

The London Art Biennale

The Process



My environmental painting *The Great Escape* made a splash at the London Biennale in 2015 with a 'Special Mention of Excellence.' With this piece I really wanted to make people think - "imagine if we had a planet with no animals."

This work depicts animals in various states of distress; an elephant calling for help, a dying dog, a chimpanzee with its hand on its head in disbelief, and the remains of a zebra. The animals are desperately trying to leave the planet - and more importantly human destruction, behind.

With my second painting, I now want to get people thinking deeper and harder about the consequences of their actions.

With the hope of attracting international attention again, my recent painting *Beefore the End* is all about the demise of Bees .

Albert Einstein once said "If the bee disappeared off the face of the Earth, man would have only four years to live"

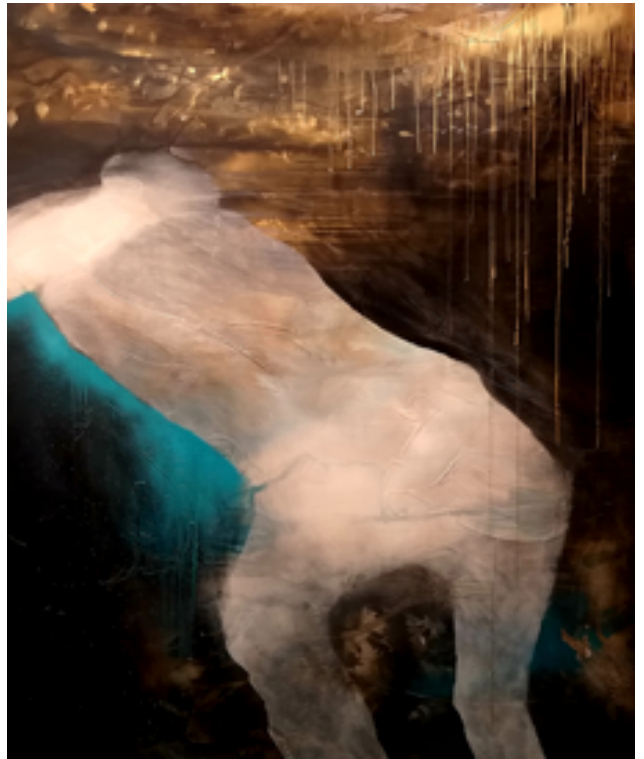
In the early stages of making this piece, I sat on a concrete floor for 5 hours a day, 5 days straight, in a gallery space in Wanaka. I had lots of interaction with people who walked by and dropped in to see what I was doing. I received a mixed reaction. After explaining the work, some would go into deep conversation about the state of the world today, others would say, "well we don't have a bee problem in New Zealand" and another said "why don't you paint pretty pictures". That question deserved no answer.

My view of this issue is simple, if we don't get our priorities right, we are in deep trouble - once the Bees are gone, it's game over.

The Stages of *Beefore the End*. These images show the process from the start to the end.

Stage one – coming up with the concept is probably the hardest part. You have to create an experience for the viewer.

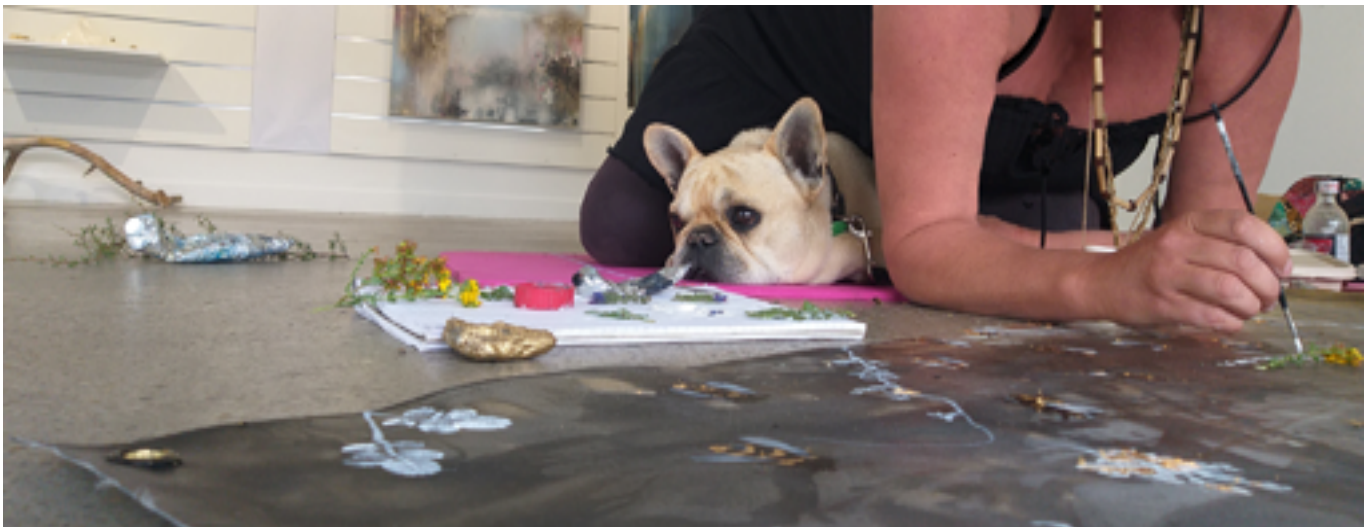
I first prepared the canvas with white gesso to add texture and movement then adding gold paint and printed leaves. A human figure was added, and it was important to make it appear frail.



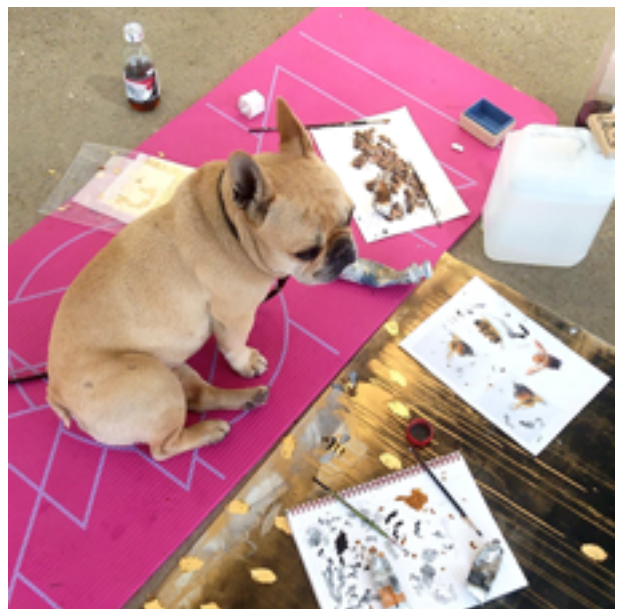
Stage two – this was difficult. Sourcing photos of bees was easy but finding real bees was a challenge.

I required real bees to study close up and to collect so I could place them under the painting, once it was hung.

My son and I would set out some days at 4pm in a row boat. We'd find the bees, scoop them out, dry them off and give them honey. Most would fly off 20 minutes later. The ones that didn't make it, I collected.



Stage three – Painting in all the bees and leaves. I first applied delicate gold leaf – this would make the bees stand out – and then I added the detail. This took an entire week. It was a painstaking process. All the little legs and wings, sometimes even the eyes had to be painted with absolute accuracy.



These images are close ups of the different areas of the work. A beehive is at the top centre . Parts of the painting have been chipped away.



On the next page, the painting is revealed. The top is full of life. Bees, a beehive, cherry blossom, gold droplets of pollen and water. In the centre, a human figure starts to weaken. As our eyes move down, life is deteriorating fast. Bits of paint are flaking off, revealing the underneath surface and emphasizing that everything is falling apart. The figures backside holds a secret message, "If we cant be arsed making massive change, we will go down". The painting is crying because it is dying.

The bees are falling to their death, the leaves have dried, as too have the flower petals. All that is left is a pile of dead, decaying bees. Once the painting is hung on the white wall at the Chelsea Old Town Hall on Londons Kings Road, underneath will be a pile of real bees that have died from drowning in Lake Wanaka.

The London Biennale will take place between May 22 and 26 this year.

