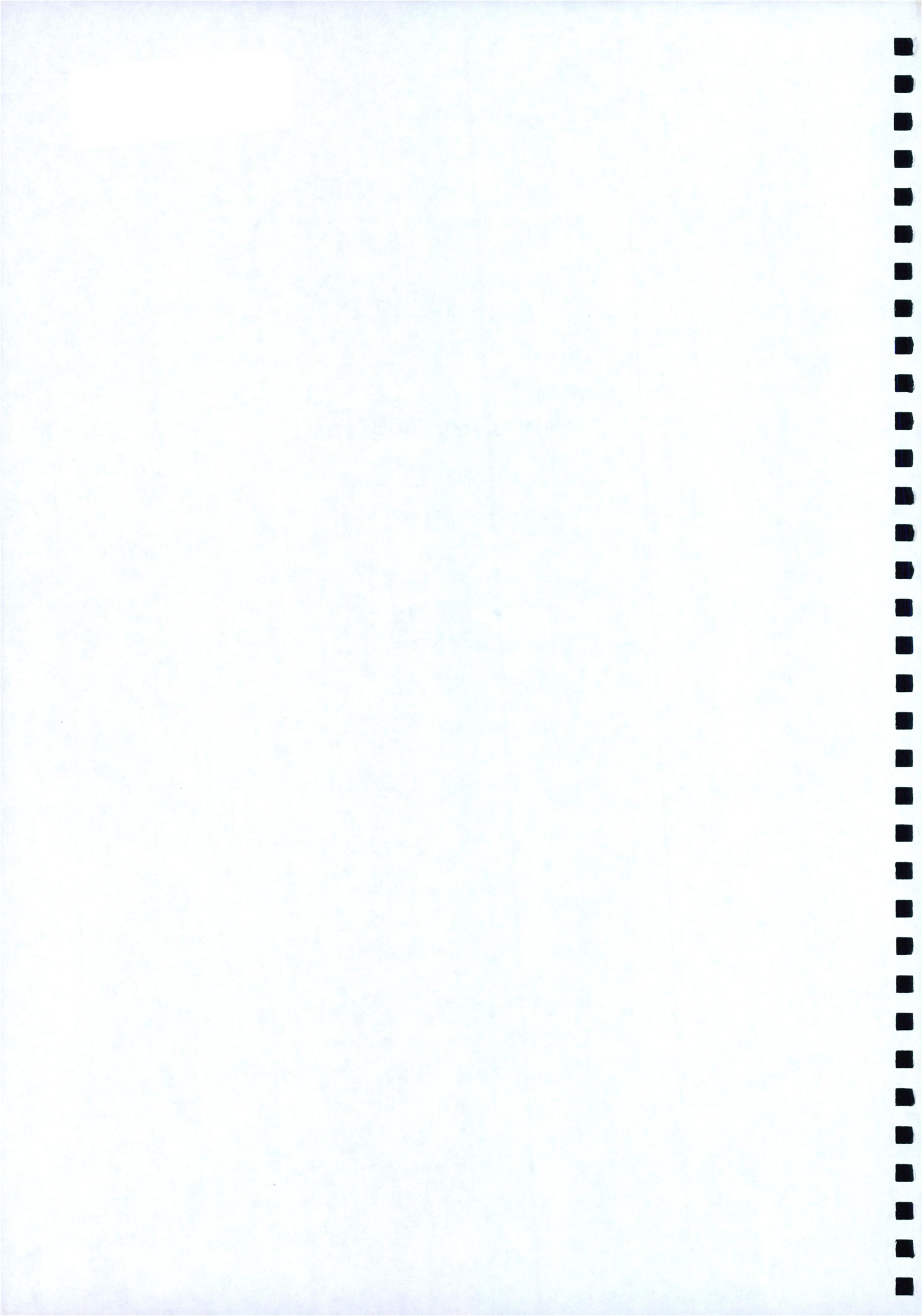
Claire Goodwillie

Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art & Design

and Complementary Studies

in Candidacy for the Degree of Bachelor of Design of Visual Communication

1994



Acknowledgements _____ (i)

In particular, I would like to acknowledge the help of Sonia Rogers, owner of Airlie Stud, of Antionette Murphy from Ib Jorgensen Fine Art, of Dr. Frances Ruane of NCAD and, of course, that of Peter Curling himself. However, completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the assistance of Janet Brabazon, Edward O'Grady and Martin Honniball, all of whom were generous with their time. Finally, I must thank the voices from the world of academic art, Carey Clarke and Brian Fallon, both of whom gave me special help.

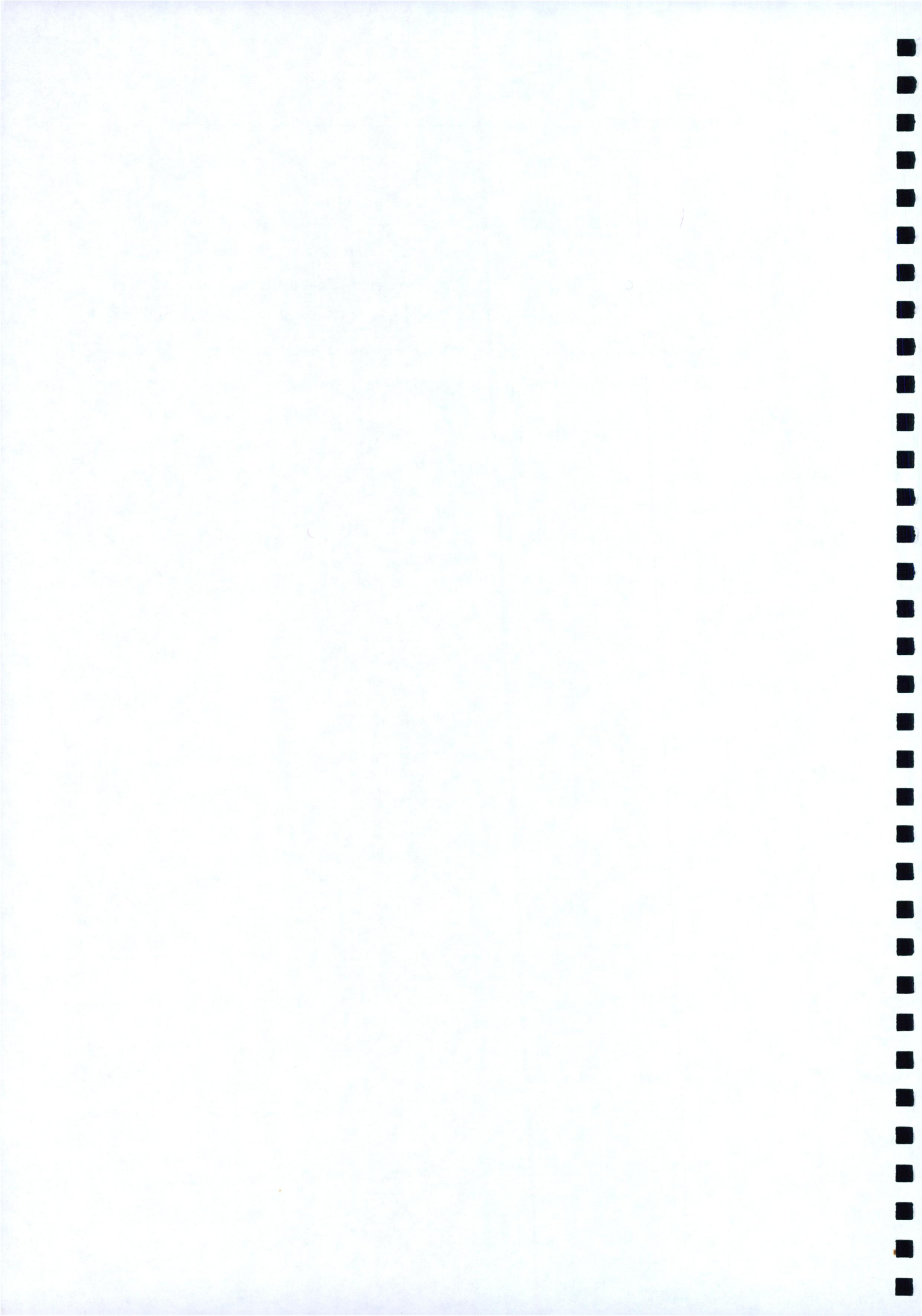
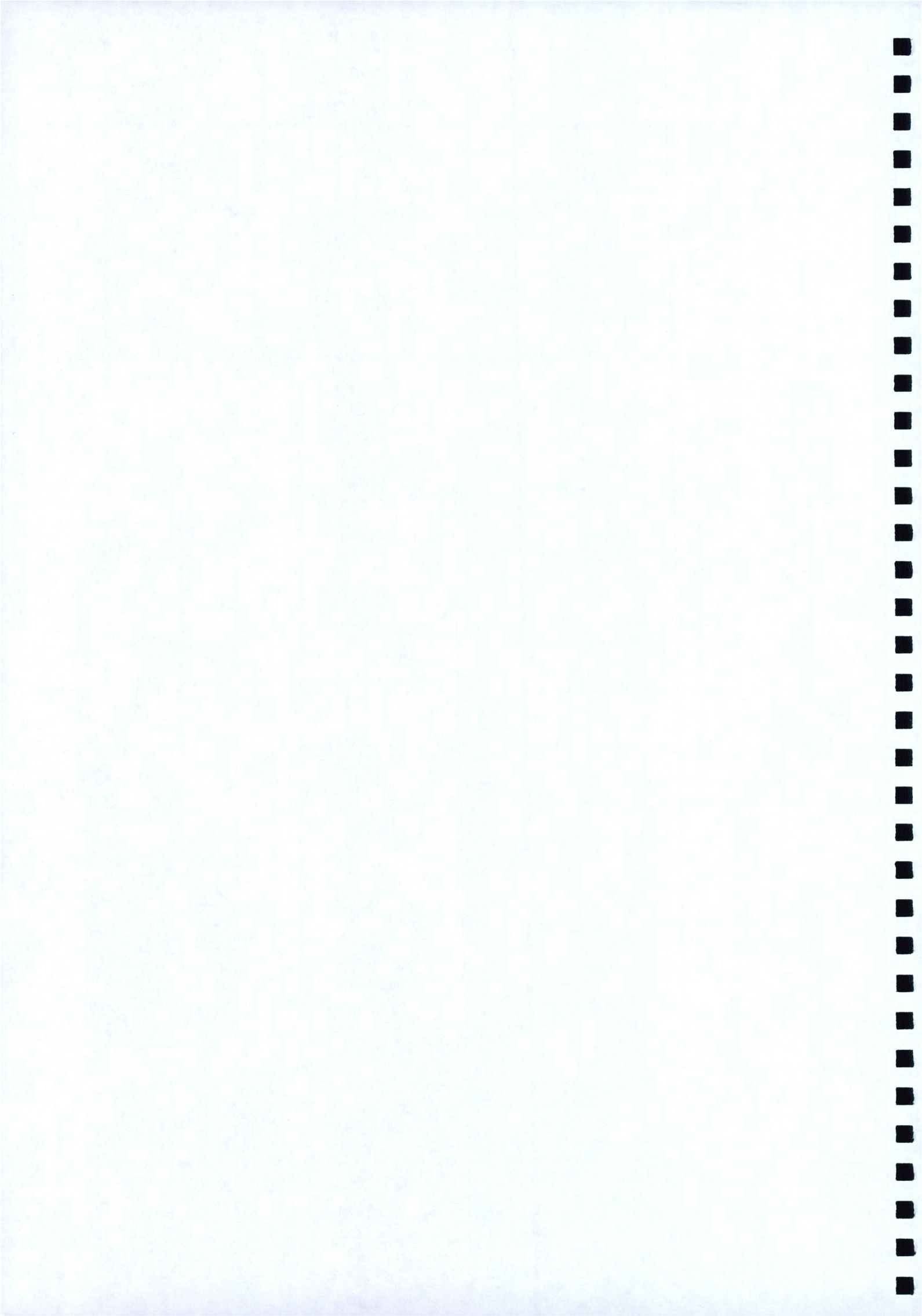
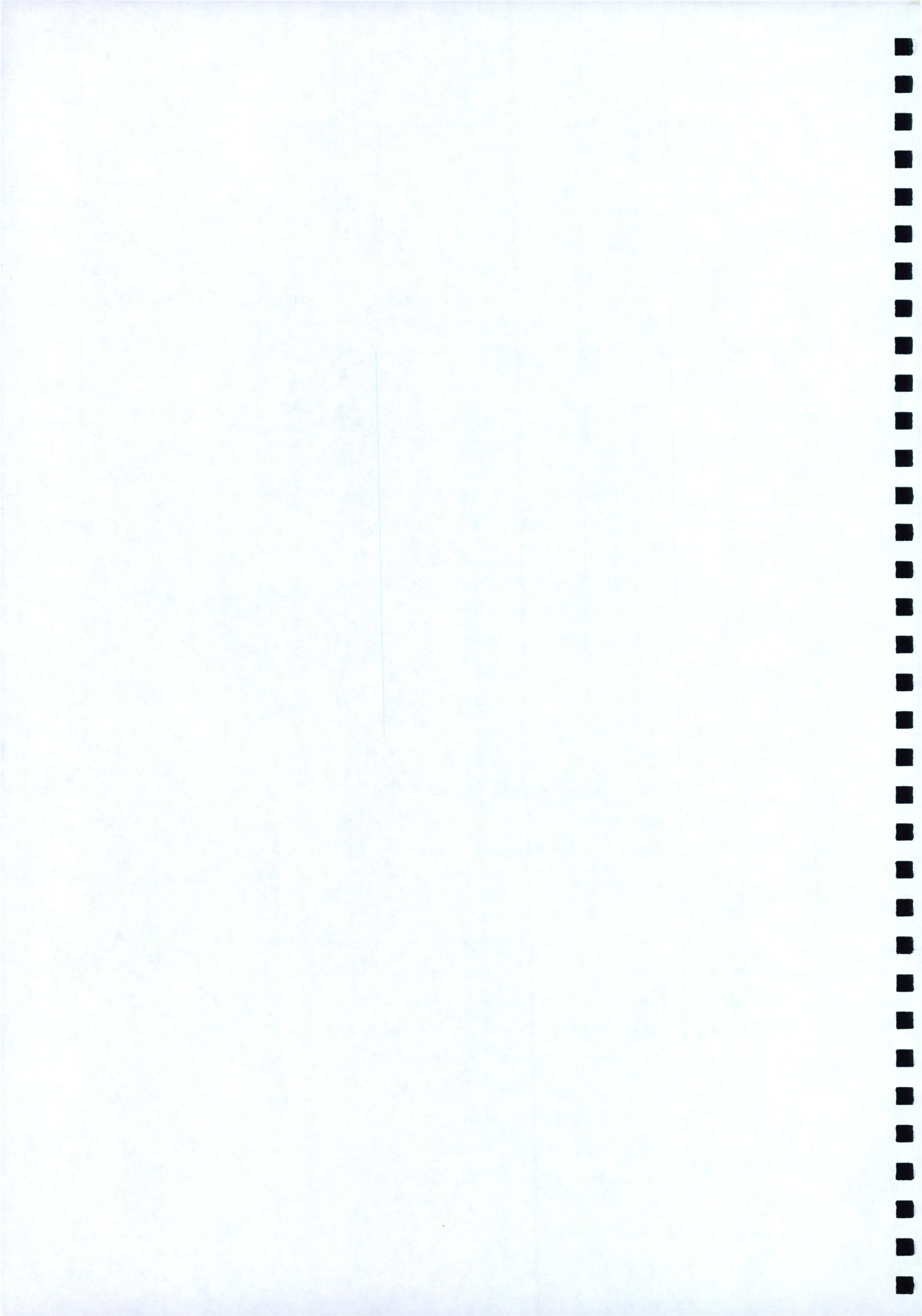


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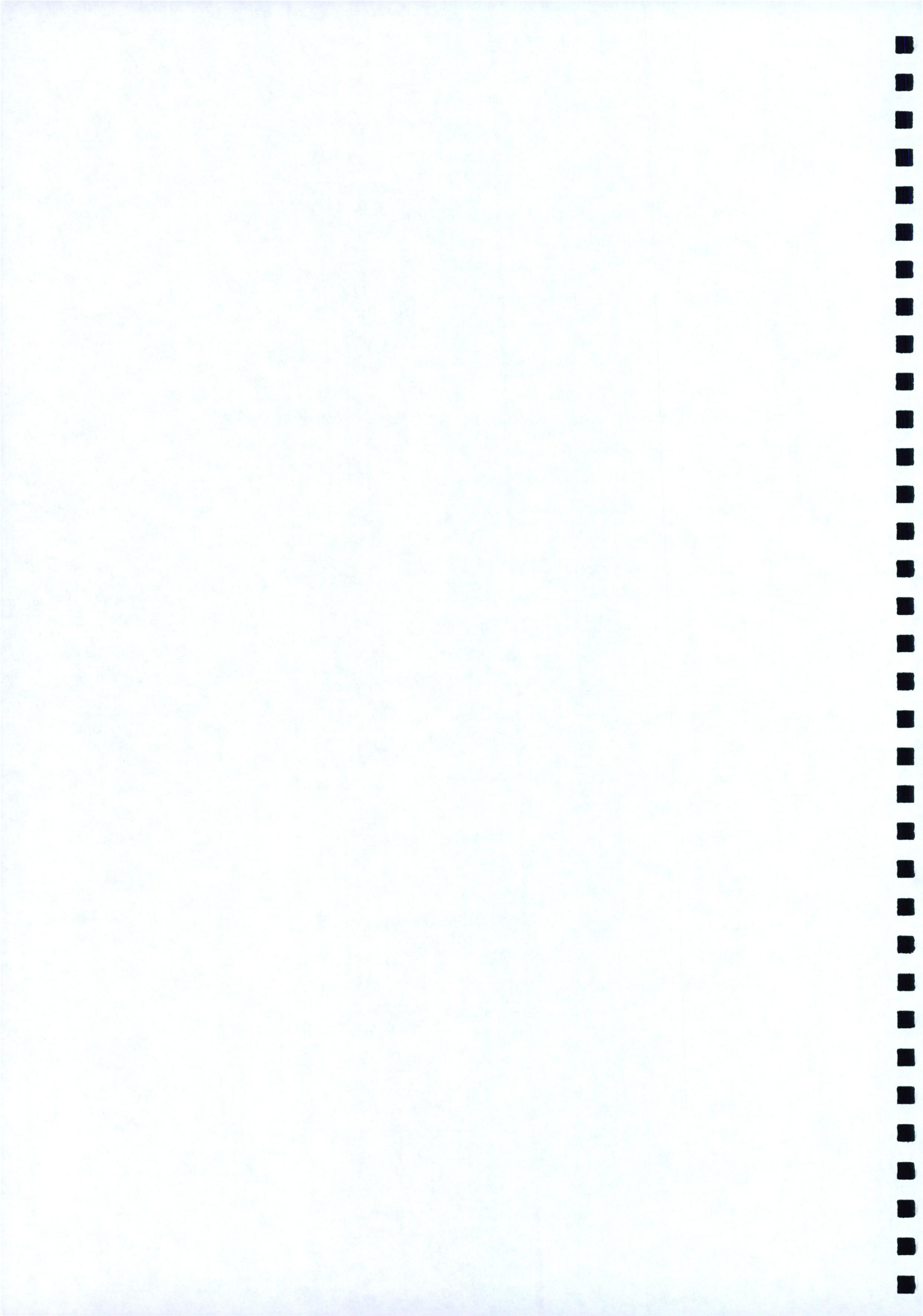
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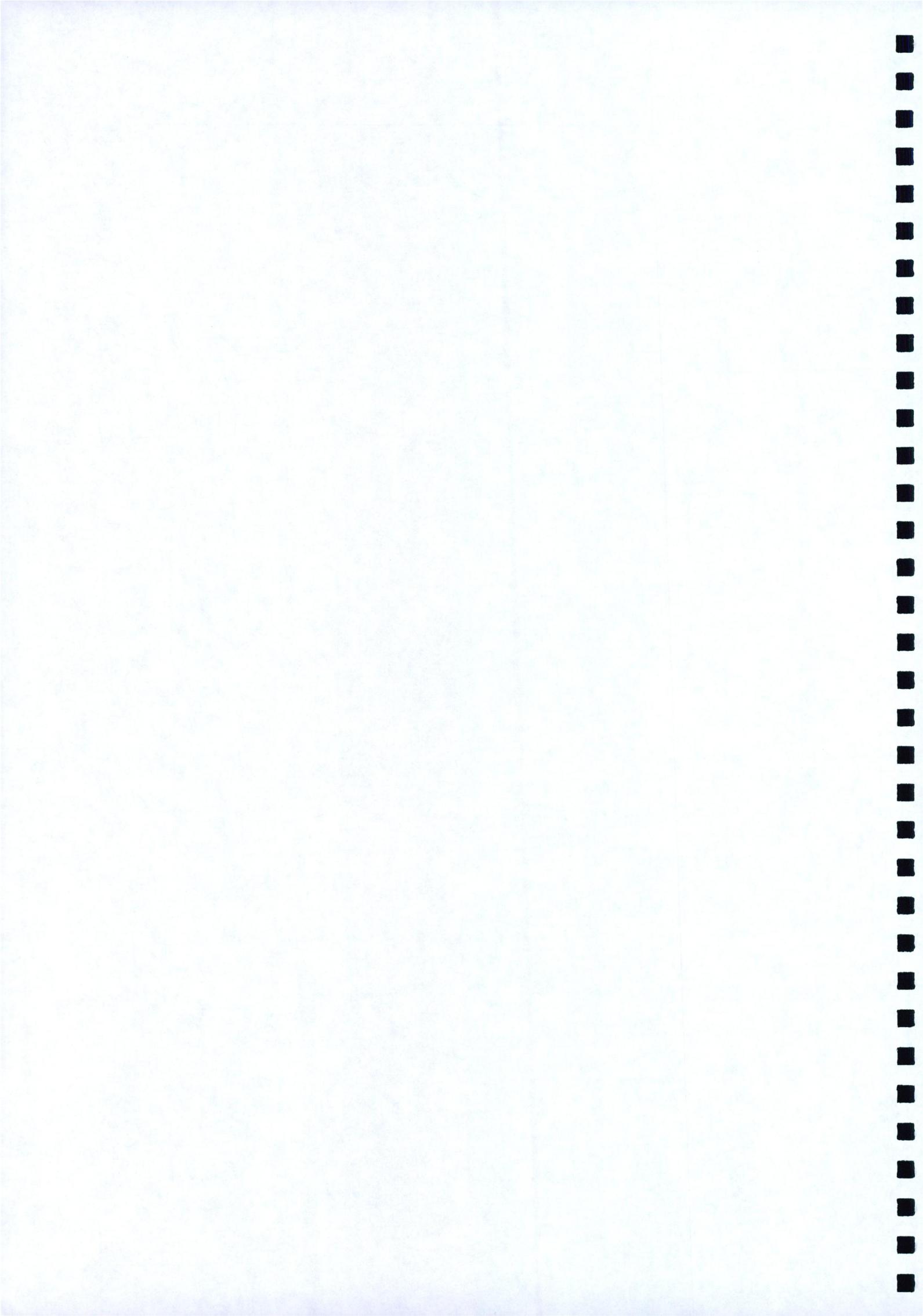


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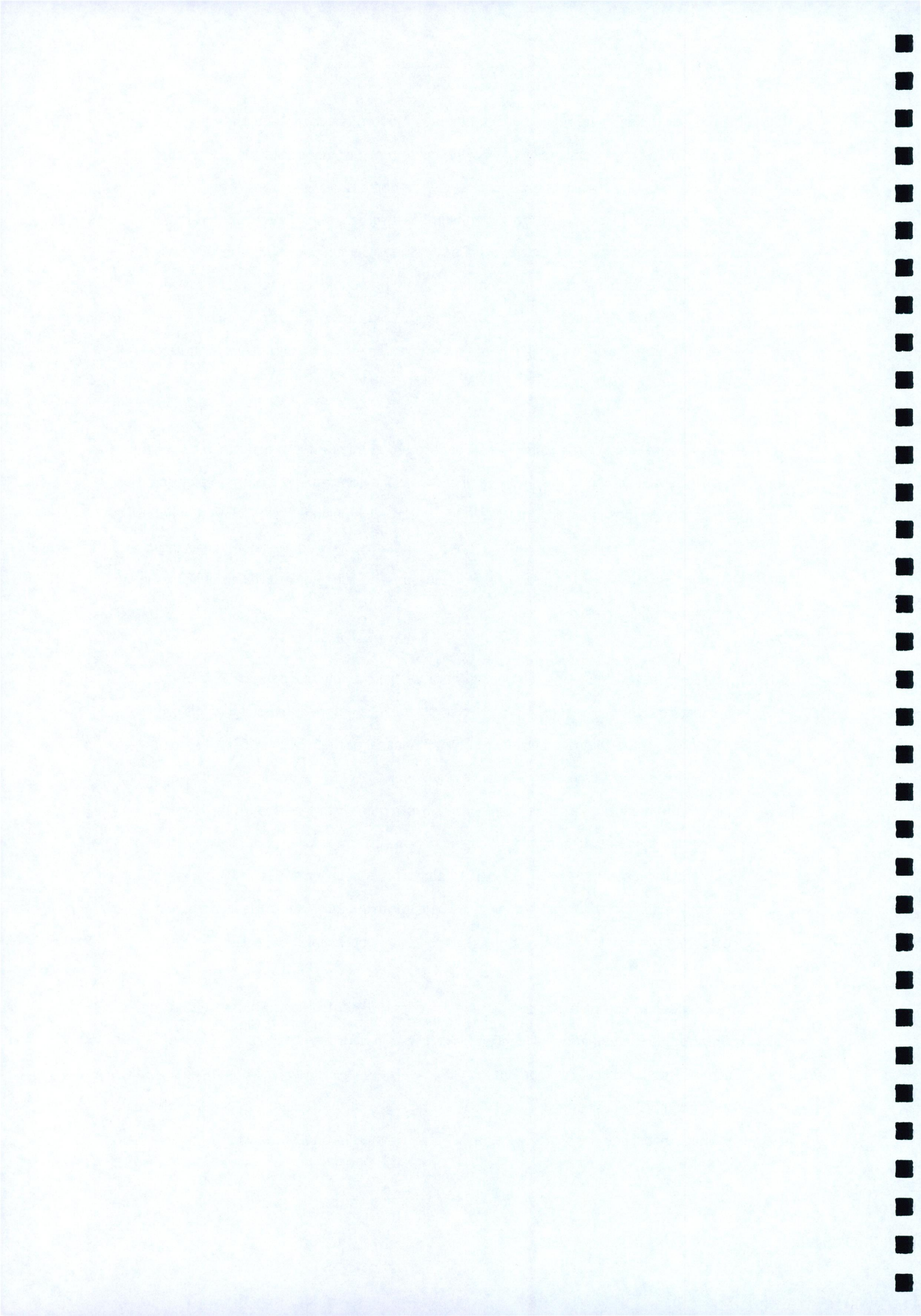


Man has always had a fascination with the horse. Modern physiology and photography may have permitted an understanding of how the horse runs, yet that intellectual understanding only reinforces one's sense of emotional awe. The horse is taking six tons of force on his pastern bones as he puts each foot down. His heart surges to ten times its normal rate. His lungs are extracting a litre of oxygen with every stride. Bursting out of the starting stalls, he can accelerate from a standstill to fifty miles an hour in two and a half seconds, a matter of half a dozen strides. "The racehorse is designed by God to explode into a machine that defies physiology" said Dr. George Pratt, the veterinarian at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Fairley, 1990, pg. 139).

It is this fascination which has produced what I regard as some superb equestrian paintings. Throughout the course of this thesis, I will compare and contrast some of these pictures. I have chosen to look in particular at the work of Alfred J. Munnings (1878-1959) and Peter Curling (1955-) which celebrates the world of the thoroughbred horse. My main reason for choosing to discuss this particular aspect of equestrian painting is a knowledge of horses in general, and racehorses in particular:

I wanted to look at the work of Munnings because, from an entirely personal point of view, I think that he is the best equestrian painter of all time; even more successful than his predecessor George Stubbs, the noted eighteenth century animal painter. Born in 1878, Munnings was painting during a time of great change in the world of art. He opted to continue painting in his own traditional style, preferring to avoid involvement with the Modern movement. His paintings are a wonderful combination of anatomical correctness along with a great sense of vitality and movement. Munnings died in 1959 and his epitaph, written by Augustus John, is eminently suitable: "I think that Munnings was greater than Stubbs; he made it more, had greater narrative quality and his groupings are better" (Goodman, 1988, pg. 214).

I have chosen to compare and contrast the paintings of Peter Curling to those of Munnings mainly because I feel that the influence of Munnings can be traced through the work of Curling. This is particularly apparent in those pictures where Curling has combined an atmospheric portrayal of a scene with a very correct rendition of the equine subject. Another reason which influenced my choice was the fact that I wanted to discuss the work of a

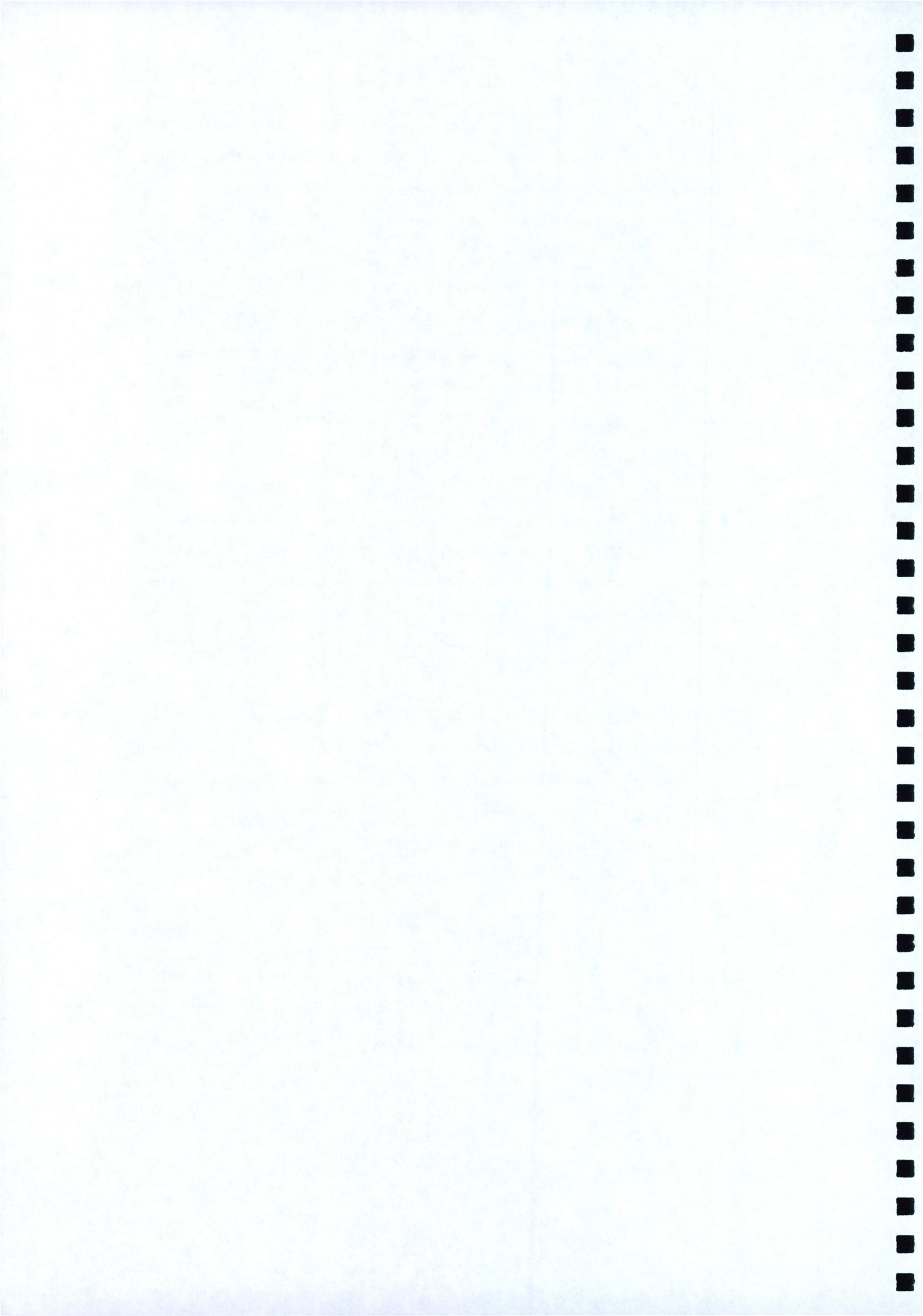


contemporary artist who, I believe, will play an important role in the future world of equestrian painting. I also wanted to document the work of this highly successful artist. Very little written material exists on this subject at the present time, and I hope that this thesis will serve as an interesting account of Curling's life and work to date.

The central core of this study will be a discussion of both Munnings and Curling in the context of their contemporaries. Munnings was painting at the same time as artists such as Lionel Edwards and Dame Laura Knight, who both painted in a somewhat similar traditionalist style. However, he was also a contemporary of the instigators of the Modern movement, and throughout his autobiography *The Finish*, (Munnings, 1953) he makes many references to the work of Picasso and Braque. Curling spent some time studying in Florence, under Signorina Simi, as did fellow artists Susan Crawford and Niccolo Carraciolo. I have found it interesting to discuss the similarities and differences in the work of these three artists, who have all produced paintings within a few years of each other. My main reason for this emphasis on the contemporaries of Munnings and Curling is that I feel that it is very important not to view any painting in isolation. Instead, it is more enlightening to look at the paintings of Munnings and Curling when compared to others from both sporting and academic art backgrounds.

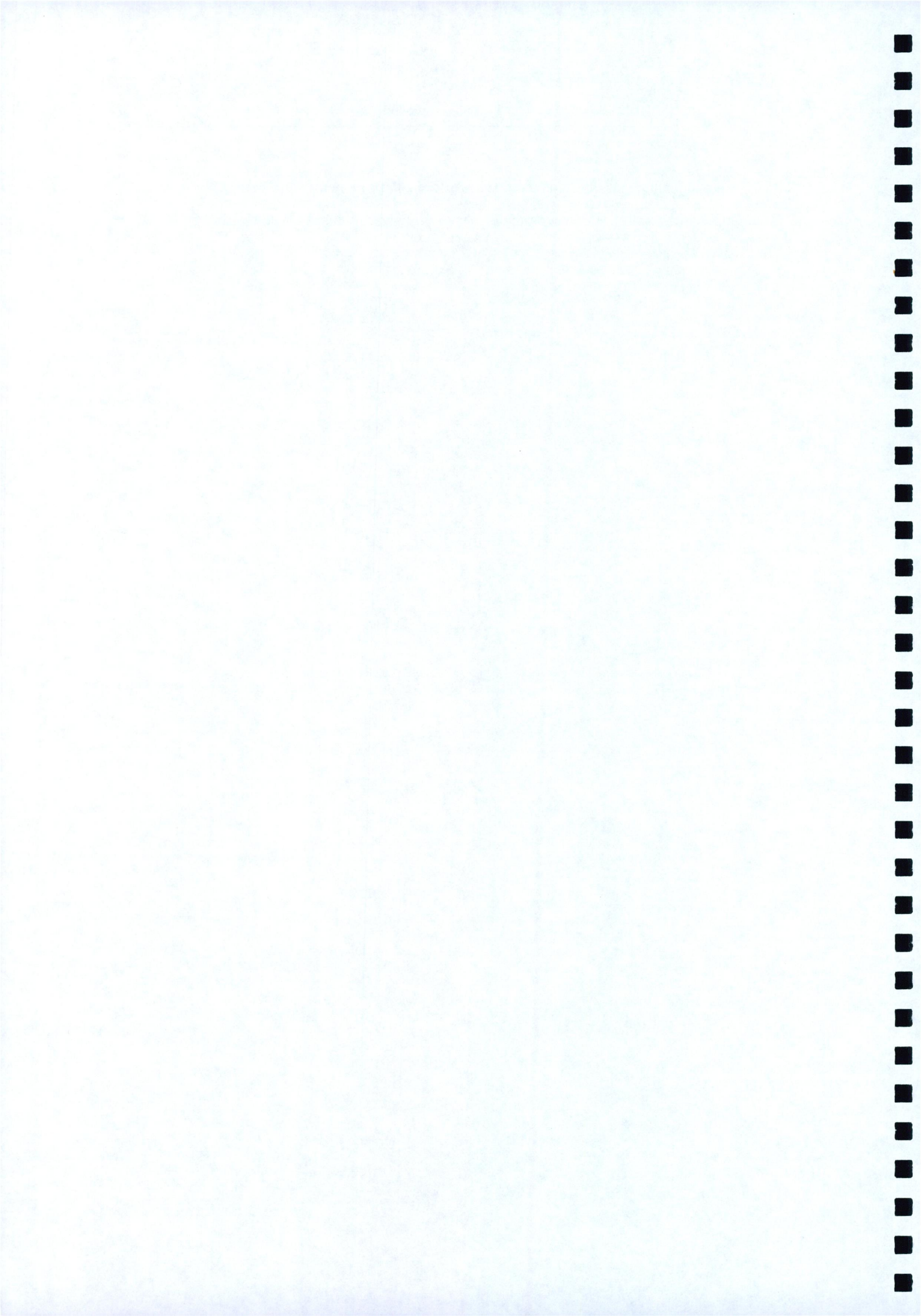
However, I will begin by giving some indication of why the two artists painted the way they did. This derives partly from their education but also from influences which previous artists have had on them. In addition, I will make a comparison in terms of style and technique and look at the lesser-known aspects of the artists' work: Munnings as a sculptor and Curling as a caricaturist. Finally, I have considered a topic which has affected both artists : that of working to commission and the consequences of such action on both their work and their reputations.

Since Peter Curling is very much alive, the majority of my research was done in the form of interviews, not only with the artist himself but also with people familiar with his work. I have tried to balance this by using (where appropriate) Munnings' own thoughts and opinions as contained in his three volume autobiography.



The main influences which affected the work of Alfred Munnings and Peter Curling.

This chapter deals not only with the results of their education but also the paintings of past masters which have had a significant influence on their own work.



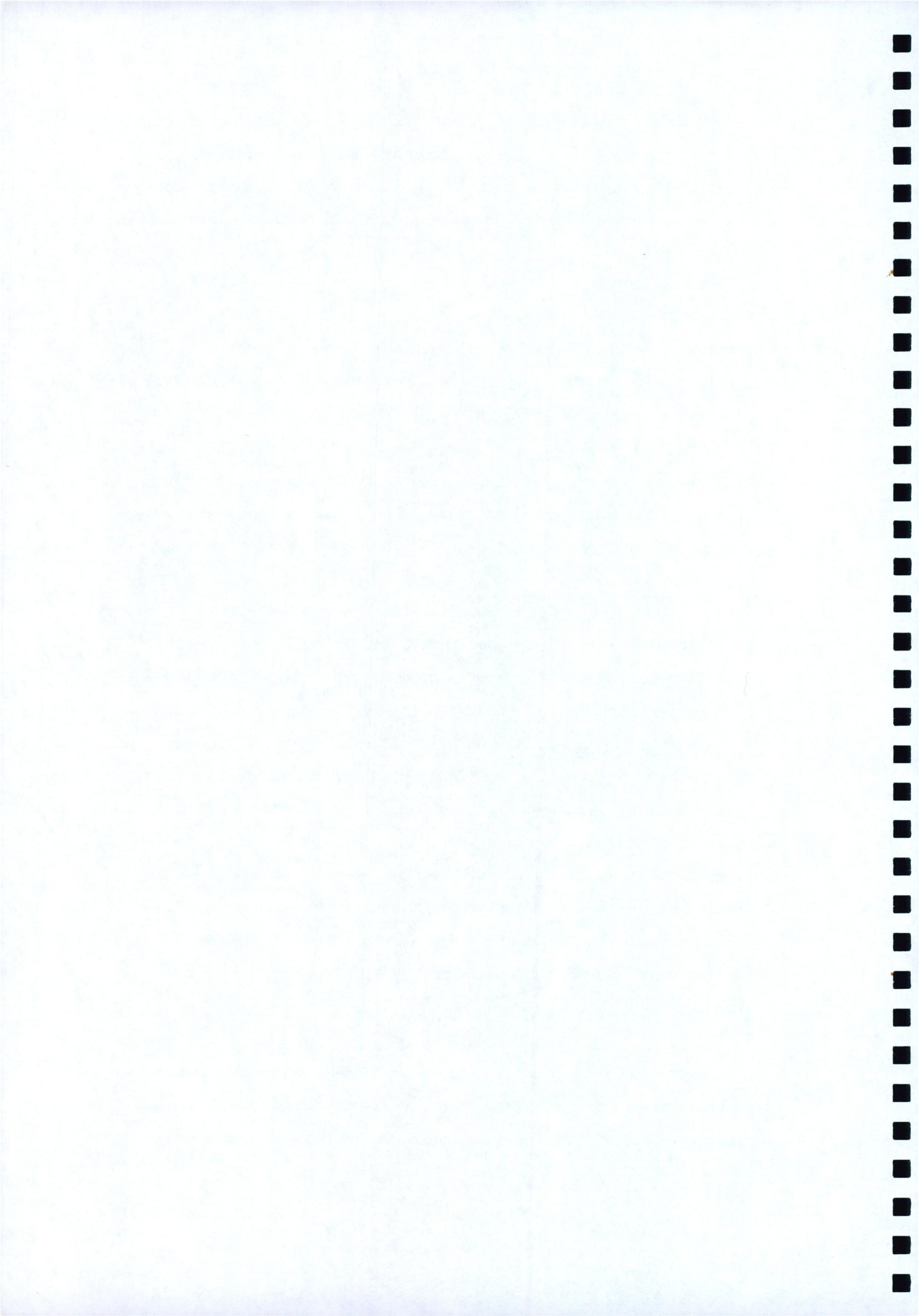
A comparison between the work of two artists would never be complete without some information on why they painted the way they did; most of all the results of their education and the artistic influences of previous painters. In this chapter I will look at the processes through which both Munnings and Curling went before developing recognisable and consistent styles of their own.

Alfred Munnings

Munnings began drawing horses in his early childhood and at the age of fifteen he was apprenticed to Page Bros & Co, a firm of lithographers. This training in lithography has, in itself, been credited with helping him to develop his fluency and certainty of line (Berry, 1989, pg. 21) but during these years he also studied at the Norwich School of Art. For the greater part of this time he studied under Miss Gertrude Offord who was a well known watercolour painter of flowers. He enjoyed painting in watercolours and continued working in this medium until well into the 1920s when he began to find the change from one medium to another too big an interruption to his painting of large oils.

In 1902 Munnings travelled to Paris where he discovered the work of Gericault and Morot. The influence of this trip, particularly of the work of Gericault, can be seen in his later use of colour and his representation of movement. Like Munnings, Gericault's roots lay in the very real impressions of his early youth, primarily those of the heavy Norman horses that he could see, ride and study in the fields around his native Rouen. Gericault was one of the first artists to study anatomy in a fundamental manner in order to learn the structure of a body. He examined different limbs of executed persons as well as studying the sick and dying in various hospitals. In his work, according to Walter Friedlaender, there is a sense of a "feverish desire for creation" which is combined with an "almost pedantic scientific study of material" (Friedlaender, 1980, pg. 100). He goes on to explain that this combination results in paintings of a fine passion which although very correct in their details, have been shot through with a new painterly Baroque impulse.

Munnings too, as we have already observed, was very interested in the study of anatomy, and this desire to achieve an overall correctness in his work overflowed into all aspects of his paintings. Having served an arduous apprenticeship he firmly believed in "craftsmanship,



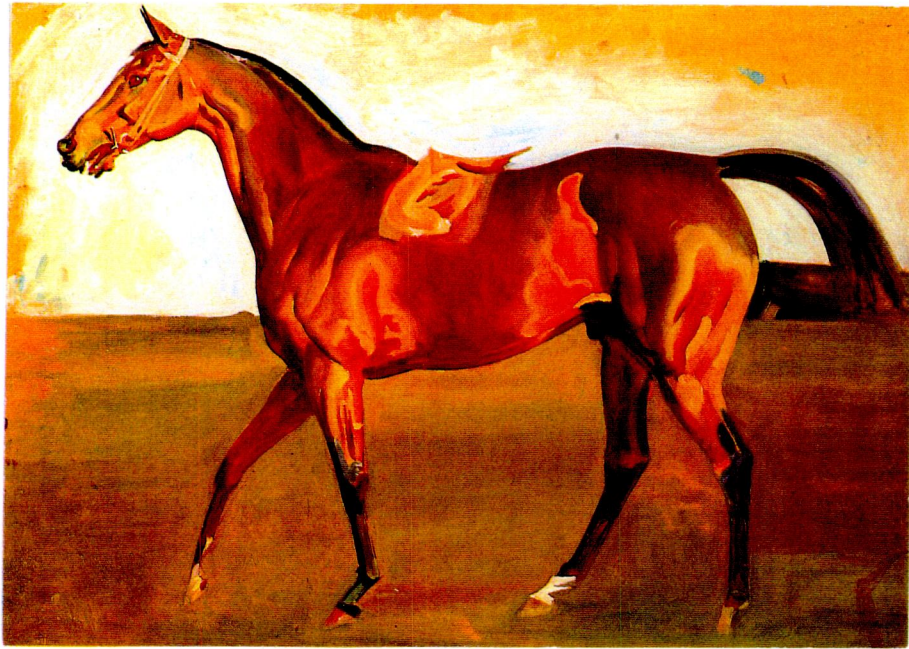


Plate I. Alfred Munnings *Preparatory Study of a Thoroughbred*

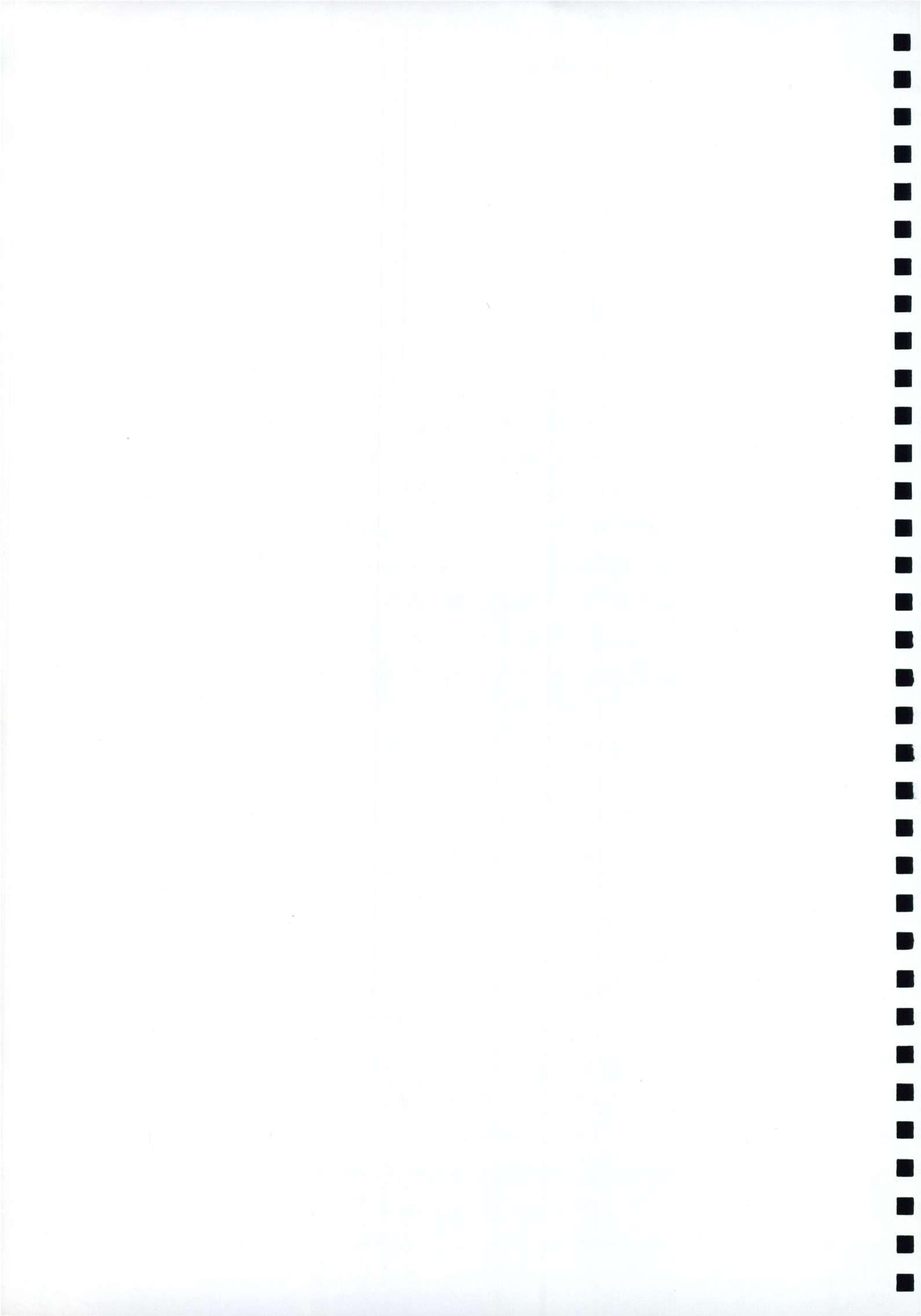




Plate 2. Theodore Gericault *Horseracing at Epsom*

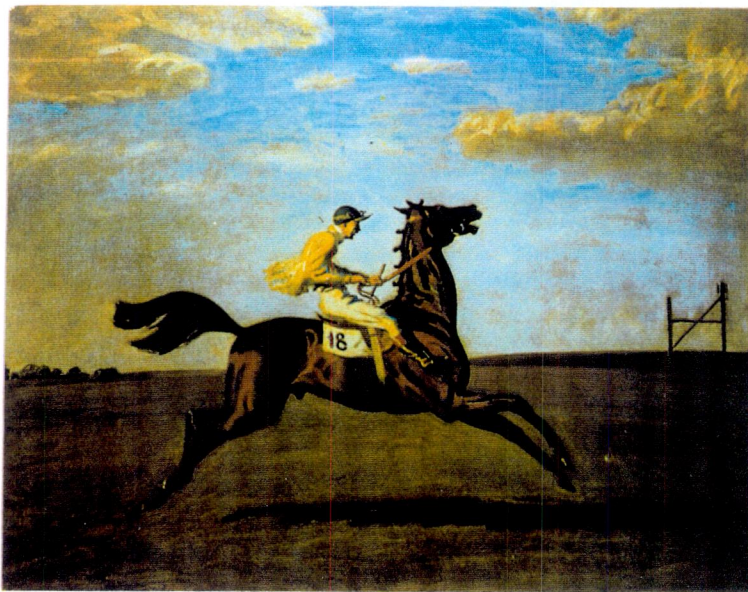
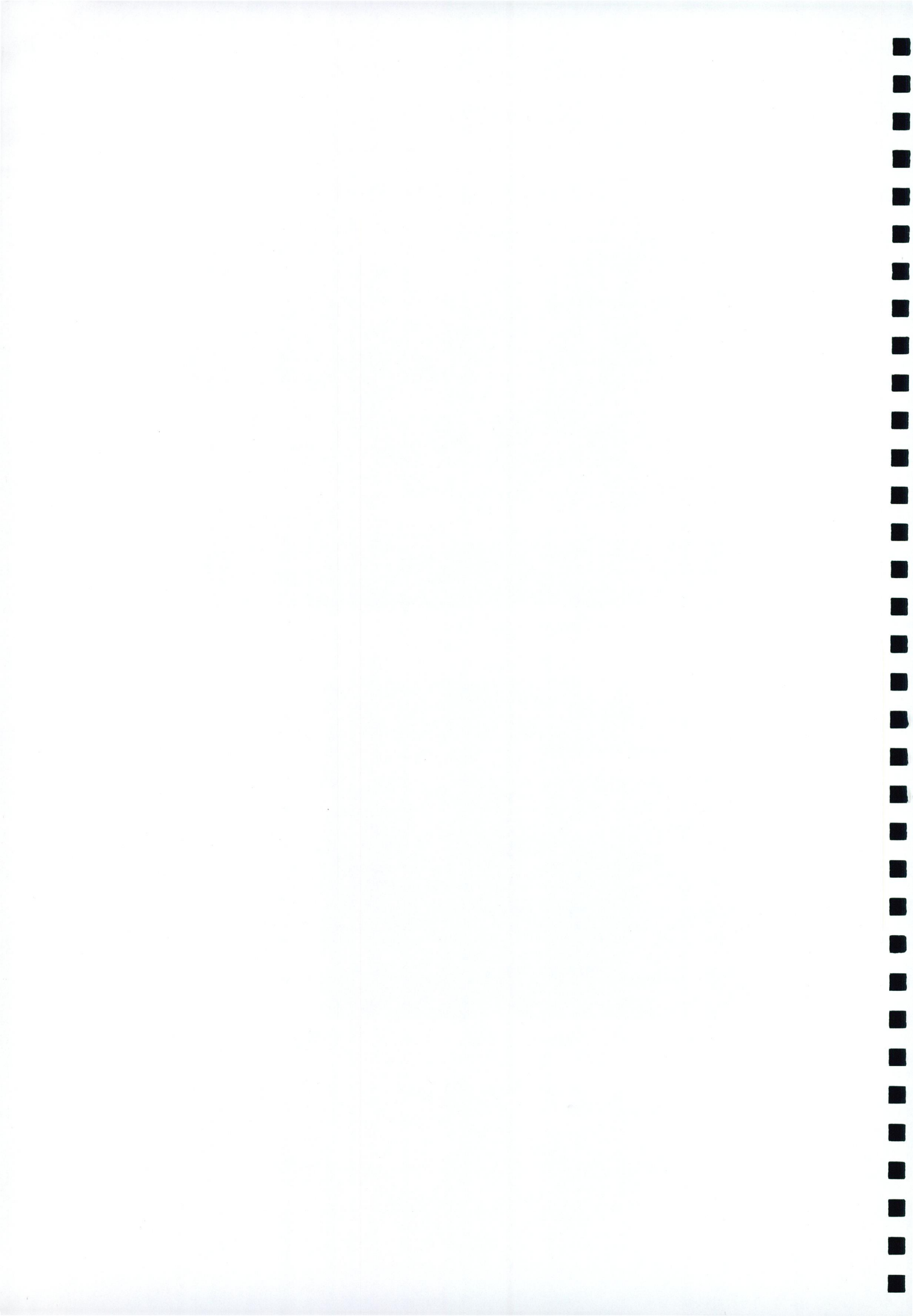


Plate 3. Alfred Munnings *The Runaway*

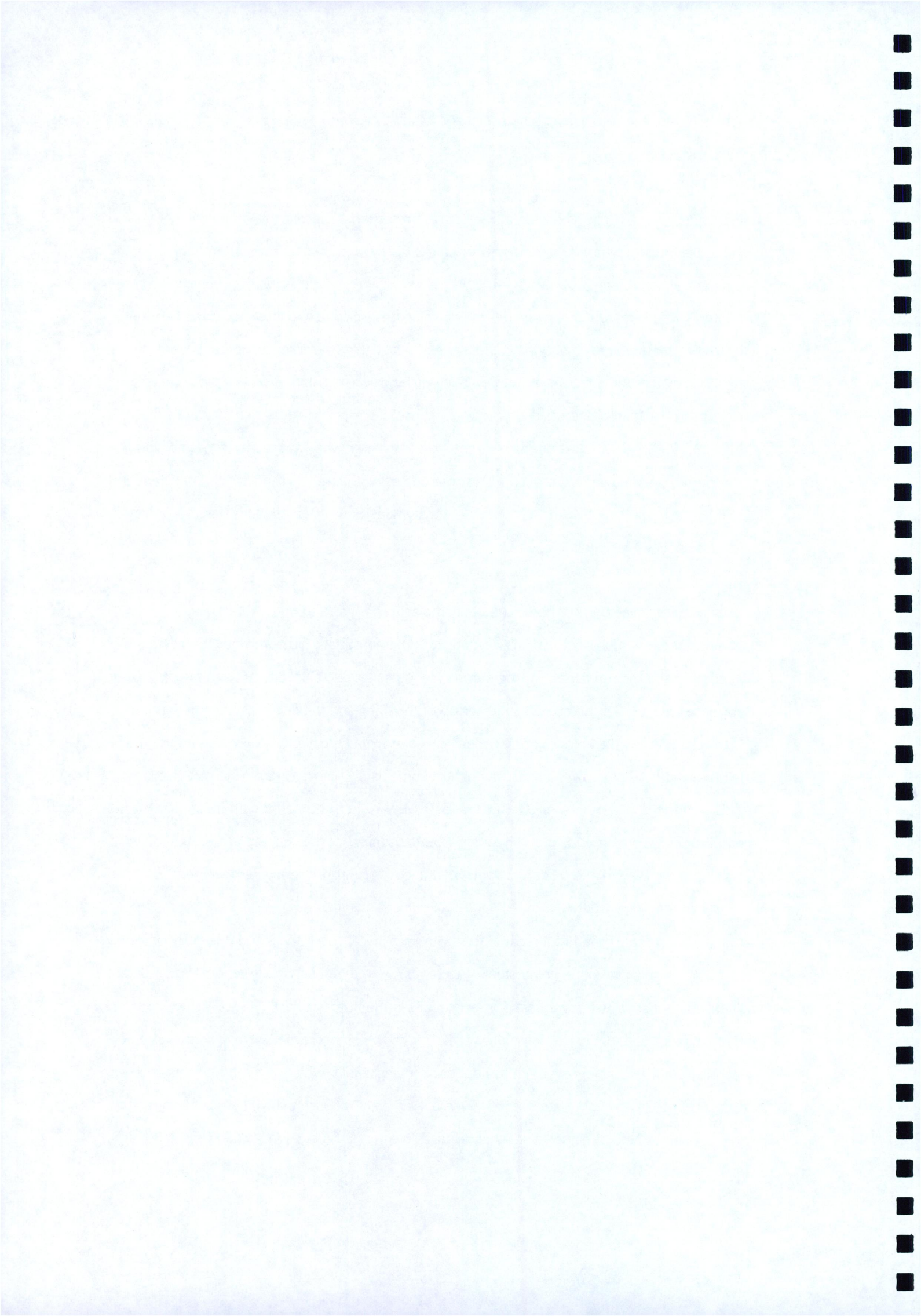


schooling and the disciplines of the profession as the basic requirements for any artist" (Booth, 1978, pg. 23).

Munnings was not only influenced by Gericault's professional approach to his painting but also in his use of colour, particularly his soft tones and deep but muted colours, alternating between light and dark. This can clearly be seen in his *Preparatory Study of a Thoroughbred* (plate 1) where many different shades of brown, varying in tone and intensity, combine together to give a fine portrayal of a wonderful horse. In fact, Carey Clarke, current president of the R.H.A. feels that the effectiveness of a painting depends on its colouration and that one of the reasons for Munnings' success is "his very subtle use of tones and colours", (Goodwillie, NCAD, 1993). Gericault is often remembered as a painter who "applied his tones nervously and quickly and knew how to produce a brilliant effect with every brushstroke" (Friedlaender, 1980, pg.102). I think that the aforementioned study demonstrates how this description could also be applied to Munnings.

In Gericault's *Horseracing at Epsom* (plate 2) the artist has grasped the whole scene in terms of a momentary impression. This is not a picture of immobilised life but rather the painting of a race and the motion itself. Throughout his life Munnings also strove to acquire this skill; an absolute sensation of the eye, a sudden grasp of the flying and the fleeting. Since he has left us with relatively few paintings of horses actually involved in a race, we can only assume that he felt more at ease portraying the activity either immediately before or after the race itself. This is all too apparent in *The Runaway* (plate 3) which, when compared with his studies of the paddock at Epsom and Ascot and his atmospheric paintings of the runners against the lowering skyline on Newmarket Heath, is somewhat unconvincing and lacking in movement.

Munnings was concerned to a great extent with anatomical correctness and the study of anatomy. In this, one of his greatest influences was George Stubbs who is generally regarded "next to Leonardo as the greatest painter scientist in the history of art" (Tate Gallery Publications, 1984, pg. 17). In his own words: "Stubbs' *Anatomy of the Horse* makes a large landmark in my youthful days, with its copper-plate engravings, which at the time I was unable to appreciate to the full" (plate 4). However in later years, after finishing his studies and maturing as an artist he did realise "what an indefatigable colossus Stubbs was" (Munnings, 1951 pg.



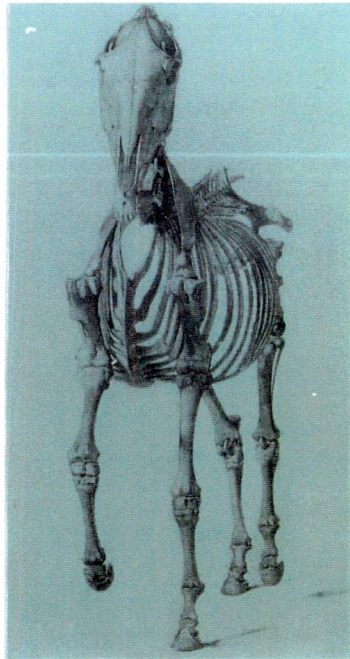
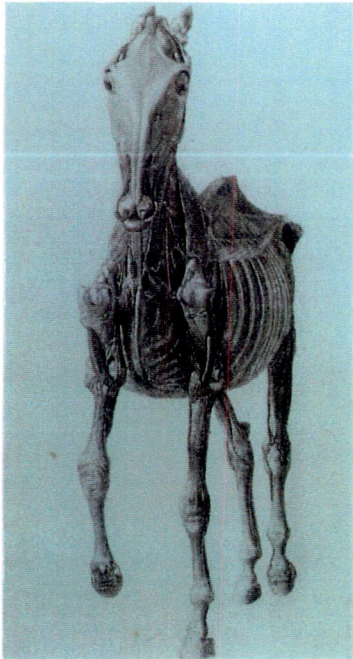
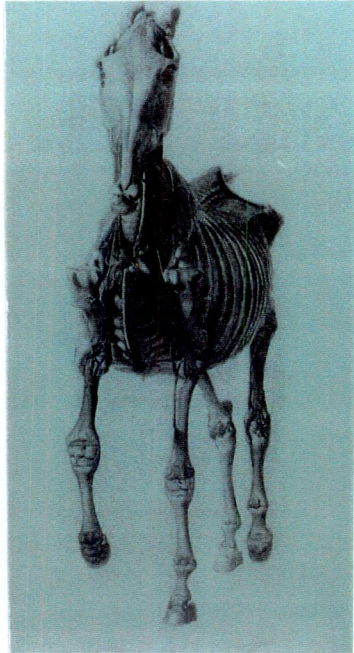
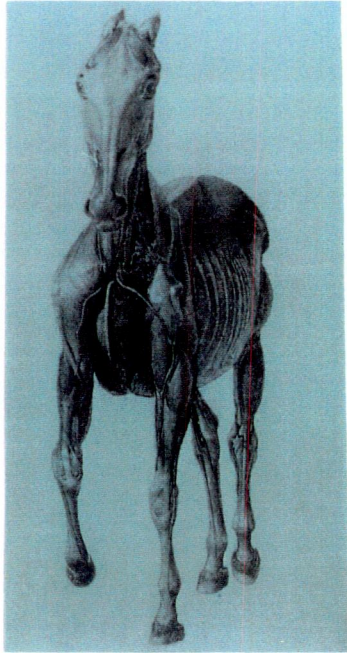


Plate 4. George Stubbs A series of studies from *The Anatomy of the Horse* for the anatomical and skeletal tables

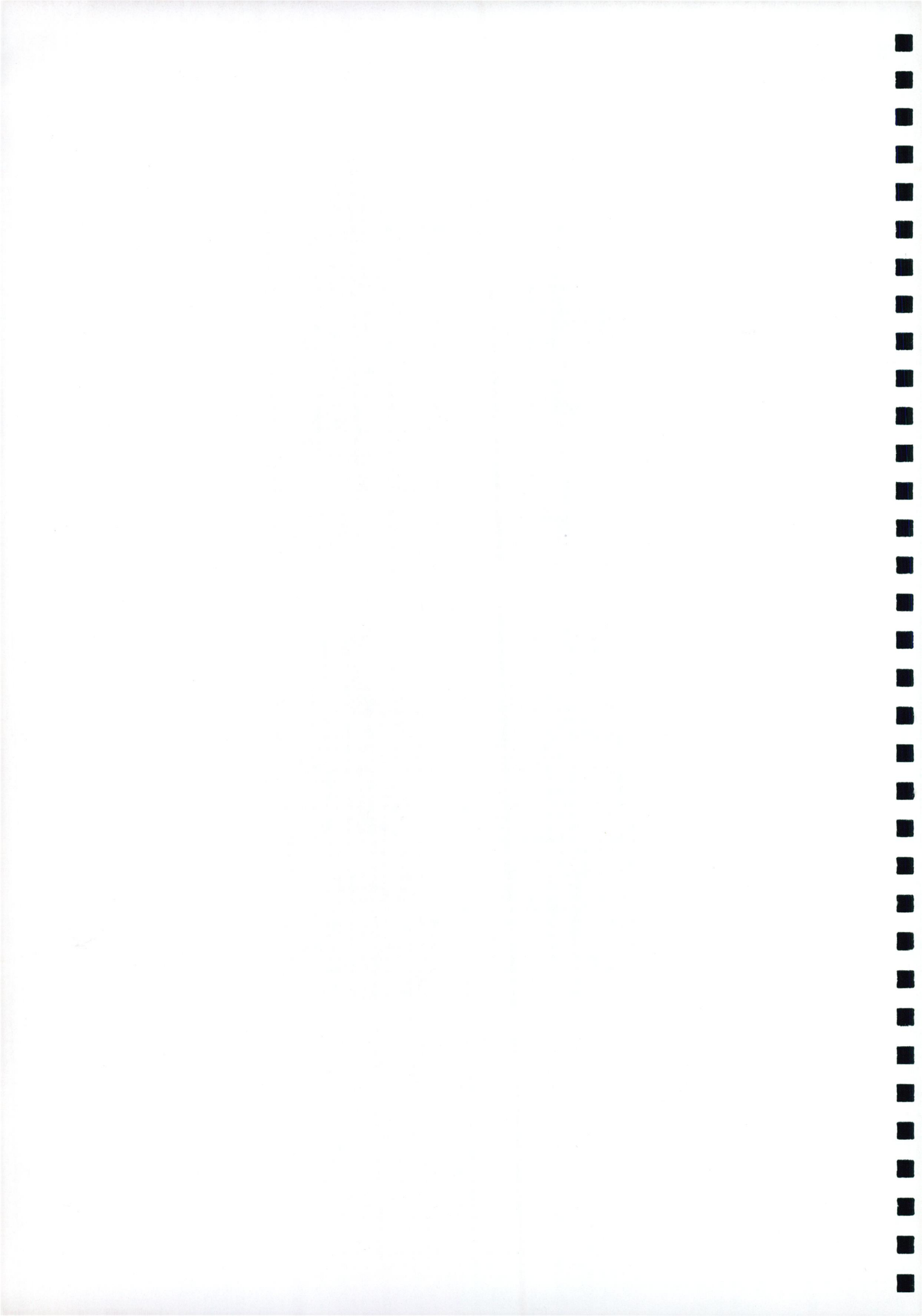




Plate 5. George Stubbs *Gimcrack on Newmarket Heath with a Trainer, Jockey and Stable Lad*



Plate 6. George Stubbs *Gimcrack with John Pratt up, at Newmarket*



17). Munnings respected Stubbs' talent for accurate observation and allowed for his tendency to overstate certain features in his paintings: (plates 5 and 6)

“Stubbs at work.....a great artist. What was Gimcrack like? No horse could have had such a thin, snaky neck; an exaggeration perhaps, on the part of Stubbs to please the owner, but what a good picture, what design, and what a sky” (Munnings, 1951, pg. 57).

In his formative years Munnings was so impressed by pictures of peasant life which had been painted out of doors that he “gave up all hope of ever being anyone at all” (Goodman, 1988, pg. 72). In 1898 he travelled to Munich and was staggered by the virility of the German painters. The large open air pictures of horses, sheep and cattle were more full of life than any paintings he had ever seen. All that summer he “visualised Zugel's vigorous manipulative brushwork in his brilliant painting of a peasant washing his yoked black and white cows in a shallow stream” (Goodman, 1988, pg.101).

Like Stubbs, Munnings may also have been influenced by Constable, with whom he shared the great East Anglian “nursery of art”. Personally I agree with this theory especially as Constable has been described by John Sunderland as an artist who “tried to achieve not only truth to nature, truth to what he actually saw in front of his eyes without selection or rejection, but also truth to the atmosphere in a strictly meteorological sense”, (Sunderland, 1970, 37), When this analysis is applied to Munnings it could equally be said that he always tried to paint the activity that was taking place in front of him while at the same time always remaining true to the anatomical details of the horses. Both artists were always at pains to be as accurate as possible. Another similarity between the work of Munnings and Constable is the fact that the figures contained in their compositions are not artificially put in solely to accentuate the view-point or as an aid to draw the viewer's eye to a particular part of the picture. The characters in the paintings are always at home in the landscape whether they are working or walking, standing or sitting. Constable's *A White Horse* (plate 7) shows this perfectly.

Art critics have also seen an influence of Degas in Munnings' mastery of line and colour, but I personally think that both Gericault and Constable had a more profound influence on what was to become his established style of painting.

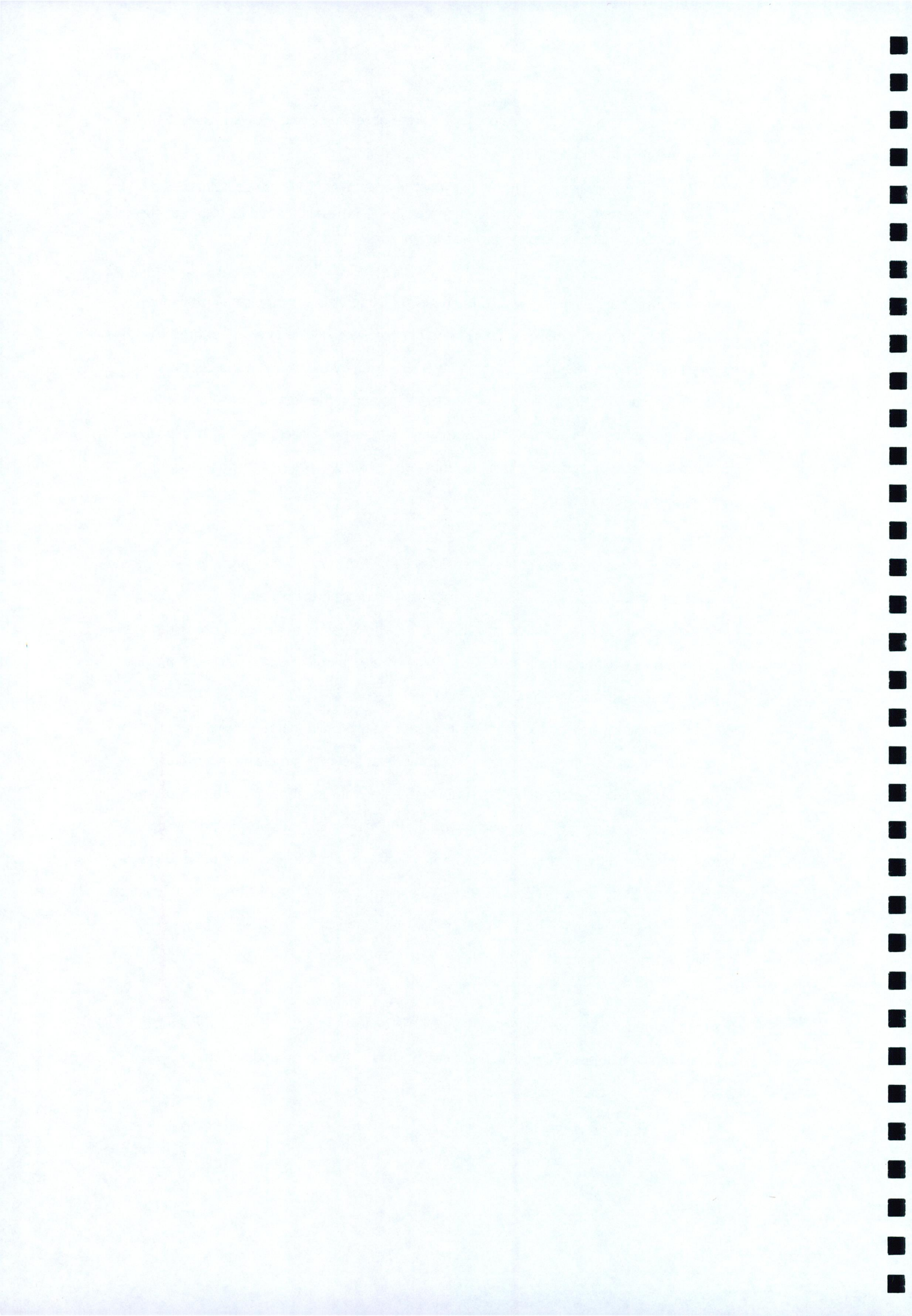




Plate 7. John Constable *The White Horse*

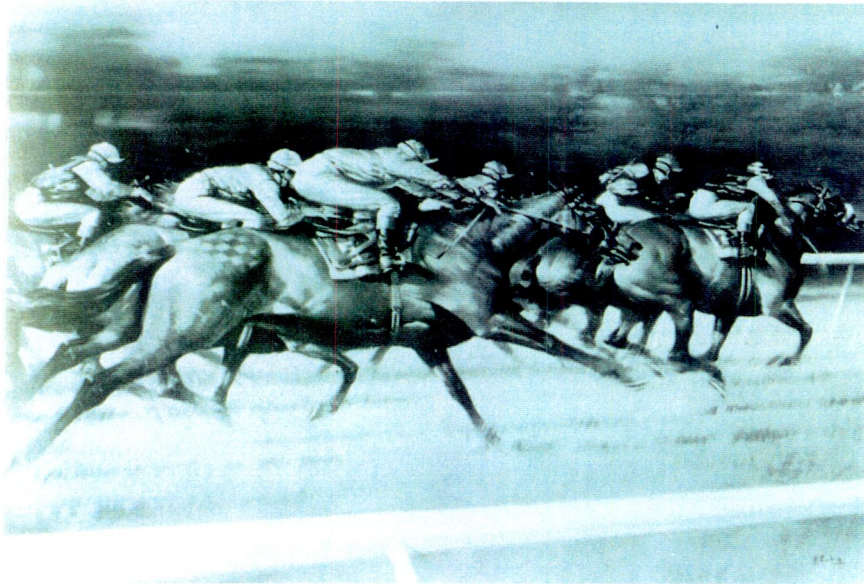
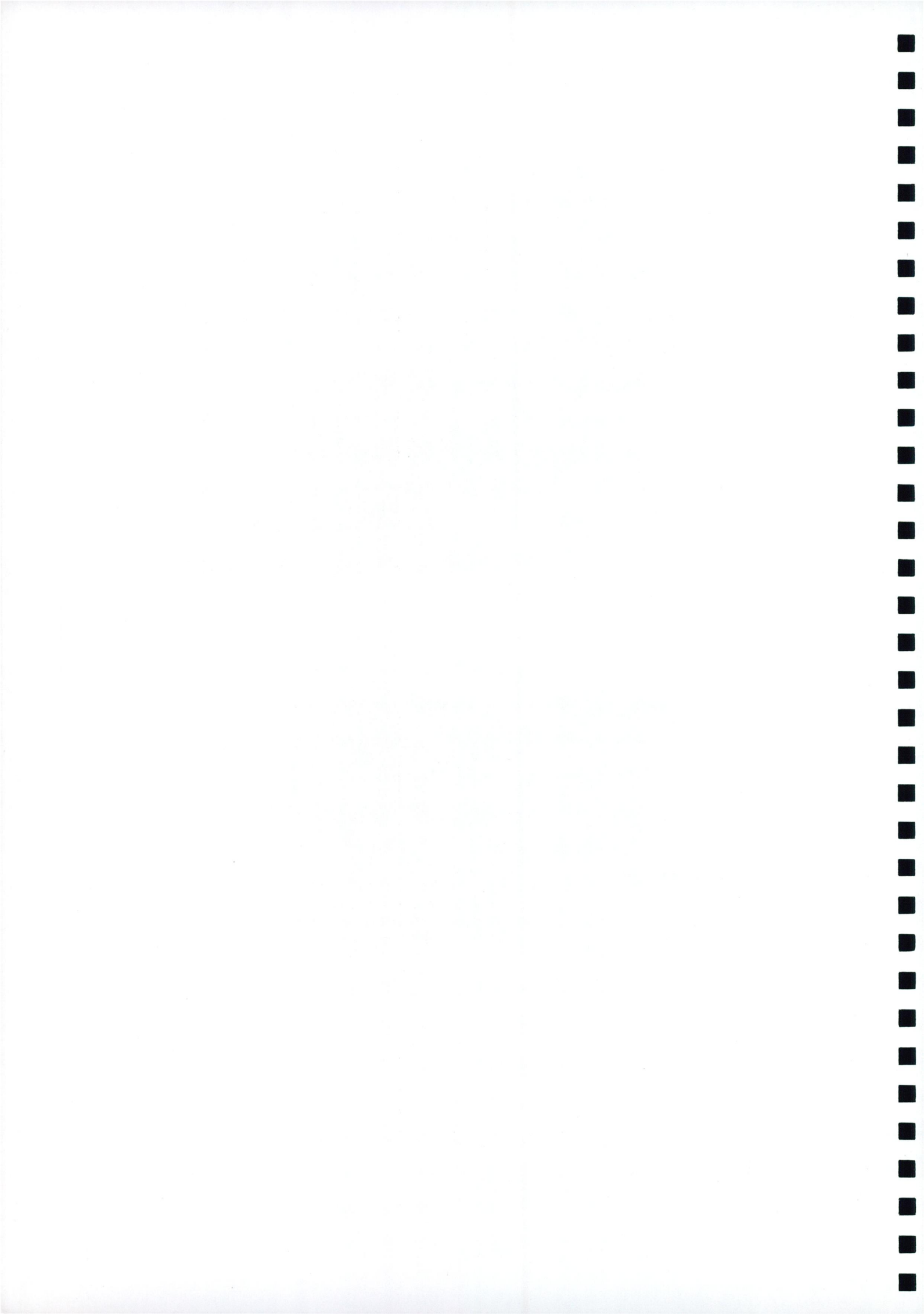


Plate 8. Peter Curling *Sprint Finish*



Peter Curling

In 1963, Peter Curling's family moved from Ireland to England and as a result he was educated first at Stonyhurst and then at Millfield where he won an art scholarship. At the age of seventeen he travelled to Florence where he spent two years studying with Signorina Simi. Her main teaching philosophy was based very much on an academic method and she encouraged all her pupils to look in great detail at the work of old masters in the galleries of the city. Even today, Curling advises his own pupils that to learn anything at all from the work of previous artists, one must go and study original paintings as so much can be lost in a reproduction. (Goodwillie, Dublin, 1993).

Despite the fact that he credits Munnings and Lionel Edwards with being his initial introduction and inspiration into the world of painting horses, the time which he spent in Italy actually had a greater influence on his work. However, he does admire Munnings' less well known earlier work, most particularly the large scale and high speed at which he worked. When Munnings painted out of doors in the summer of 1910: "A fifty by forty canvas, with others were now laid in the long cart each morning (Munnings, 1951, pg. 217), This influence can be seen in Curling's own *Sprint Finish* (plate 8) which is a large canvas, forty-eight by seventy-two inches.

Lionel Edwards must rank as "one of the foremost racing painters of the century because he brought to his racing pictures the same understanding and skills which made him the supreme hunting artist", (Berry, 1990, pg. 32). What is of particular interest with regard to his influence on Curling is the fact that it is his "love of the British landscape in all weathers that comes through in all his most important work" (Berry, 1990, pg. 33). In particular I feel that he can convey, better than any of his contemporaries, the muted colours and dampness of the British winter landscape. *In the Paddock, Cheltenham, March Meeting* (plate 9) is a good example of this. Although he painted many racehorse portraits, it is clear from his work that his forte was the action picture. Like Curling, he was more fluent in watercolour than in oils.

It was during his time in Italy that Peter Curling first became seriously aware of the work of the Impressionists, particularly that of Toulouse-Lautrec and Degas. Toulouse-Lautrec's life was similar in many ways to that enjoyed by both Munnings and Curling. Most of his family members were "passionately fond of hunting, riding, painting and fine cuisine and were quite adept

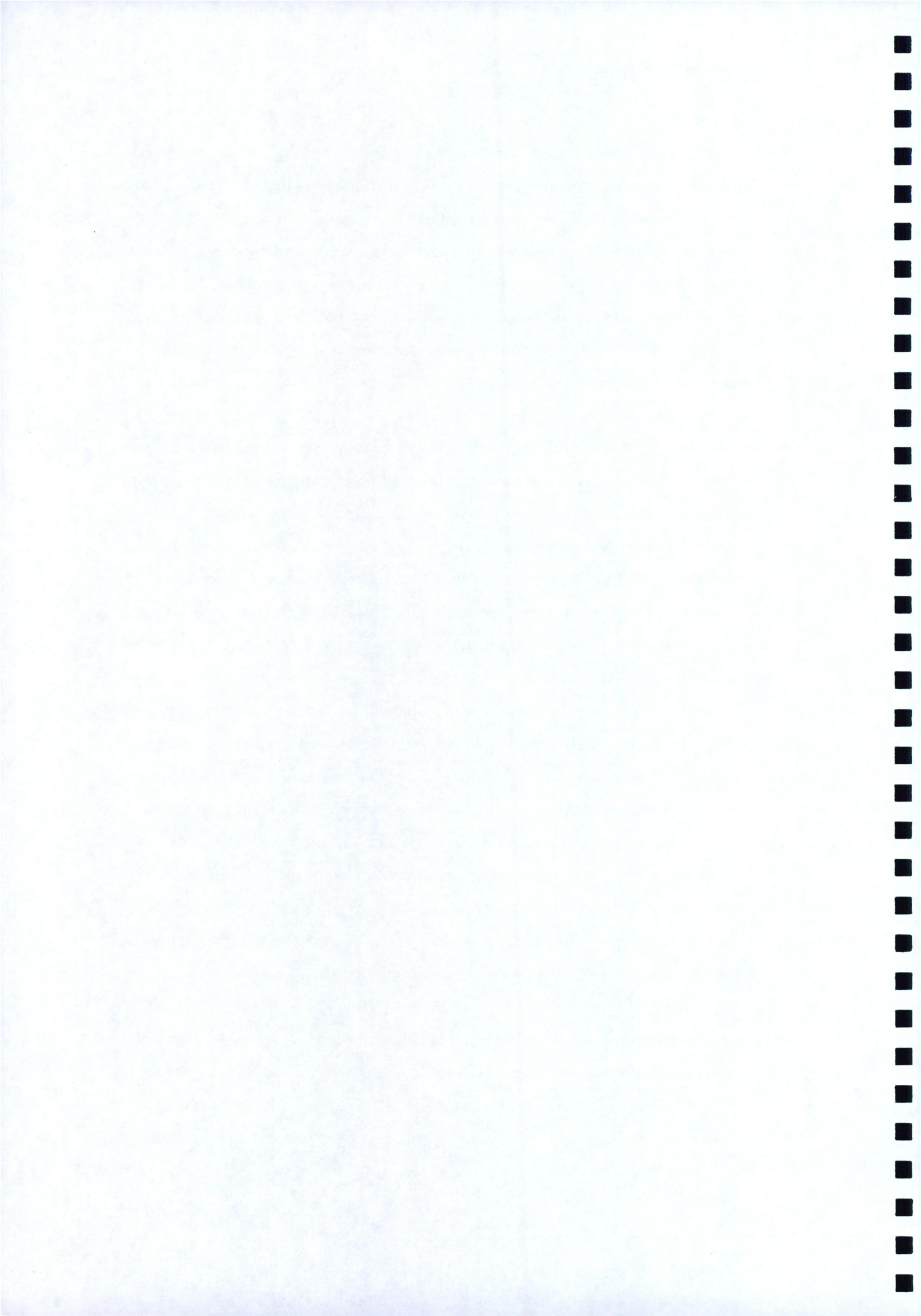




Plate 9. Lionel Edwards *In the Paddock, Cheltenham, March Meeting*



Plate 10. Peter Curling *Feeling Well in Herself*

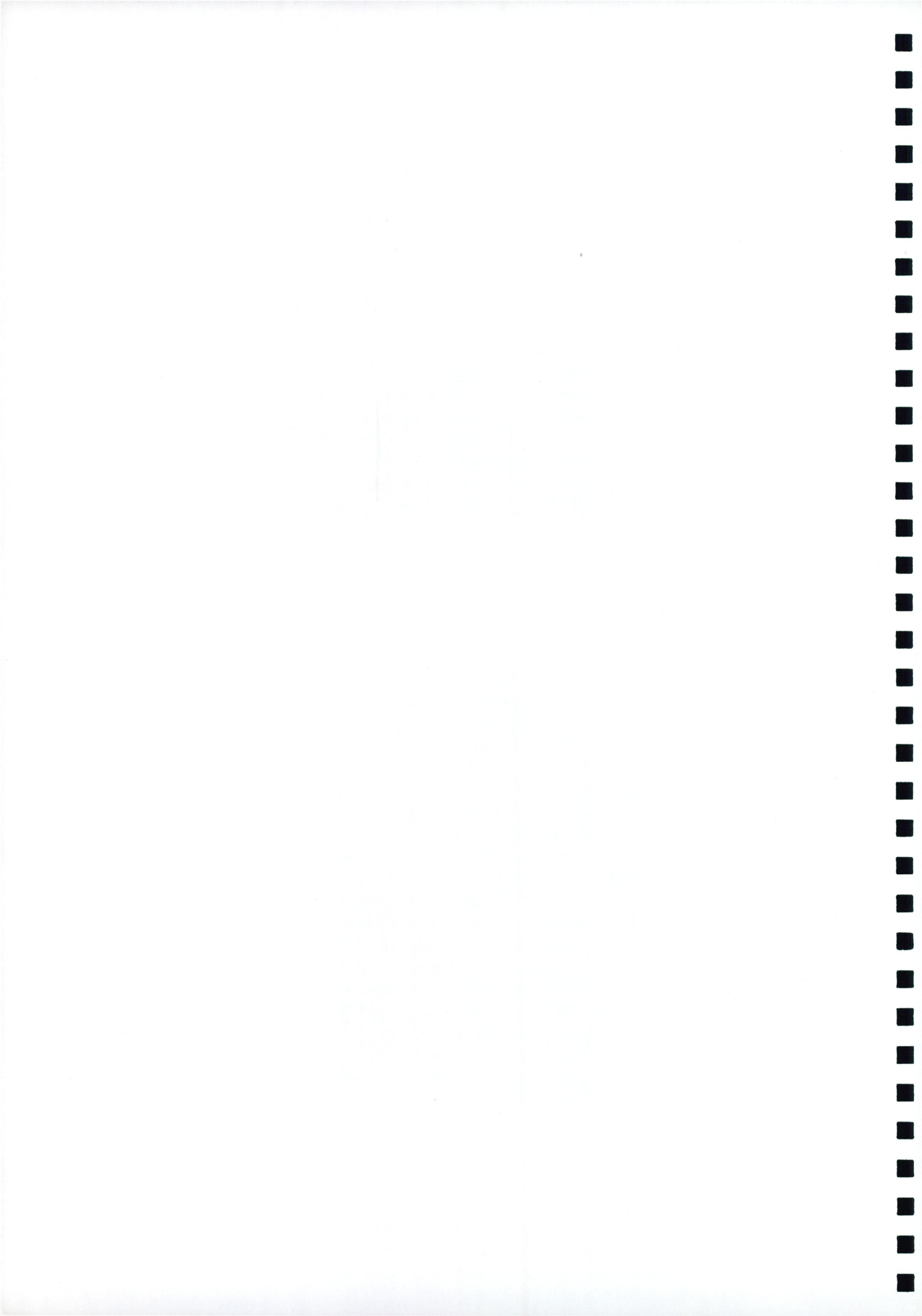




Plate 11. Peter Curling *A Nice Bit on the Bridle*



Plate 12. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec *Souvenir d'Auteuil*



at all of them" (Huisman and Dortu, 1971, pg. 13). His first teacher, Rene Princeteau, was an artist friend of the Lautrec family who specialized in painting horses. Lautrec later studied with several academic painters who impressed on him the importance of good draughtsmanship.

When describing Lautrec's views on painting, his biographer P. H. Huisman could equally be speaking of Curling: "Art and daily life went hand in hand.....he [Lautrec] was never wholly at ease in painting professional models. He liked to be genuinely captivated by a subject and then his inspiration flowed freely" (Huisman and Dortu, 1971, pg. 62).

Toulouse-Lautrec is usually thought of as an artist whose true gift lies in his power of suggestion. I feel that this is also the case with much of Curling's work, particularly his pen and ink sketches. For example, *Feeling Well in Herself* (plate 10) contains many unstated allusions. We get the impression that the jockey is simply a passenger on the far stronger horse. Although the horse is pictured going no faster than a walk, her hind quarters which point towards us, are filled with a sense of nervous tension and barely controlled energy which are about to be released in an explosion of power and speed.

In *Toulouse-Lautrec* by Huisman and Dortu the artist's paintings are described as being characterized by their extremely incisive and vivid line and by an emphasis on strong expression over academic correctness. Although Curling does not make an obvious use of line, it is true to say that his paintings are highly expressive and emotive. I think that the reason for this is that he realises the necessity of having a strong "feel" for his subject, to the point of getting inspired by it. (Goodwillie, Dublin, 1993).

An ideal way of showing the similarities in the work of Lautrec and Curling is to contrast two paintings, one from each artist. For this I have chosen *A Nice Bit on the Bridle* (plate 11) by Curling and Toulouse-Lautrec's *Souvenir d'Auteuil* (plate 12). It is clear to see that in these paintings, both artists have avoided transparent effects and the blending of colours. They have been successful in defining solid forms and structures by adopting the use of vibrant colours and startling contrasts. It is also interesting to note that while Curling's early work (plate 52) shows a marked influence of Toulouse-Lautrec, his later paintings do not show this tendency to the same extent.

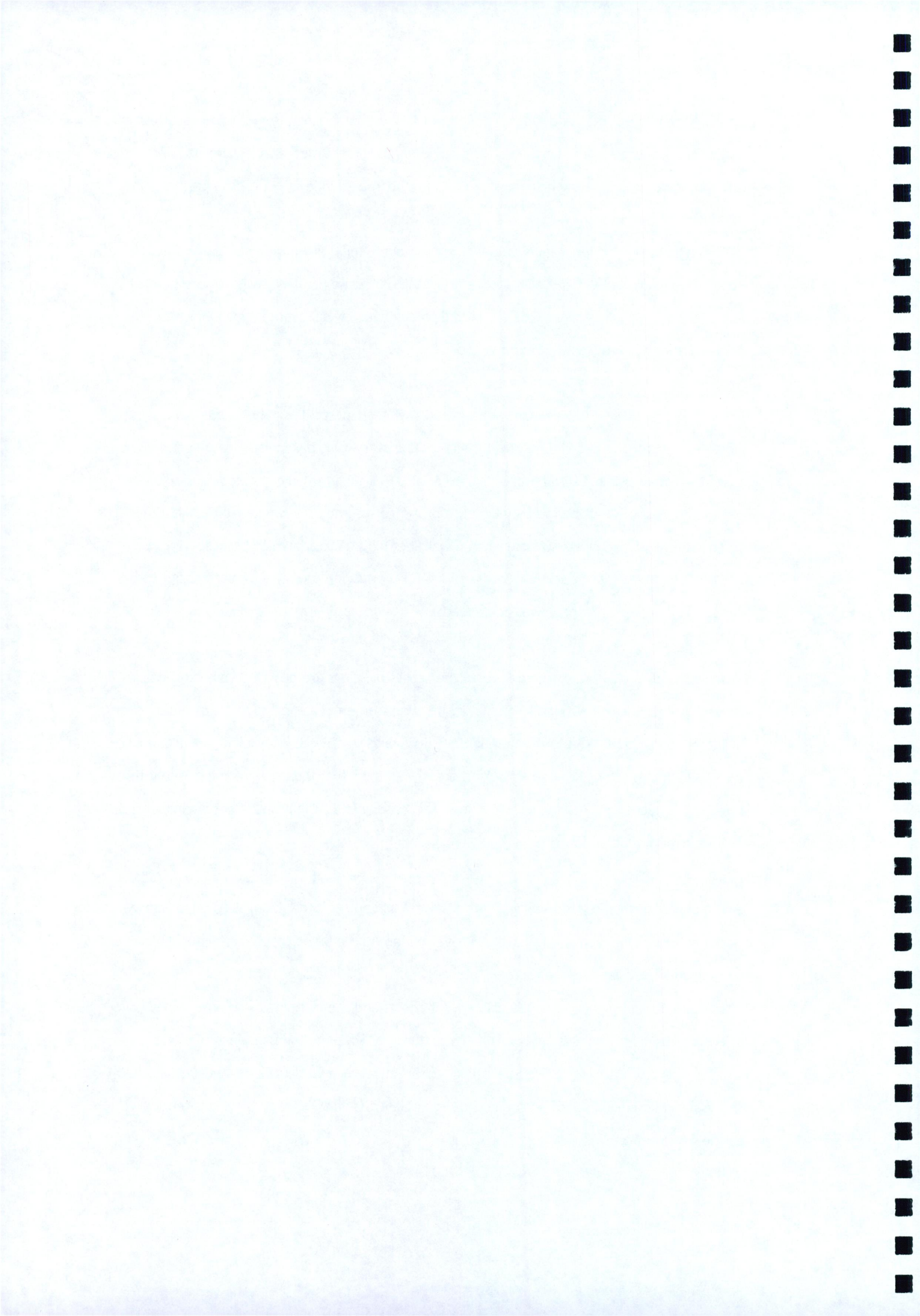
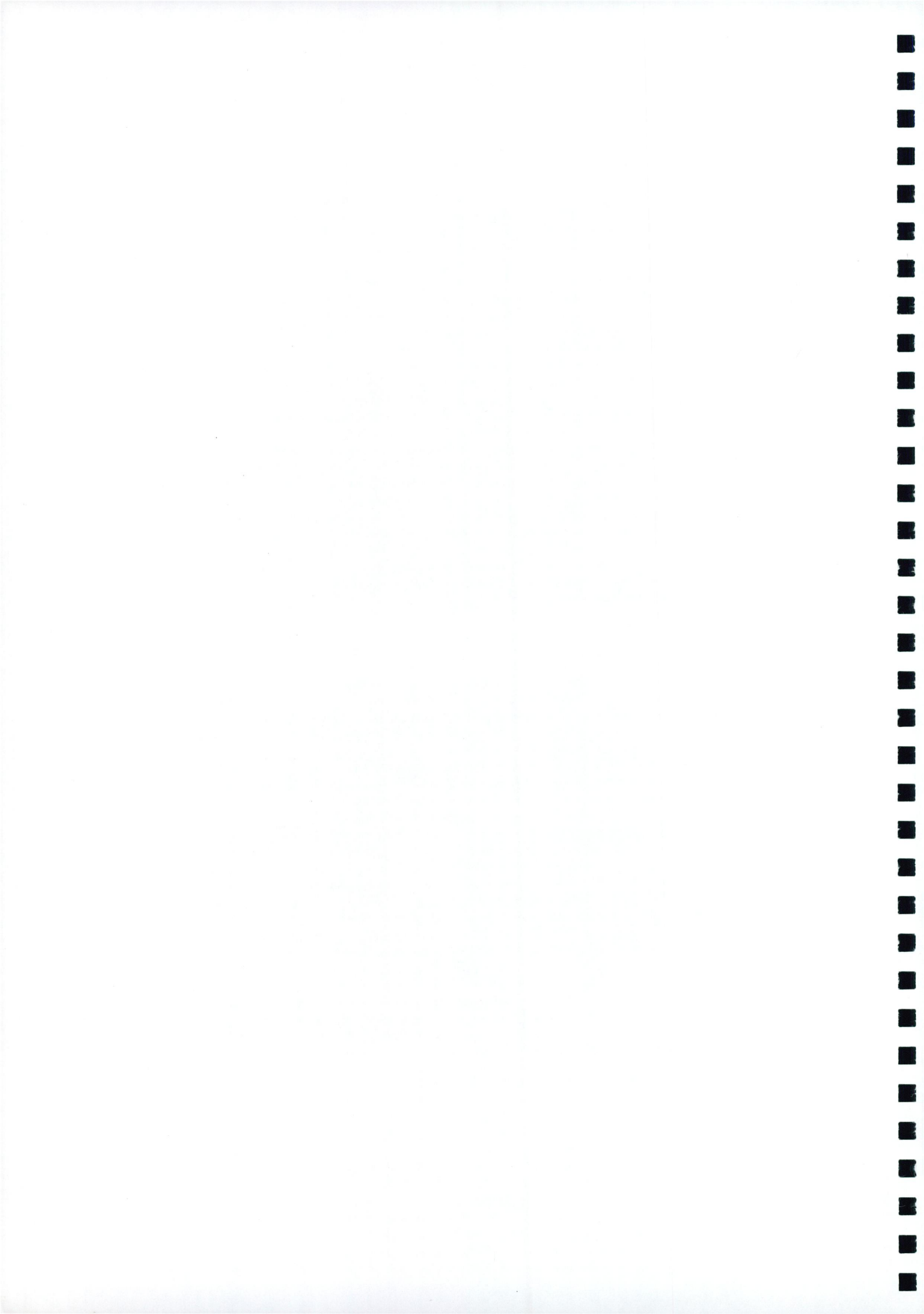




Plate 13. Edgar Degas *Racehorses*



Plate 14. Peter Curling *Indian Skimmer*



Curling was further influenced by Degas, feeling that while the latter's paintings are not particularly realistic, the artist has still managed to capture the moment and provide a highly atmospheric work, impressing on the viewer a sense of actually being at the scene and of observing it first hand. (Goodwillie, Dublin, 1993). Curling has tried to carry this feeling into his own pictures, thinking that the importance does not lie in the subject but rather in the painting as a whole.

Art critics like Eunice Lipton, author of *Looking into Degas* (Lipton, 1986) have divided Degas' racing art into two distinct divisions commonly known as the Frieze Paintings and the Discontinuous Mode Paintings. I think that this division can also be applied to the racing paintings of Curling, although here there is not such a marked divide. However, enough similarities exist to make a comparison worthwhile. Taking Degas' *Racehorses* (plate 13) as an example of a painting with a frieze construction and comparing it to Curling's action portrait of *Indian Skimmer* (plate 14) we can immediately see that both paintings tend towards a horizontality, balance and sense of continuum. There is no interaction between the foreground and background; the jockeys and horses emerge as subjects to the landscapes' passive backdrop. One plane leads logically to the next; the subject is in the spotlight and all superfluous details are being shadowed. These frieze structure paintings neither encourage reflection nor are they disturbing. This point of view is echoed by Janet Brabazon who studied with Curling for a number of years. When criticizing Curling's work, she says that although his paintings are technically very good, his work is perhaps not particularly stimulating nor psychologically demanding. I think that this is due primarily to the composition of Curling's pictures. The viewer can see the content of the painting so quickly that there is no need to try and interpret or pay more attention to any particular aspect.

In direct contrast with this type of painting are the discontinuous mode paintings which often contain two contradictory messages: the conflict between precisely drawn classical figures and an unconventional composition. An excellent example of this is Degas' *Carriage at the Races* (plate 15). To emphasise the main features of this style, I have compared it to Curling's *Spring Drills* (plate 16). Both are agitated, incisive, even aggressively constructed paintings. There is a certain halting quality to the compositions as the directional lines zig-zag and forms swell and dwindle. This *mélange* of forms, spaces and activities produces a nervous and unpredictable

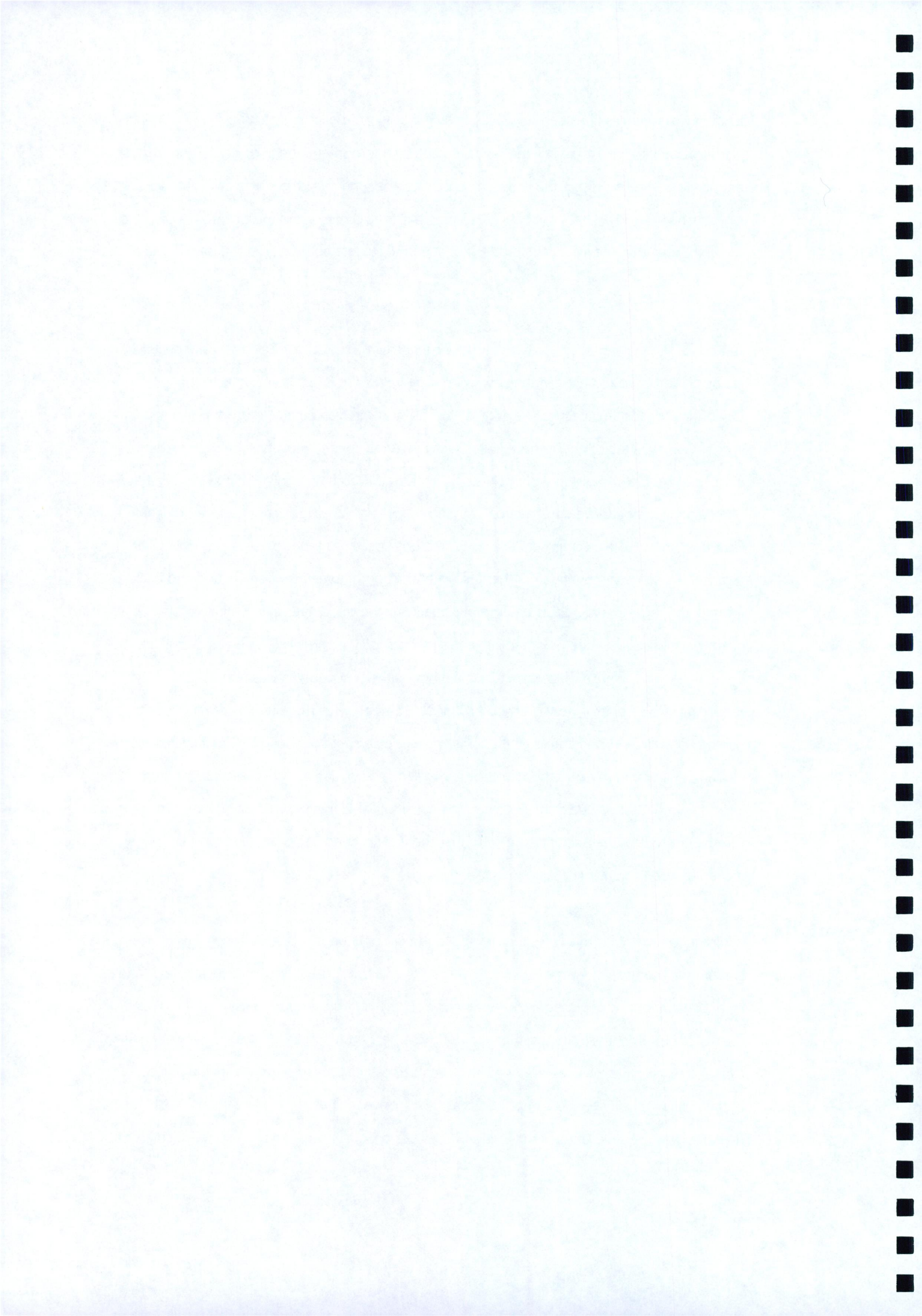
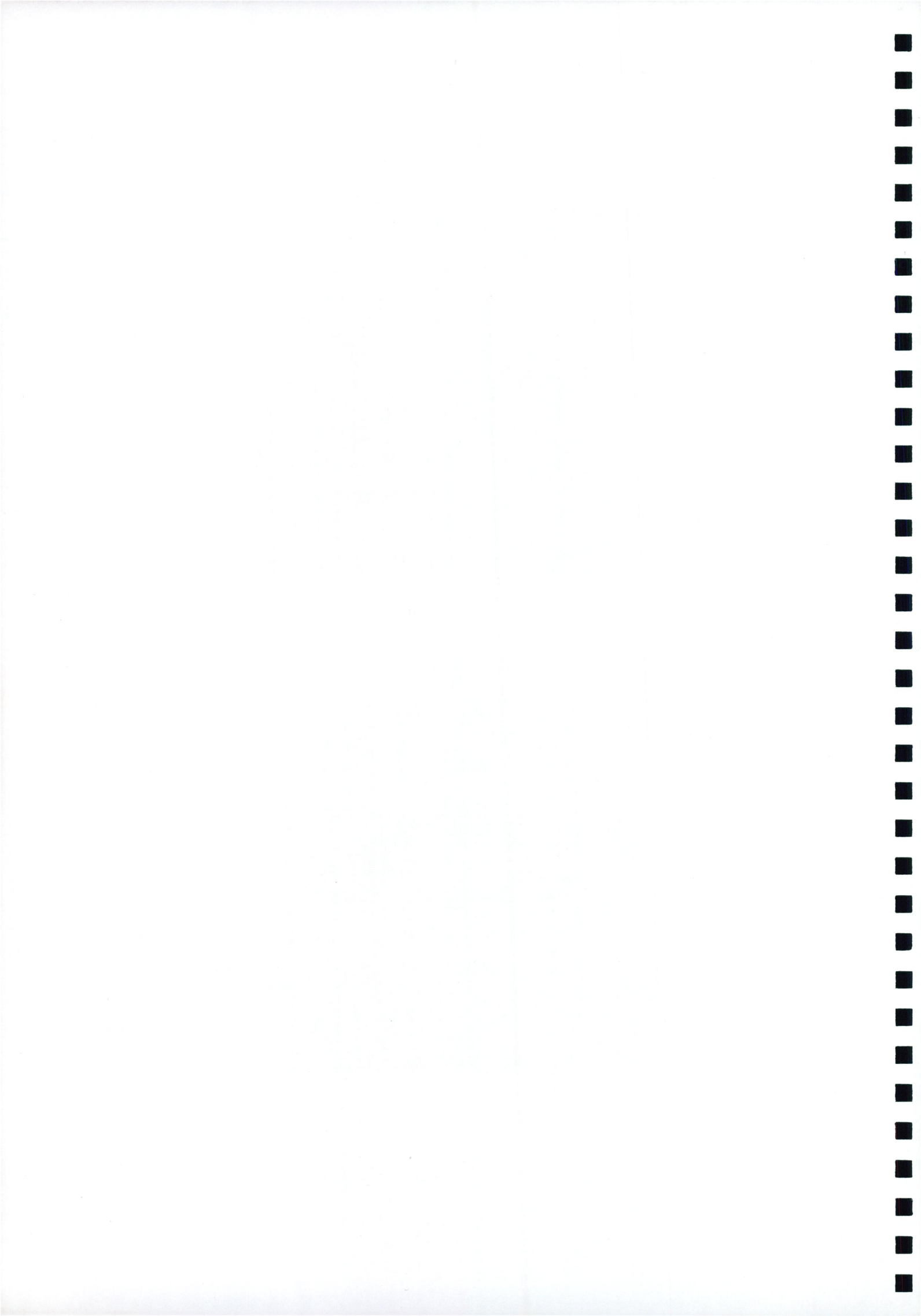




Plate 15. Edgar Degas *Carriage at the Races*



Plate 16. Peter Curling *Spring Drills*



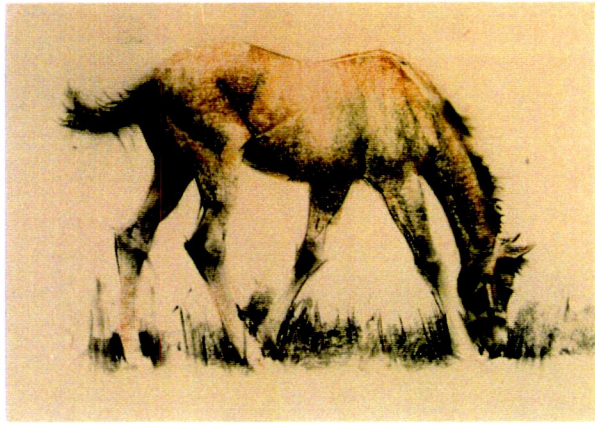


Plate 17. Peter Curling *Studies of a foal (detail)*



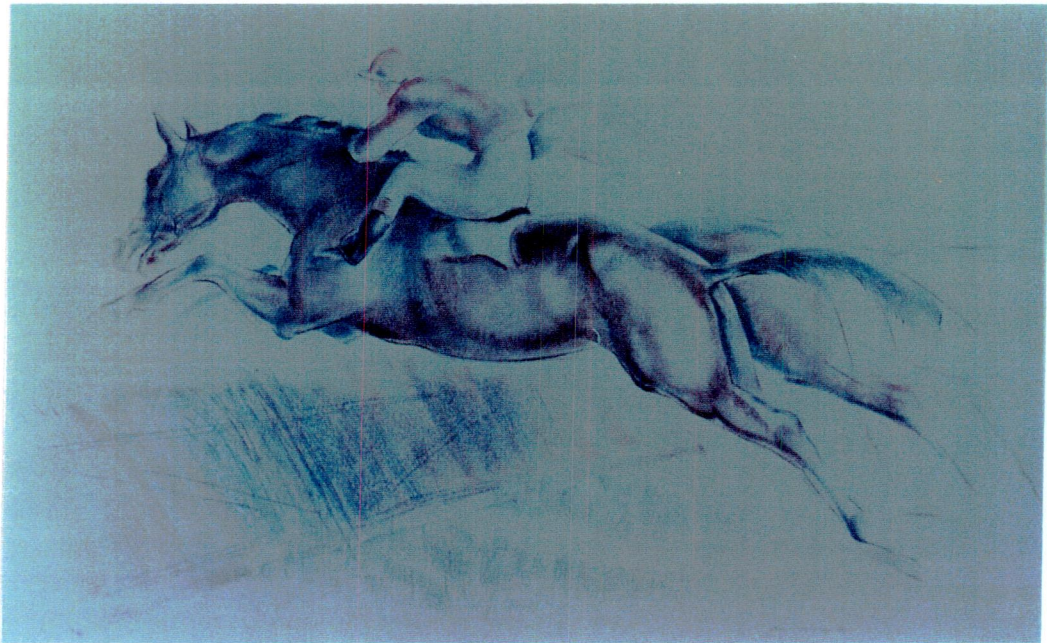
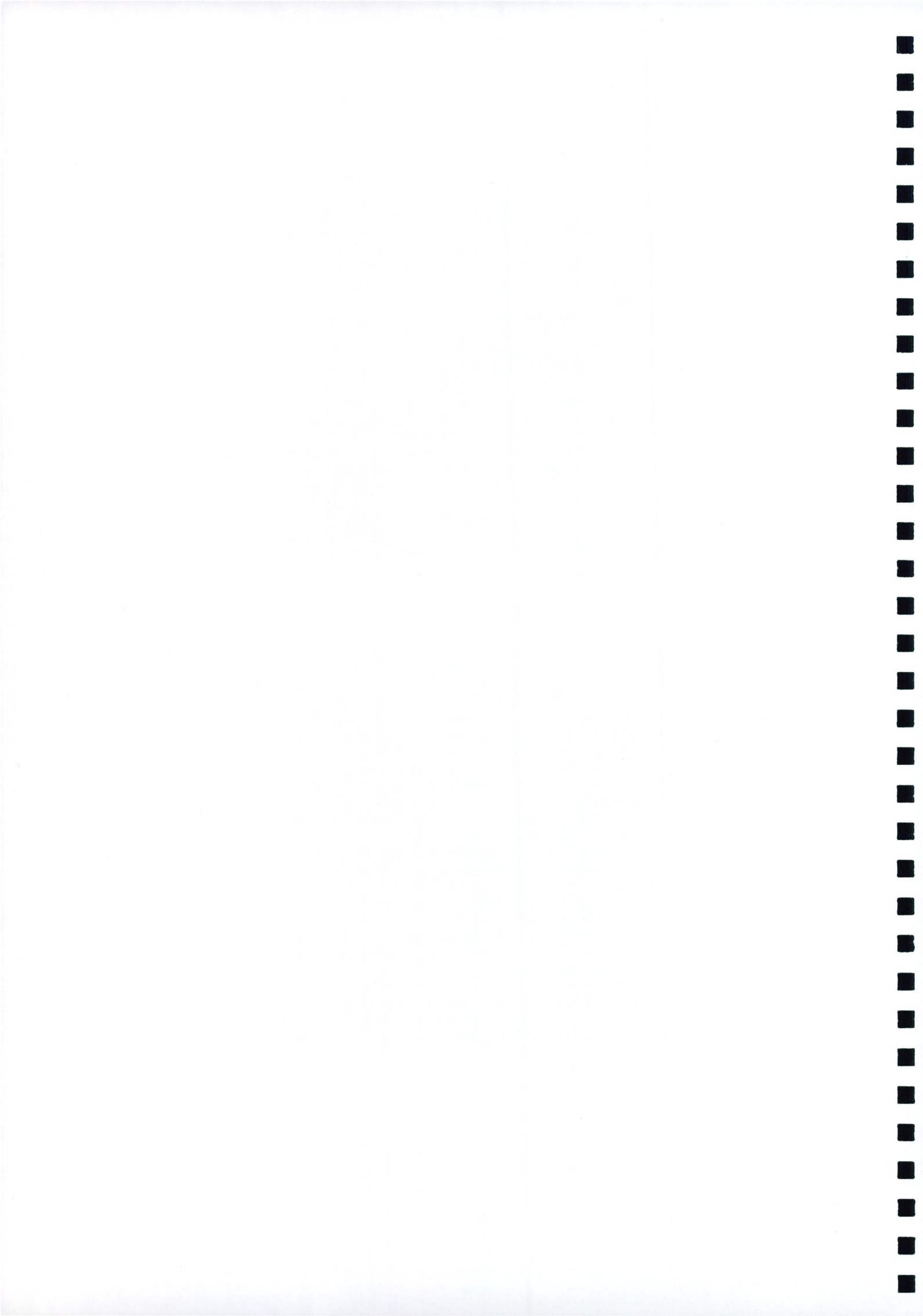


Plate 18. John Skeaping *Reaching for It*



Plate 19. John Skeaping *Rounding the Turn*

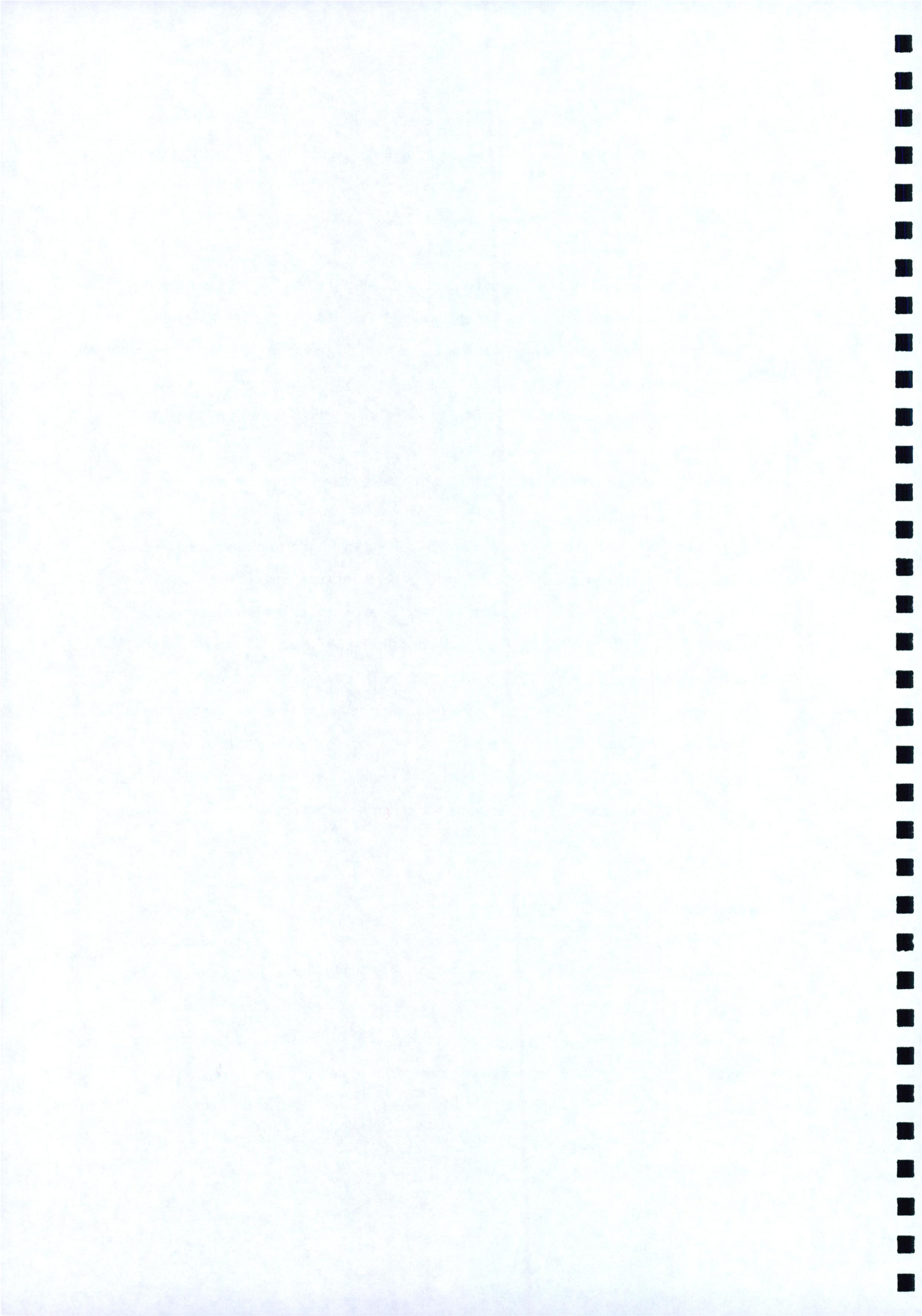


atmosphere. I feel that although this type of painting eludes immediate comprehension or reading, on a literal level the lack of focus is enticing as it urges the viewer to look and choose, becoming more involved in the act of looking at the painting. However I do believe that Curling does not use this device as effectively as Degas.

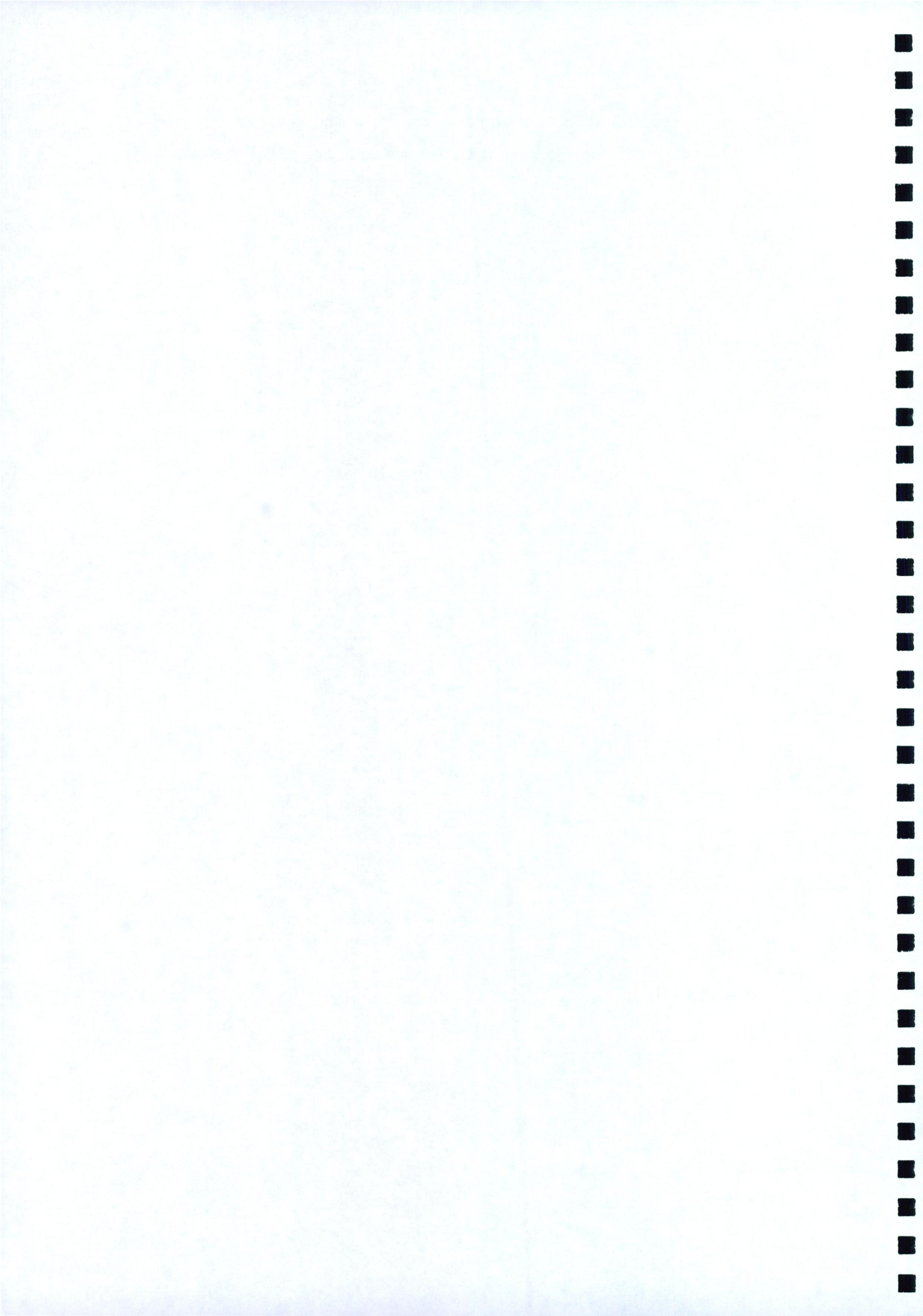
Finally, in discussing the influences which previous artists have had on Curling, it is interesting to note the view of Carey Clarke, president of the R.H.A.. He feels that Curling does not have "the consistent vitality of Munnings, nor the talent of Degas" adding wryly "but then, who does?" (Goodwillie, NCAD, 1993). In general, I agree with this point of view but I think that some of Curling's sketches have an energy that is not matched by any oil painting by either Degas or Munnings. *Feeling Well in Herself* (plate 10) and the *Study of a Foal* (plate 17) are excellent examples of this ability to portray the inherent vivacity of his subject.

While grateful for all that he learned in Florence, particularly for the emphasis placed on drawing and on the development of the artist's sense of observation, Curling felt that the students studying under Signorina Simi were trained to reproduce "what was done centuries ago by the old masters" (Berry, 1989, pg. 79). He decided that he was more interested in saying something newer in his work. In this he was influenced by John Skeaping with whom he spent a brief but important period in the Camargue, towards the end of 1974. During this time Skeaping impressed on Curling the need for an artist always to push himself to do something a little beyond what he has previously achieved. As a result, Curling feels that this is the most effective way of keeping the ever present danger of complacency at bay (Goodwillie, Dublin, 1993).

During the 1920s, Skeaping was involved with the Modern movement, and became a close friend of fellow sculptor Henry Moore. However, he reverted to a more realistic approach in the portrayal of his animal subjects in the 1930s. Although best known for his bronzes, such as the life-sized figure of Hyperion, he was also a prolific draughtsman. I think that, like Curling, his most successful drawings are in gouache or pastel (plates 18 and 19) where he succeeds brilliantly in capturing a sense of movement, thanks to the freedom of his drawing and his economy of line. By comparison, his oil paintings seem stiff and less fluent. According to Claude Berry, Skeaping has few rivals when it comes to capturing the movement of his sub-

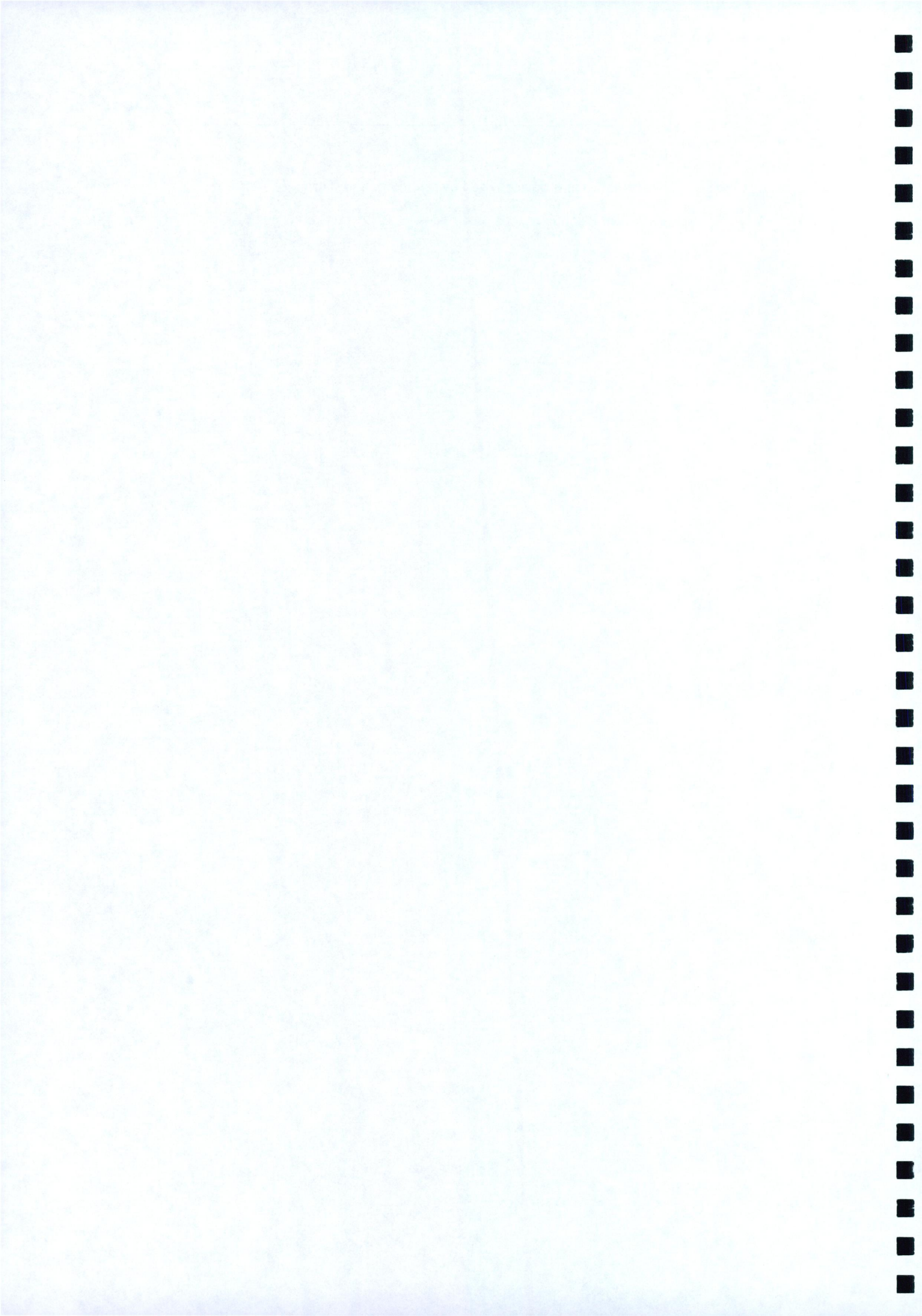


jects. He sees his line drawings as superb, showing a deep understanding of both horses and jockeys (Berry, 1989, pg. 57). Surely almost the same words describe Curling equally well.



The stylistic techniques and devices used by Munnings and Curling.

An analysis of certain paintings under such headings as Composition, Light, Colour, Medium and the general painting process.

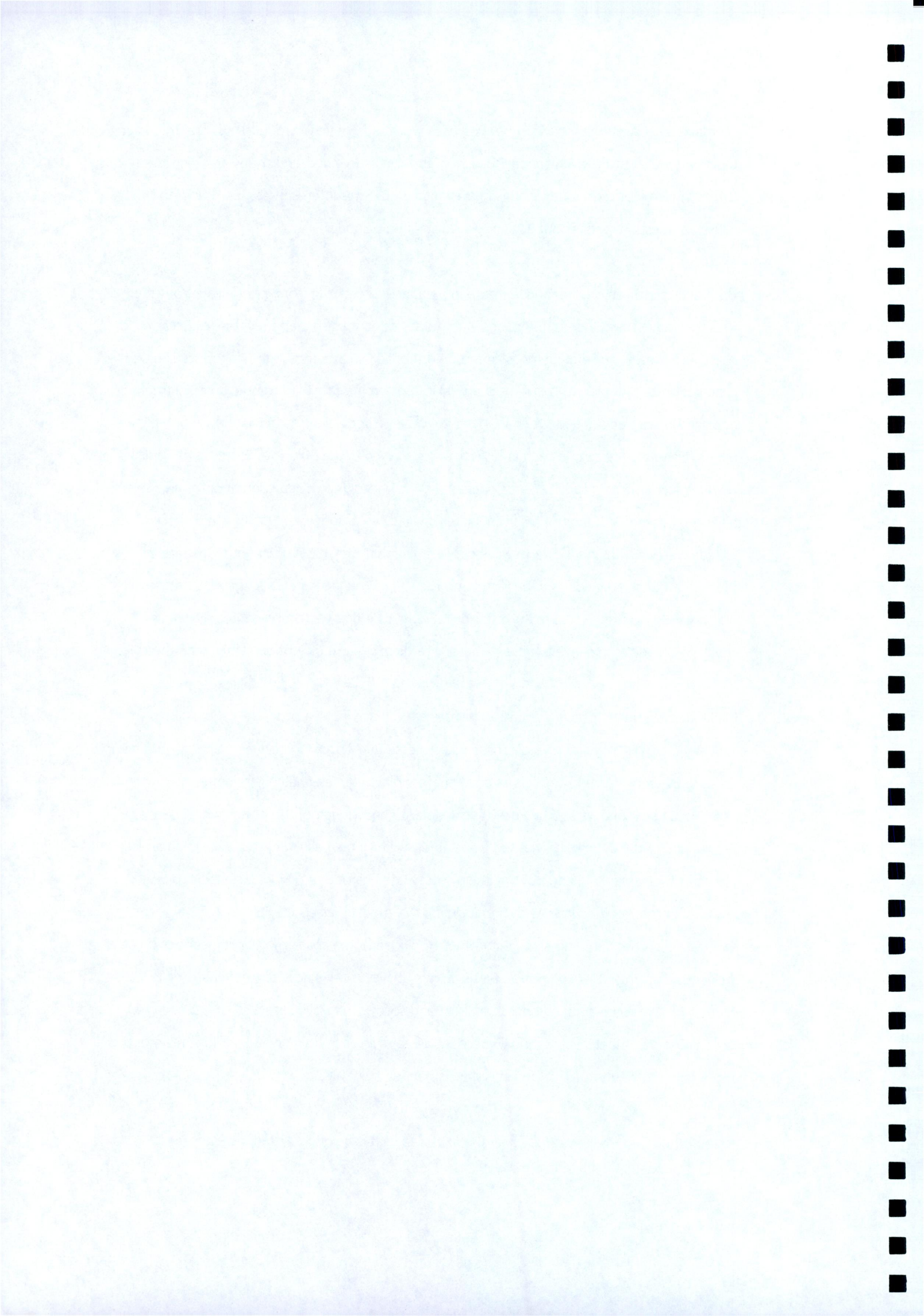


To make an accurate comparison between the work of Munnings and Curling, I feel that initially some time must be given to a discussion of the differences and similarities between the two artists in terms of techniques. This is important because it is interesting to learn how the artists in question went about achieving their finished paintings.

Both artists are very concerned with the importance of drawing from life. Throughout their lives they have surrounded themselves with horses of various shapes and sizes to use as models. Occasionally, some of Curlings' fine-boned thoroughbreds end up looking more like common halfbreds. He admits this himself and blames it on the fact that he uses an assortment of cobs and ponies as subjects when working at home (Goodwillie, Dublin, 1993). A fine example of this tendency can be seen in his *Carrying Condition* (plate 20). Nevertheless, he dislikes working from photographs because once he sees a photographic representation of his subject, his three-dimensional memory is immediately forgotten (Goodwillie, Dublin, 1993). Both Claude Berry and Lionel Edwards have commented that they have often felt that some of Munnings' colts and geldings appearing in his racing pictures have necks and crests on them which would do justice to a mature stallion. Could it be that he too relied heavily on his "over-fat" models? However, these paintings are definitely the exception rather than the rule.

Nevertheless, simply drawing the subject from life will not in itself produce a successful painting. A general knowledge of anatomy is also necessary in order to produce paintings that will be seen by well-informed viewers as correct. Munnings studied anatomy relentlessly, long after his art school days and he knew that a detailed knowledge of the bones which lay below the surface of the animals he wanted to paint was "vital if he was to master their form and stance in every situation and portray their beauty and characters" (Munnings, 1951, pg. 51). Stubbs' *Anatomy of the Horse* with the author's own meticulous copper-plate engravings (plate 4), was always near at hand along with other books on horse anatomy. Curling echoes these thoughts, demonstrating the notion that one must have a basic knowledge of anatomy in order to show successfully a concept of form and solidity. However, I think that although he has painted a number of straightforward portraits of horses in training and stallions his most important contribution to racing art will be his action paintings.

To look more closely at this aspect of the artists' style it is helpful to examine Munnings'



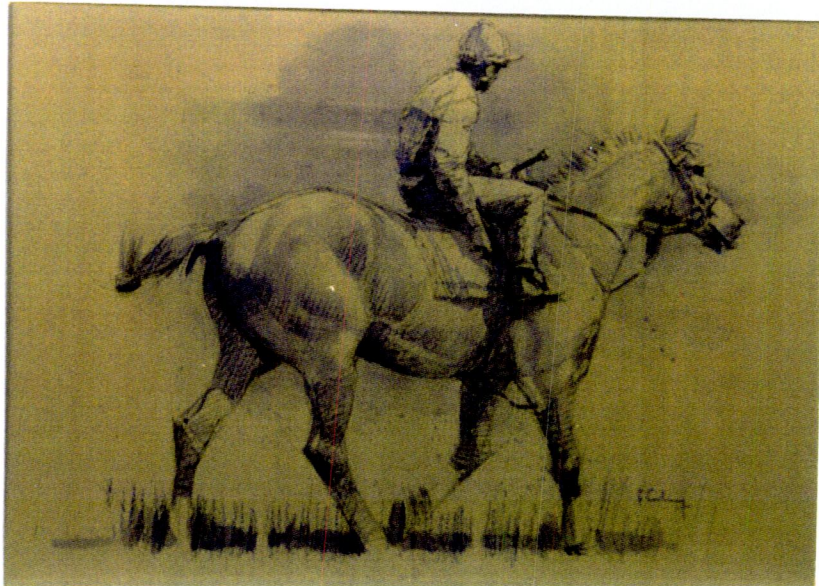


Plate 20. Peter Curling *Carrying Condition*

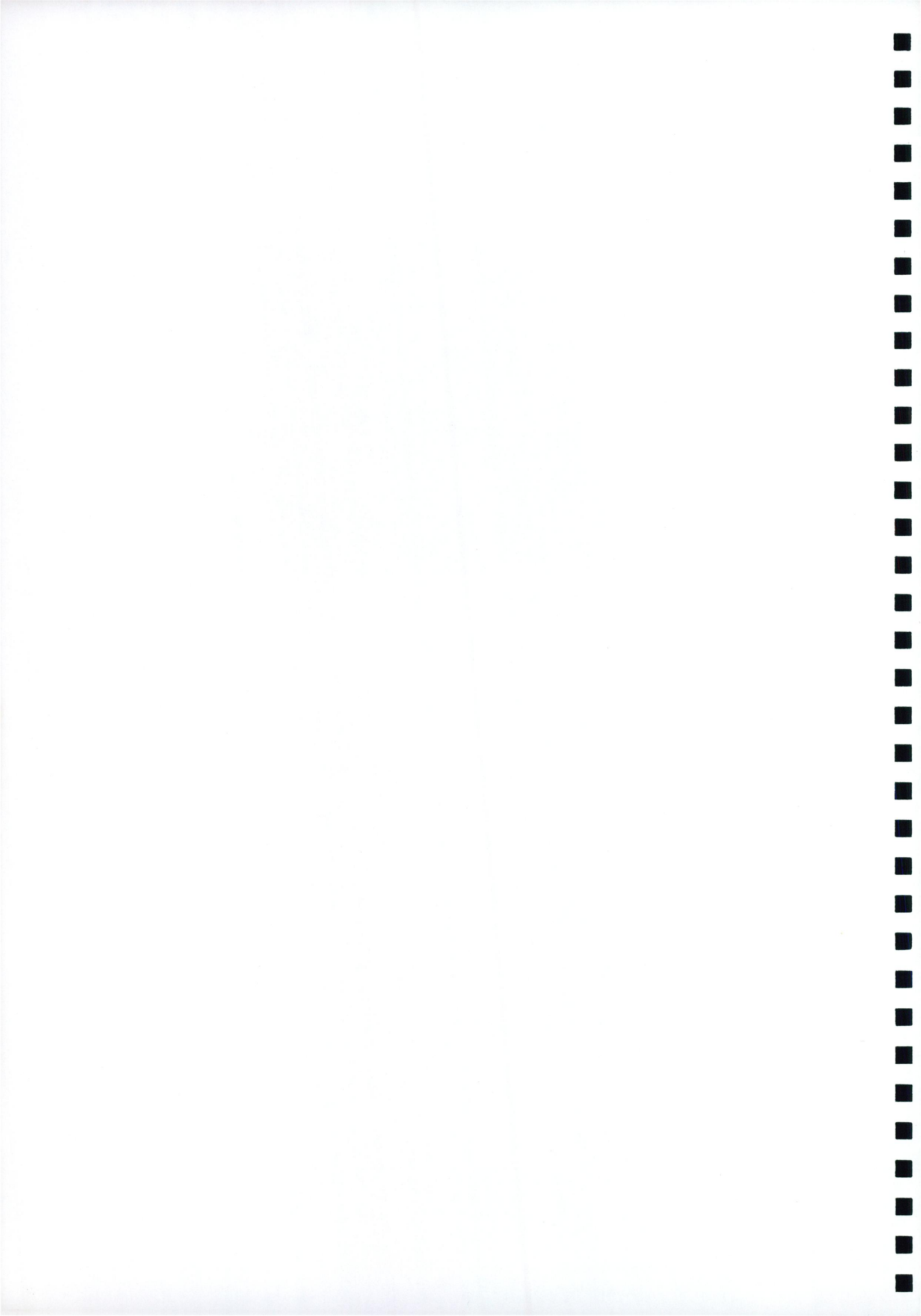




Plate 21. Alfred Munnings *Hyperion*



Plate 22. Peter Curling *Ballad Rock*



portrait of *Hyperion* (plate 21) and Curling's study of *Ballad Rock* (plate 22). Apart from fundamental differences between the two works, such as those of medium and scale, I feel that Munnings has captured the character of the horse more accurately than Curling. *Hyperion* appears more noble and intelligent than *Ballad Rock*; physically he looks stronger and more muscular, his coat almost rippling over his shoulder and hindquarter.

Basic draughtsmanship is another skill considered as essential by both artists. Curling feels that although a painter can look endlessly at his subject "to accurately observe you must draw, thus providing a link between hand and eye". (Goodwillie, Dublin, 1993). Martin Honniball, a manager of Airlie Stud, has frequently watched Curling work and admits that he can capture the character and physique of any horse in just three lines. (Goodwillie, Kildare, 1993). This is the result of many hours spent sketching quickly but accurately, in an attempt to provide quality work.

Munnings also sketched continuously, whether at race meetings, on the Heath at Newmarket or simply making preparatory studies for larger work. He made a rare study of a finish in 1937 but had great difficulty in completing it as it (the finish) was "over in a flash". (Goodman, 1988, pg.101). He tried to overcome this difficulty by sketching the finishes of six different races in one afternoon before creating his final painting.

In terms of the composition itself, there are some striking differences between the styles of the two artists. Munnings tends to give us paintings with a more traditional and conventional composition. We are normally viewing the activity as it takes place parallel to us, the horses are led past as in *Going Out at Epsom* (plate 23), or the jockey unsaddles his mount directly in front of us in *H.M. the Queen and her horse Aureole* (plate 25).

In contrast, Curling generally provides more dynamic composition, like the horse being led down to the start in *Pre-Race Parade* (plate 24) and *Preliminary Chat* (plate 26). Here the horses are being led both towards and away from us, giving a greater sense of movement and activity. From this it is clear that here is an artist who prefers a different type of composition, that which is perhaps more dynamic and visually attractive. Further examples of this difference are evident when we contrast Munnings' *Coming off the Heath, Warren Hill*,

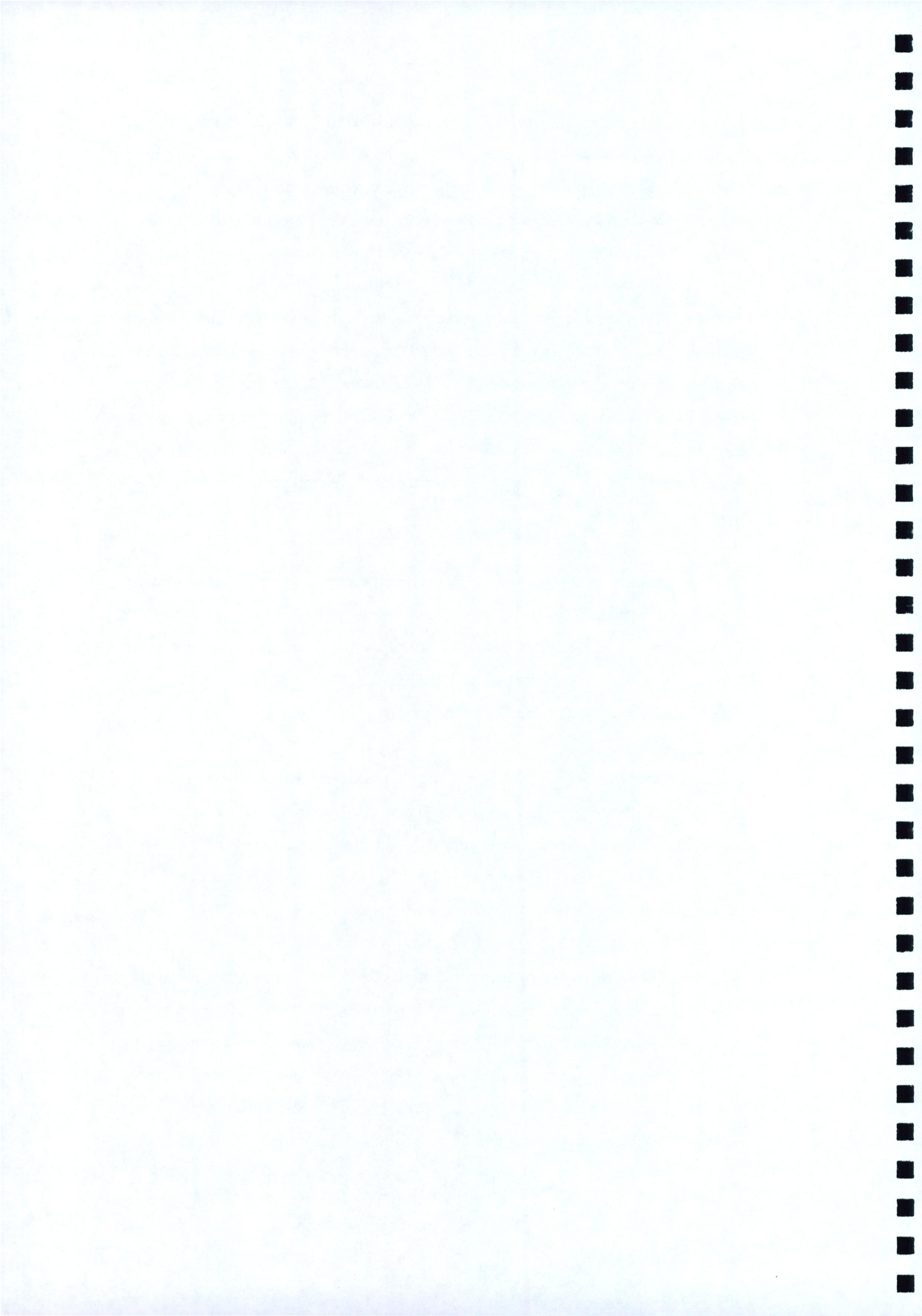




Plate 23. Alfred Munnings *Going out at Epsom*



Plate 24. Peter Curling *Pre-Race Parade*

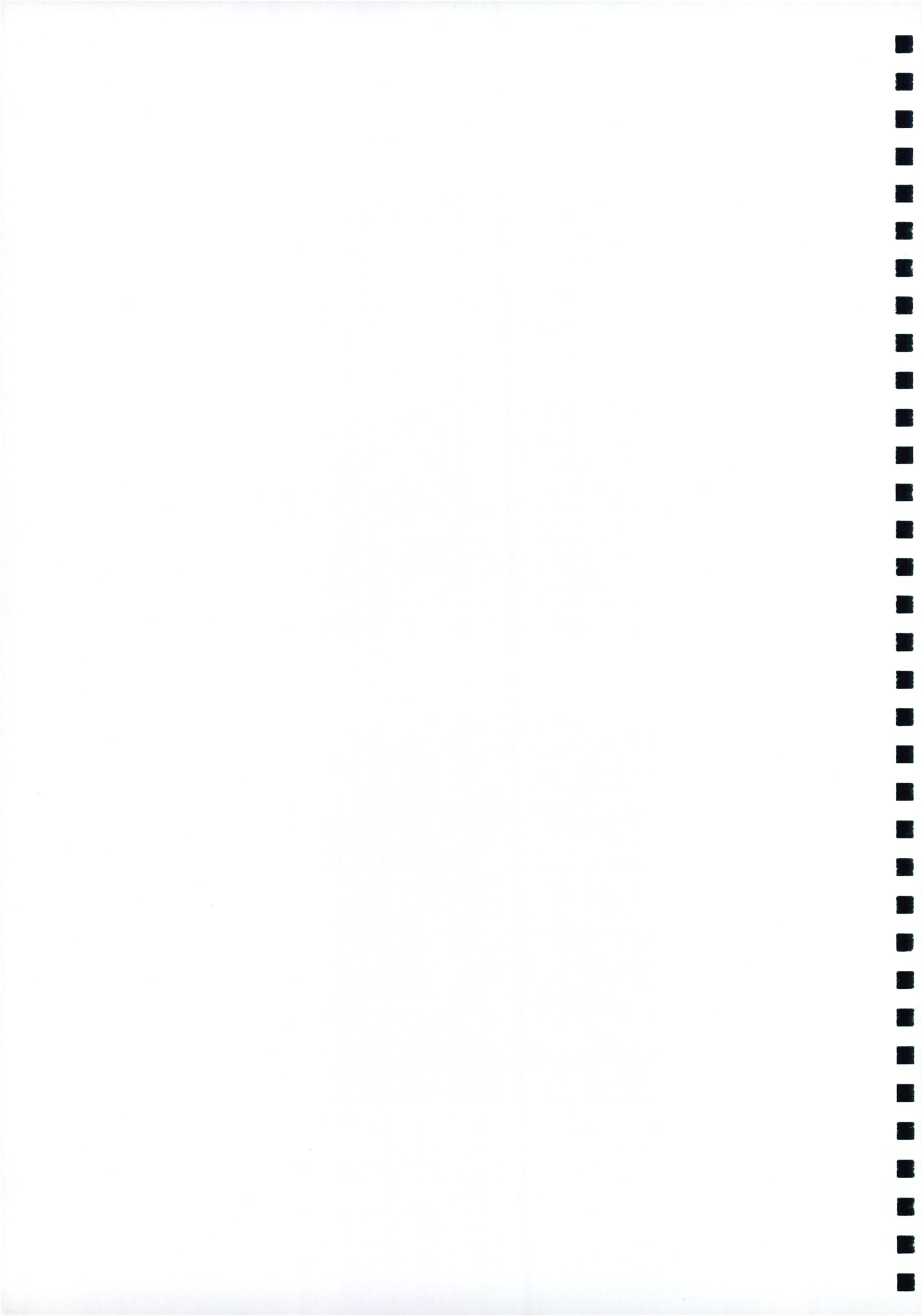




Plate 25. Alfred Munnings *H. M. the Queen and her Horse Aureole*

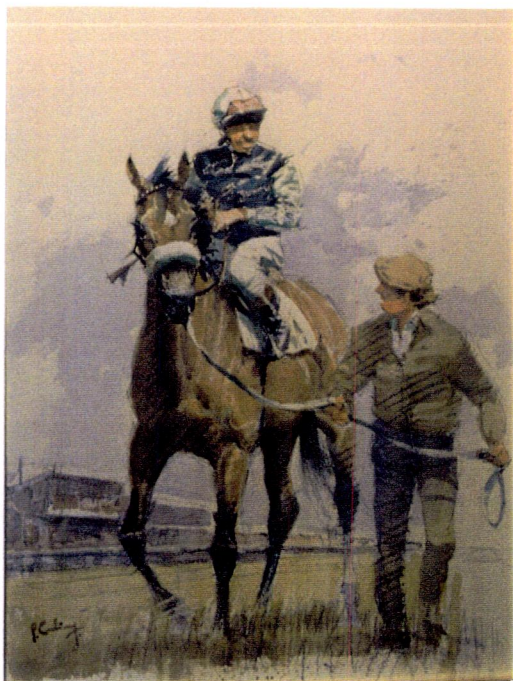


Plate 26. Peter Curling *Preliminary Chat*

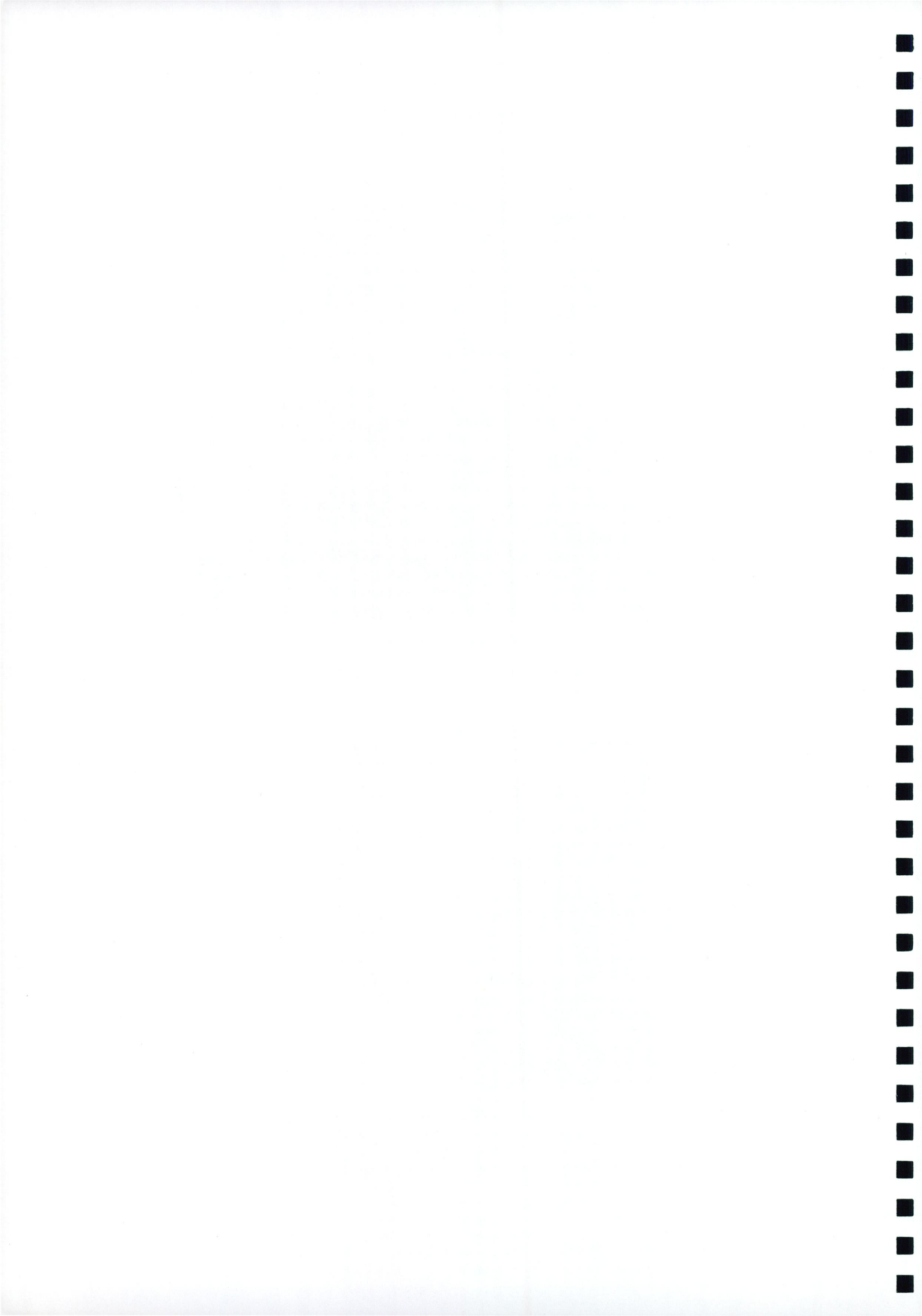




Plate 27. Alfred Munnings *Coming off the Heath, Warren Hill, Newmarket*

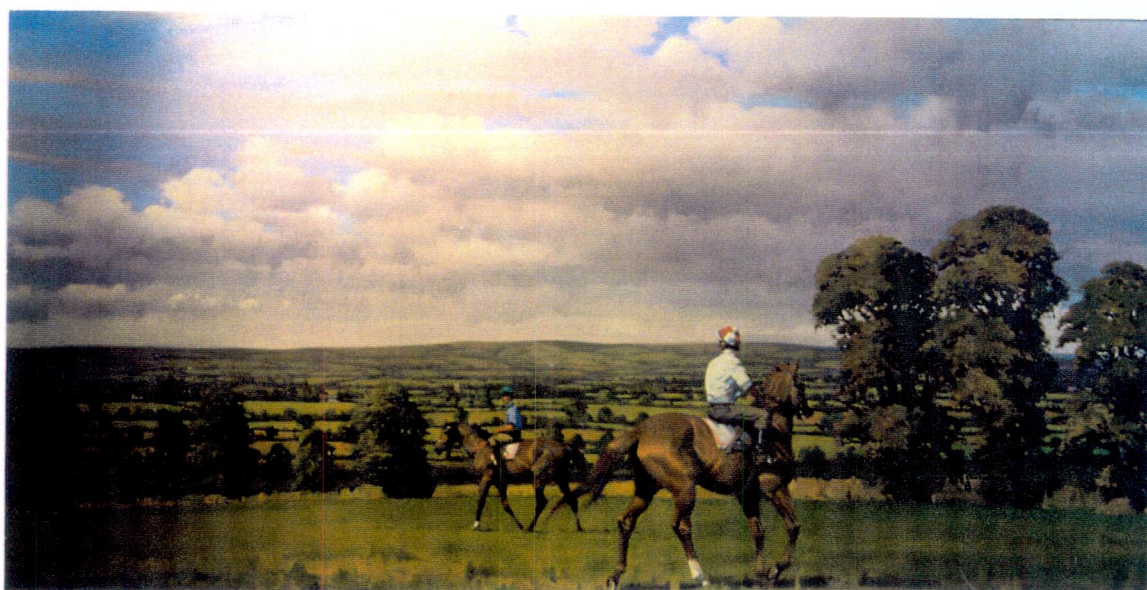


Plate 28. Peter Curling *September Exercise*



Newmarket (plate 27) and *Curling's September Exercise* (plate 28). Both of these paintings contain studies of horses exercising in wide open spaces. However, while Munnings has placed the emphasis solely on the moving horses, Curling has given us a wonderfully atmospheric landscape painting, the two horses circling in the middle distance and foreground playing an interesting but not altogether essential role. This composite picture is given a unity and freshness by inimitable sweeps of wide skies and brightly shadowed turf.

Both Munnings and Curling were influenced to a minor extent by the work of the Impressionists. The paintings of Munnings have been described as "suffused with the Impressionist intoxication of colour and light" (Fairley, 1990, pg.126). Curling relies on impressionistic techniques to convey the message of his paintings. Munnings preferred to reveal form through the use of lighting rather than by studying intricate details. The importance of this technique was later acknowledged by his friend Charles Simpson, a bird and animal painter from Newlyn. He wrote that while many painters have a formula for achieving the pattern of highlights, the gloss and the shadows of a horse's coat, Munnings faithfully recorded the changes of colour on the coat of each horse which were affected not only by a slight movement of the muscles, but by the reflection of the sky and anything in the surroundings on which a strong light fell (Goodman, 1988, pg.78). This tendency can be seen in his *After the Race, Cheltenham* (plate 29) where the blue of the sky is reflected in the horse's shoulder and foreleg.

Curling does not use such dramatic lighting in his paintings but nonetheless still succeeds in giving an excellent impression of form and structure using the added technique of viewing some of his horses from unusual angles. In *Spring Drills* (plate 16), we are almost looking up at the horses as they gallop past. This feeling is accentuated by the blocks of light and shade which define the horses against the sky. Janet Brabazon regards these contrasting planes as one of the main characteristics of his work (Goodwillie, Kilkenny, 1993).

Although Munnings was very concerned with achieving an overall understanding of shapes and solidity, his personal interest was colour. After he had mastered the basic concept of portraying an accurate physical representation of his subject, he turned his attention to experimenting with colour reactions; "the way a touch of purple placed close to a slash of green reflected on

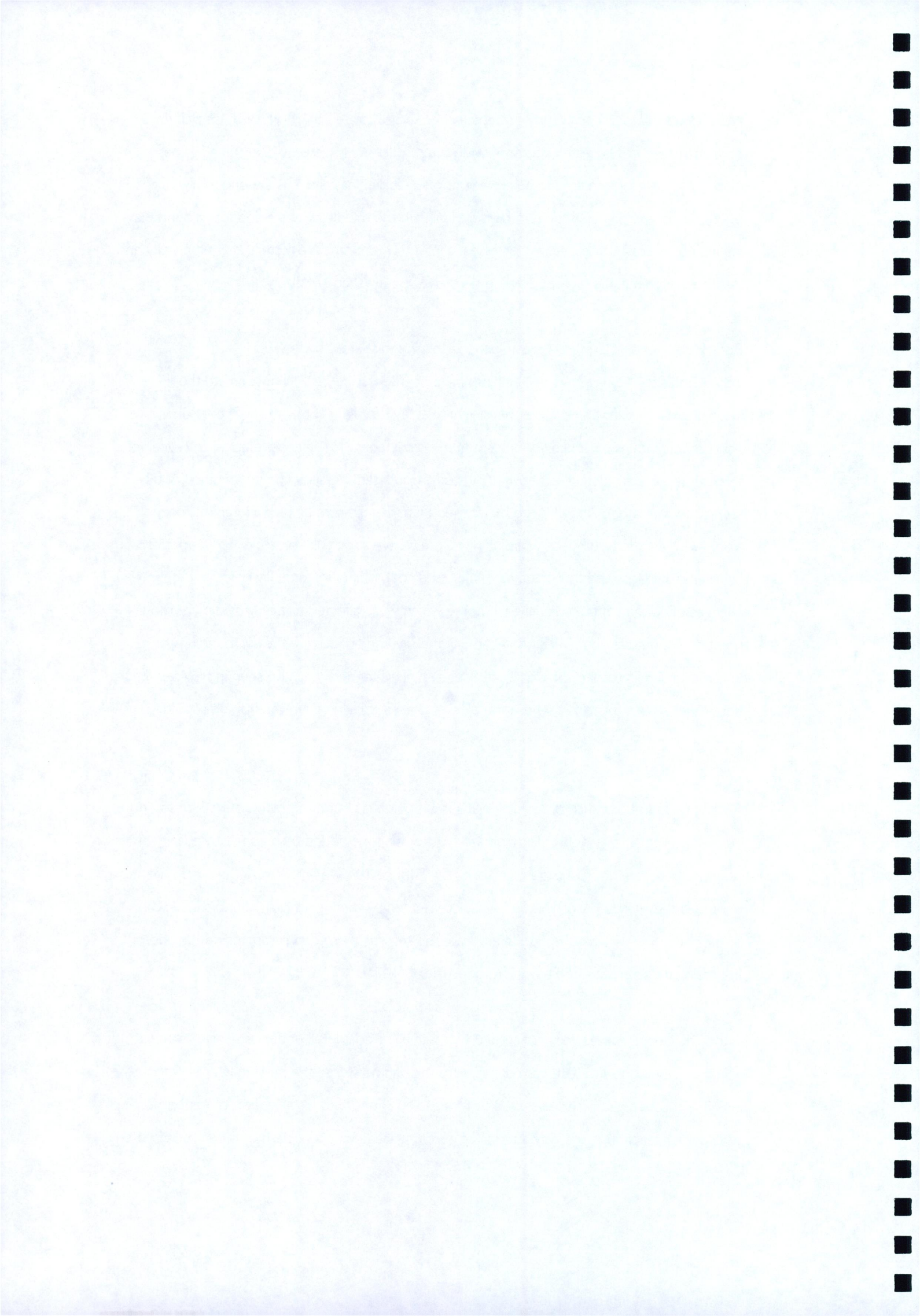




Plate 29. Alfred Munnings *After the Race, Cheltenham*





Plate 30. Alfred Munnings *Son-in-Law*



Plate 31. Peter Curling *Laytown Races*





Plate 32. Alfred Munnings *Going Out at Kempton*

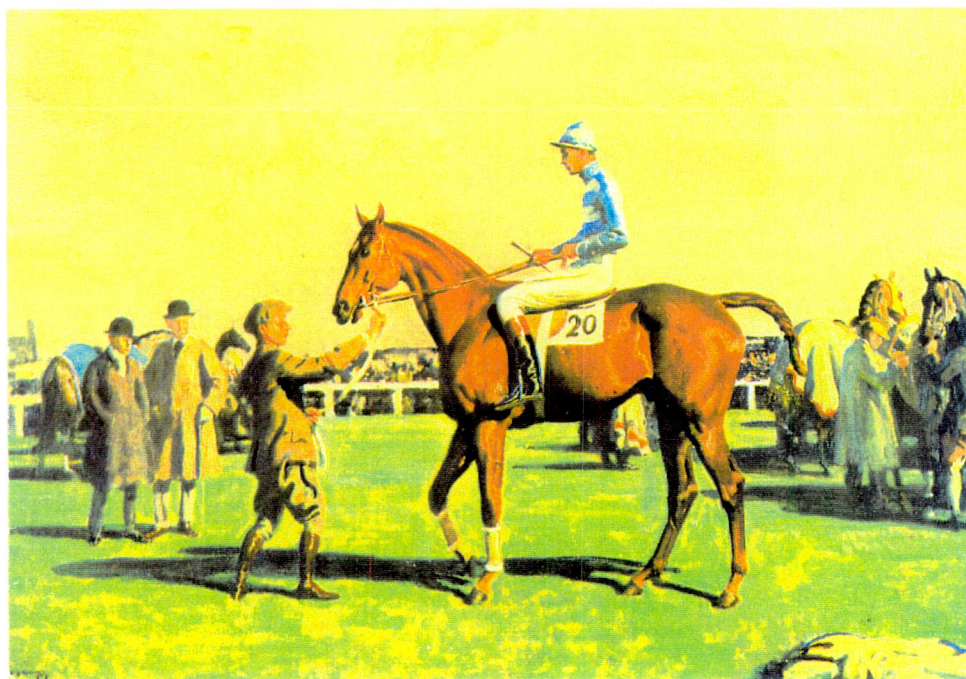
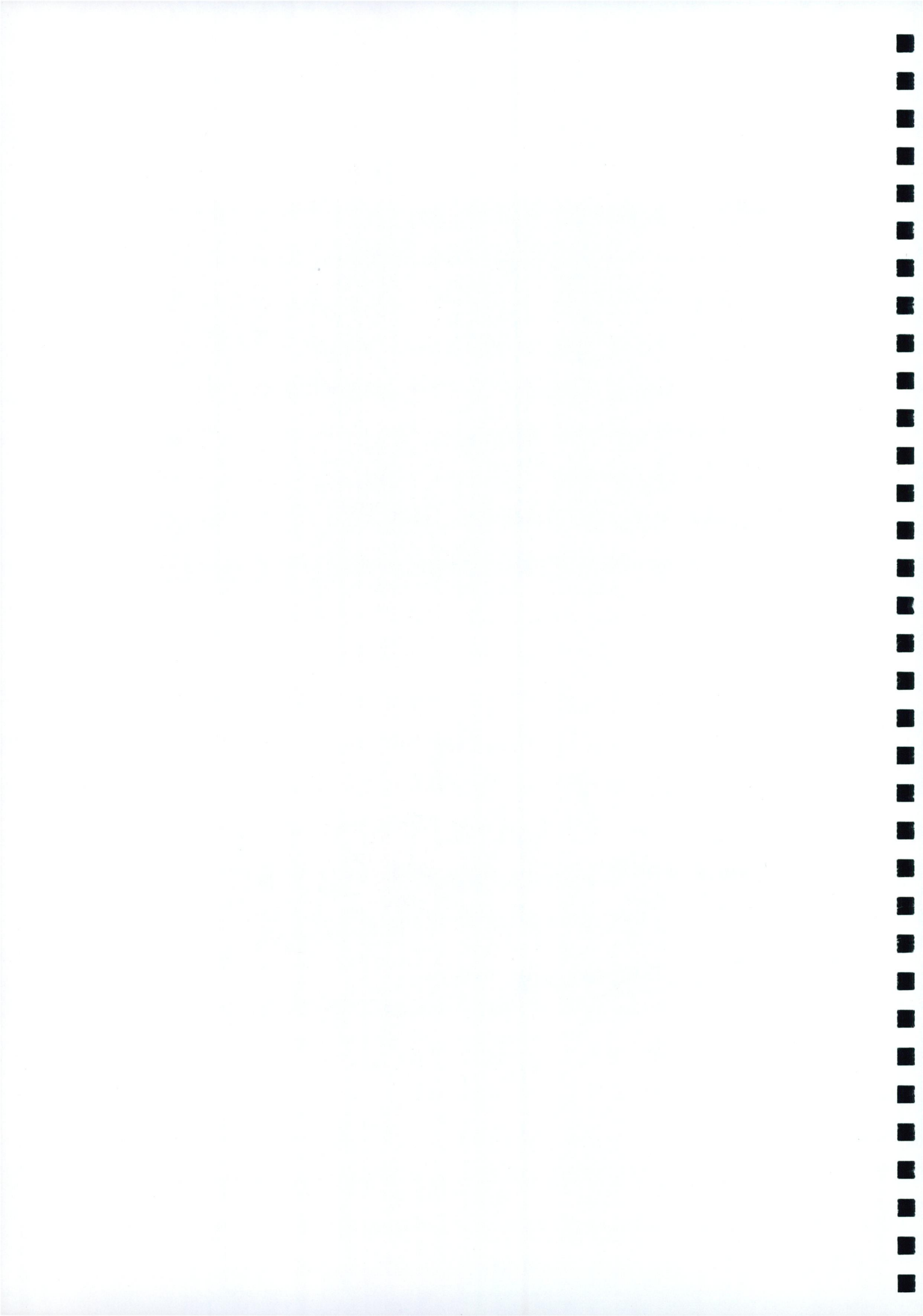


Plate 33. Alfred Munnings *Anthony Mildmay on Davy Jones*



the horse's coat could light up a brown hide" (Goodman, 1988, pg. 79). The blues and violets in his shadows imprison the sunlight rather than quench it. He was the first artist to realise that the coat of a living horse was "coloured by the reflection of blue and grey from the sky" (Goodman, 1988, pg. 81). Nowhere is this more evident than in his portrait of *Son-in-Law* (plate 30); a beautiful stallion, obviously in his prime. Although the horse's coat is a rich dark brown, Munnings has accentuated certain areas by the highly effective use of different colours such as a stroke of red to define the neck muscle, and violet shadows which emphasise the roundness of the hindquarters.

This technique is also present, although to a lesser extent, in Curling's *Laytown Races* (plate 31). Here the artist has observed the sky's reflection on the horses' coats and has recorded it by using a small touch of blue on the horses' hindquarters. He has also heightened the contours of the ribcage of horse number one by using yellow highlights. Curling's "tremendous respect" for Munnings' "bold use of colour" is clearly evident here (Berry, 1989, pg. 92).

Although Munnings spent six years as an apprentice with the publishing firm of Page Bros., learning the art of lithography, the majority of his later work is in oils. He has clearly mastered the medium and uses it to its fullest extent, producing a wide variety of paintings ranging from *Going Out at Kempton* (plate 32), where the brushstrokes are clearly evident, to *Anthony Mildmay on Davy Jones* (plate 33), where the rendition of the horse is somewhat smoother.

In contrast, Curling has produced what is regarded by many as his best work through the use of watercolours. These pictures, such as *A Bit of a Boyo* (plate 34) and *At the Curragh* (plate 35) have a freshness and a spontaneity which is not conveyed as successfully in his oil paintings. However, he regards working with watercolours as a series of tricks and techniques which are easily mastered through practise. This same sense of familiarity was shared by Munnings who felt that "as experiences accumulate, the painter gradually learns the ways and means to carry out his purpose" (Munnings, 1953, pg. 213). I think that this feeling is a great pity because many of Curling's watercolours succeed in capturing a particular incident or emotion in just a few lines. He is currently enjoying the challenge of working in oils and trying to convey the same feeling of immediacy through these paintings. In this sense he regards Munnings as "very brave" to work so quickly on such large canvases and succeed in producing spontaneous,

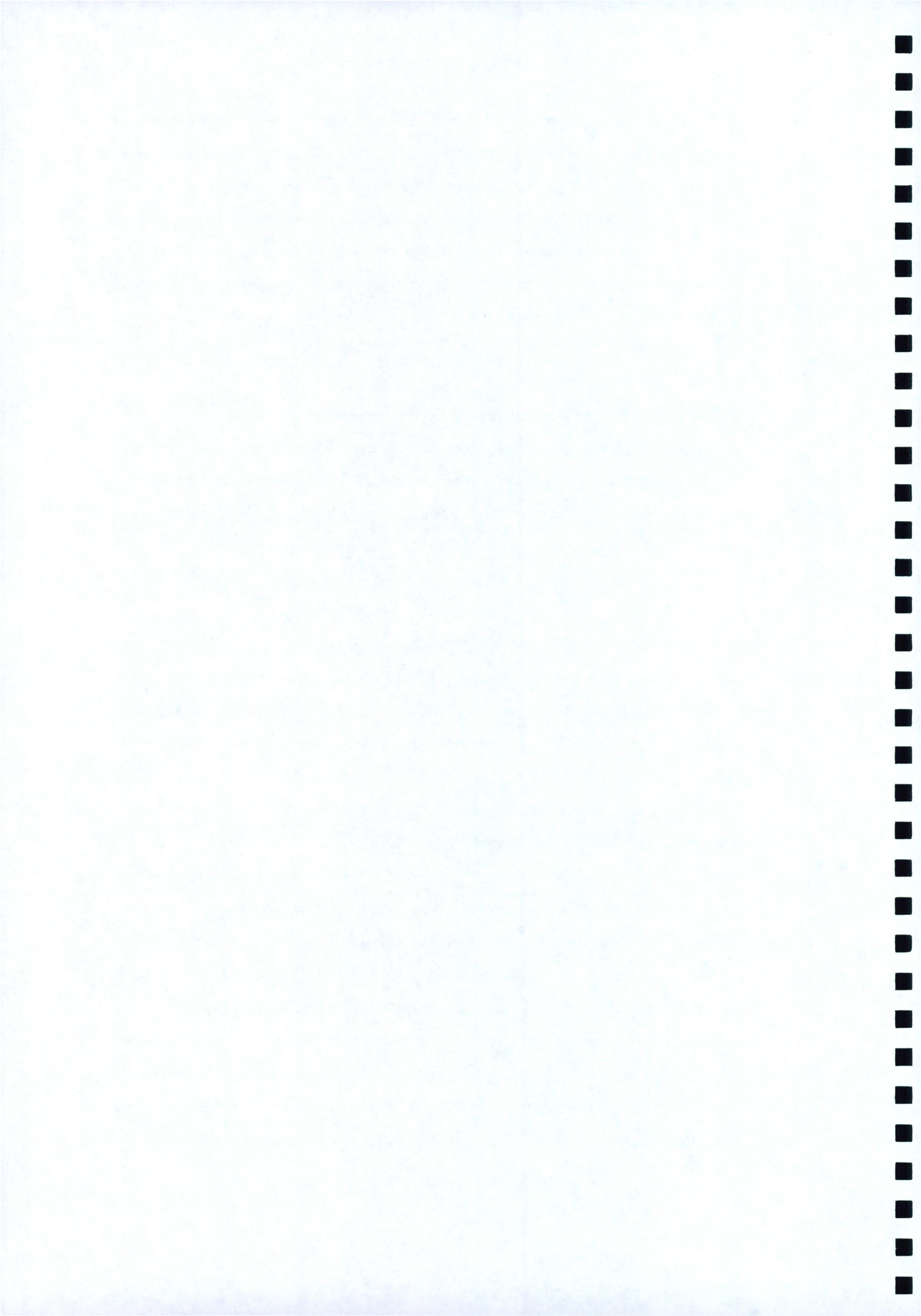




Plate 34. Peter Curling *A Bit of a Boyo*



Plate 35. Peter Curling *At the Curragh*

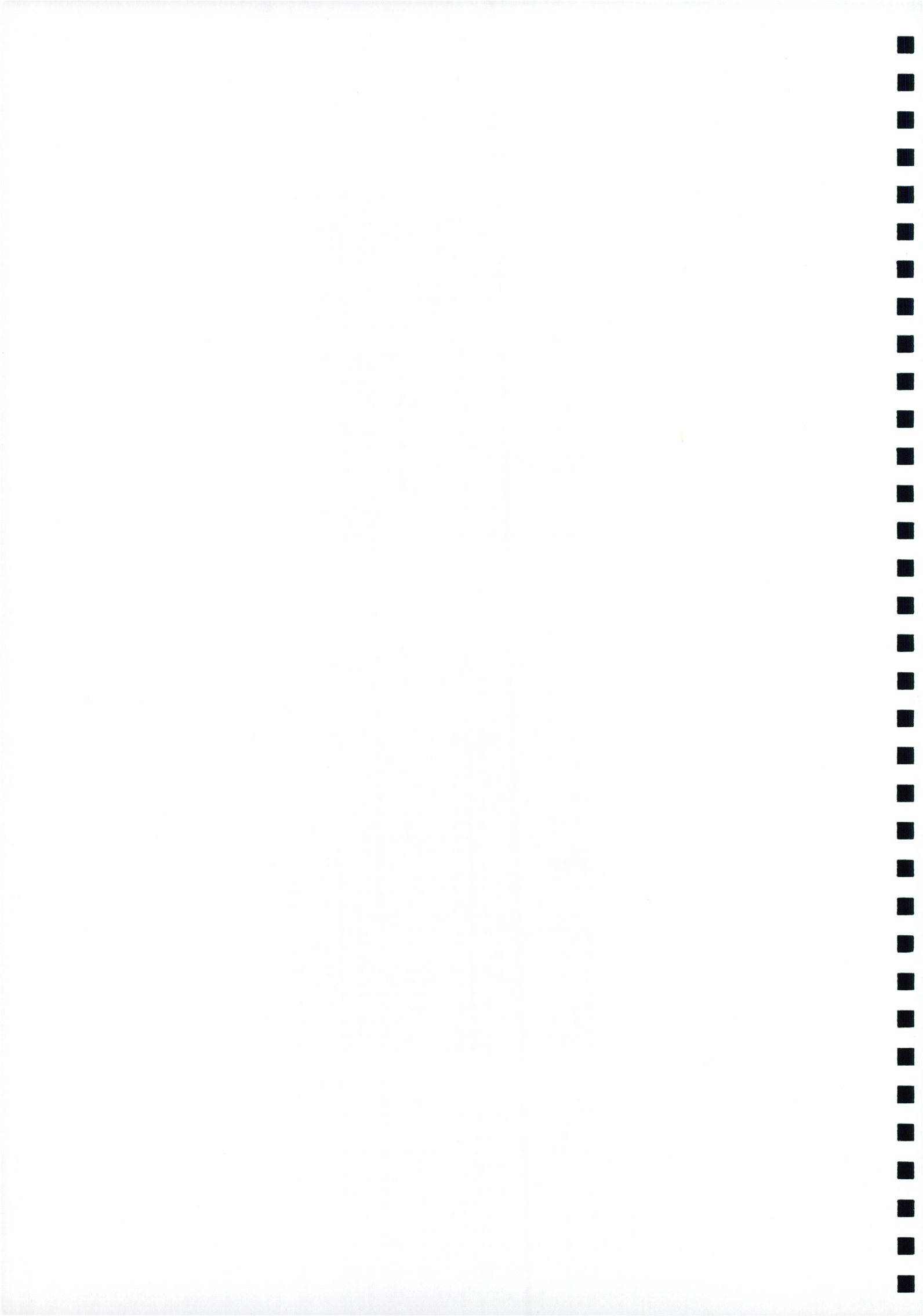




Plate 36. Peter Curling *Flat Out for the Line*



Plate 37. Peter Curling *Has he Come too Soon?*

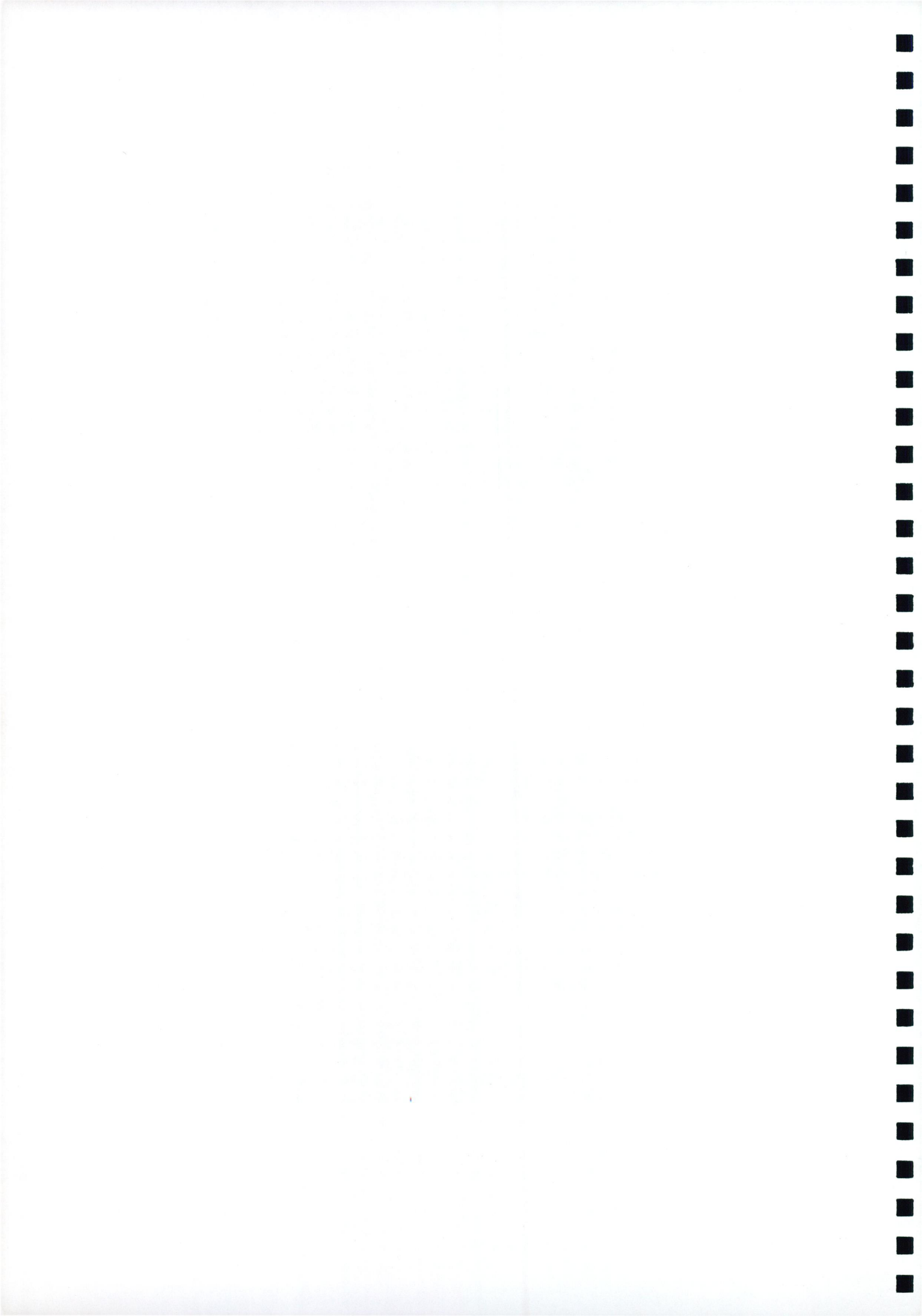
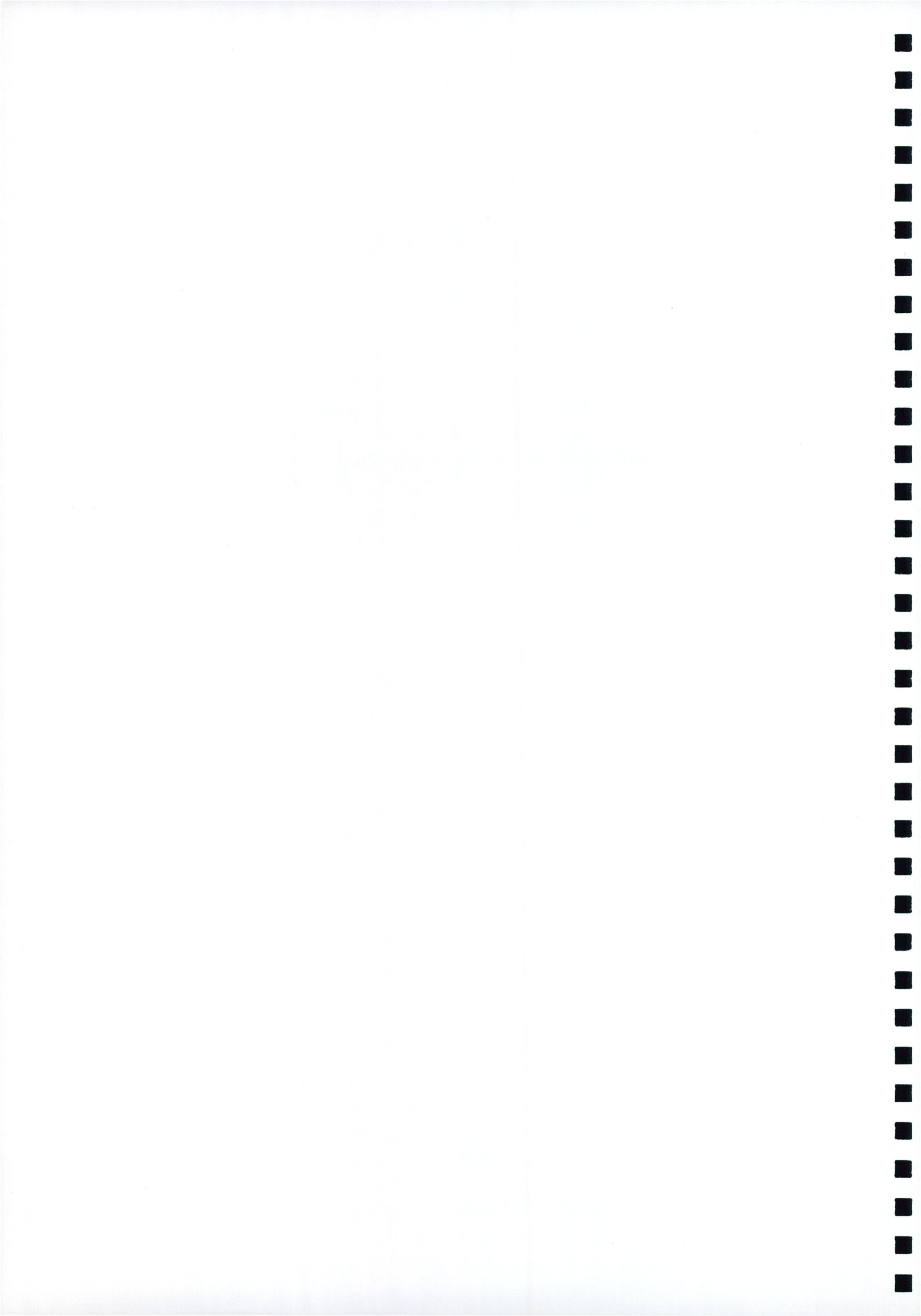




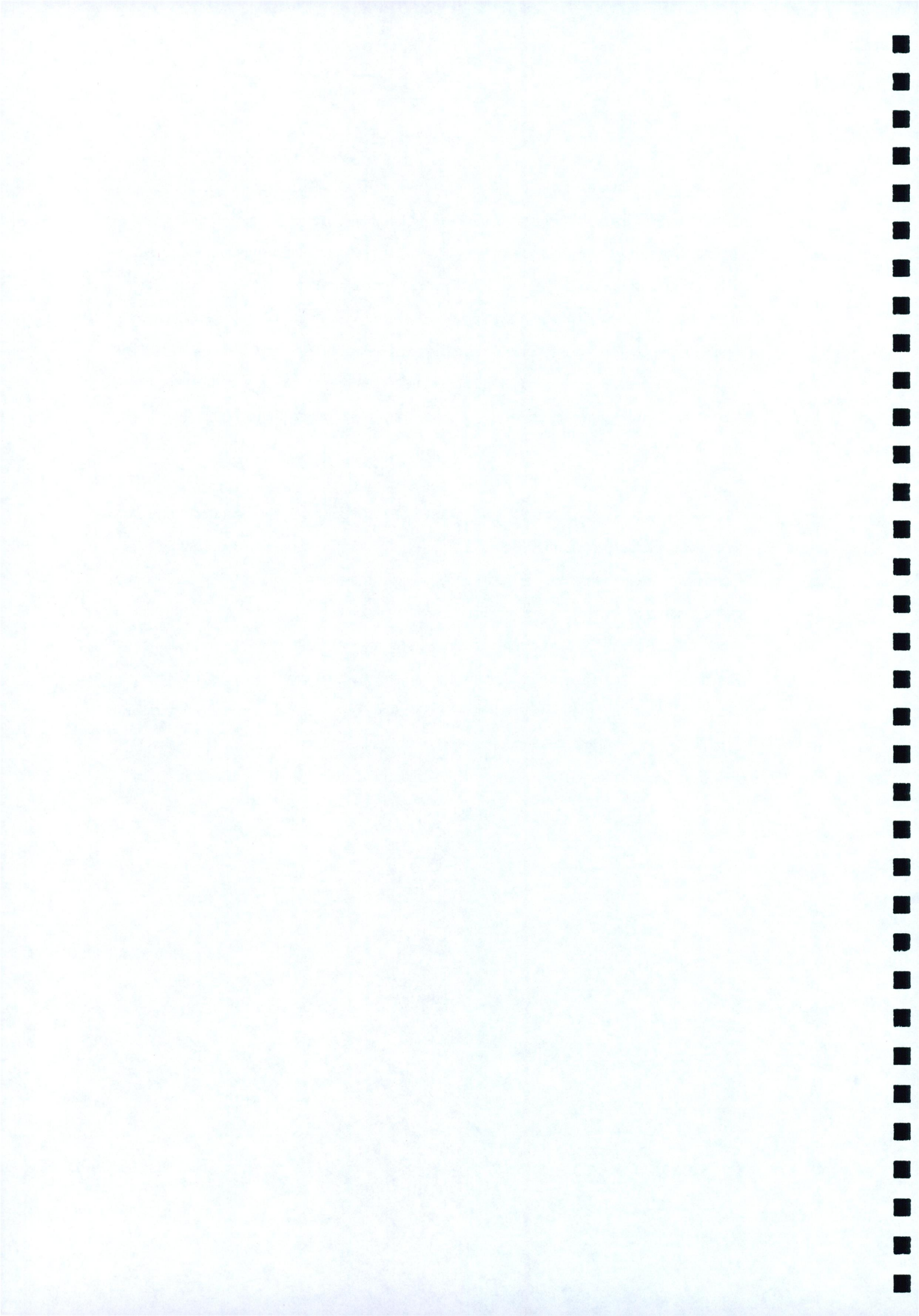
Plate 38. Alfred Munnings *Exercising at Newmarket*



“flowing” paintings (Goodwillie, Dublin, 1993).

However, even when using oils, I think that Curling succeeds in describing a sense of movement more effectively than Munnings. *Flat Out for the Line* (plate 36) captures the drama and urgency of his subject, his “blurring of the horses’, limbs reflecting the technique pioneered sixty years earlier by Holiday” (Berry, 1989, pg. 93). This blurring technique is also used to great effect in *Has He Come too Soon?* (plate 37) where the flying sods of turf and dust combine with the horses’ legs into an impression of great speed and power. Compare these paintings with Munnings’ *Exercising at Newmarket* (plate 38) and it becomes clear that Curling truly has the ability to capture the essence of speed without portraying a photographic representation of his subject.

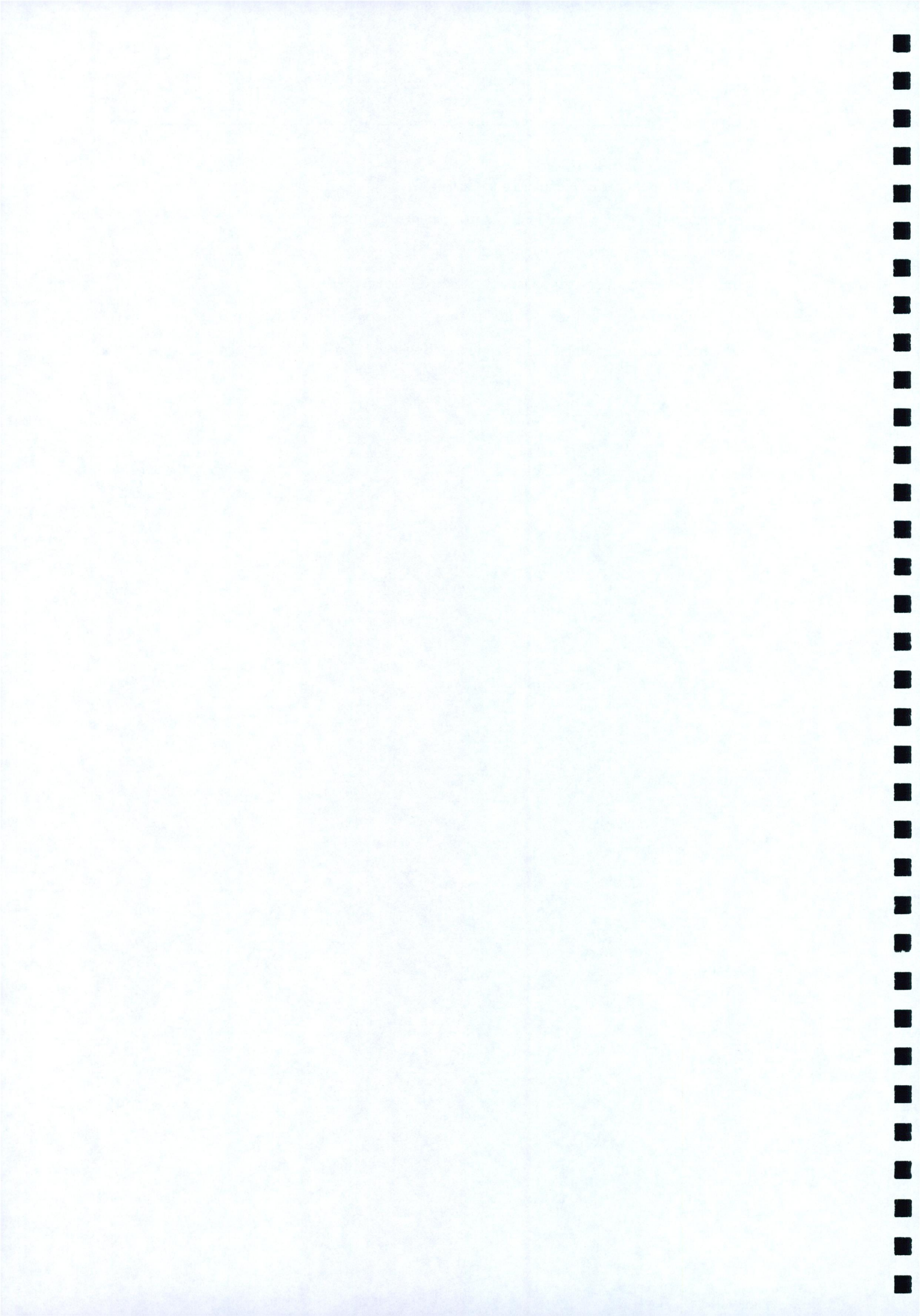
To close this chapter, I would like to give my own personal point of view. I feel that if one were to choose which artist was the more successful in terms of style and technique, I would class Munnings as the better horse portraitist and Curling as the action painter. As can be seen, each artist has his own concerns and priorities within a painting. Nevertheless, whether the preoccupation is with colour or composition, light or medium, both Munnings and Curling would appear to be in agreement that the only way to produce what can be regarded as a successful equestrian painting is to combine an excellent knowledge of anatomy with the ability to make very accurate, although often brief, sketches from the horse itself. These show how the animal relates to its environment, its reactions and its movements; all essential qualities needed to portray an individual character.



The contemporaries of Munnings and Curling

A comparison of the work of Munnings to paintings by sporting artists such as Lionel Edwards, Gilbert Holiday and Snaffles, by traditional painters like Dame Laura Knight and John Sargeant and by modern painters, particularly Picasso and Duchamp.

The pictures of Curling are contrasted to those of his contemporaries in the field of sporting art: Susan Crawford, Peter Deighan and Peter Biegel and also in the world of academic art: John Skeaping and Niccolo Caracciolo.



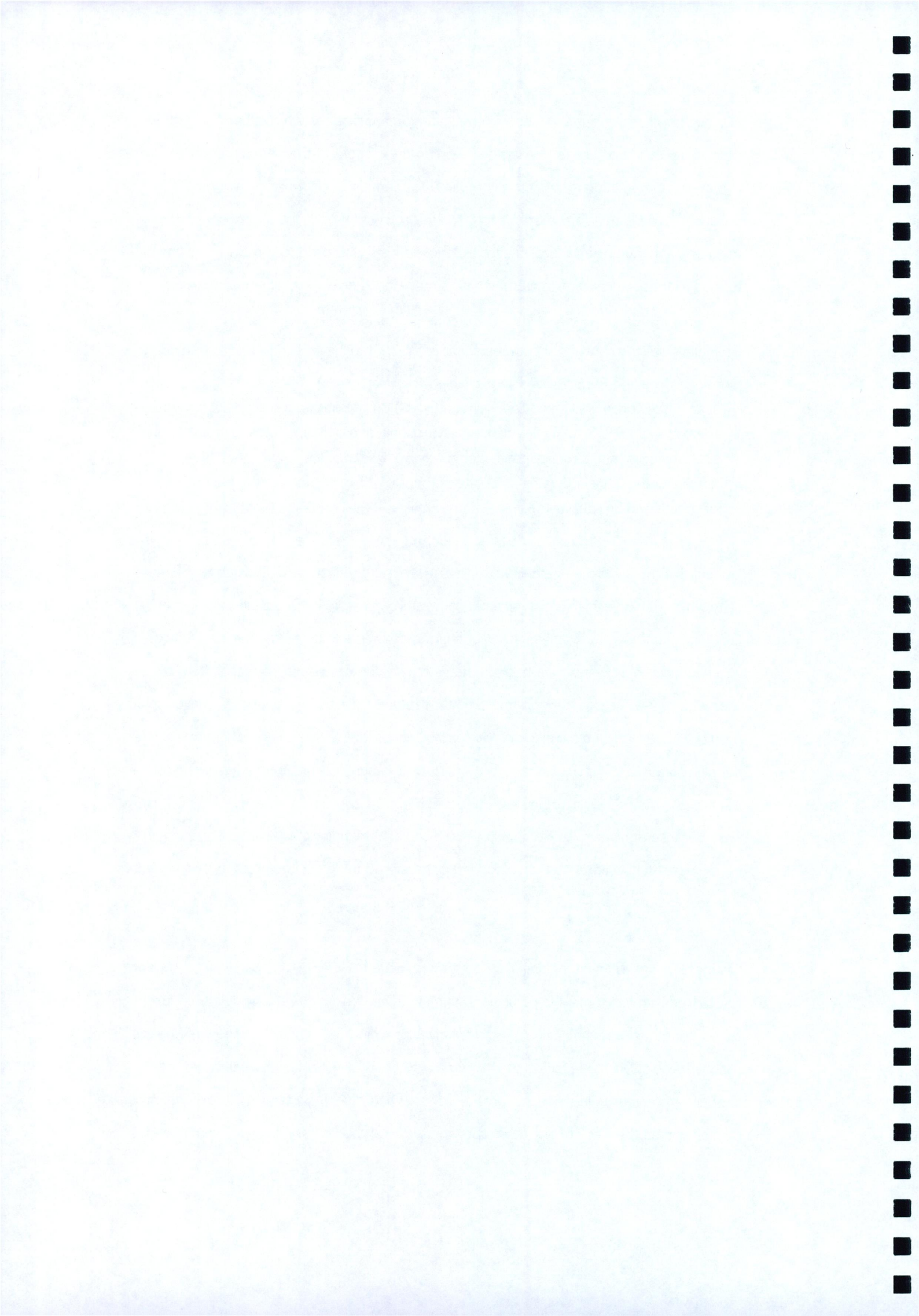
Although both Munnings and Curling have painted many pictures which stand in their own right, it is very important to look at their work in the context of their contemporaries. Instead of viewing it in isolation it should be compared to the type of art which was currently being produced. To delve slightly more deeply into this subject I have divided the contemporaries of Munnings and Curling into two categories : those artists who produced mainly sporting pictures, and those who were concerned with a more innovative approach in painting,

Beginning with the sporting art contemporaries of A. J. Munnings, I find the choice made by John Welcome and Rupert Collins a particularly satisfactory one:

"If an art historian was asked to mount an exhibition of British equestrian art between the two wars, 1918-1939, and he could select one, and only one, artist to represent each major medium, most people would agree the selection would be A. J. Munnings as an oil painter; Lionel Edwards as a watercolourist, Gilbert Holiday as the best handler of pastels and Snaffles as the greatest print maker" (Welcome and Collins, 1987, pg.125).

Lionel Edwards is widely regarded as a sporting artist of the first rank. The feeling of authenticity which pervades his hunting pictures comes through again in his steeplechasing scenes. Guy Paget, author of *Sporting Pictures of England* considers that "he can paint a scene as good and lifelike as Fearly, on a background worthy of Birket Foster....no man softens his outlines with mist as he does, and at the same time retains their truth and weight" (Paget, 1988, pg. 92). However, when painting portraits, his depiction of the human figure seldom reaches the high standard of his equestrian portraits. Edwards' summer pictures of flat racing (plate 39) lack the intense feeling of involvement, found in his steeplechasing paintings. This is most likely because of his own lack of interest in the subject. Munnings, for example, was much more successful in capturing the colour, the glamour and the excitement of a flat race meeting in June.

Claude Berry gives an interesting view on how to judge the quality of sporting art. Although not to be taken as an infallible regulation I think that it serves as a useful guideline. "A useful rule of thumb for sporting pictures is to remove the main subject and then see what remains" (Berry, 1989, pg. 41). He feels that in too many pictures by the younger generation the answer is "precious little". The pictures of Edwards and Munnings stand up to this test probably better than the work of any other sporting artists of this century; both were marvellous



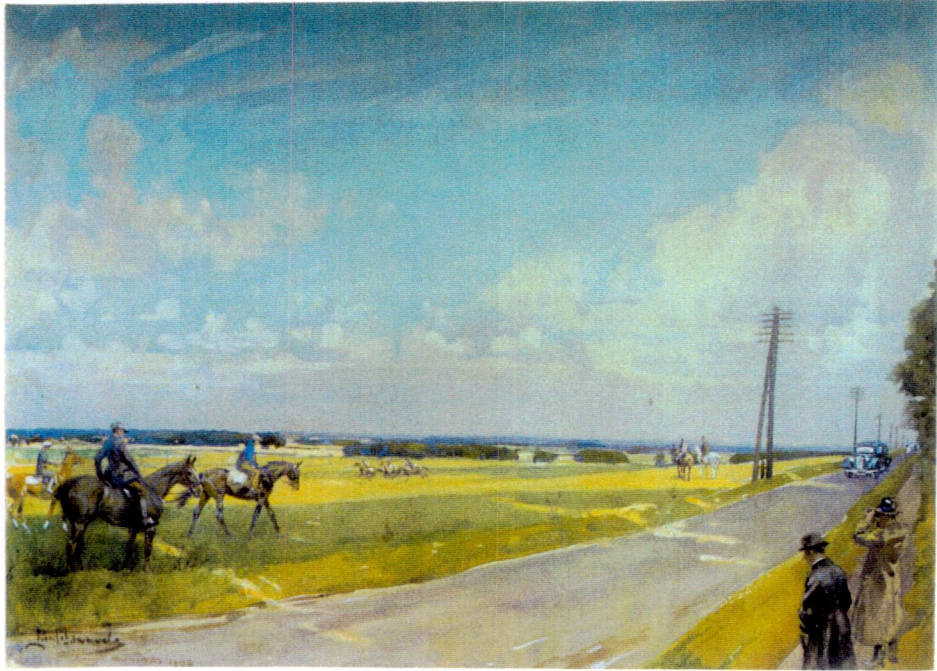


Plate 39. Lionel Edwards *A Trial on the Limekilns, Newmarket*

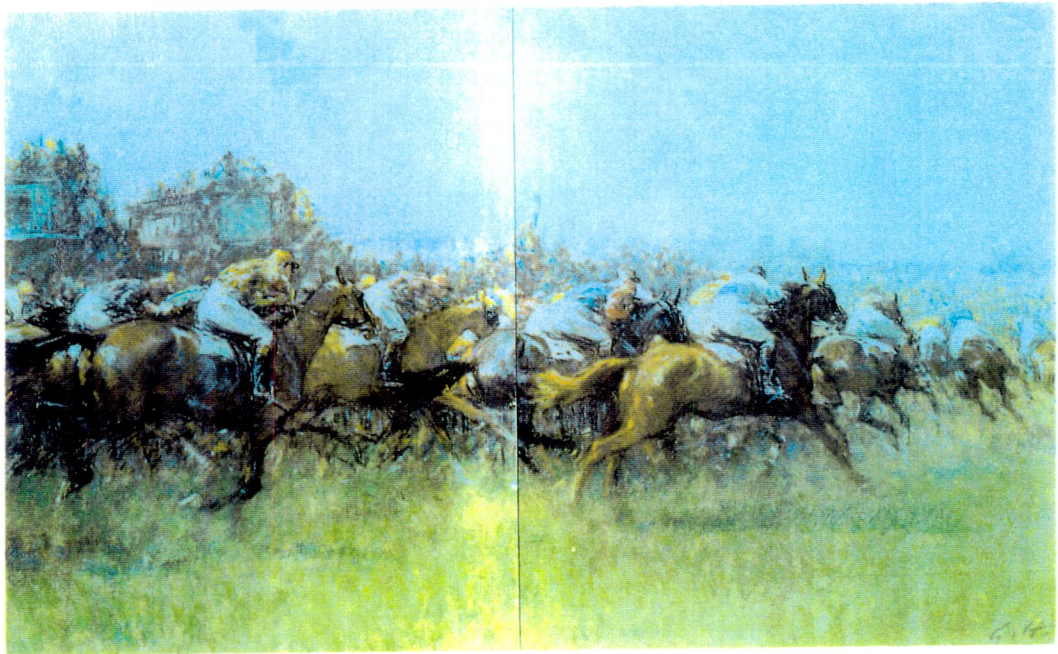


Plate 40. Gilbert Holiday *Epsom, Rounding Tattenham Corner in the Derby*

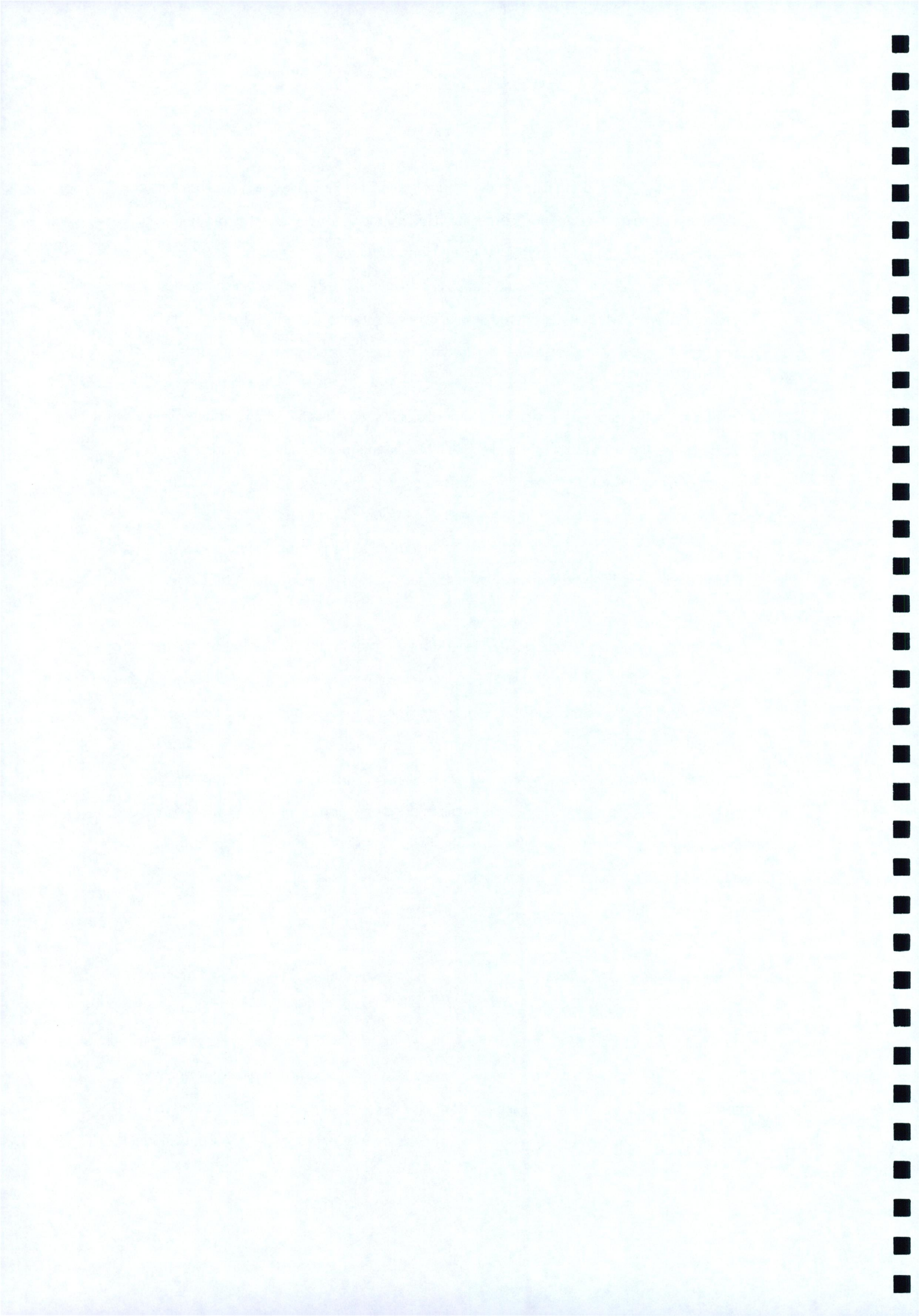


landscape painters.

Of those artists born in the nineteenth century, it is Gilbert Holiday who is credited with the distinction of being the one most successful in portraying the sheer speed of racing horses. He is regarded by many fine judges, including Lionel Edwards, as the first artist to make use of Eduard Muybridge's photographic revelations. This interest in the work of a camera led him to produce work which is considered revolutionary for its time as he was the first artist to avoid the "rocking-horse" gallop so favoured by seventeenth century sporting artists. His talent lay in capturing atmosphere and movement. In achieving this he was influenced, like Munnings, by the daring approach of the Impressionists so that rather than relying on line, he chose to use the contrast of light and shade to evoke the mood of the racecourse. In the words of Lionel Edwards the reason for his success was "his clever manipulation of dust or mud and the consequent blurring of outlines which gives a tremendous sense of speed" (Berry, 1989, pg. 43). In this he imitated a technique which was to be continued and refined during the second half of the century by artists such as John Skeaping and Peter Curling.

Another technique which sets Holiday apart from the other artists of the 1918-1939 period is his love of painting horses from unusual angles. His *Epsom - Rounding Tattenham Corner in the Derby* (plate 40) shows the leaders hindquarters while the main body of the field is seen more conventionally from the side. Holiday's paintings are also excellent examples of a daring use of colour and the unusual way in which he used his media. He frequently mixed his media, a technique later used by Curling, to create the impression which he required. His broad and direct method of working has initial similarities with Munnings' style but I think that their finished paintings are quite different in appearance. Holiday's brushstrokes are more apparent than those of Munnings and his use of colour is not as striking nor as vibrant.

Charlie Johnson Payne is an artist who is also connected to the sporting world of Munnings, Edwards and the like, although he produced work of a very contrasting nature. Better known as 'Snaffles' he is regarded as "one of the most precise painters of this century" (Welcome and Collins, 1987, pg.11). Snaffles received no formal art training. He taught himself mainly by copying the work of leading sporting artists of his time, for example Finch Mason and Jon Sturgess. He earns high praise from Ireland's best known racehorse trainer, Vincent O'Brien:



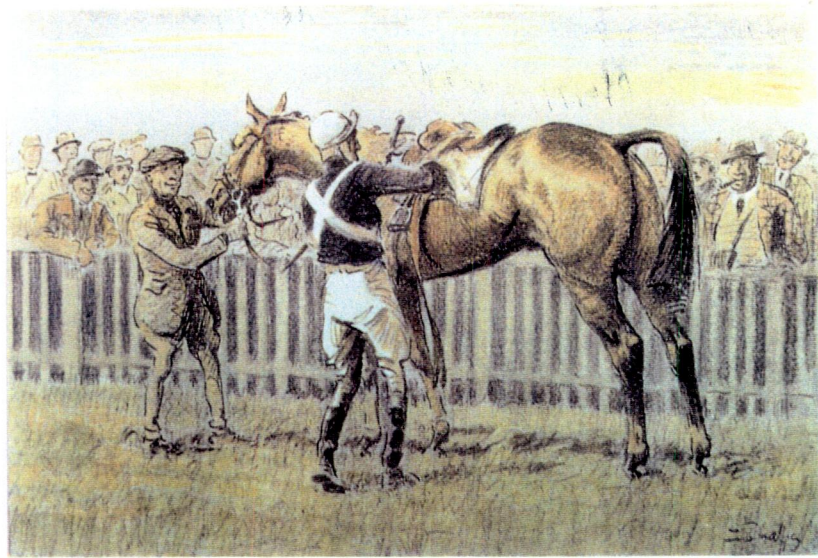


Plate 41. Snaffles *After the Race*

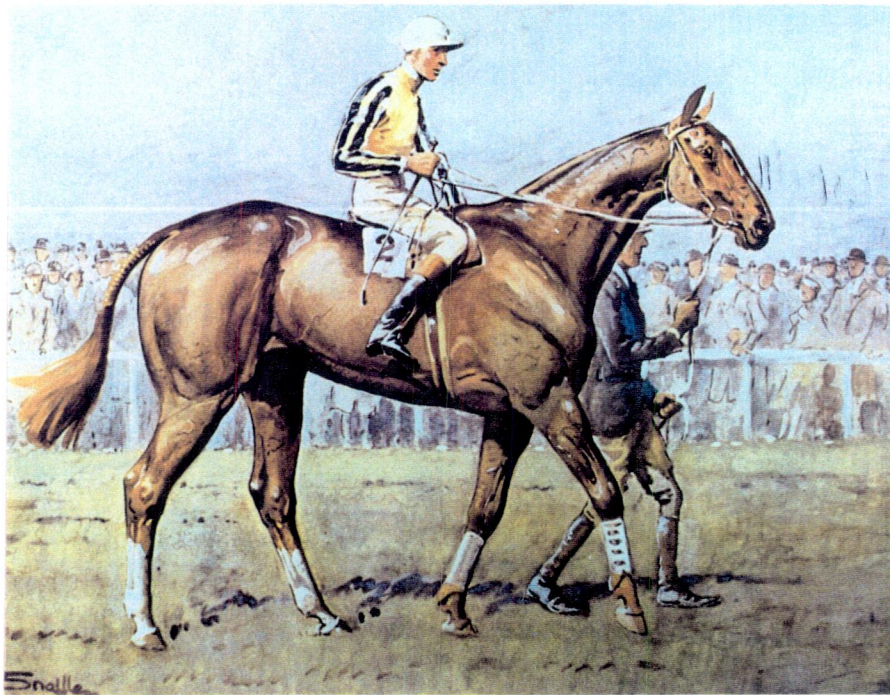
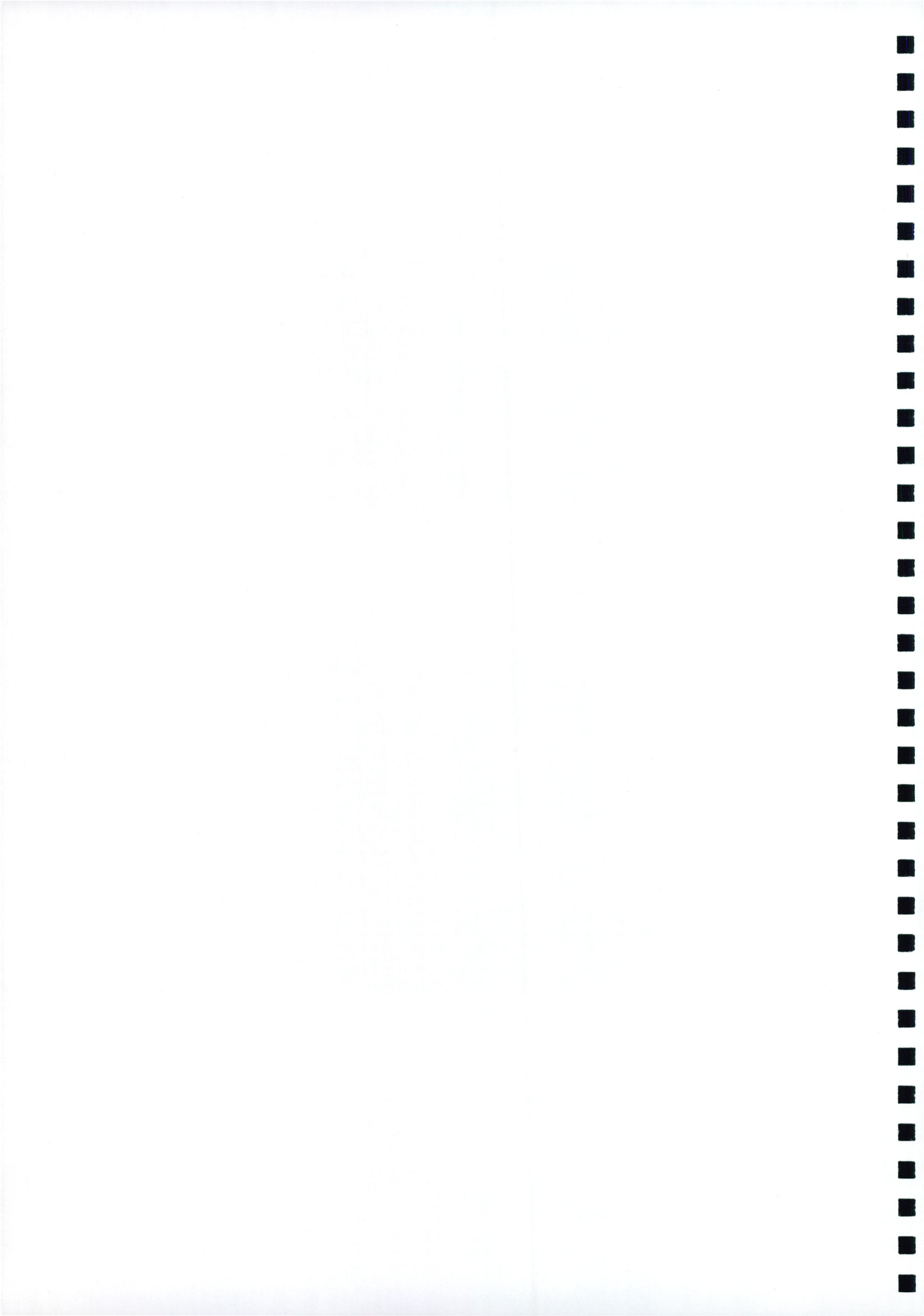


Plate 42. Snaffles *A National Candidate*



"His spirited pictures of the Grand National, Sandown and Cheltenham, together with those of great horses such as Sergeant Murphy, Easter Hero and Prince Regent bring vividly to life all the thrill and excitement of steeplechasing at its best"
(Welcome and Collins, 1987, pg,7),

Personally, I find it hard to agree with this point of view. I feel that Snaffles' pictures, although accurate, do not convey the same emotions as the more atmospheric work of Munnings and Holiday.

A sharp contrast in the methods of working of Snaffles and Munnings exists in the fact that while Munnings constantly sketched and made notes while in the field, so to speak, Snaffles never made any use of a sketchbook. Apparently he had an amazingly retentive memory and this allowed him to produce a scene or incident with absolute authority (Welcome and Collins, 1987, pg, 63). A phrase or idiom would give him the idea for a picture or provide a caption for one that was already in his mind and he normally needed these for his work to achieve its full effect.

Snaffles liked Lionel Edwards and admired his work, an admiration which did not extend itself to Munnings whose paintings he regarded as being over-stylised and 'chocolate-boxy'. He always denigrated himself when it came to horse portraiture; "I am not a portrait painter; I leave that to Munnings and his like. (Welcome and Collins, 1987, pg. 63). I believe that although the majority of his paintings are neither as successful nor as remarkable as those of Munnings and Edwards; his prints are certainly as good. Certainly they are highly effective when used as illustrations for books and magazines. *After the Race* and *A National Winner* (plates 41 and 42) are suitable examples of this particular illustrative quality.

During Munnings' lifetime he acquired a reputation as one who was very much opposed to radical change in the world of art. The painters whose careers ran parallel with his own, and whose work he admired all painted in a similar traditional style. He felt that "the first artists in any line are those near to nature. For them there are no artful stunts nor perverse trickery" (Munnings, 1953, pg. 285). He preferred paintings that were self-explanatory and felt that the noble efforts of these artists had been discarded as old fashioned. These views were shared by a fellow artist called Zuloaga, who lived and worked in Spain; "The modern works of the Ecole de Paris backed by the critics brought an end to the true efforts in painting"

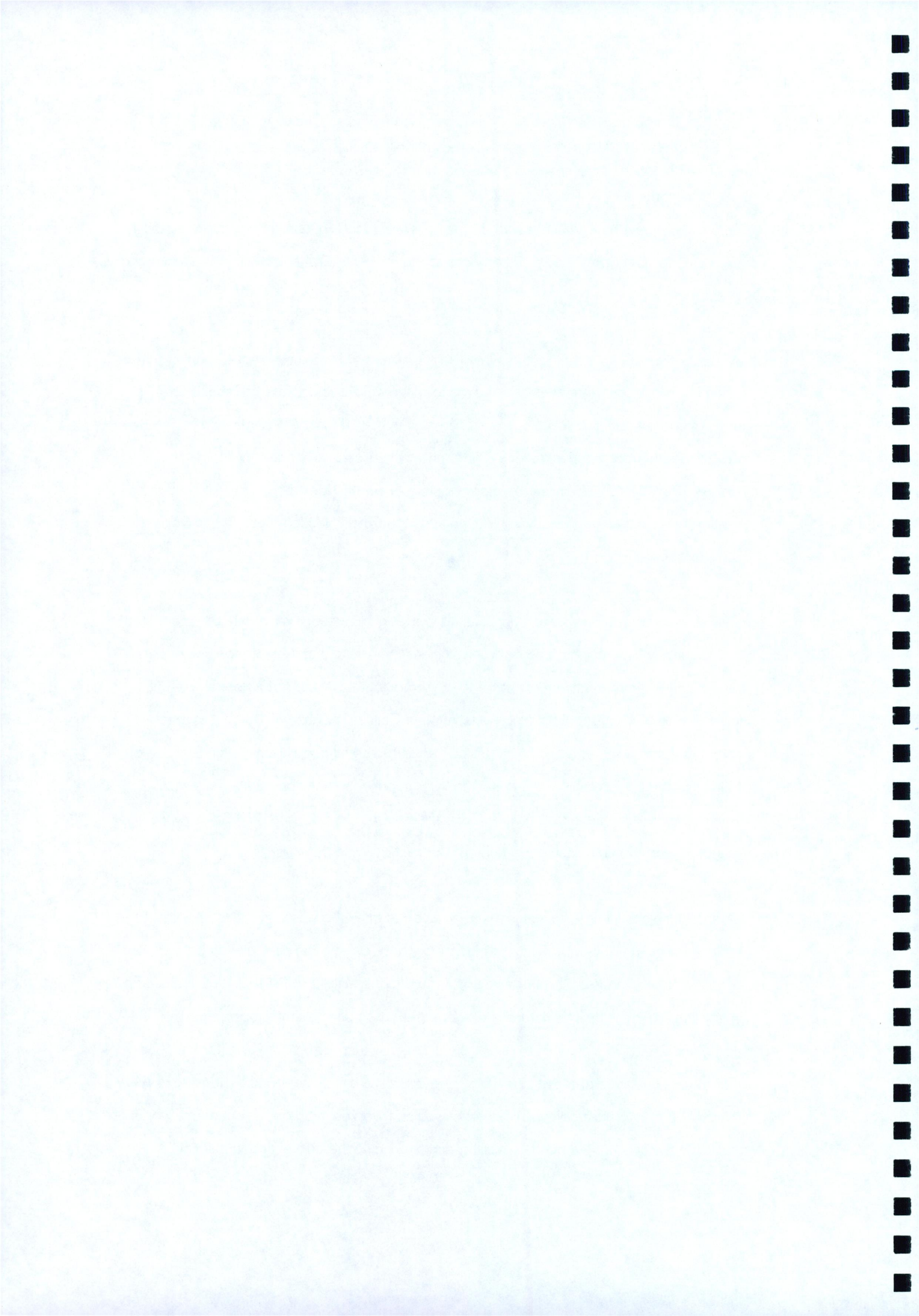




Plate 43. Laura Knight *The Beach*

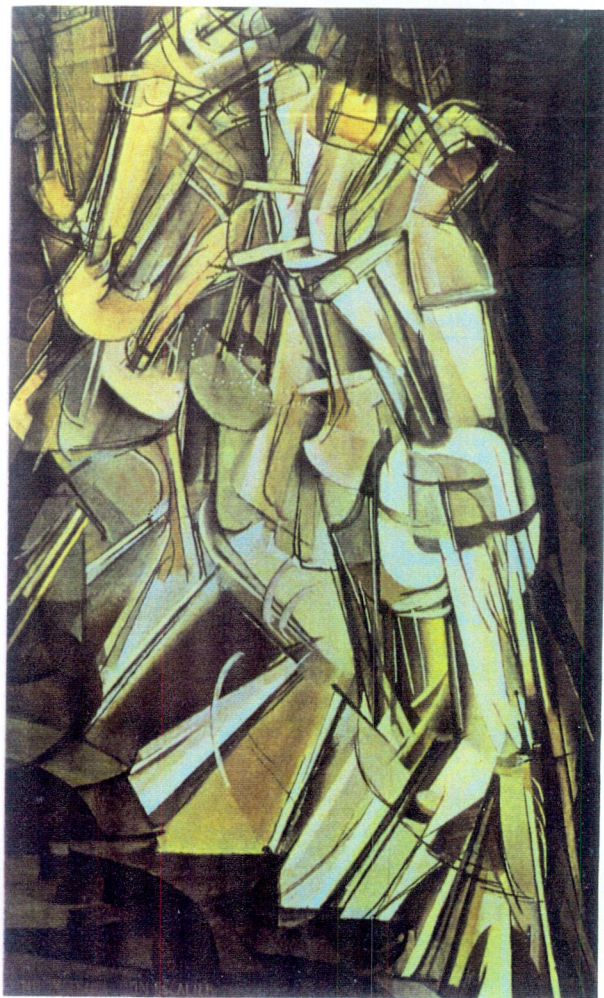


Plate 44. Marcel Duchamp *Nude Descending a Staircase*



(Munnings, 1953, pg. 215).

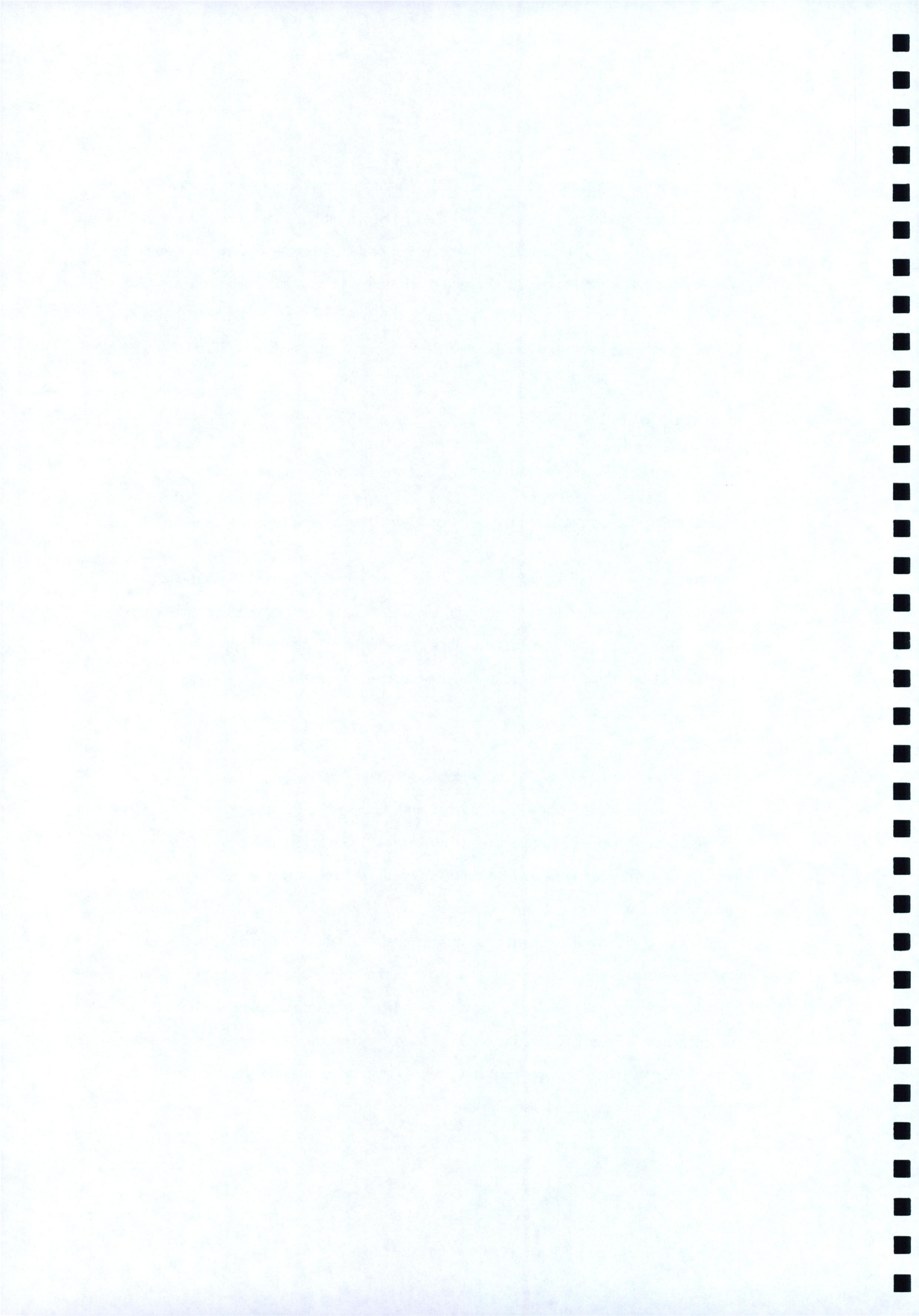
Probably the most important and influential of Munnings' contemporaries was Laura Knight. He was far more extreme than she in his dislike of modern art but in many ways there are strong similarities in their careers. It is reckoned that both produced their best work early on, when on the whole they were struggling and before they had achieved much success. According to Caroline Fox, in both cases success possibly encouraged work which was "superficial and lacking the depth and spontaneity of their earlier paintings" (Fox, 1988, pg. 97).

Laura Knight's work was much admired by Munnings. In 1908, after seeing *The Beach* (plate 43) he declared it a picture

"which made the rest of us sit up. Here was a great artist who never ceased working. She possessed the energy of six; the studies for her larger pictures were wonderful. Laura Knight could paint anything be it a small watercolour or a nine foot canvas" (Fox, 1988, pg. 295).

They remained good friends throughout their lives. Laura sometimes tried to intervene for Munnings when he had gone too far in expressing his dislike of contemporary art and appears to have been very tolerant towards him. Munnings, in his turn, "was very supportive of her, and may have been partly responsible for her election as a full member of the Royal Academy in 1935" (Fox, 1988, pg. 37).

Another artist whose work was greatly respected by Munnings was John Sargent, who died in 1926. At a retrospective exhibition of his paintings, Munnings felt that the pictures on show "showed us what a rare genius we had lost" (Munnings, 1952, pg. 305). He proclaimed that Sargent's *Olive Gatherers in Albania* was a brilliant painting, particularly in its rendition of sunlight and shade. Munnings also admired Sargent's versatility and the fact that he recorded scenes of an idyllic environment before the age of industrialisation changed the face of the world. It was partly this age of mechanisation which drastically changed the style of contemporary painting. It brought with it a desire to experiment with traditions and methods that had once been viewed as almost sacred. In addition, although the camera had been invented in the 1820s, it was now in wider circulation; hence artists were no longer required to portray their subjects in a highly naturalistic fashion,



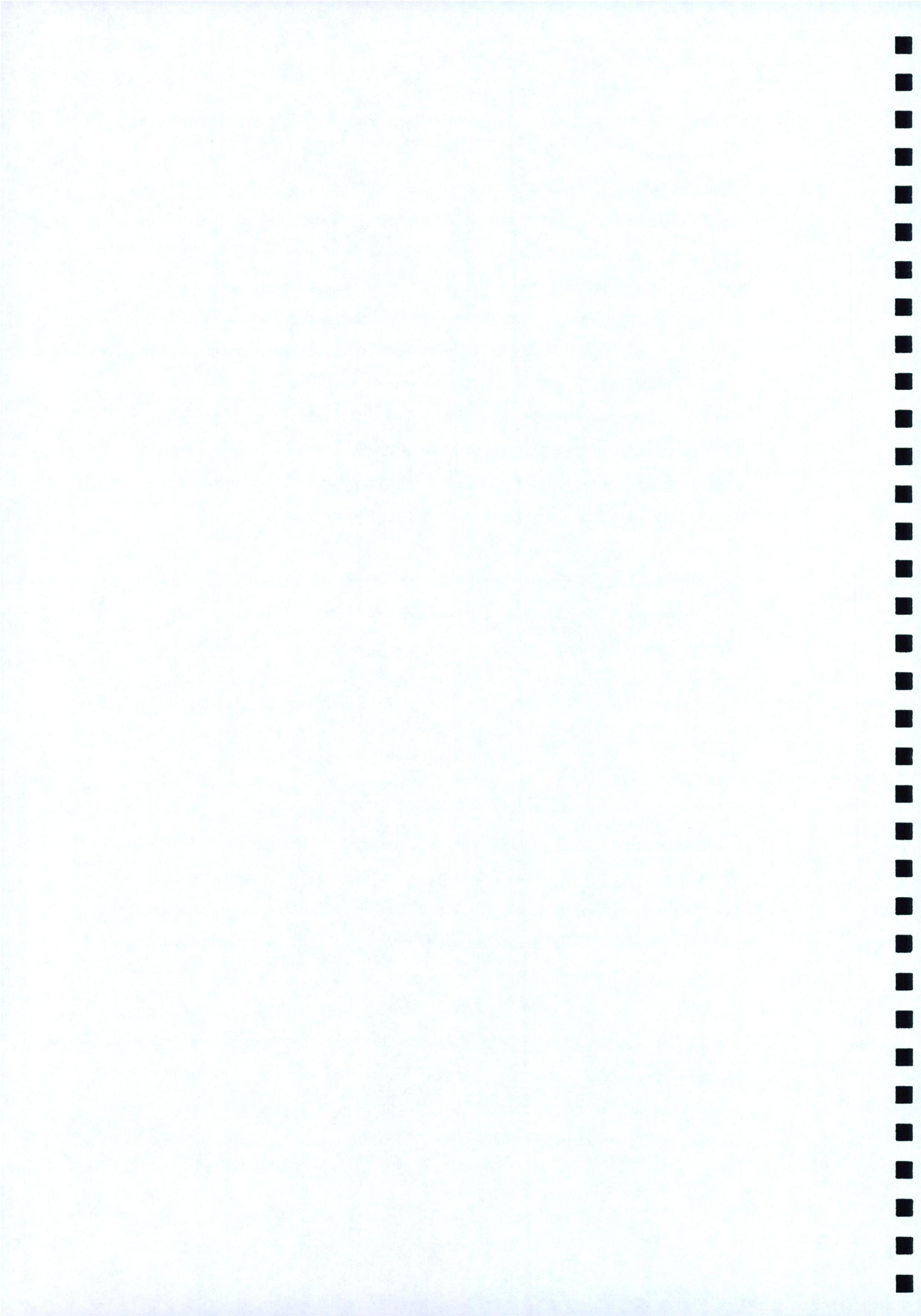
Throughout his lifetime Alfred Munnings constantly criticised the artists who were responsible for the development of modern painting styles, such as Fauvism, Cubism and Futurism. He found fault not only with their work: "figures painted as though cut out of pale yellow box-wood, their joints working like those of a wooden doll" (Munnings, 1953, pg. 295), but also the fact that they were so influenced by the art critics of the time (plate 44). He felt that these painters were imitating their predecessors, twisting and turning their figures to express new inhibitions, thinking all the while of the critics' reactions. Being a traditional painter himself, his work never posed any problem for the critics. This is still the case today as was proved by Brian Fallon, an art critic with *The Irish Times*: "So long as you paint horses, ballerinas or nudes you have no need to worry about the critics" (Goodwillie, Dublin, 1993). Although perhaps not strictly true, this sentiment does explain why Munnings was never particularly concerned with pleasing the critics. He had no need of critical acclaim because his work had popular appeal and he could always find a ready market for his paintings.

One of the main reasons for his strong dislike of modern art was that he felt that it did not have the timeless and immortal qualities of previous masterpieces. In the final part of his autobiography he makes a list of the five paintings that he felt would always be modern:

1. Velasquez, *The Dwarf*
2. Goya, *Nude*
3. Boilly, *Arrival of the Diligence*
4. Turner, *Evening Star*
5. Manet, *Bar of the Folies Bergère*

Taking this choice into consideration it is easy to understand why he regarded the emerging styles so negatively. In 1949 there was an exhibition of Picasso's work at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Munnings felt that although many thousands of people visited the exhibition, this was no indication that they wanted "to see Chagall's over-baked turnovers by Braque forever" (Munnings, 1953, pg. 245).

After his election as President of the Royal Academy, he was filled with hopes for the future of English Art. He believed that although the great masters of the past, such as Michelangelo and Rembrandt, would never be surpassed the society of the time would get to see things as they were and carry on to a future of sound painting. Those with jobs on the press and various



Art Councils "would wag their beards for the last time on the wireless" (Munnings, 1953, pg. 78). Much to his disgust these hopes were never realised and in 1949 during his resignation speech at the Royal Academy he made his feelings extremely clear:

"I myself would rather have a damned bad failure, a bad, muddy old picture where somebody has tried to do something, to set down what they have seen, than all this affected juggling, this following of what shall we call it, of the School of Paris" (Munnings, 1953, pg. 245).

This speech understandably provoked outbursts from all sides, both condemning and praising what he had said. Two letters, reproduced in his autobiography *The Finish* contain opposing points of view; one angry listener wrote "As far as you are concerned, your achievements don't entitle you to kiss Picasso's boots", while another congratulated him "at last someone has said publically what 95% of the population feel, be they art lovers or just ordinary people who know what they like".

In his own way, however, Munnings was behaving in the same way as all those involved in the modern movement. He was standing up for what he believed to be true, as were they. His nostalgia for the past and condemnation of twentieth century progress sprang from his great and enduring love of the English countryside as well as his feeling that all that was beautiful in England was slipping away in a materialistic world where few cared. His attitude to modern art, whether well or badly expressed, was founded on the belief that much of it was a confidence trick on the public and not based on what he considered to be the essential virtues of craftsmanship and hard work.

Curling's contemporaries

The horse remains as popular a subject today as it was during the early part of the century when much favoured as a subject by Munnings. As a result, Curling has as many contemporaries in the field of sporting art as his predecessors. He himself likes to divide them into two categories, namely the real artists (he considers himself as a member of this group) and the "chocolate-box" artists (of whom he can name several). Although this is an interesting classification it could never be described as rational because Curling is too involved to make an accurate judgement.

I have chosen to discuss the work of Susan Crawford, born in 1941, primarily because her

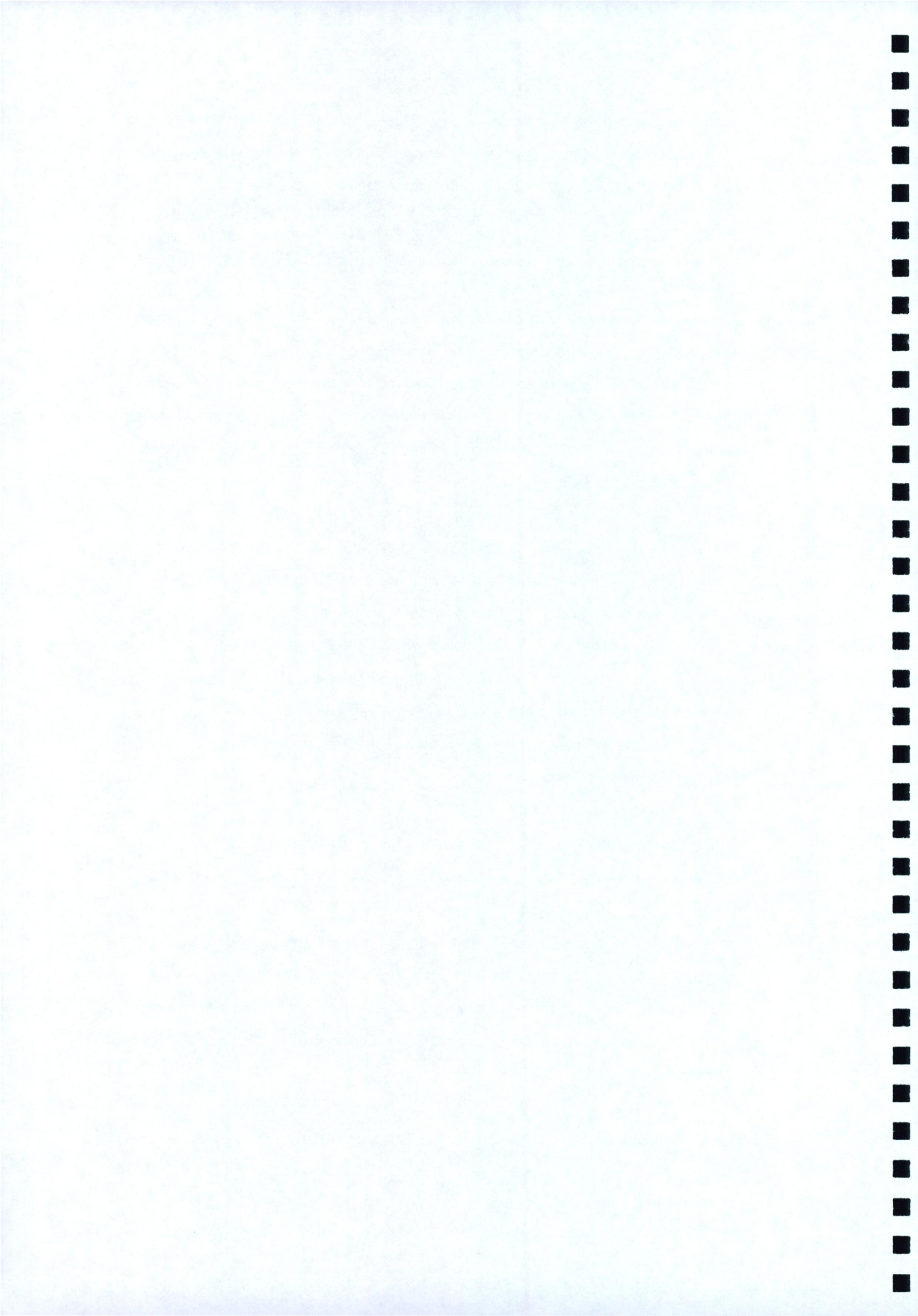




Plate 45. Susan Crawford *Northern Dancer*

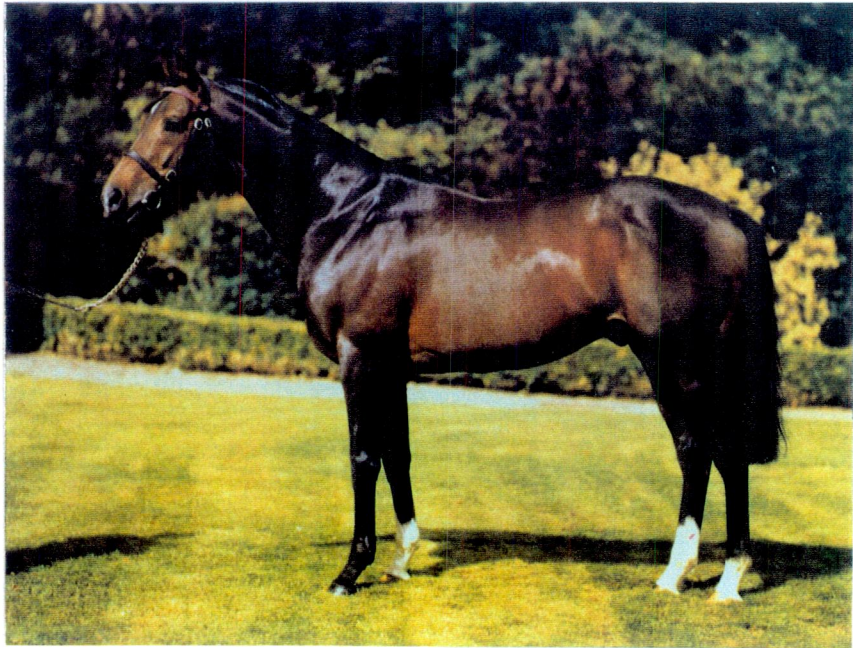


Plate 46. *Ela-Mana-Mou*



career holds many similarities to that of Curling. However, as will be seen, there are several notable differences apparent in their work. She is "at her best when engaged on the formal, traditional racehorse portrait", (plate 45) while Curling "excels in capturing the movement of the thoroughbred horse in action" (Berry, 1989, pg. 81).

After growing up in a conventional English country house where horses were very much a part of life, she decided that she needed professional instruction to maximise her already present ability as an artist. Hence, at the age of twenty-two, she travelled to Florence where she studied (at the same time as Curling) under the renowned Signorina Simi for eighteen months. Here her training consisted mainly of life drawing, both nudes and portraits.

The result of her sojourn in Florence was that she returned to Britain having learned to draw, with a great appreciation of the artistic traditions handed down over the centuries. This experience, coupled with her innate love of horses, pointed her towards the field in which she has become extremely skilled. Being primarily a painter of horse portraits, she has always concentrated on working to commission. The first of these was a horse called Santa Claus who had won both the 1964 Derby and the Irish Sweeps Derby. This picture was bought by the late Tim Rogers at whose Airlie Stud the horse stood. Further commissions followed, leading to the present situation in which she is forced with reluctance to turn away more commissions than she accepts.

An ideal way to show the differences between Crawford's academic style and Curling's more expressive approach to painting, is to contrast two paintings of the same horse, one painted by each artist. I have also included a photograph of the horse (plate 46) so that the pictures can be judged on how successfully each artist captured a likeness.

Crawford's portrait (plate 47), depicts the stallion at the peak of his career, in racing fitness. The muscles are lying taught underneath the skin of his back and shoulders as can be seen from an admirable handling of the paint. The artist has placed her subject in an open landscape, and the jockey is traditionally dressed in his racing colours despite the fact that there is no sign of a racecourse. We view the horse from the side in a manner typical of this type of painting. I find this a satisfactory interpretation of Ela-Mana-Mou. Although not the most

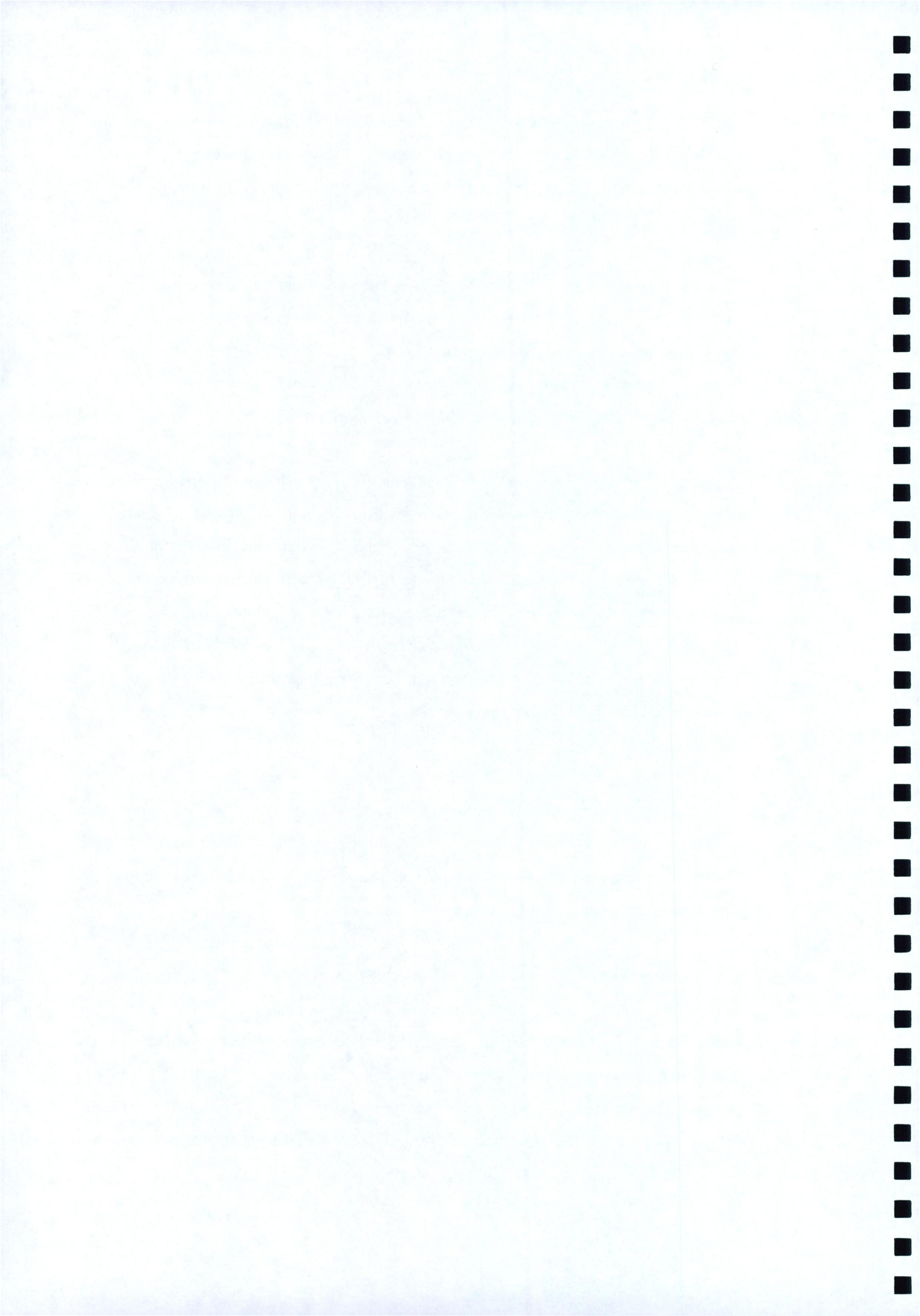
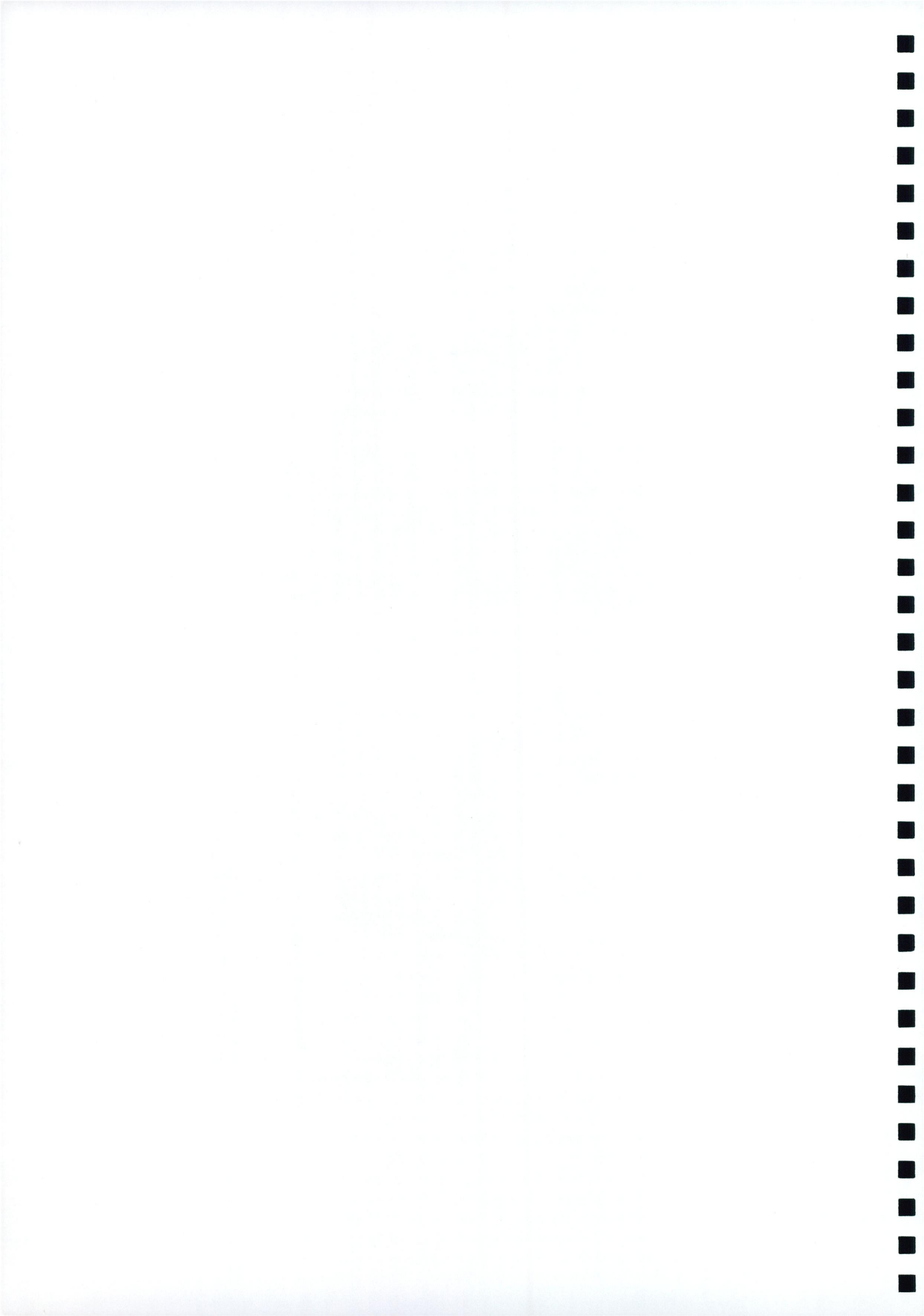




Plate 47. Susan Crawford *Ela-Mana-Mou*



Plate 48. Peter Curling *Ela-Mana-Mou*



adventurous of paintings in terms of style, the portrait does bear a strong resemblance to the horse and this is the job of the commissioned artist.

In comparison, Curling's mixed media picture of the horse (plate 48) is quite different. Here the subject is presented to us in a more innovative way. We get an added impression of his power from his slightly exaggerated hindquarters which almost point towards us. It is also evident from this picture that the horse's racing career is over. He is carrying more weight and his muscular structure is more relaxed. I feel that Curling has captured the essence of the horse more accurately than Crawford. I have seen Ela-Mana-Mou many times myself and I think that he has succeeded in portraying the silent nobility and dignity of the stallion. He stares off into the middle distance as if unconcerned by anything happening in his immediate vicinity.

Another artist, although now deceased, who can be classed as a contemporary of Peter Curling's is Peter Biegel who was born in 1913 and lived until 1987. He was a pupil of Lionel Edwards and his early work shows much of his master's influence. However, his later work shows greater boldness and freedom, thus being particularly suitable to the portrayal of the hurly-burly of the racecourse.

His formal education amounts to a brief spell with Lucy Kemp-Welch's School of Art at Bushey and two terms at the Bournemouth School of Art. After this time he joined Edwards as his one and only pupil, and stayed with him for almost two years. He was taught the importance of working quickly from life and in the open air, and he quickly learned the technique of capturing the landscape with the minimum of fuss. In spite of his apprenticeship with Edwards, just as Curling had used the time which he had spent with Skeaping, he became no slavish copyist of his master's methods, soon developing a style which was at once recognisable as his own.

According to Claude Berry, Biegel's best work was produced between 1950 and 1980 (Berry, 1989, pg. 62). During this time he was greatly in demand to paint hunting and racing commissions, not only in England but also in the United States, Italy and Ireland.

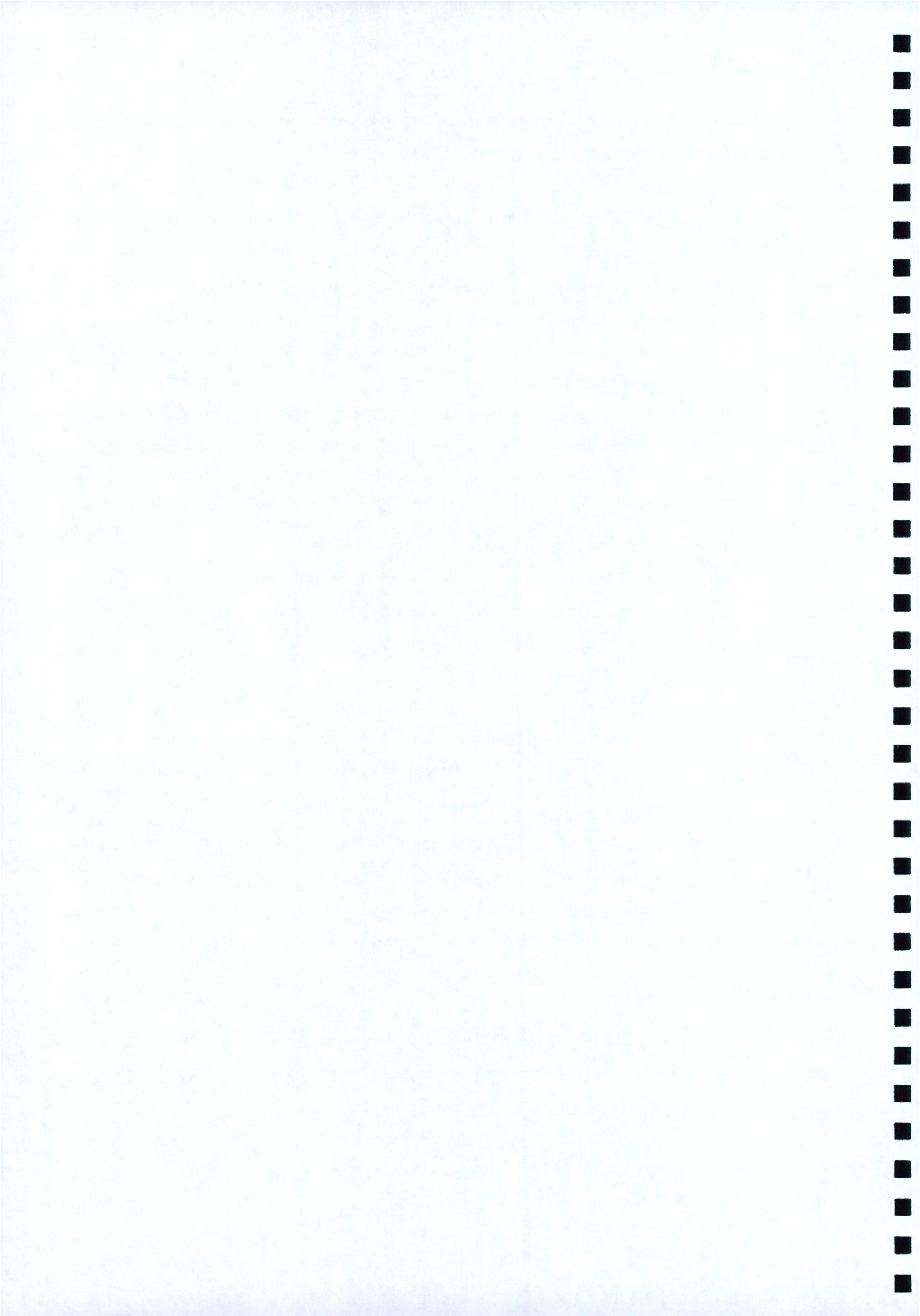




Plate 49. Peter Biegel *Slanting Down Over Beechers.....and the Next!*



When working on the racecourse, the artist has to sketch very quickly in order to capture the impression of what he has seen. Biegel shows the influence of Edwards here, as he is remarkably adept at evoking, with a few strokes of pencil or brush, the little actions which are at once recognised by those who have spent their lives among horses. These little sketches are "absolute gems" and "show better than anything else how well he understood his subject" (Berry, 1989, pg. 63). All the action which he has portrayed in *Slanting down over Beechers.....and the Next!* (plate 49) is indeed proof of this.

Despite Curling's description of the paintings of Peter Biegel as "romantic notions which will become dated" and "only useful to keep a record of what people wore at the time" (Goodwillie, Dublin, 1993), the method of painting practised by both artists is remarkably similar. During an interview in 1957, Peter Biegel said that an action painting required many days of often arduous outdoor work. The incident that was to be painted had to be fitted into the background and memorised in detail and sketches made on the spot to ensure the greatest possible accuracy. This is very much along the lines of how Curling works. Also, both Curling and Biegel share the notion that "it would be difficult to get the feel of a picture if you had never taken part yourself" (Berry, 1989, pg. 65).

As can be seen, Curling is often extremely scathing when referring to his contemporaries in sporting art. Perhaps this is due to the fact that he regards himself as being more qualified as an academic artist, due to the strict academic training that he received in Florence. Nevertheless, I think that there is some truth in his statement that sporting art has a tendency to become dated. However, I would not go as far as to pinpoint the work of a particular artist. Much of this type of art is produced simply to provide pictures for an ill-informed public and the artists responsible do not have the ability of Munnings or other past masters. As a result, the paintings survive neither the test of time nor comparison with pictures by more competent artists.

As a final contemporary of Peter Curling in the world of sporting art. I have chosen to discuss the work of Peter Deighan, a portrait painter from Co, Monaghan now living and working in England. Deighan had already acquired a considerable reputation as a portrait painter before being introduced to the world of equestrian art. However, despite the fact that he spent the

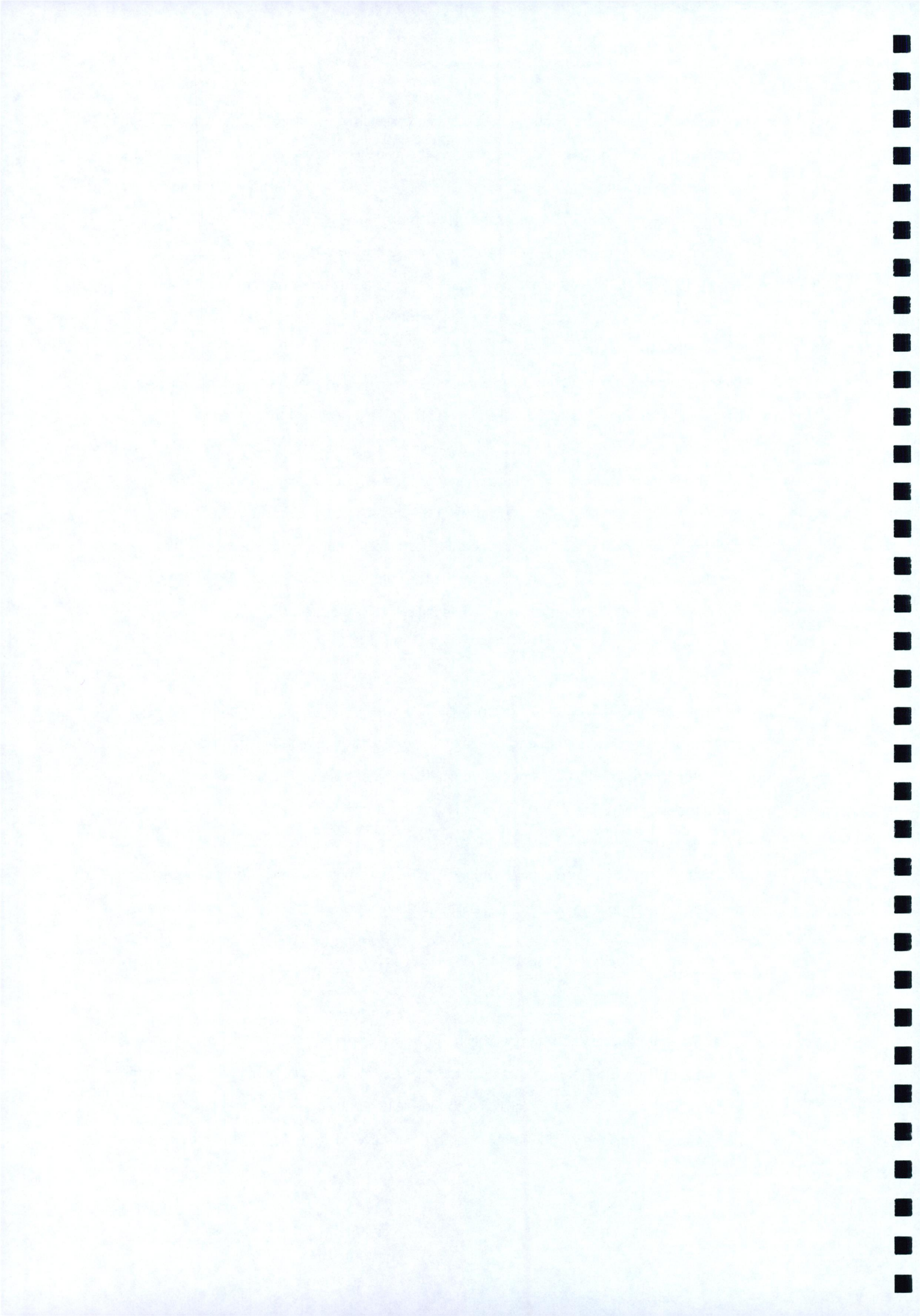
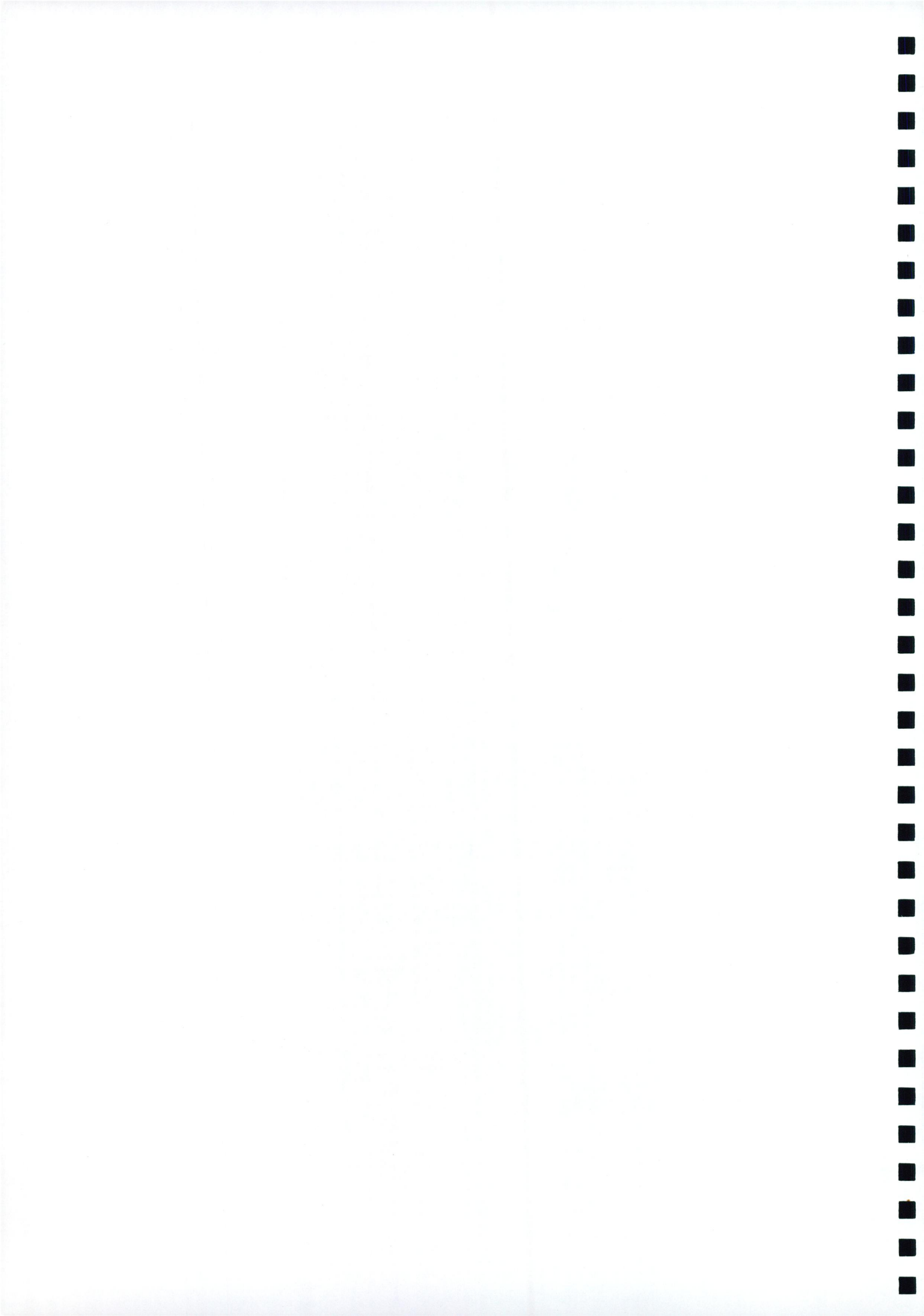




Plate 50. Peter Deighan *Dancing Brave winning the Arc, 1986*



Plate 51. Peter Curling *Spring Morning, Bennet's Hill*

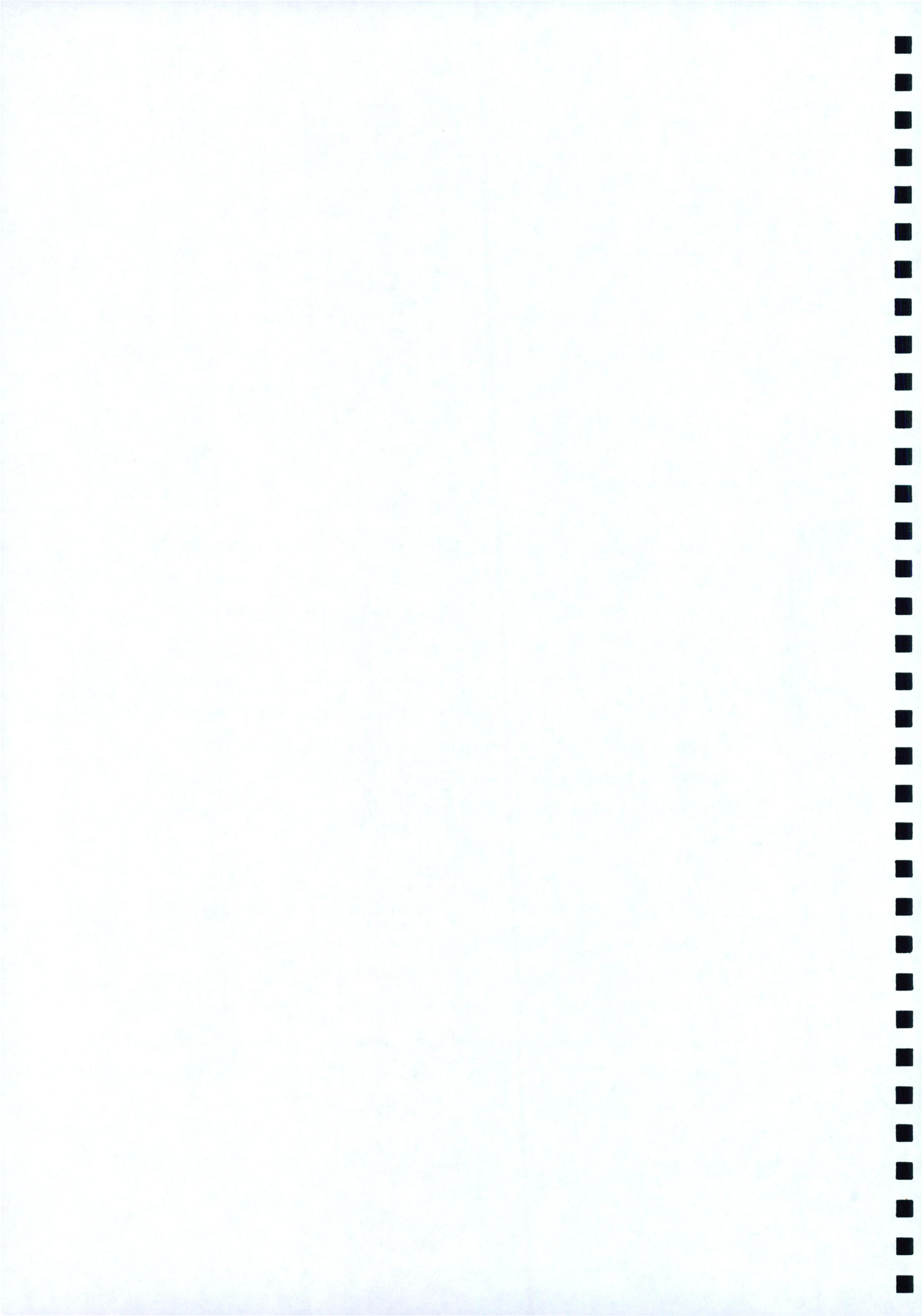


first fourteen years of his life on a farm in Ireland, the knowledge of all animals, including horses, that he must have gained does not seem to come through in his work to the same extent as it is revealed in the paintings of Curling and Crawford.

In his picture *Dancing Brave winning the Arc de Triomphe, 1986* (plate 50) the horses do not look as if they are racing. There is no real sense of excitement or tension; no sensations of the physical exertions of the horses or the jockeys. M. A. Fitzpatrick compliments his portraits "be they of people or of horses-the paintings of which he has become justifiably famous-are correct in every detail" (Deighan, n.d., pg. 4). This, to a certain extent, is true but I cannot agree with this source when he says that "the masters of old would be proud of him" (Deighan, n.d., pg. 5), because his paintings simply do not carry the same force as those of some other equestrian painters.

However, he does fill a slot in this market and this is of supplying what have been described as 'delightful' paintings to affluent horse owners who have lower expectations and less knowledge of art. As Carey Clarke says, "it is easy to stay in a niche once you have found one" (Goodwillie, NCAD, 1993). This, it appears is what Deighan is doing. He is obviously not filled with Curling's desire to experiment with media, composition and subject matter and, as a result, become more proficient. Nevertheless, his horse portraits are well received by his followers including commentator Michael O'Hehir who feels that he captures "all that is good in his horse subjects" and "has the knack of finding the characteristics of his subject, human and animal, and translate them to the canvas in the manner of a modern master" (Deighan, n.d., pg. 7).

Curling himself feels that much of today's sporting art is just "mimicking or copying what has previously been done" (Goodwillie, Dublin, 1993), and to an extent this is true. However, it is important to judge it as art that has been primarily produced simply to give pleasure to hunting and racing people. Nevertheless, it is true to say that from the large volume of this type of art that is created, it is undoubtedly the work which consists of "ten percent inspiration and ninety percent perspiration" (Berry, 1989, pg. 60) that will ultimately survive and be remembered by the generations of the future.



Curling's position within society is quite different to that of Munnings, primarily because he does not hold such strong views and opinions about the condition of painting in the broadest possible sense. He is more interested in his own place in the context of today's painters. The largest of these concerns is that many people view him as a horse painter and not as an academic artist. This is not a label which is well received: "certainly, since most of my paintings in the past have included horses I would probably be known as an equestrian artist, but this is not what I aspire to" (Curling, 1993). Carey Clarke believes that this reluctance is chiefly due to the largely academic type of training which he received in Florence from Signorina Simi. He also feels, without a doubt, that Curling has never been just a horse painter; "he is capable of anything, whether the subject is a landscape, a portrait or a still life" (Goodwillie, NCAD, 1993). Curling himself prefers to think of his paintings as landscapes in which horses tend to appear: a sentiment which echoes standards set by both Munnings and Edwards. However, although he has recently begun to paint a greater number of landscapes and interiors, the fact that he has not broadened the range of venues for his exhibitions would lead us to believe that, despite his own views on the subject, he is more or less content to remain in touch with his current audience.

Taking *Spring Morning, Bennet's Hill* (plate 51) as an example of Curling's abilities as a painter, one can see that although the horses form an intrinsic part of the composition, the background has not been left to chance. Behind the horses, the hillside swoops down to a valley before rising up to mountains on the far side. We see a wonderful mosaic of small fields bordered by hedges, with farmhouses and barns dotted around the countryside. Sunlight drenches the valley floor, leaving its sides in shadow. This is indeed the work of an artist who is not simply a painter of horse portraits.

Despite Curling's classification as a horse painter, it would not be true to accuse his work of remaining static. It comes through in his paintings that he is never afraid to experiment. Edward O'Grady, who has been familiar with the development of Curling's work over the past twenty years, feels that his work is progressing as it goes along. He goes on to explain: "There is more realism and depth of feeling in his work now, He is never standing still, always sailing close to the wind" (Goodwillie, Cashel, 1993). This sense of taking risks appears in his paintings in the guise of new angles and daring approaches. The progression can be seen when

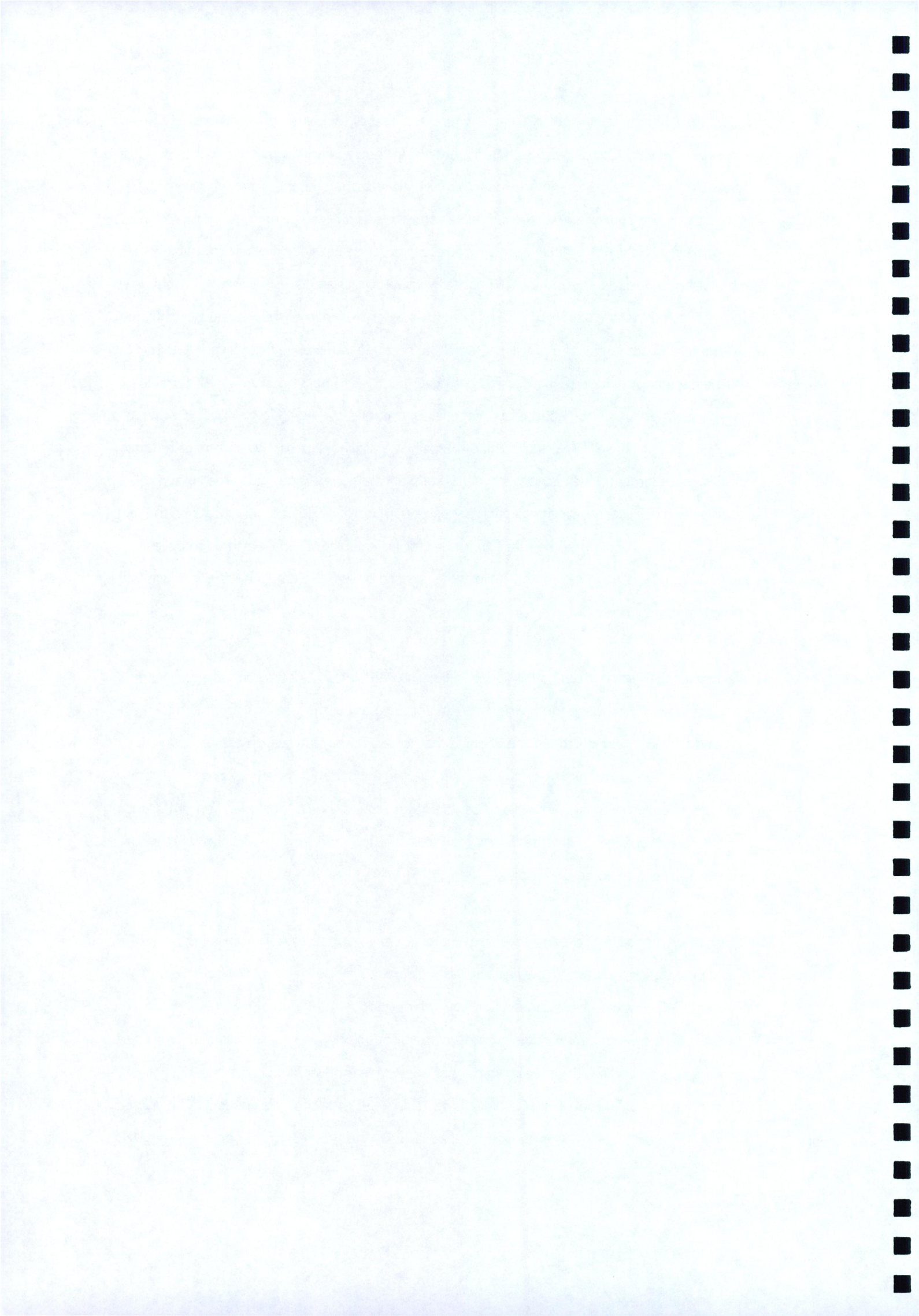
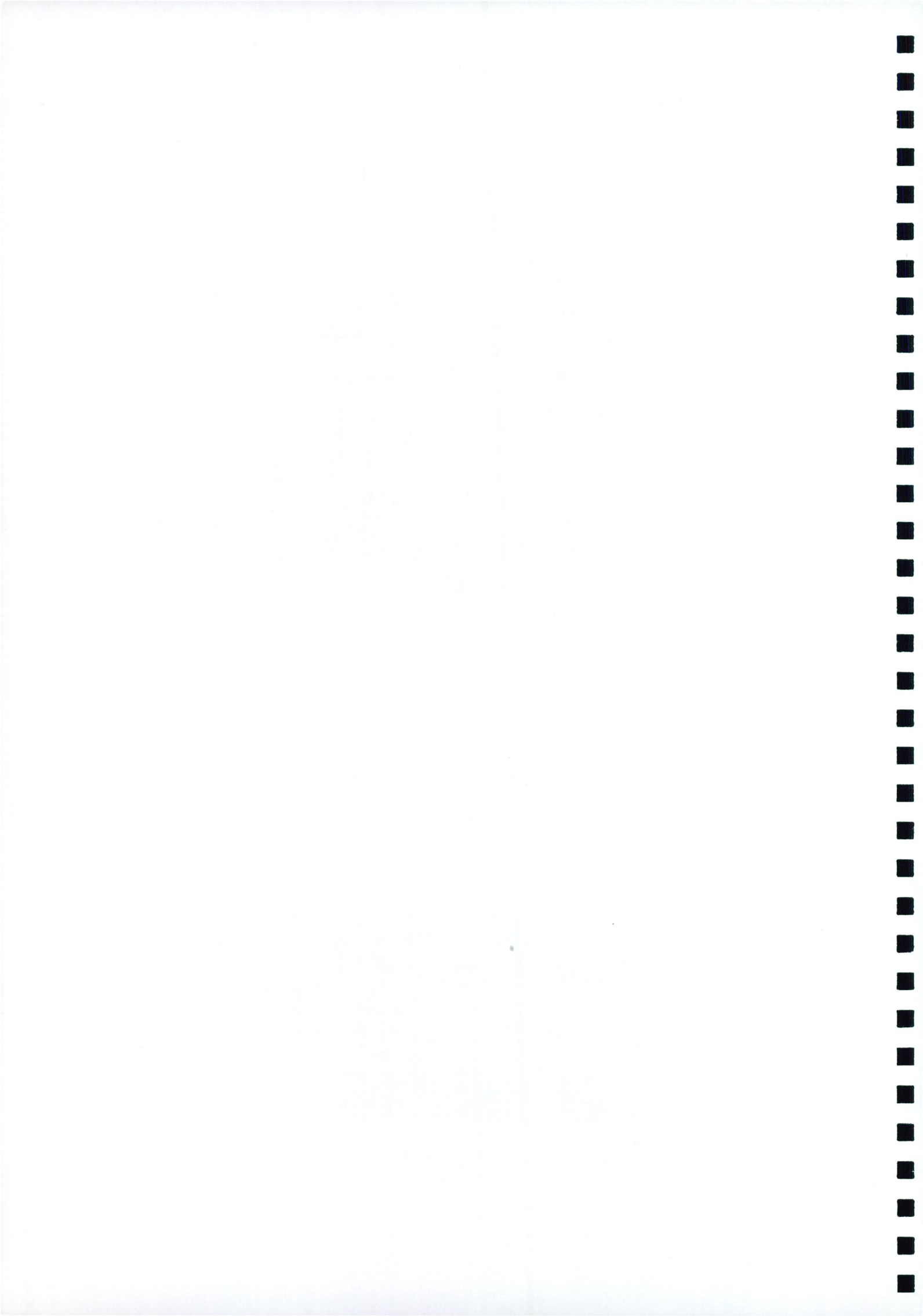




Plate 52. Peter Curling *Racehorses Rounding the Turn*



Plate 53. Peter Curling *First Lot on the All-Weather*



one compares his early painting of *Racehorses Rounding the Turn* (plate 52) with a later picture such as *First Lot on the All-Weather* (plate 53).

Although one can understand Curling's desire not to be classified with the group of horse painters who are popularly known as the "chocolate-box" artists, I cannot help but feel that he is worried about a problem which does not exist in any serious form. "Chocolate-box" artists tend to paint rather romantic and sentimental pictures of horses frequently paying more attention to trivial details than to anatomical structure and form whereas the horses in Curling's paintings are always physically correct. His pictures are obviously the work of an artist who can combine a great knowledge and love of horses with artistic expertise and skill to produce pictures that are too full of action and energy to be described as "chocolate - boxy". He is not afraid to show the realities of situations as they present themselves to him; the way a horse's coat changes as it breaks into a sweat, a jockey's racing silks covered in splashes of mud. He has never been one to give us a neat and clean description of a scene simply for the sake of making a nice picture.

Nevertheless, this is a purely personal point of view and there will always be those whose criterion for recognition as an artist will always be based on whether or not the painter has exhibited work with the Royal Academy. It is interesting, therefore, to learn that Curling has never presented any paintings to either the R.A. or the R.H.A. If he did, according to Carey Clarke, success of the painting through the selection process would depend on a number of factors, namely, competition from other artists, the way in which the picture is painted, the personal choice of the members of the selection committee, and to a lesser extent, the subject matter of the painting (Goodwillie, NCAD, 1993).

The art critics of today feel that equestrian painting is a genre which is filled mainly by R.A.s. Brian Fallon, art critic for *The Irish Times*, did not review Curling's most recent exhibition because he felt that since the paintings were certain to sell well, "the artist needed no help from me as a critic" (Goodwillie, NCAD, 1993). This raises the unanswerable question that just because an exhibition is a likely financial success, does this give critics the right to completely ignore these artists? I am of the opinion that the traditional style of both Munnings and Curling is every bit as important as the latest experiments and innovations within the

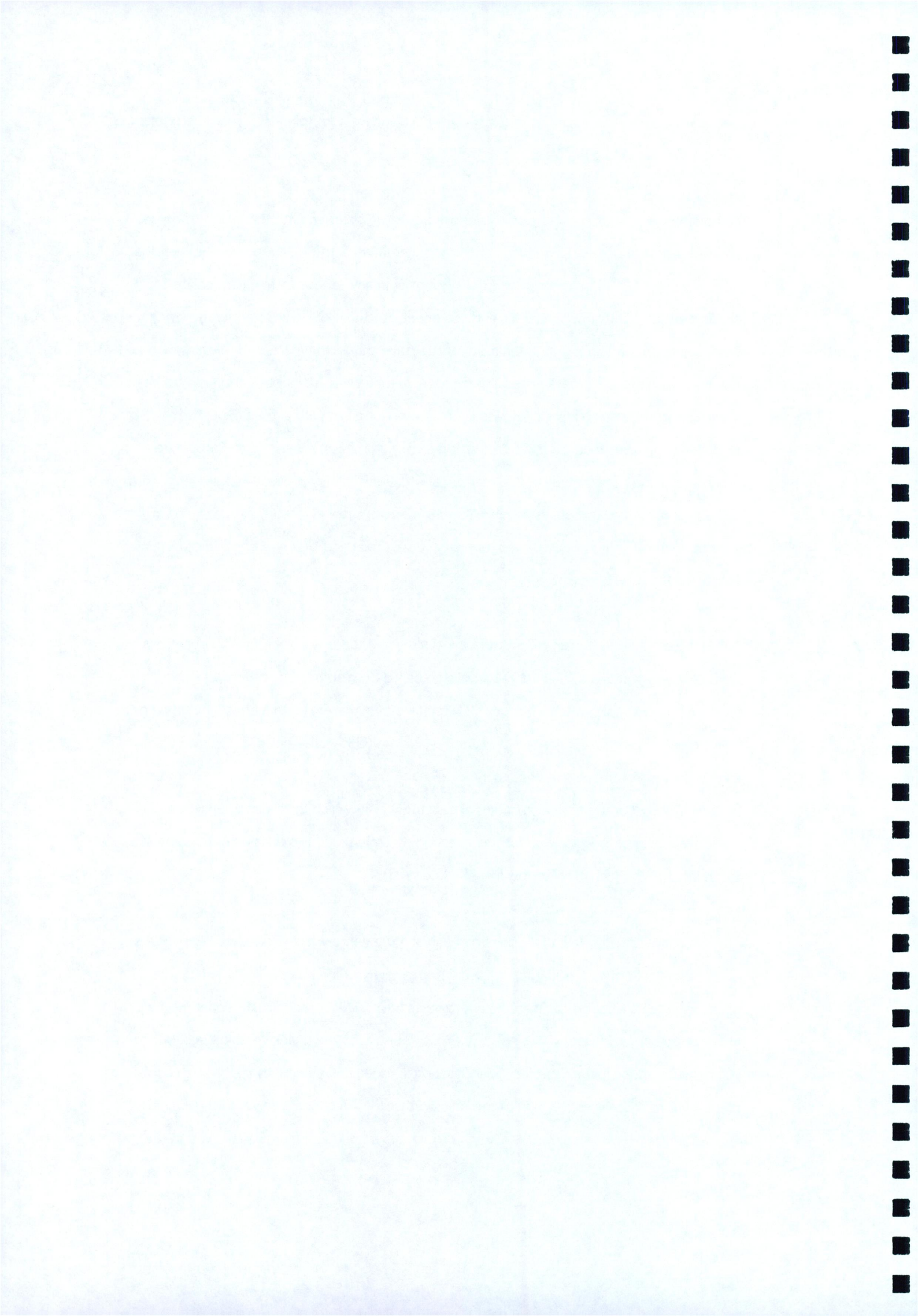
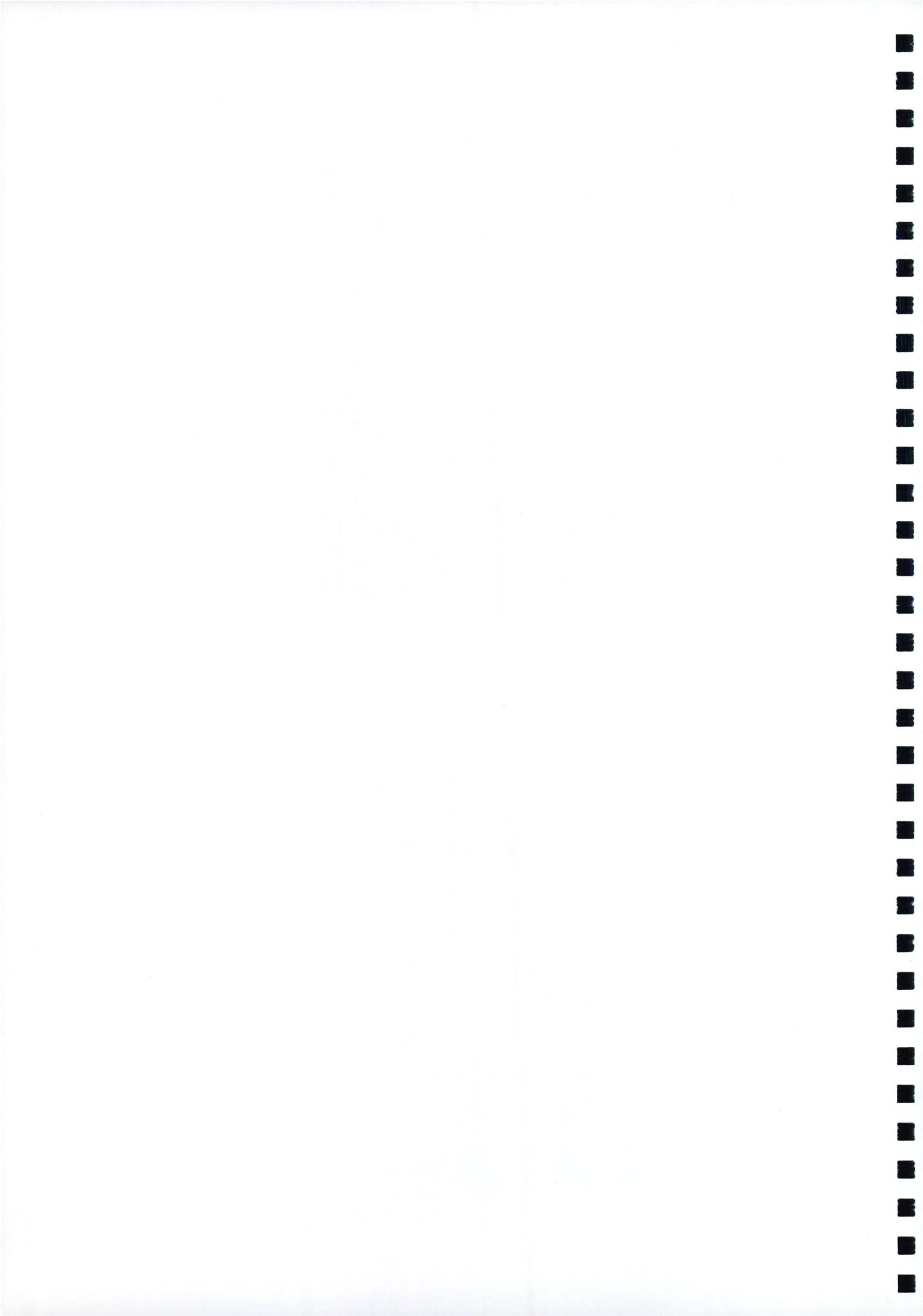




Plate 54. Niccolo Caracciolo *Allotments along the Canal*



Plate 55. Peter Curling *Porta Romana*



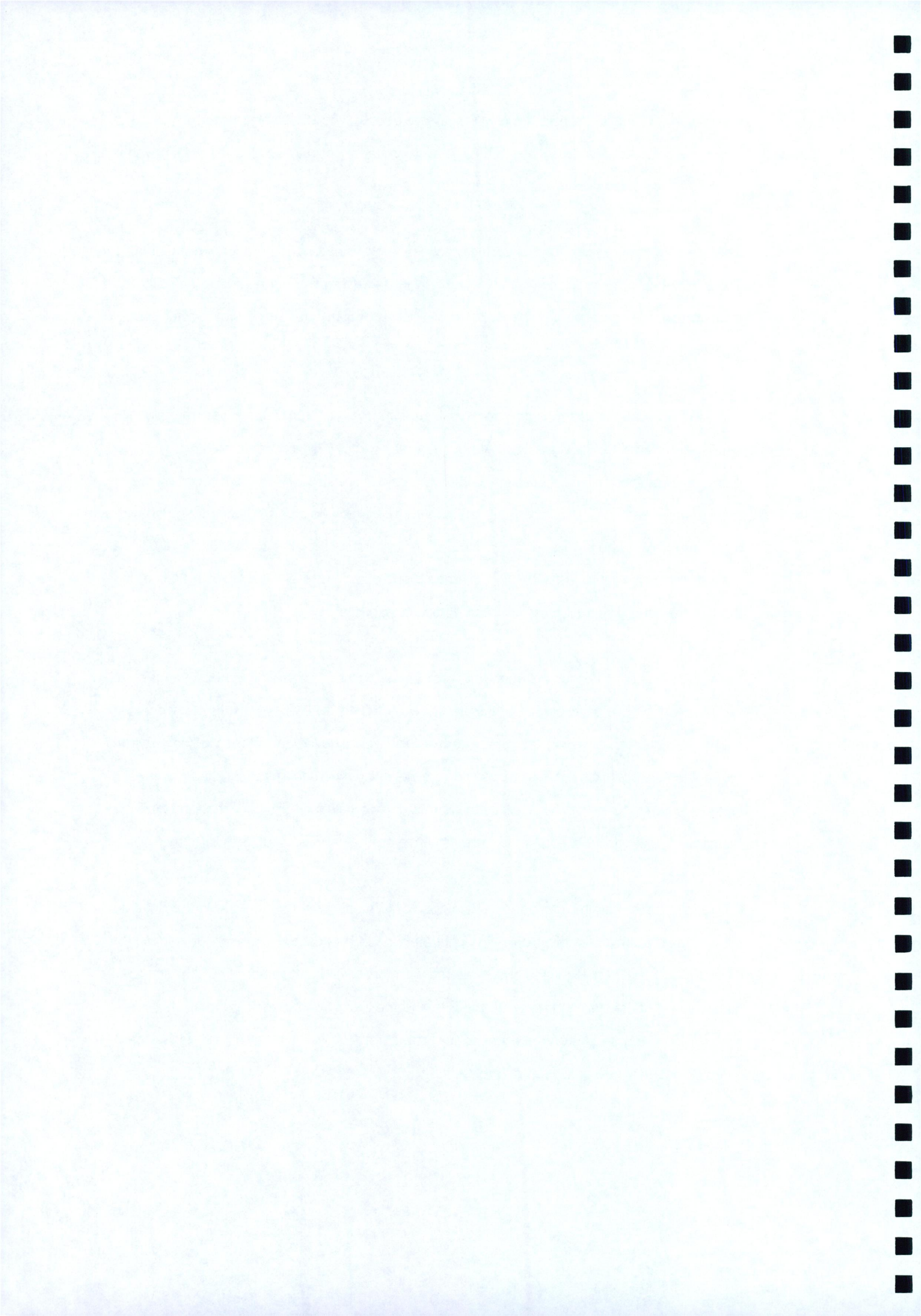
world of modern art, because there will always be people who derive pleasure simply from looking at a painting, where although the meaning or statement may be clear to read, it is the mastery of line and colour which will intrigue the viewer.

The previously mentioned John Skeaping is generally regarded as a contemporary of Curling's. The similarities in the work can be seen primarily in the shared technique of blurring outlines so as to give the impression of speed. For more details of Skeaping's work, please refer back to page 22.

Niccolo Caracciolo is also a contemporary of Curling's but unfortunately he was tragically killed in a car crash some years ago. Although primarily known as a portrait painter, his "superb landscapes and cityscapes in oil and watercolour are also worthy of recognition" (Solomon Gallery, 1989). Like Curling and Crawford, Caracciolo also studied in Florence with Signorina Simi and he always remained true to her training. According to the Knight of Glin, art historian and author, his landscapes can be compared to those of Constable and Corot in the fact that they give an impression of the grace of past ages.

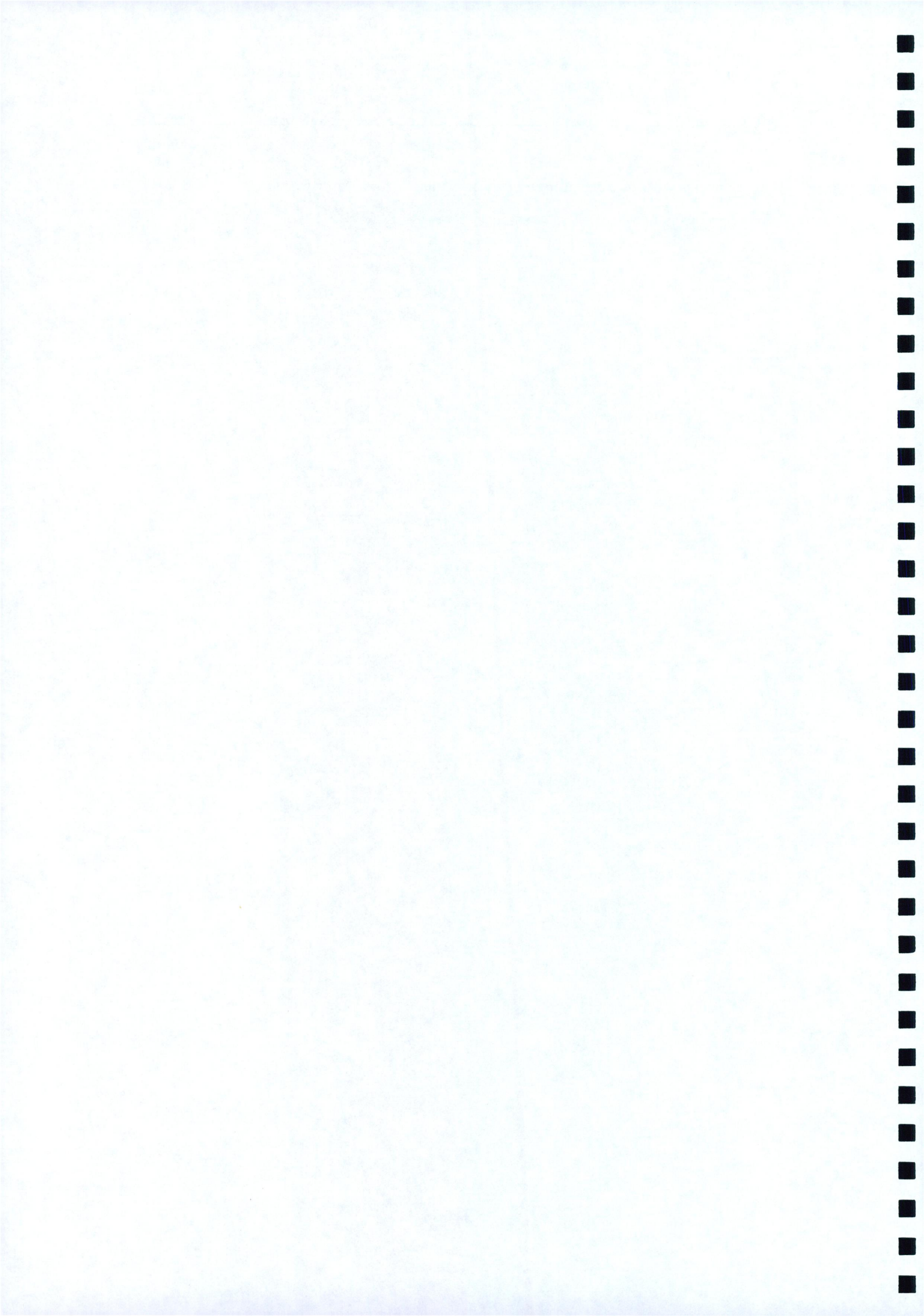
Many people find similarities between the work of Curling and Caracciolo, especially in their use of colour. More particularly, both artists have a tendency to lay large planes of contrasting colours beside each other on the canvas in order to emphasise large forms as well as areas of light and shade, for example, Caracciolo's *Allotments Along the Canal* (plate 54) and Curling's *Porta Romana* (plate 55). The result of this is that no two paintings are quite the same; it is clear to see that each location has its own influence on the work and subject matter.

Caracciolo, unlike Curling, exhibited both in the Royal Academy in London and in the Royal Hibernian Academy in Dublin from 1981 until the time of his death. He was made a full member of the R.A. in 1983 and also exhibited with the Royal Portrait Society. Although to date, Curling has shown no interest in the R.A. and the like, both his work and that of Caracciolo undoubtedly shows a tremendous respect for Classical art which has been combined with a very personal approach to painting.



Munnings work as a sculptor and that of Curling as a caricaturist

A discussion of the lesser-known aspects of the artists' work.



Munnings as a sculptor

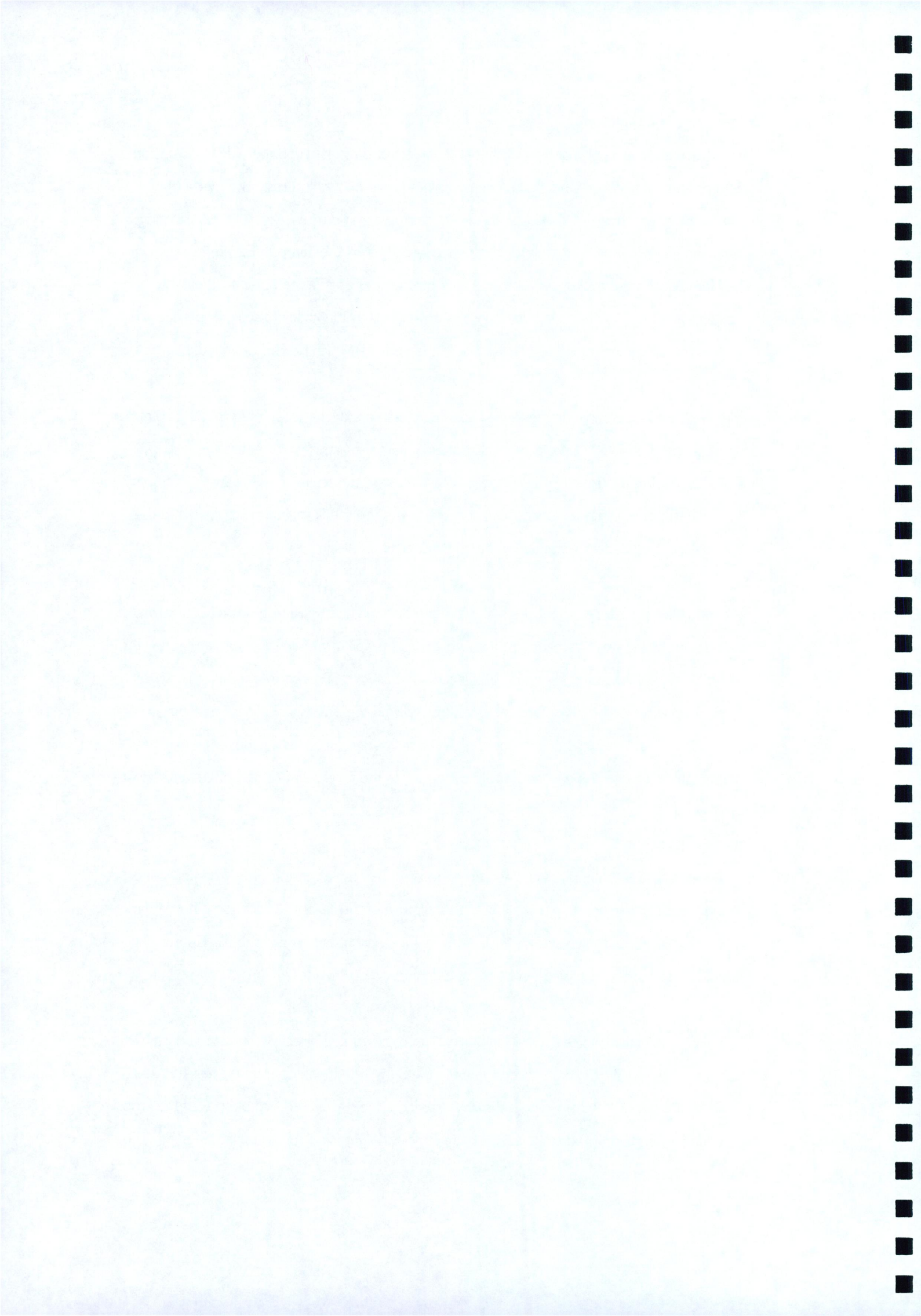
Although recognised primarily as a painter, Munnings also displays considerable ability in the field of sculpture. During his lifetime he completed only two sculptures, both made of bronze, but his obvious talents in working with this medium are immediately clear to see. Munnings obtained his first work as a sculptor through an architect by the name of Edwin Lutyens who had been commissioned by Sir John and Lady Horner to design a memorial to their son Edward, a casualty of the First World War. Lutyens invited Munnings to sculpt a bronze sculpture of the officer on horseback to surmount the pedestal which he had designed.

Munnings was previously inexperienced as a sculptor but Lutyens recognised that the painter's horse pictures showed "a sculptor's grasp of essential form" and "represented the furthest limits to which a picture can go in approaching the art of the sculptor" (Goodman, 1988, pg. 153). Despite his limited knowledge and contact with the medium, Munnings accepted the challenge but he did ask his sculptor friend, Waters, to assist him.

He modelled the horse (about the size of a small deer) in his studio from his bay mare who was ridden by his groom wearing military uniform. It is apparent from the statue that it is the painter's lifelong feel for horses plus his supreme knowledge of anatomy and his mastery of form which have carried him through. Waters sculpted the details including the boots and the stirrups. The final result, *A Lieutenant of Hussars*, shows the officer as a handsome young horseman riding into the east and is acknowledged as the focal point of one of Lutyens's most moving memorials.

In the early 1930s, Munnings was recommended by George Lambton (a Newmarket trainer) as the most suitable artist to make a bronze sculpture of the illustrious racehorse Brown Jack, owned by Sir Harold Wernher. After looking at *A Lieutenant of Hussars* in Mells Church, Sir Harold had no hesitation in commissioning Munnings to do the job.

In making the initial studies for the sculpture, Munnings worked directly from Brown Jack himself who came to Dedham and lived there for the duration. Munnings first made a detailed study of the horse's anatomy and did many drawings. He discovered and portrayed the "most unassuming, kind and modest horse-character that had ever lived" (Goodman, 1988, pg 203).



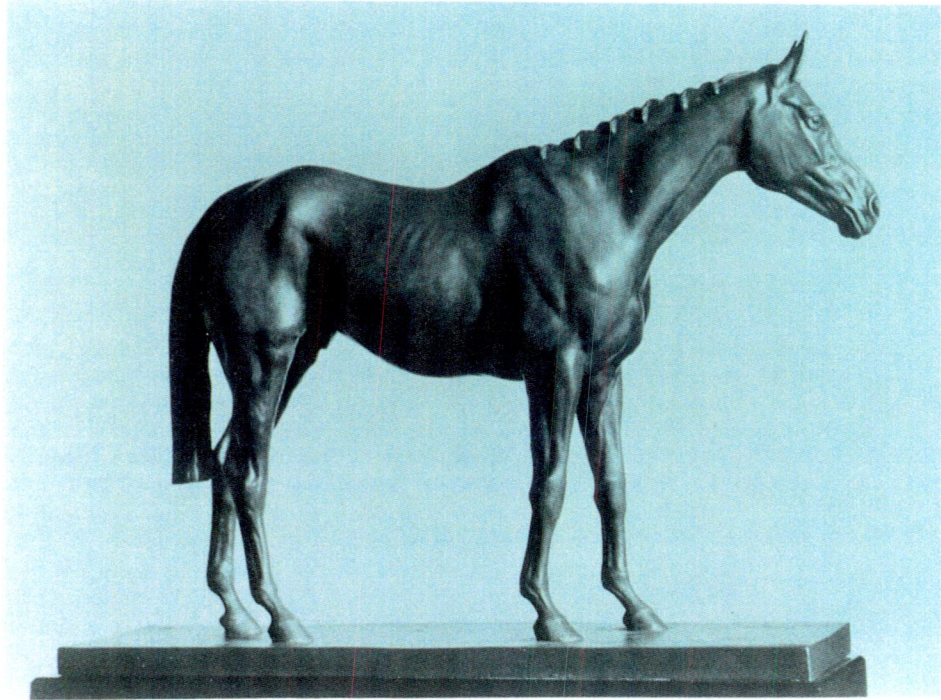
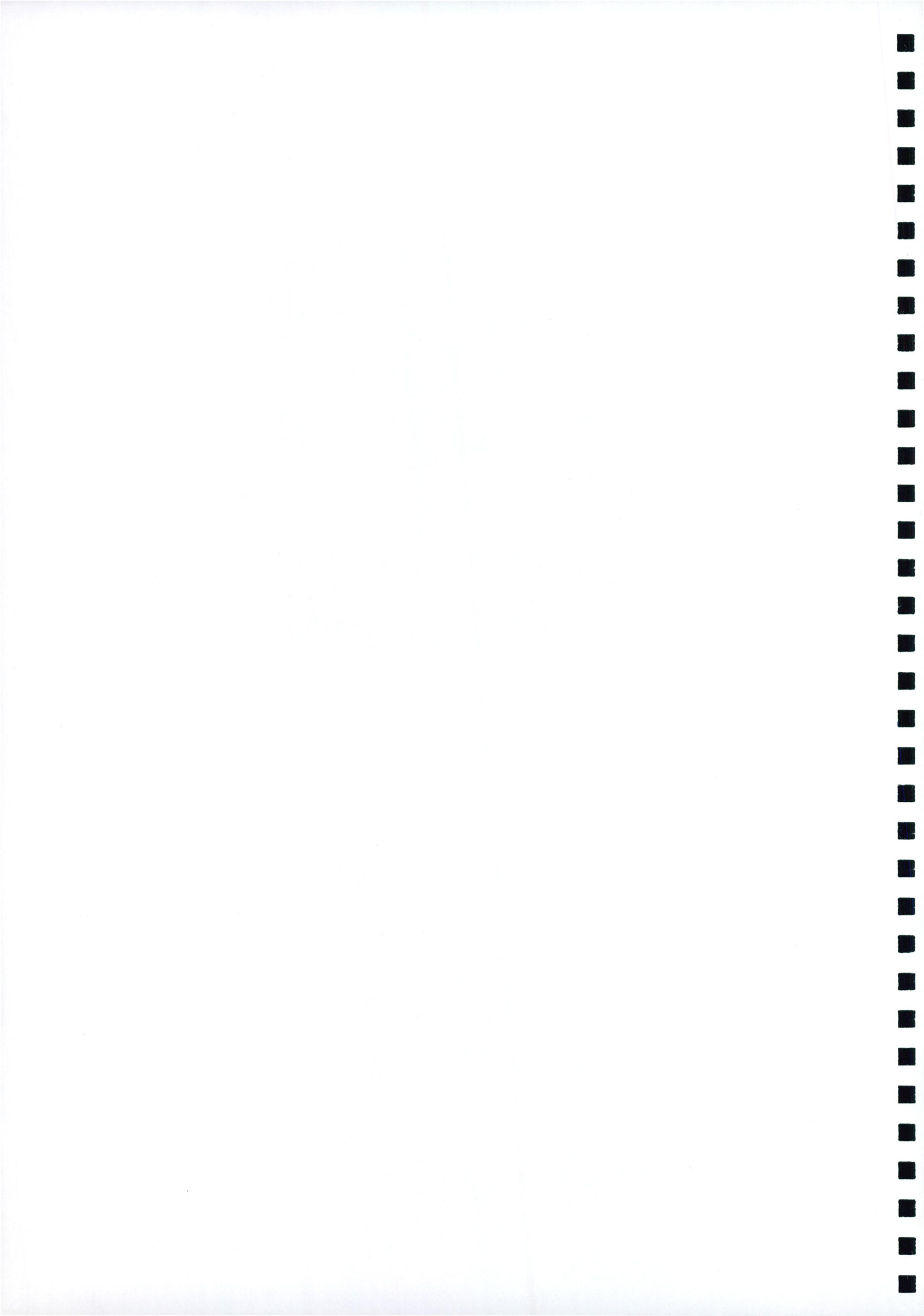


Plate 56. Alfred Munnings *Brown Jack*



It took him six weeks to make the model for the sculpture and in his own words he described it as "quite the most difficult problem I have ever tackled-modelling the horse in the round" (Munnings, 1952, pg. 127).

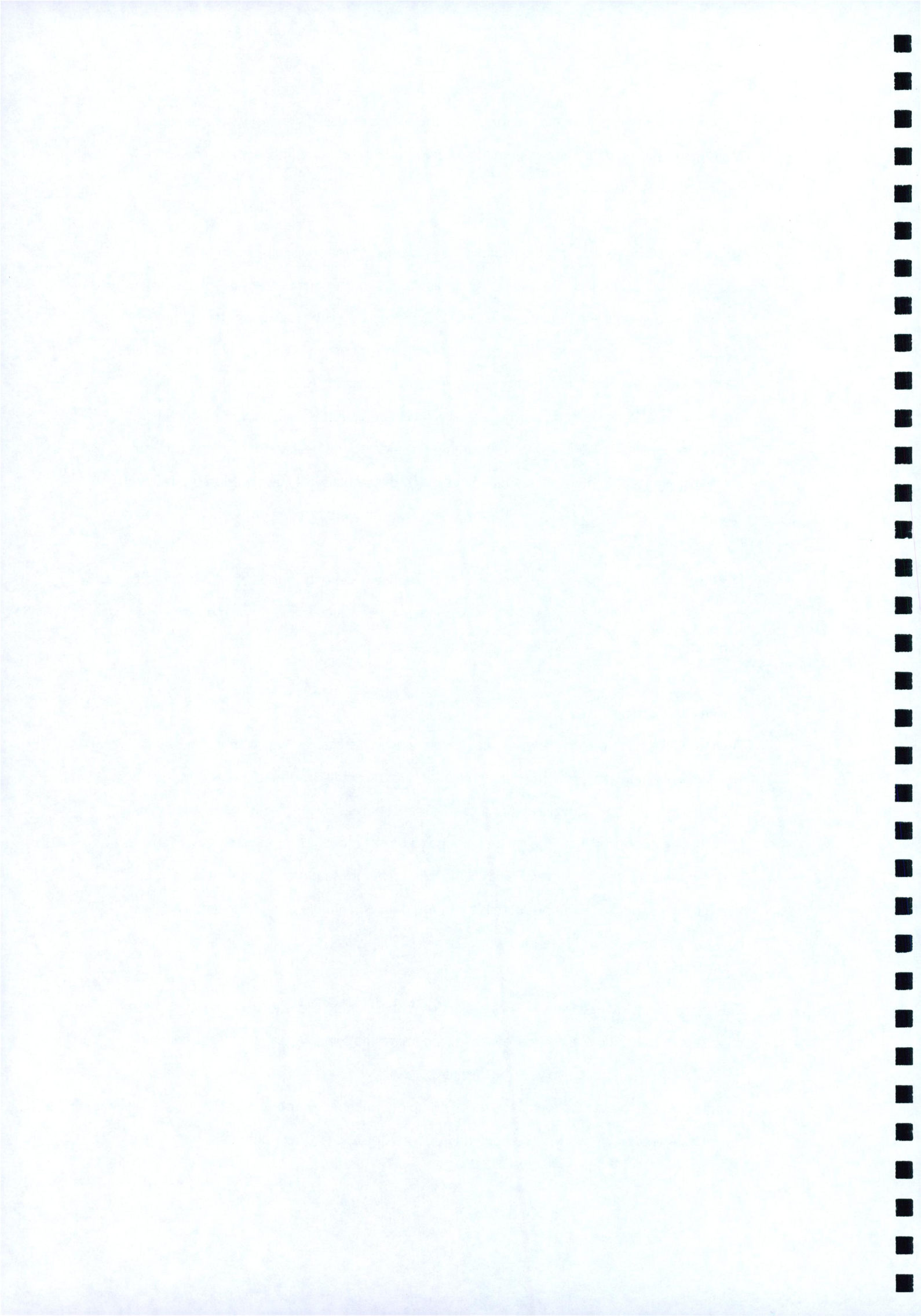
His original commission from the Jockey Club had been to make a sculpture of Steve Donoghue on Brown Jack. However, Lord Hamilton, a former Senior Steward of the Jockey Club, after looking at the horse awhile said "Do we want the little jockey on the old horse at all?.....No, I think not. No jockey-just the horse alone" (Munnings, 1952, pg.128). I think that he made the right decision. The horse needs no rider to emphasise his qualities. His wise head, kind eye, large ears and magnificent shoulders say all that is necessary in this situation. The sculpture shows the character of a champion, and knowledgeable horse lovers can learn more from it about the unique animal than experts at the National History Museum learned when they examined his skeleton after his death. That showed nothing unusual.

I feel that it is a great pity that Munnings did not pursue his efforts in the field of sculpture to a greater extent. The existing results are a very pleasing and successful complement to his work and further emphasise his unique talents as an equestrian artist.

Curling as a caricaturist

A very interesting aspect of Peter Curling's work are his caricatures, which although not as well known as some of his commissioned paintings are worthy of some discussion in their own right. That Curling should succeed as a caricaturist comes as no surprise when one remembers that he considers that "the making of a good painting, portrait or caricature is all about grasping the essentials" (Goodwillie, Dublin, 1993). The drawing of cartoons plays an important part in Curling's life and he regards them not only as fun but as an important break between his bouts of more serious work (Berry, 1989, pg. 92)

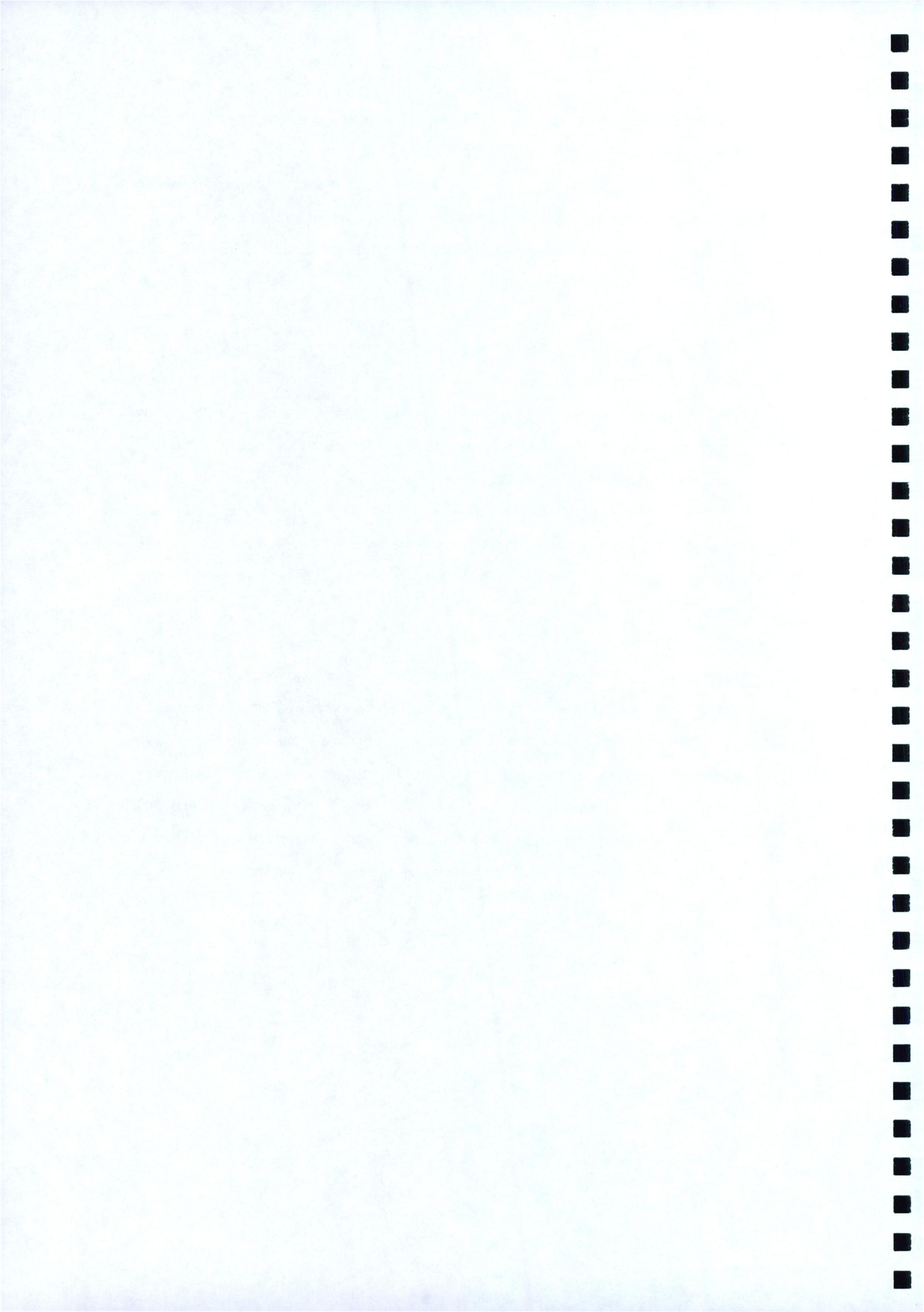
The six cartoons owned by Sonia Rogers of Airlie Stud are excellent examples of this. From racetrack to sales ring and from exercise gallops to weigh room, we are given light-hearted images of the characters involved. Nevertheless, although Curling is providing us with humorous descriptions of various events, he never completely abandons conventional form and realism. This is especially obvious in *Getting a Head Start* (plate 57) where although the horse is



wearing a rather human expression on its face, its body and legs are still anatomically correct. Another interesting point about Curling's cartoons is that he frequently inserts well-known figures into his compositions, thus providing an added item of interest. In *Studying the Form* (plate 58) we have Dermot Weld, a prominent Kildare trainer, watching the rear view of Sonia Rogers with a great deal of interest. *A Helping Hand* (plate 59) shows the American blood-stock agent Axel Donnerstag about to make a purchase.

The largest and most demanding commission which Curling has so far undertaken has been for John Magnier, owner of Coolmore Stud in Co. Tipperary. From what started in November 1983 as a painting containing only a handful of people gradually expanded into a huge mural which covers one complete wall of a large cloakroom. It took thirteen months and now shows two hundred and eighty five figures more or less well-known in racing on both sides of the Irish Sea. The artist's acute sense of observation has been given a free rein and his skill as a caricaturist is well exemplified. When one considers the fact that he worked on the well-known characters mainly from memory it is clear to see that here is an artist with a great sense of visual recall.

From the figures of Vincent O'Brien and Christy Grassick standing in the parade ring, to Tim Corballis watching from the stands, all the figures are represented in a highly recognisable manner. Curling has even gone as far as placing a small self-portrait in the top right hand corner. We see the artist busy at work, being observed by his young daughter Rebecca. Such an enormous undertaking would most likely be impossible now, with the growth in the popularity of Curling's work and the corresponding rise in the prices. However, he is still producing the smaller cartoons; two of his most recent being caricatures of *H.H. Aga Khan* and *The Hon. Lady Dowager*.



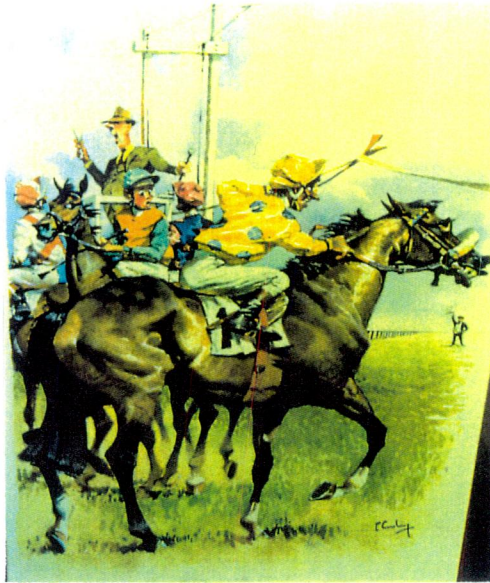


Plate 57. Peter Curling *Getting a Head Start*



Plate 58. Peter Curling *Studying the Form*

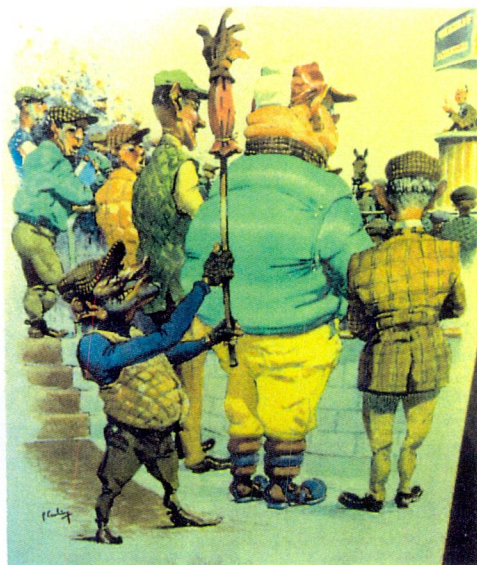
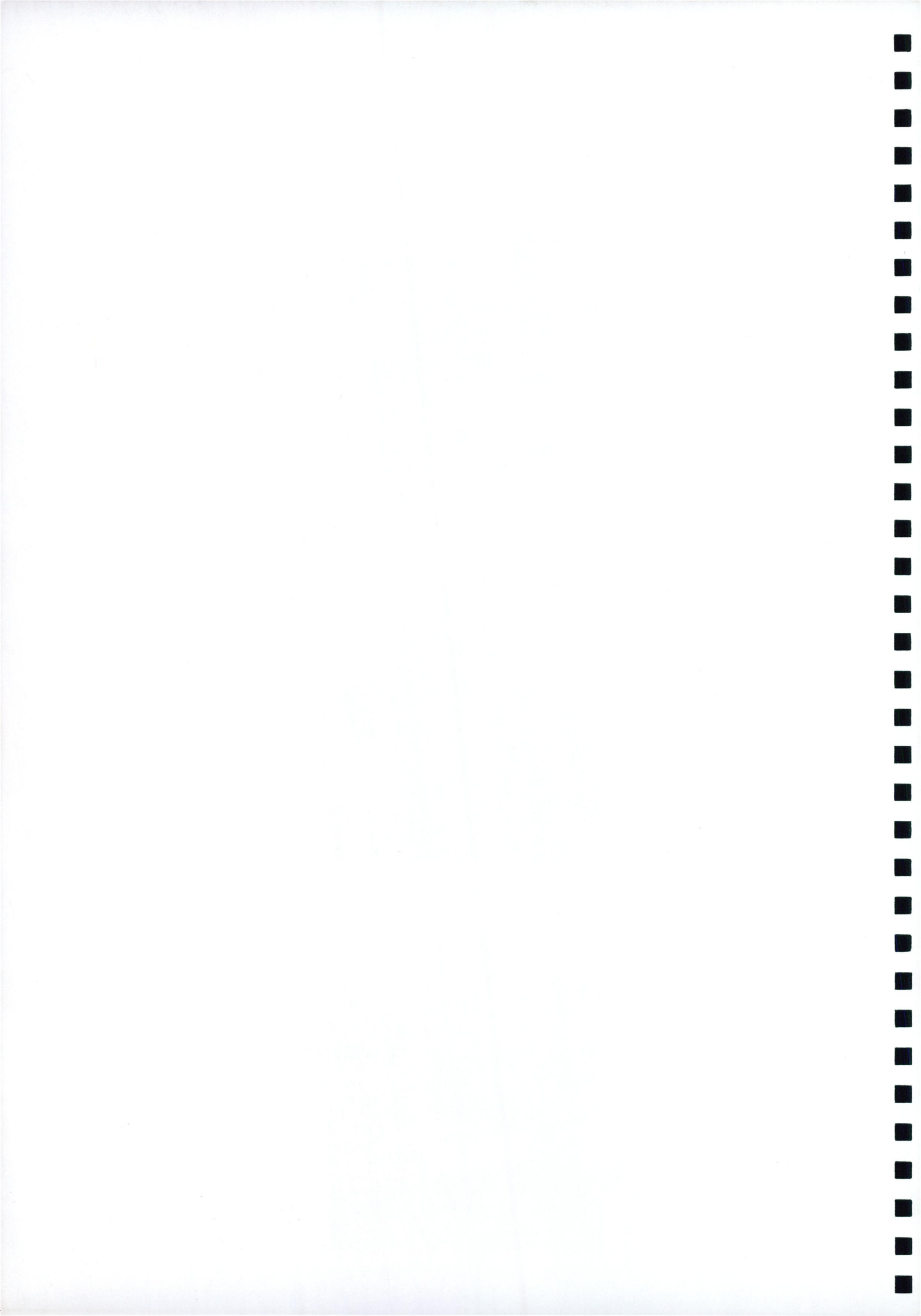


Plate 59. Peter Curling *A Helping Hand*





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Plate 60. Peter Curling The mural at Coolmore Stud, Co. Tipperary



Plate 63. Peter Curling



Plate 61. Christy Grassick

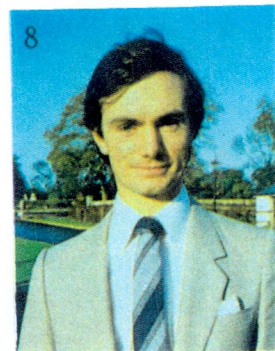
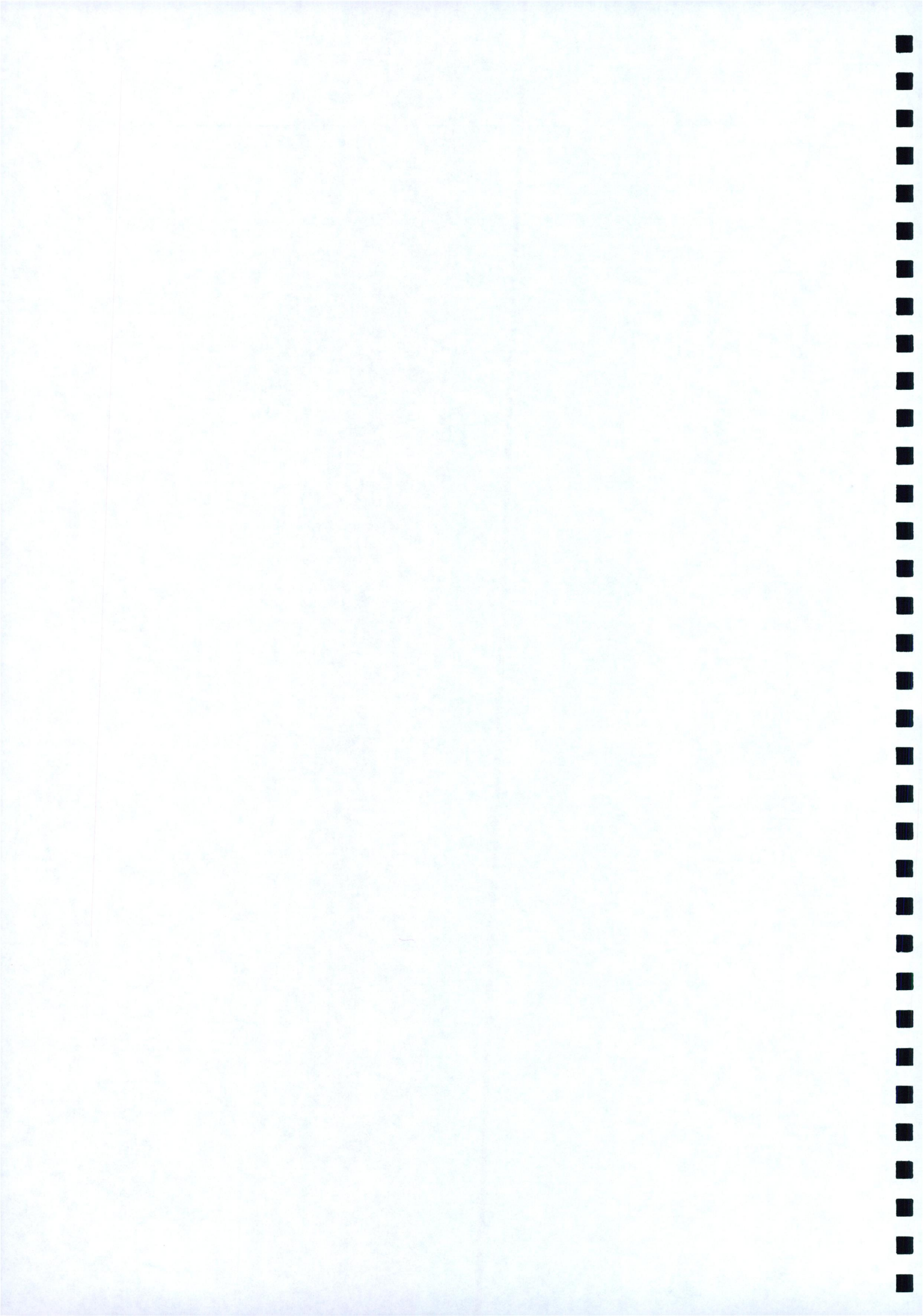


Plate 62. Tim Corbalis



Working to commission

The results of working to commission; not only the effect on the artists' work but also on their reputations.



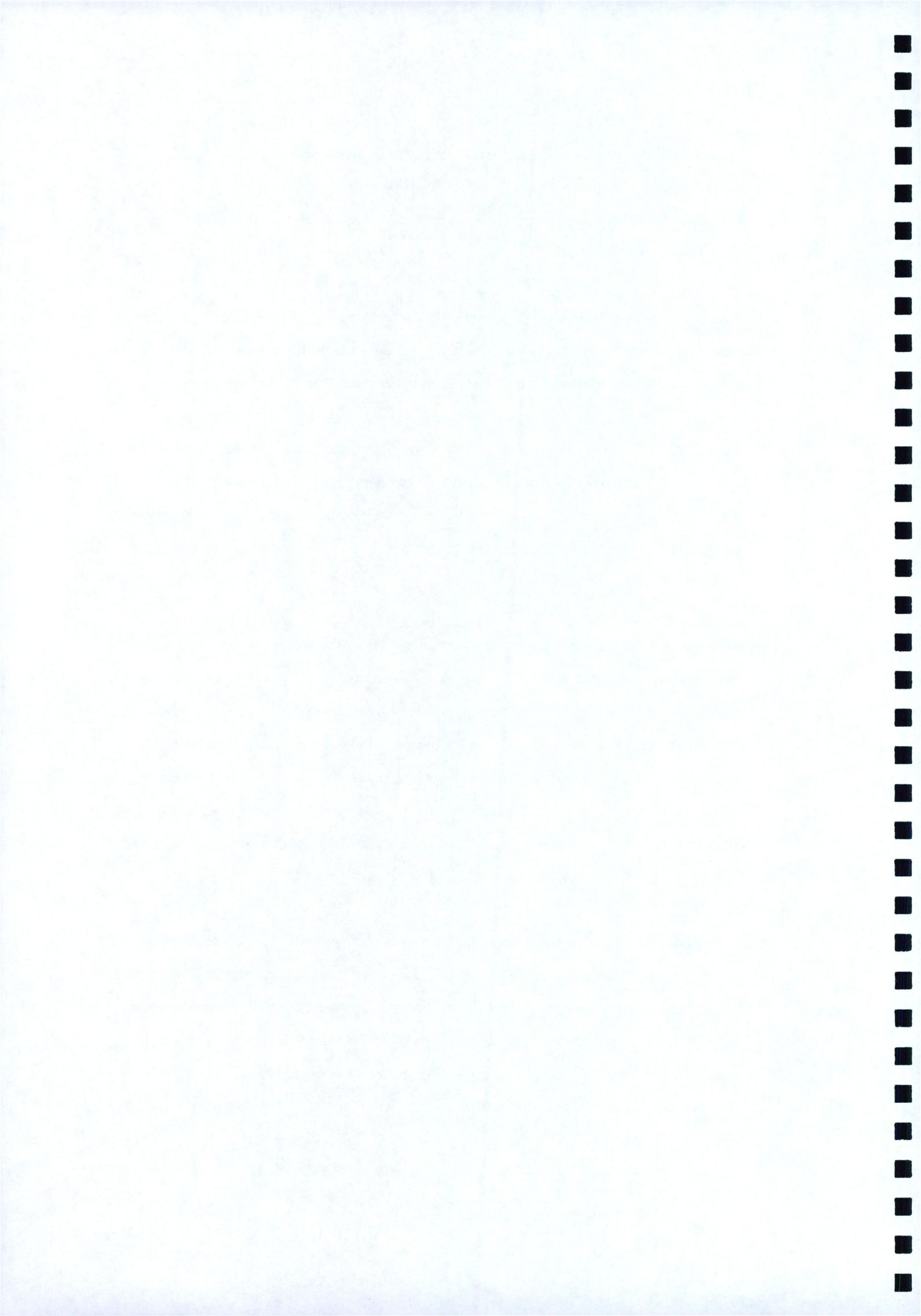
The practice of patrons commissioning artists to paint particular pictures is not a new one. From the Renaissance up to the present day it has been popular, beneficial to artists and patrons alike. Equestrian portraits have always been a popular subject as commissions. What better way to immortalise a successful racehorse, whose career on the racetrack will span no more than four or five years.

Both Munnings and Curling have achieved much recognition and credit for their racing portraits whether they are of horses or of jockeys. In the course of this chapter I will show how this way of working affected not only their work but also their reputations.

To bring the idea down to its most basic level, most artists need to earn a living from their work in order to survive from day to day. While paintings produced as a result of a personal experience may, in the end, realise a financial gain there is no guarantee that this will happen. The reverse is true of painting commissioned pictures when, in general, the artist can be certain of payment.

For this reason it is easy to understand why Munnings, from the age of twenty three, always accepted even small commissions. He needed the opportunity of gaining a reputation as an equestrian artist while at the same time earning enough money so that he could establish his own studio: "I painted portraits of horses for people in the neighbourhood for £10 each" (Munnings, 1951, pg.178). However, as his fame and popularity grew he found himself resenting this type of work. The lure of lucrative payment was always present however, and in 1924, although very busy with his personal work, he travelled to Long Island in America because he "was tempted with a sum I could not refuse" (Munnings, 1951, pg.169).

Curling also has to contend with the conflict between commissioned and non-commissioned work. Janet Brabazon tells of one particular instance where a wealthy racehorse owner asked him to paint a portrait of one of his successful horses. Curling, at the time, had no real need or desire to produce such a painting so he quoted a price almost three times his normal rate in the hopes that the horse owner would look elsewhere for his painting. To his surprise the reverse happened and, with mixed feelings he completed the portrait. (Goodwillie, Kilkenny, 1993).



Leaving aside the financial aspect of commissioned paintings, it is important to realise that an artist will always find it unavoidable to compromise while working 'to order'. He is governed by a set of instructions which have been given to him by his 'employer'. In 1919 when Munnings was asked to paint Galloper Light, his first commission to depict a winner, he was faced with the problem of producing a painting which satisfied both himself and the owner of the horse. Naturally, it was his own personal feelings which remained unfulfilled.

"The traditional way of doing so many of these pictures was to put a jockey on the horse, with the trainer standing by, attired in his Ascot fancy. Such pictures have a stilted, foolish appearance; but since the owner wished for such picture I did not hesitate to do it" (Munnings, 1951, pg.89).

As a result of this he looked on many of his paintings of this kind as failures and disappointments primarily because he saw himself as an artist who wanted to paint pictures that captured a moment in time rather than simply a horse or figure in isolation. An example of this is his portrait of champion jockey Steve Donoghue, plate 64.

Curling succinctly expressed the constraints of working under these restrictions during an interview. "If the owner of the horse also wants his wife and family as well as his house in the painting, what can you do? You have to put them in" (Goodwillie, Dublin, 1993). This indeed must be a difficult problem for an artist who relies on the initial elements of his composition for inspiration. Although he recently refused a lucrative offer from Robert Sangster to paint his Derby winners, the reason that it took him many months to prepare work for his most recent exhibition is because he was busy working on other portraits and commissions.

Another problem which constantly faces equestrian artists is that they are often working for people who know very little of the artistic process and hence want a photographic representation of their horse. They expect to recognise the animal on canvas and will show the picture to friends, often horse experts, and ask for their opinion. In general, they are not particularly interested in the subtleties that occur when the horse and its surroundings are seen as a whole. Carey Clarke feels that this is one of the main reasons why horse portraiture has progressed very little over the past hundred years, when compared with other aspects of modern art: "Reality always gets in between the art and the aesthetics and prevents a contemporary treatment of the subject" (Goodwillie, NCAD, 1993).



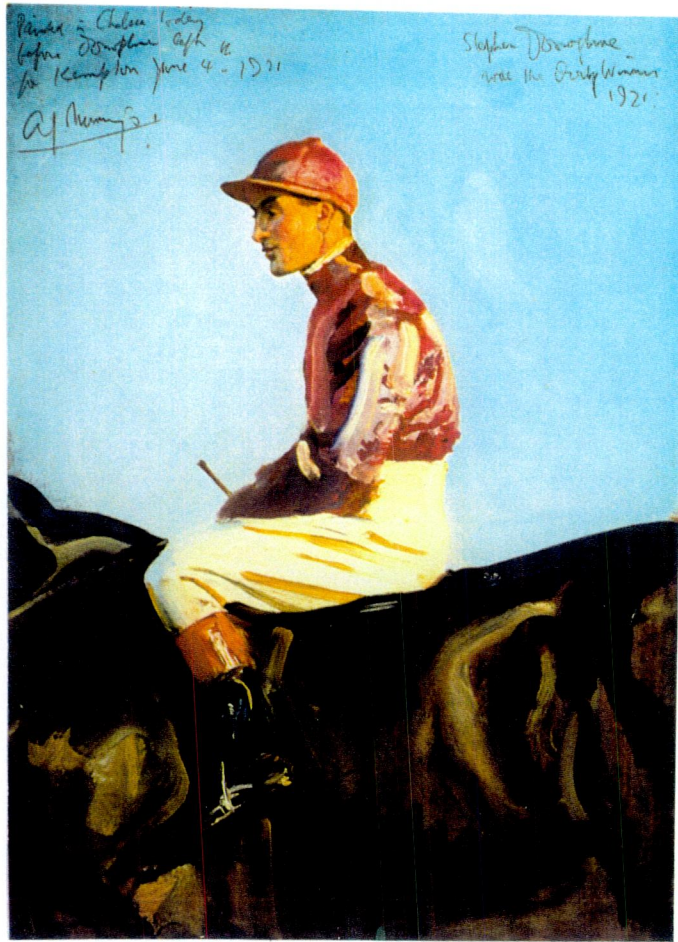
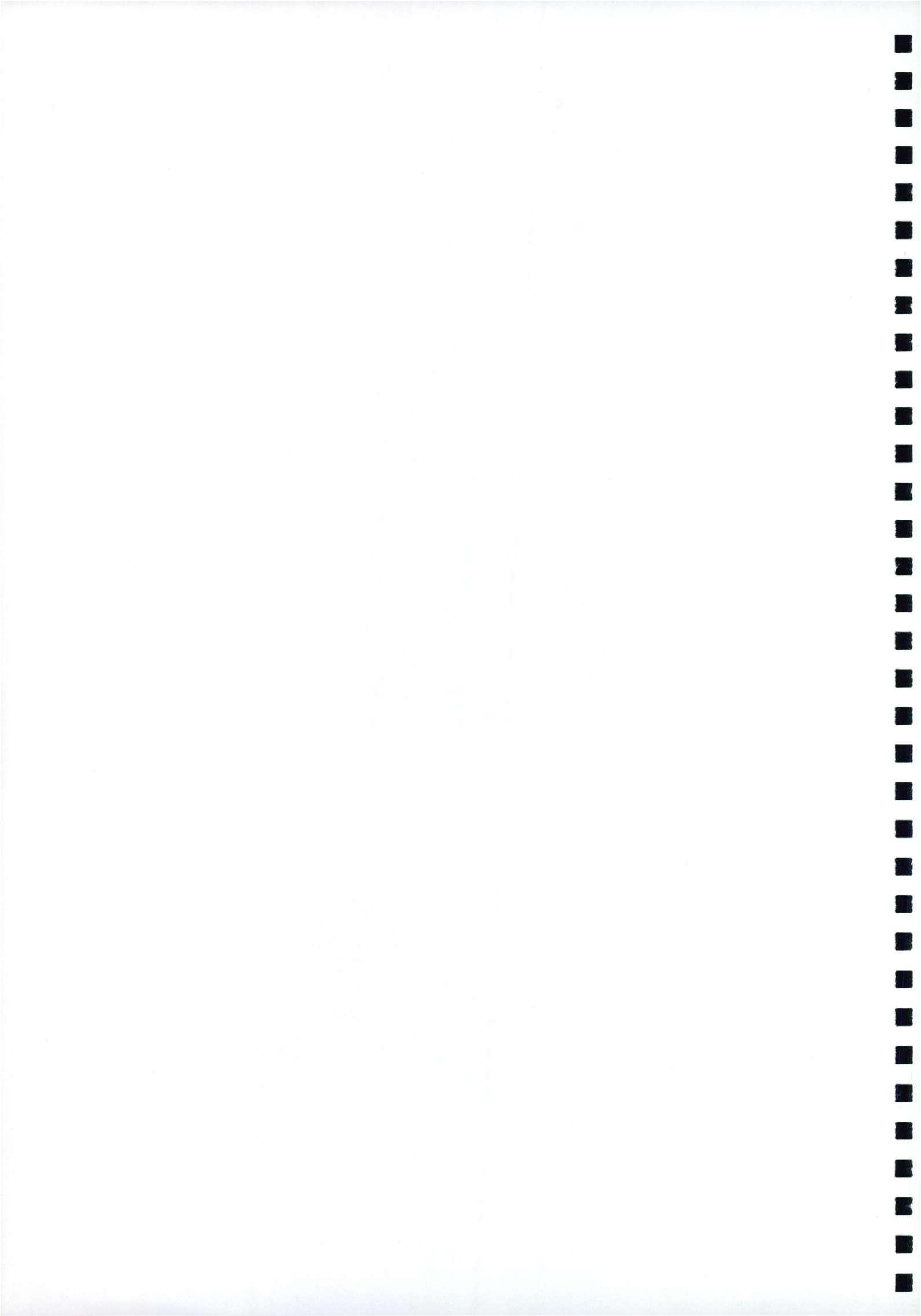


Plate 64. Alfred Munnings Steve Donoghue



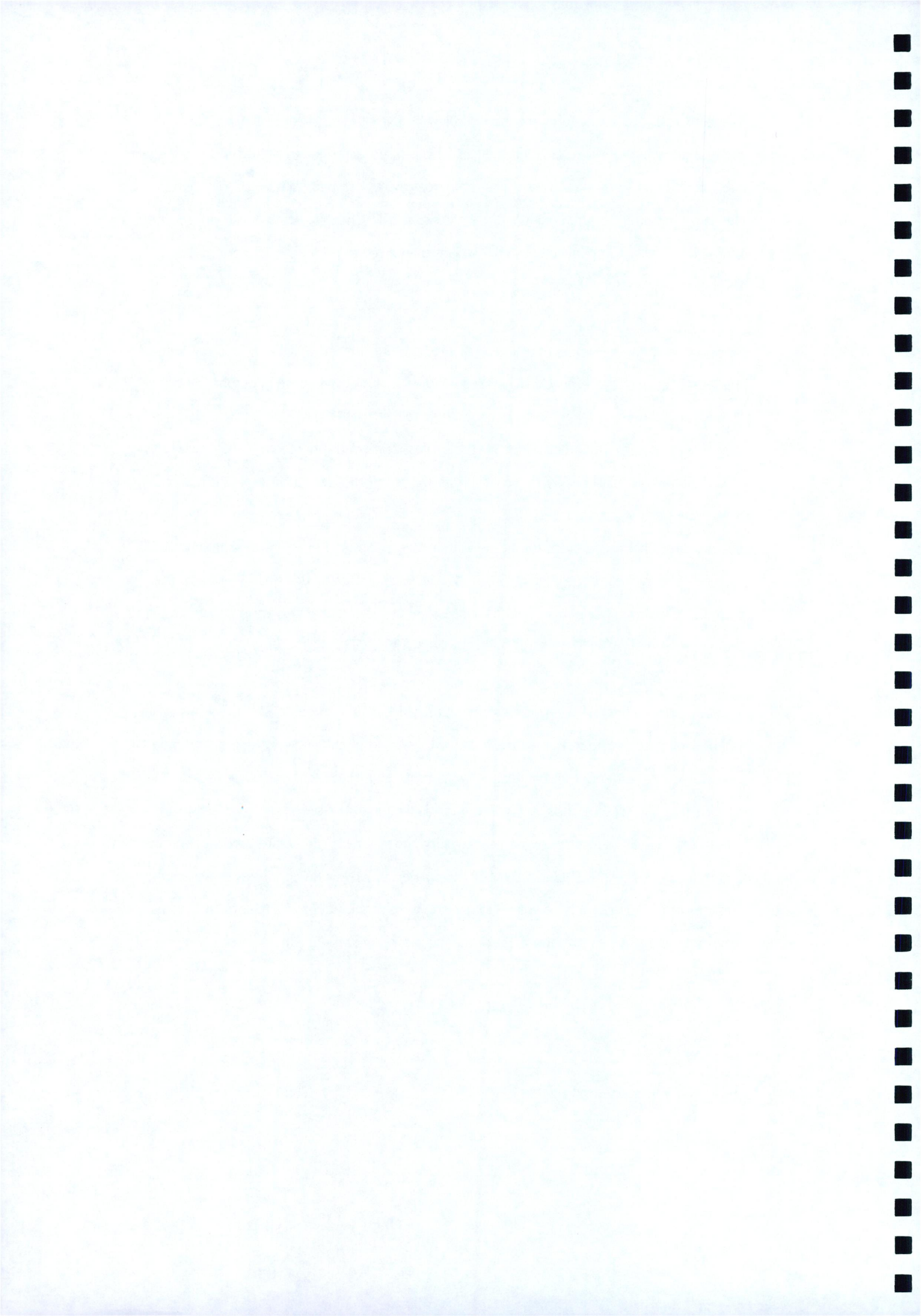
Plate 65 Peter Curling Irish Bird

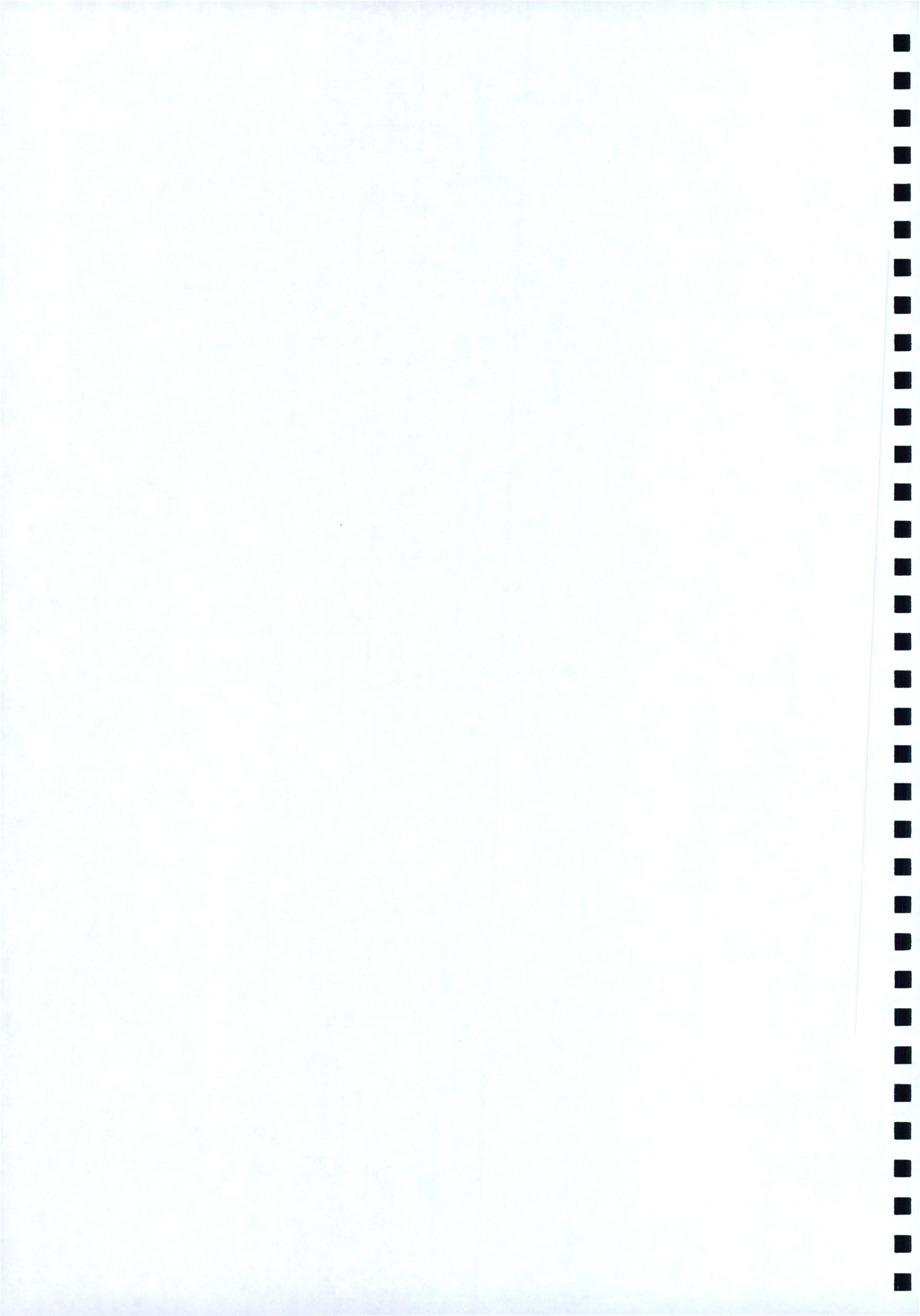


Nevertheless, a knowledge of art and horses does sometimes co-exist. Curling found this in Airlie Stud when working for Sonia Rogers who is a respected judge of both horses and art. He has given us an evocative portrait of the great mare, *Irish Bird* (plate 65). Munnings had the same experience when painting the filly Macwiller in Chantilly. Both artists appreciated having the liberty to produce something more than a "cut and dried horse portrait" (Munnings, 1952, pg. 238).

Although racehorse owners may know very little about the actual painting of a portrait, one thing that they are extremely knowledgeable about is their own horse. Fortunately both Munnings and Curling know enough about their subject not to produce pictures that are simply pleasing to the eye and regarded by the professionals in the horse world as "nice but not real" (Goodwillie, Cashel, 1993). I believe that this is one of the most important reasons for the success of these two artists. Both have the ability to combine their talent for portraying an accurate representation of the horse with a certain flair and produce a painting which is inclined to "get the adrenalin going" (Goodwillie, Cashel, 1993). Edward O'Grady, a trainer from Co. Tipperary, feels that Curling's success lies in the fact that "he appreciates the things that racing men find so important" (Goodwillie, Cashel, 1993).

The immediate effect of accepting commissions which is felt by the artist is the way that he will be viewed by society. For example, an artist who frequently paints studies of people will become known as a portrait painter; he who paints equestrian scenes will gain a reputation as a horse painter. Curling finds this type of branding a particular problem: "I am rather frightened of the label 'Equestrian Artist' as it conjures up visions of chocolate-box horses, lovingly and meticulously painted"(Curling, 1993). However, as long as he continues to accept commissions of horse portraits he will remain in the eyes of the public as a 'painter of horses' despite a desire to be considered as something more than an equestrian artist.

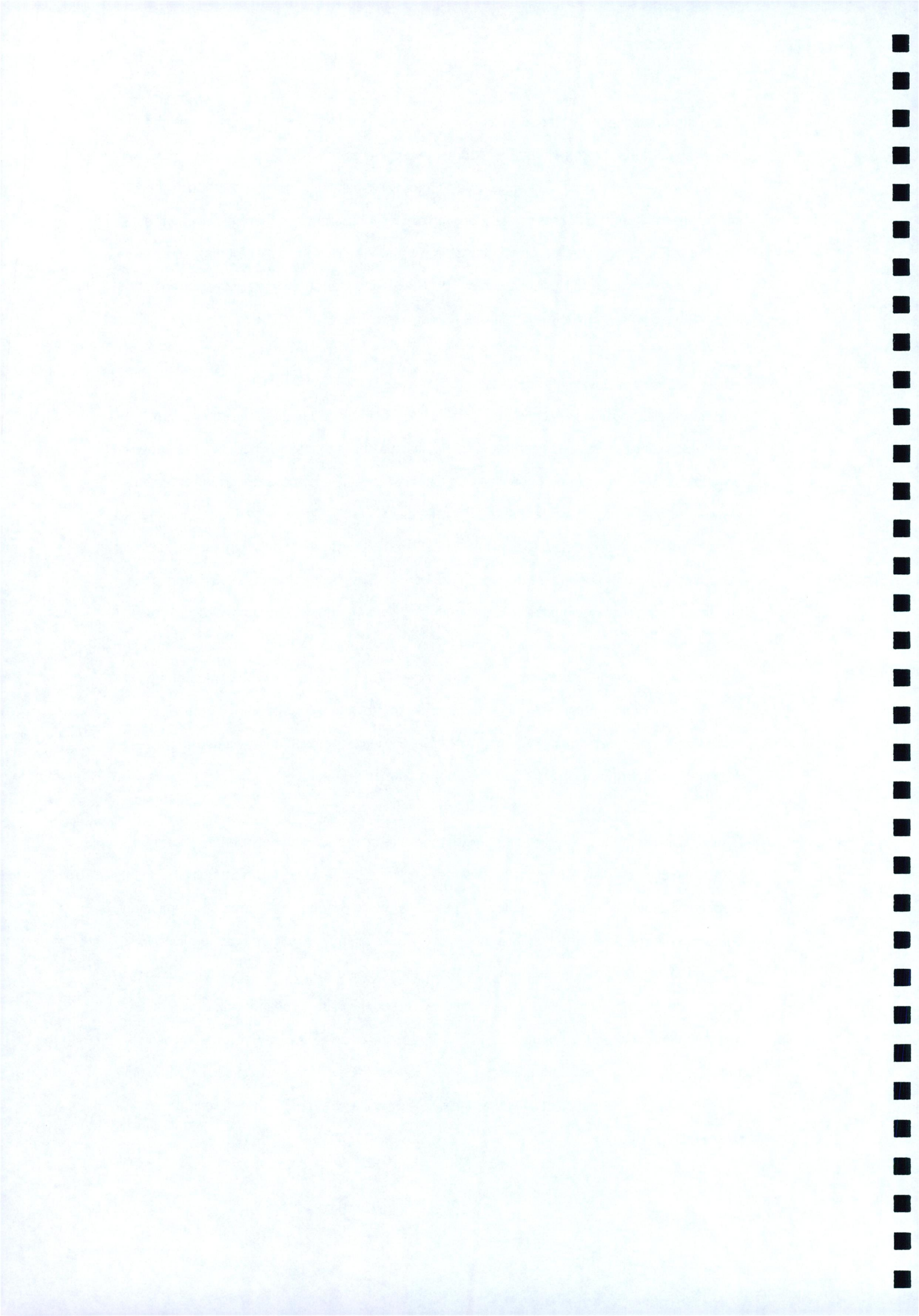




There is no reason why equestrian painting will not continue to remain popular in the foreseeable future. Despite great developments in the area of photography, there will always be those who want the satisfaction of owning an original painting. However, although there will be several hundred horses painted, only a very limited number of these pictures will survive the test of time. The reason for this is simple and was alluded to by Munnings in a remark he once made to Lionel Edwards "Those who know about horses know nothing about art and those who know about art know nothing about horses (Berry, 1989, pg. 11).

I think that the reasons for the success of the pictures of Munnings and Curling is that they possess timeless qualities which ensure that they will neither lose their popularity nor become dated. Both artists have been capable of producing paintings that satisfy not only the knowledgeable horse-owning public, in terms of their accuracy, but also more discerning art-loving viewers who look to the mastery and skill of the artist to shape their judgements. It is the pictures painted by the true devotees of the "chocolate-box" style that will fall by the wayside. In my opinion, there are several reasons for this. Perhaps the most common explanation is the fact that many people who paint horses simply do not have an adequate knowledge of the equine form in general. Both Munnings and Curling knew many of their models intimately and both viewed the capturing of a horse's character as a challenging and essential part of a painting. A lack of basic draughtmanship is another reason for the failure of many horse pictures. As has been previously mentioned in chapter five, those people with a knowledge of horses will accept only the best possible accuracy, down to minute details.

Finally, I think that it is interesting to note that there is a common link between all successful equestrian artists which has been consistent down through the ages. From Stubbs to Gericault and from Munnings to Curling, all those who are renowned for their horse paintings completely immerse themselves into the equine world for the greater part of their lives. They hunt, go racing and keep horses. They become part of this society, thereby not only gaining experience and visual material to use in their work, but they also appear in public as men with a genuine interest and love of horses. In contrast, many people who paint horses simply for the sake of painting a popular subject have no understanding of their equine subject. This ultimately shows in the final painting and as a result they will find it much more difficult to sell their work.

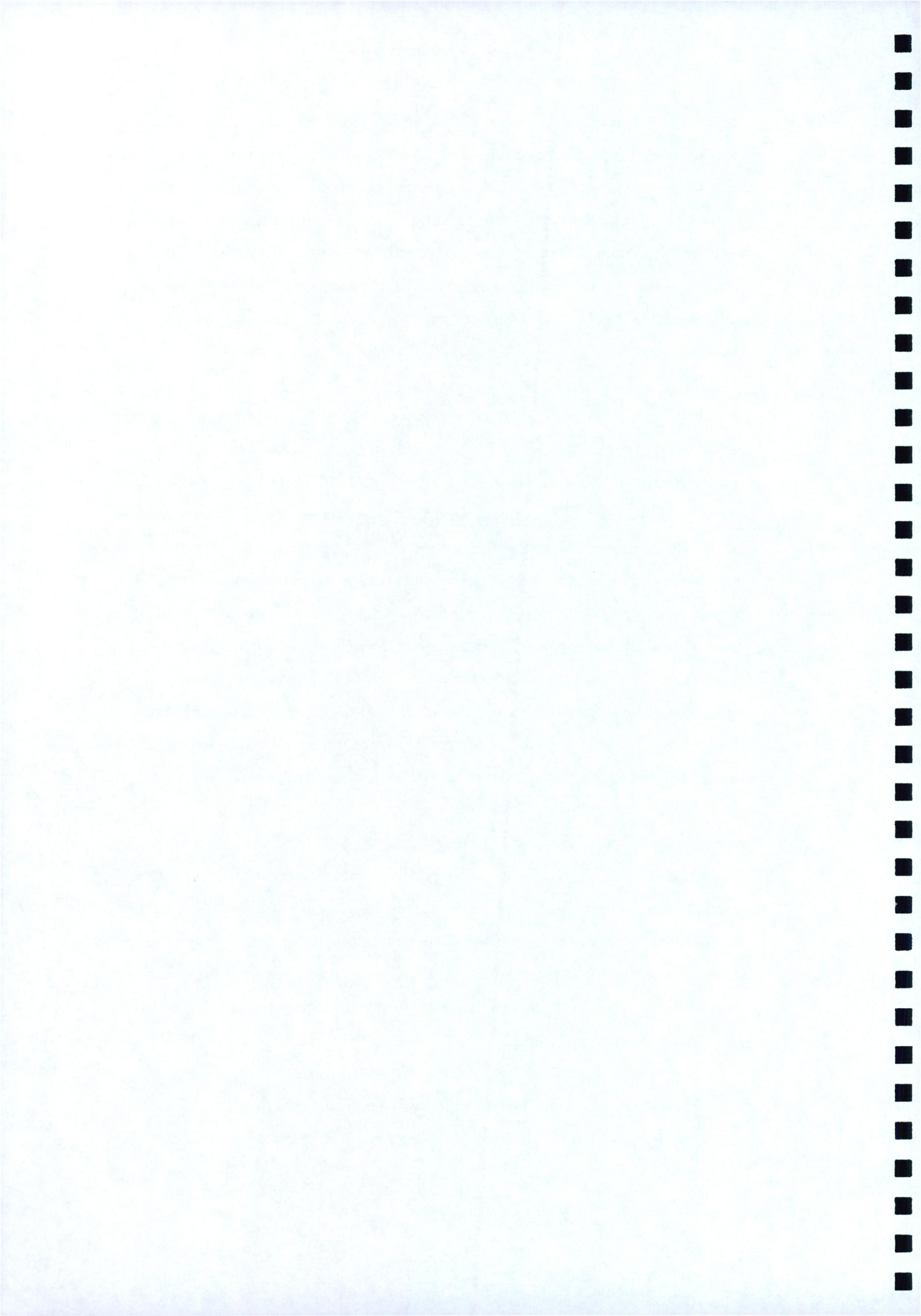


I hope that this thesis has succeeded in comparing some aspects of the work of Alfred Munnings and Peter Curling. By looking at the influences which previous painters have had on these artists, it is interesting to note that while Munnings looked for guidance to masters of anatomy, particularly Stubbs and Gericault, Curling tended to dwell more upon the work of the French Impressionist artists Toulouse-Lautrec and Degas. In terms of technique, both artists agree that there is no substitute for drawing from life. However, while Munnings' main concern was the use of colour, Curling tends to pay more attention to the composition of his paintings.

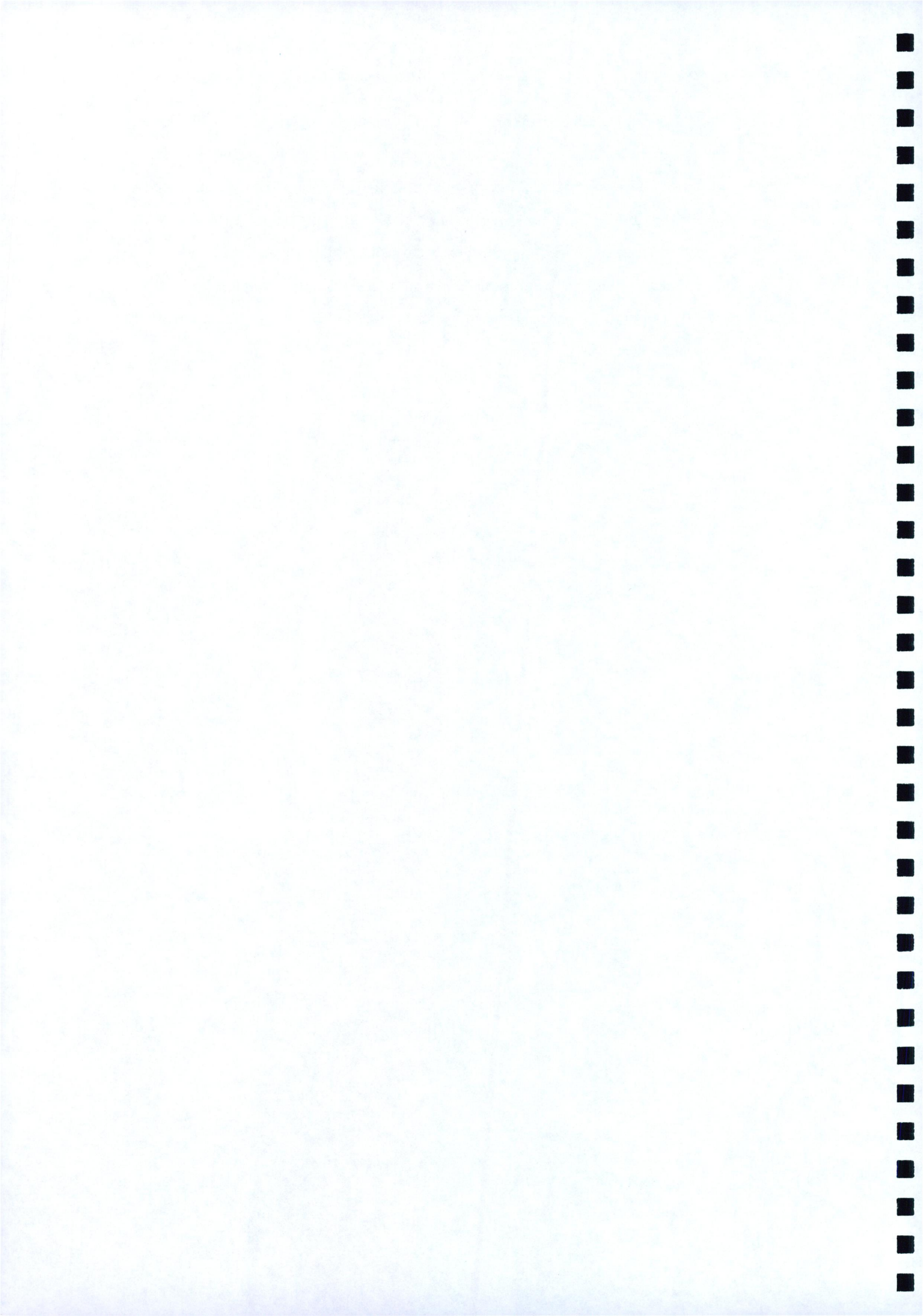
The examination of the work of the contemporaries of Munnings and Curling has proved to be highly important for the simple reason that to fully discuss the work of any artist, it is essential to draw comparisons with other work being produced around the same time. Several features arose out of this area of research. Munnings emerges as a painter who stands out from his contemporaries by the sheer volume of work he produced. In my opinion not all of his paintings are entirely successful. Nevertheless, the majority of his work is that of a highly competent and professional artist. Another significant aspect of this painter which is discussed here is his absolute loathing for any element of the Modern movement. In this chapter I hope to have conveyed my own personal opinion which is that Curling is the most successful of today's equestrian painters. His paintings emerge most favourably when juxtaposed with other modern pictures. However it also becomes obvious at this point that he has a great fear of being classed as a horse painter rather than an academic artist.

A small amount of space was given to Munnings' exploits into the field of sculpture and Curling's work as a caricaturist. What was intriguing about this subject was the fact that both artists managed to carry their skills and knowledge into working with different media; neither are simply "oil-painters". The final chapter of this study dealt with the effect of working to commission on the artists' reputation and work. This is a complex issue which has been of great influence on artists both past and present. I believe that it has a greater influence on their work than any other factor.

Without wishing to repeat all that I have written in the previous pages, I would simply like to summarise my own thoughts and feelings on the subject. To do this I have chosen a particular



quote by Munnings which corresponds very closely with my own personal view: "When an artist has created a picture that arrests and stirs people, when it draws response from dullest minds - then he may die happy" (Munnings, 1952, pg. 284). I imagine that the paintings of Munnings and Curling cannot fail to stir the heart of even the most un-horsey viewer. What other painters have succeeded to such an extent in capturing the unique relationship between man and horse? Although each goes his own way in achieving his final result, both have the ability to portray their respect and admiration for the thoroughbred horse without resorting to romantic or sentimental approaches.



An unpublished letter from Peter Curling, dated 28th August 1993

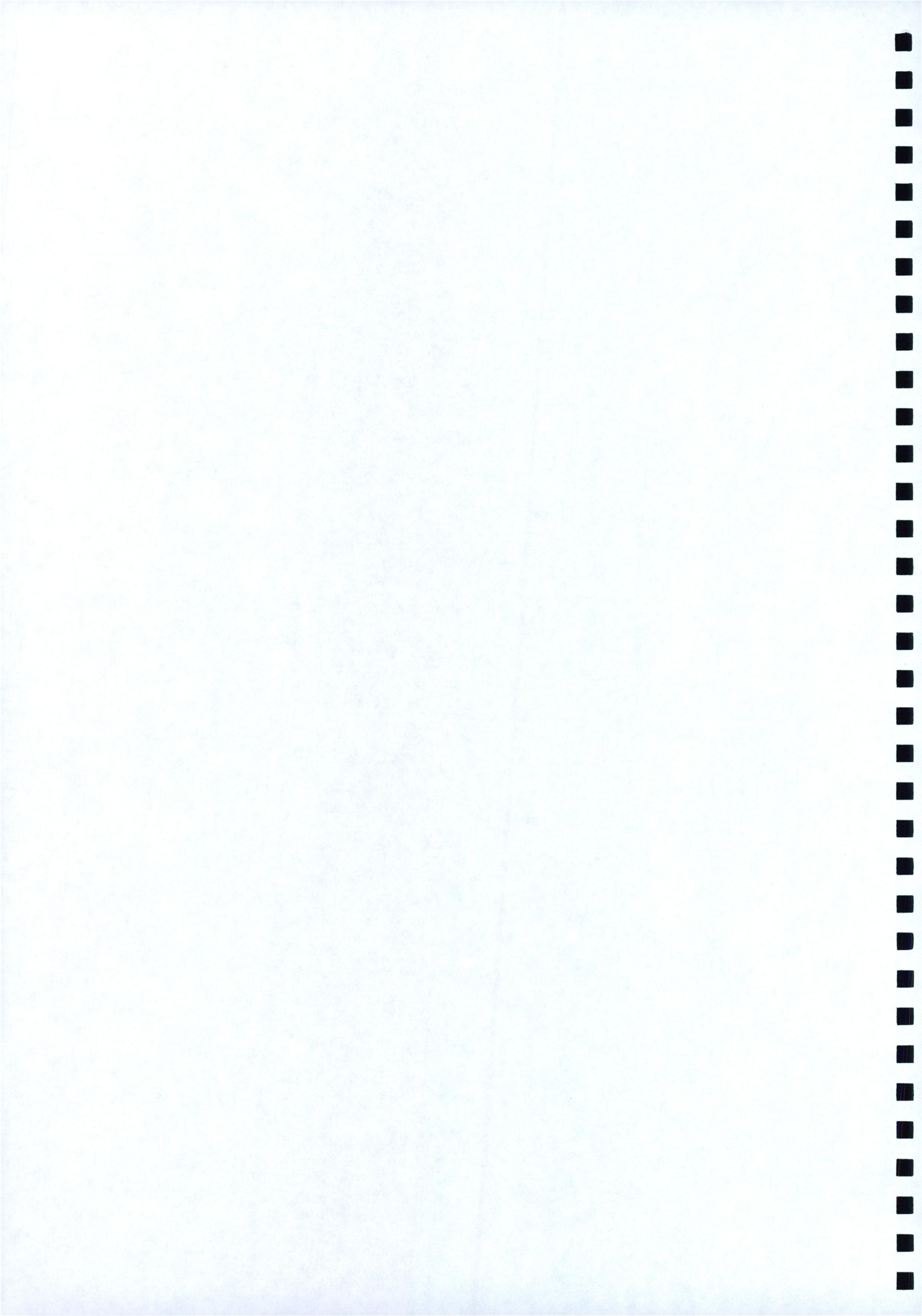


SKEHANAGH
GOOLDS CROSS
CASHEL
CO. TIPPERARY
0504 42194

28th August.

Dear Claire,

Thank you for your letter. 28th
Contemporary Equestrian art will certainly be
a varied subject for a thesis. Personally,
I am rather frightened of the label 'Equestrian
artist' as it conjures up visions of chocolate
box horses lovingly and meticulously painted.
Certainly, since most of my paintings in
the past have included horses I would
probably be known as an Equestrian artist
but it is not what I aspire to.
I know I wouldn't call themselves

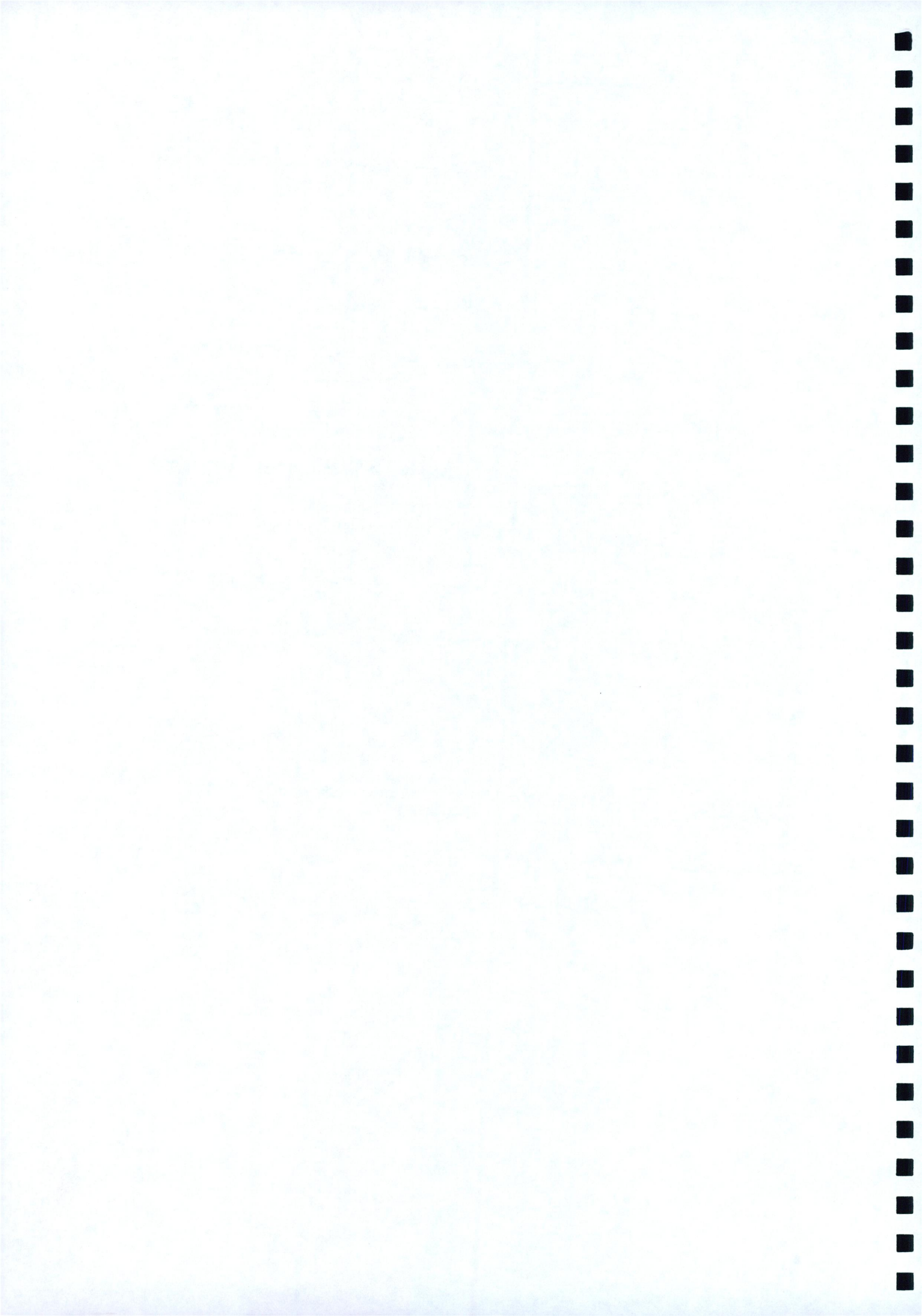


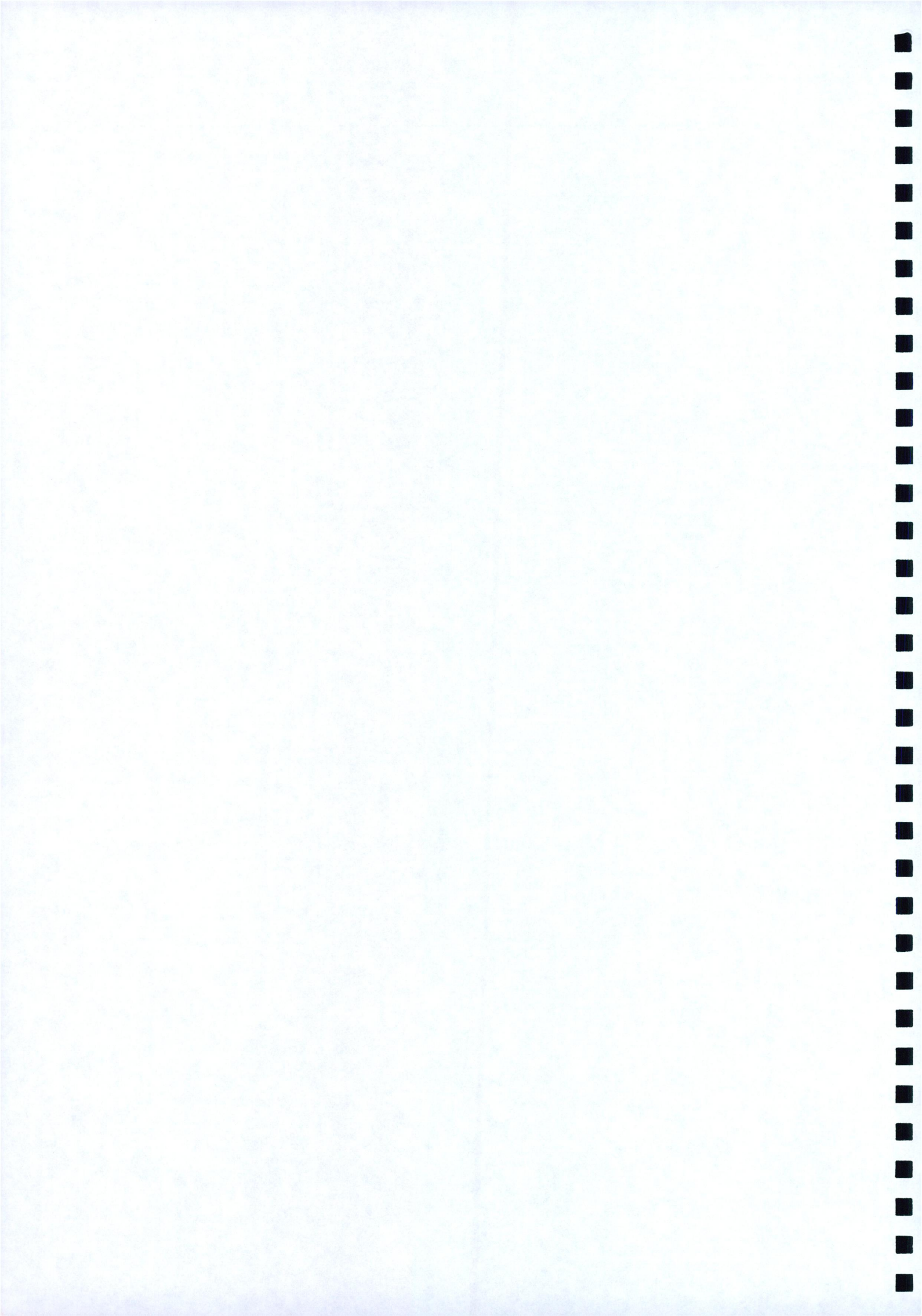
an Equestrian artist, rather a painter
of English life in the first half of the
20th Century whose paintings normally have
a horse or two in them!

Anyway, I'm sure we can discuss
this in further detail. By all means
give me a call and come over and
see the studio etc. At the moment I
am working for an exhibition in Dublin
and most of the paintings will be going
up to the frames next week but you
are welcome to come and see what
work I have on hand,

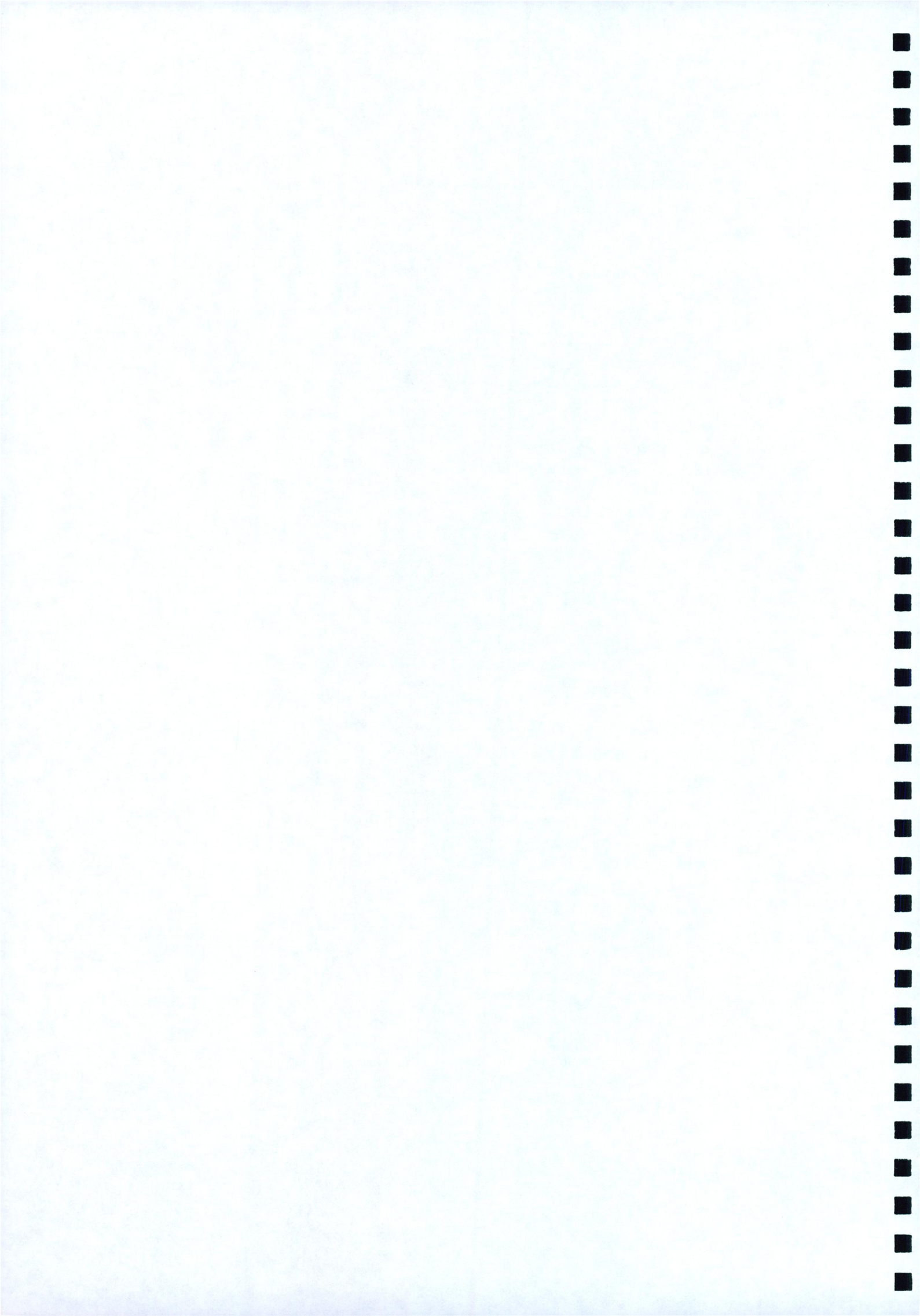
We will be away from 25th
September - 10th October, I look forward
to hearing from you,

Yours sincerely Peter Culy.





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