



What is Enlightened French Classical Dressage? What is it not?

The word enlightened tells us that it is different than our traditional thinking of French Classical Dressage. Different how? Let us begin by speaking of French Classical Dressage.

We take most of our teaching from Francois Robichon de La Gueriniere. His book is the foundation for the teaching methods we use today, most importantly the shoulder-in. We gain our understanding of all the movements and how and when they are incorporated in the progression of training. I can assure you it has nothing to do with an artificial pyramid, submission, or contact. (This is part of the 'what is it not' question.)

The training progression in French Classical Dressage exists to ensure you are creating a horse who is sound, rhythmic, and prepared for collection and the haute-ecole or high school movements of piaffer, passage, and canter pirouettes. The airs above the ground is another discussion.

The founders and followers of the French Classical School of Dressage, including the early German, Austrian and Iberic Masters, were obsessed with lightness and harmony. They were obsessed with the beauty of the *Equestrian Art*. Like everything in life, with the passage of time, all things change.

I'm going to make a very declarative statement. There is no competition in Art. So can there be Art in competitive dressage? At the current level? I think not. Should there be the possibility to observe the equestrian art during competition? Yes, I believe so. We have made a sport out of an art form. We have made a breed show and multi-billion dollar industry instead of an opportunity to showcase correct training and refinement of the movements (as was originally intended by the masters of the early twentieth century. We train now to show, rather than showing to demonstrate our training ability. Article 419 gives us the reason that we have competitions at all...Article 419 states: The FEI instituted an International Dressage Event in 1929 in order to preserve the Equestrian Art from the abuses to which it can be exposed and to preserve it in the purity of its principles, so that it could be handed on intact to generations of athletes to come. It seems the train has jumped the track. We see so much abuse in the most prestigious events, escalating abuse, how is the novice rider to know what is correct?

So now let's move forward so we can talk about *Enlightened* French Classical Dressage.

The one thing you won't find in all the manuscripts and texts written by these great Masters is the importance of mental communication with your horse. To be sure, they were all communicating, but they weren't talking about it.

From the moment we think to go to the barn we are communicating with our horse. Understanding the dynamic connection we share with our horses is essential when speaking about Enlightened French Classical Dressage. This principle is fully explored in *Dressage for the New Age, Meditation for Two*, and my latest book, *The Alchemy of Lightness*. Basically, when we are in communication with our equine partners, we are involved in a molecular exchange. It is up to you to decide to fill that exchange with harmony and lightness, with love, with patience and acceptance, with gratitude.