

## A SWIFT APPRAISAL OF THE SCULPTOR AS ECO WARRIOR

*For Ian Swift the world is a time bomb just waiting to go Ka-boom!! Then not only we, but all of God's creatures will go up in a puff of smoke. In the absence of any serious plan of human action to prevent our own and our environment's obliteration, Swift has taken up arms and joined forces with nature's eco warriors.*



Swift's art has always been about re-use and re-cycling and always with a very clear environmental message. Whaling, deforestation, waste, as well as art history and pop culture, are all themes in his work, the latter addressed very much with tongue in cheek. He describes himself as a self-deprecating painter, writer, bush philosopher and budding astronaut. You might say he has never grown up, but that's because his passion is as sincere, fresh and strong as a teenager's, and yes, sometimes he can be quite corny.

There have been many projects and exhibitions over the years, all memorable and quirky – remember A Swift History of Australia, or In Bed with Ned? And then there have been the dogs, hundreds upon hundreds of the animals, large and small, rudely doing what dogs do, and today there are countless homes (good, naturally) where these canines continue to prop open doors or hog the best chairs and are much loved, whether Avant Guard Dogs or the Dapto Dishlickers.

Swift has won a number of important sculpture and art prizes since he began exhibiting regularly in 1990 and if he's not up there among the winners he's usually the people's choice. He is known predominantly for

*Left: General Gumtree, found objects 54cm h 2015*



While on holiday Swift indulges his passion for collecting (whether flip flops or fishing net) at the same time making his own contribution to cleaning up the environment



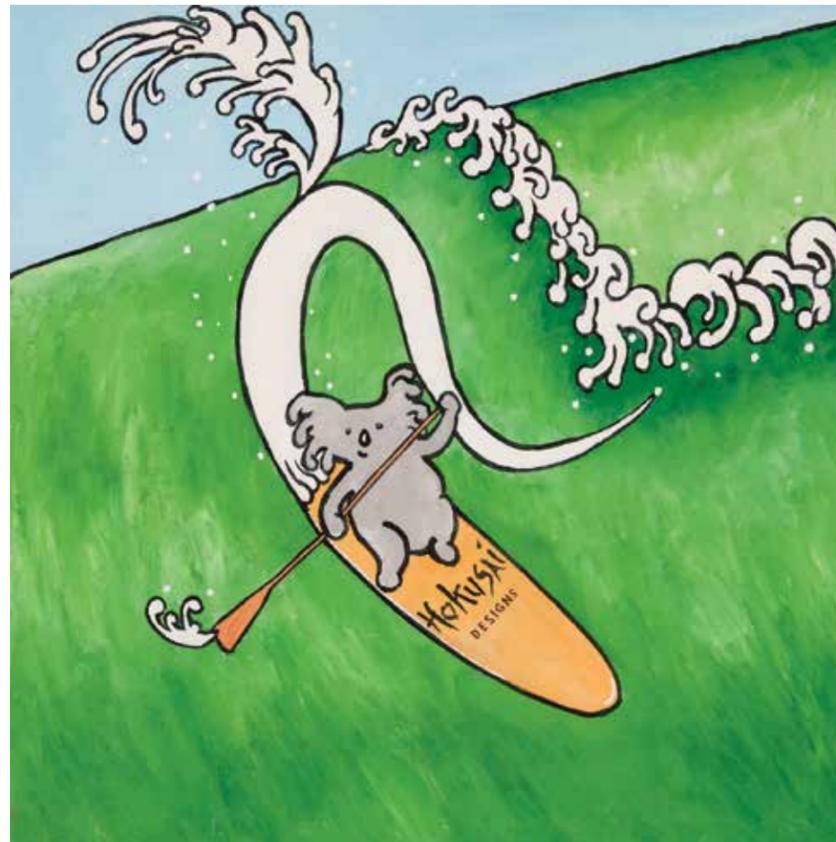
Above: Gulf Country, reclaimed thongs on board  
135cm x 360cm 2014  
Right: Sculpture by the Sea, 2014  
Below: Natural Selection: Flip Flop Fish



his sculptures, particularly his entries into Sculpture by the Sea where he has been included consistently since its inception. He is one of 19 from 1,108 artists to be included in the Sculpture by the Sea Decade Club. For its past two events he has also been part of Sculpture at Scenic World in the Blue Mountains.

Several years ago he painted a series of works depicting the iconic ocean baths along Sydney's coastline for a gallery exhibition (2005). Then at the 2014 Sculpture by the Sea he produced the latest large, Australian blue pool complete with swimmers which delighted visitors and was featured in various news media, including the front page of the Sydney Morning Herald, then purchased and shipped to London. This year his entry into Sculpture by the Sea is a hugely labour intensive artwork which will bring together all of Swift's talents and passions: 1,000 individual





This page:  
 Top:  
 Tears for Tuvalu  
 Left:  
 Standing up for the  
 environment (after  
 Hokusai)

Opposite page:  
 Top:  
 Eric 21cm h 2015  
 Centre:  
 Patsy 24cm h 2015  
 Below:  
 Wally 25cm h 2015

'parasites' have been created using all the detritus of our throwaway society – bottles, plastics, rubber bits and pieces all wired together. Colourful, shiny and shivery, these will adhere to rocks along the beach, a thousand parasites devouring and destroying nature. Accompanying the parasites will be quantities of fishing net retrieved from the ocean, washed up on our beaches – the killer of so much of our marine life.

Collecting the netting is this year's project for Swift when he flies with friends to Weipa on the Gulf of Carpentaria. It will be his fourth collecting trip on this remarkable sparsely populated coastline at Albatross Bay on the western Cape York Peninsula. With friends on a boat who will swim and fish, Swift will indulge his passion for collecting and at the same time make a small contribution to cleaning up the environment by working through the extraordinary drift of civilization's rubbish which accumulates in the oceans and is carried by sea currents to end up on these pristine shores.



The harvest of a previous expedition, 56 kilos when bundled up of rubber and plastic flip flops, was transformed into a number of different artworks, among them Gulf Country, a large wallpiece, the blue and green flip flops becoming the sea and the pinks, yellows and reds the tropical island and its horizon. This year's catch of fishing net will be draped over the parasite-covered rocks at Bondi.

Large sculptural works have formed the backbone of Swift's practice – iconic animals (horse, rhino, polar bear, gorilla) close to life-size, are works which have periodically surfaced between the exhibitions of paintings or smaller series.





a prolific and very public creative output, always with an environmental message, has confirmed Swift's eco warrior status, but it is his most recent project which will, he hopes, send the message out even louder, clearer and stronger

Westmead Children's Hospital was recently gifted by a benefactor with one of Swift's sculptures. The delightful baby elephant now plays inside its perspex cylinder for all visitors and patients to enjoy as they walk into the hospital.

Such a prolific and very public creative output, always with an environmental message, has confirmed Swift's eco warrior status, but it is his most recent project which will, he hopes, send the message out louder, clearer and stronger. Bert, one of his bear characters, describes Swift: 'You are coming from a high-art platform and diving deep to exploit mass consumerism for a great cause where art meets the environment to save habitats. This is wildly conceptual!'

The Drop Bear Gorgeous project as Swift calls it, corals the appeal but also the feistiness of a beloved Australian, the koala. Swift quotes Picasso - 'good artists copy, great artists steal' - and in a frenzy of appropriation he wheels out the big guns, Munch, Picasso, Hokusai, Rodin and Ken Done in a series of small works on canvas, t-shirts and cards. And of course Marilyn is the inspiration for the most gorgeous drop bear. This is a retail project based on a shop in Katoomba, a town within a World Heritage National Park, and to



Swift imagines his eco warriors project reviewed by Margaret and David

Margaret: I found this utterly compelling, hilarious and an anthem for our times.  
 David: I disagree! I find the juxtaposition of terrorism and climate change to be mind numbing, facile pap! Let alone the anthropomorphic banality. I'm giving it 2 stars.  
 Margaret: Oh David! You are such a prick! I'm giving it 5. Heeeekk!



Top: Sixties Remembered  
 Right: Gorilla, industrial foam 164cm x 107cm x 170cm 2009  
 Opposite page top: Elephant  
 Below: Polar Bear steel, found objects & recycled plastic 120cm x 255cm x 85cm 2009



Right: Postcard to Charlie, acrylic on canvas 104x60cm 2015

Opposite page: Ian Swift with Elephant at Westmead Children's Hospital, Sydney

launch the project Swift painted a series of graphic, semi-naïve, colourful cartoons with references to art history, pop culture, famous photography and film and at the end of last year these were posted daily on Instagram.

The real radicals of this new project are the animal THUGS who are demanding a pristine homeland – these are the Tree Hugging Über Green Separatists and of course they will go to any lengths to stop their habitat destruction.

The concept is entertaining but also very serious. The native animals have taken over from Swift's earlier dogs – Patsy is a mole, Wally a wombat with a suicide belt. In fact guns and weapons, explosives and suicidal and murderous maniacs abound in this new world of animal anarchy. We are told that they call themselves eco warriors but to the rest of us they are a fanatical death cult, plotting to end our obsession with economic growth.

Meanwhile, a mole close to the THUGS has returned from a forest training camp for terrorists to reveal their terrifying tactics. They have been radicalised by ultra-left extremists, he says, and are demanding an end to the obsession with constant growth and habitat destruction.

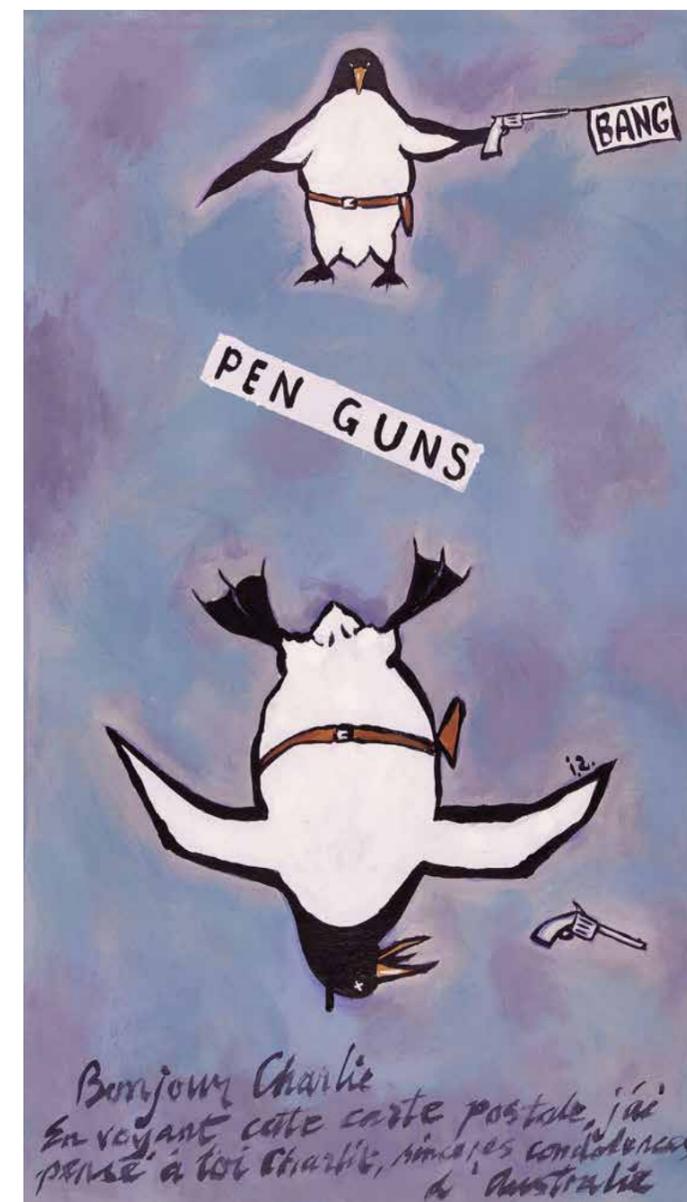
We are warned that 'there are those among us who sympathise with their cause. This 'enemy within' has been brainwashed by climate scientists and the green alarmists at the ABC. The message from our leaders is to keep calm, report suspicious behaviour and donate generously to the coal industry.'

The sentiment is there and the graphics are great including Swift's 'camouflage designs' – magpie, kookaburra, dingo, drop bear, fighting fauna, drones – all of which say 'Australia' loud and clear and would lend themselves to trendy interior design products such as wallpapers and fabrics.

Swift is a popular and much admired member of the artistic community. All wish him and this admirable new project much success. *Buy your eco warrior t-shirt now!*

Carolynne Skinner

Photography Graeme Wienand



Ian Swift exhibits at the Lost Bear Gallery, 98 Lurline Street, Katoomba [www.lostbeargallery.com.au](http://www.lostbeargallery.com.au) Drop Bear Gorgeous shop is at 208 Katoomba Street, Katoomba NSW [www.dropbeargorgeous.com](http://www.dropbeargorgeous.com) Sculpture by the Sea at Bondi opens in September 2016