



Artist, Michael Zavros

THE ART *of success*

Michael Zavros has won accolades, and occasionally raised eyebrows, the world over for his artwork. **Alex Bernard** interviews our next candidate for *bmag's* Brisbane Person of the Year Award

As I look deep into *Falling August* I am hypnotised. It's the image of a horse in free fall. From the veins on its hind leg to the dapples on its coat, the detail of the charcoal on paper artwork is breathtaking.

I feel like a snake in a basket being charmed by the extraordinary talent of Brisbane-based artist Michael Zavros. This is not just because I cannot even draw a stick-man either. My interview subject is truly gifted, and the fact his work has been exhibited all over Australia and in New Zealand, Milan, Hong Kong and Paris is testimony to this.

Michael Zavros can't remember a time when he wasn't painting or drawing. His mother, a teacher, recognised his astonishing talent and sent him to lessons at a young age. "It was always just this thing that I had, that my parents were excited about," he says. Zavros describes himself as the "black sheep" of the family, perhaps because his four sisters were all athletically-gifted.

His path was set very early on. As a

teenager his viewing of William Delafield Cook's *Haystacks* was formative. "I knew when I saw it that was the kind of work I wanted to do. I don't know that I ever had that moment where I 'decided' to become an artist. It's just what I always did. But I did wonder after art school if it was something I could make a living doing."

After studying at the Queensland College of Art, Zavros found success through his murals, which became a ready-made business, and in the highly subjective and competitive art world went straight on to commercial success. "I was lucky in that the work I was doing was popular and allowed me to earn an income while I was still practising my craft and working on my own pieces."

While he did odd jobs, the work was always there. "I never had to work as a waiter! The other work I did was always in the field of art. As a realist painter your work is more viable, more accessible than other styles of art."

Zavros' talent is well-recognised critically at home and abroad. His

Italian love affair.

Cult leather corner sofa with motion from \$4,495 or 20% off Cult range for 20 days only

Cult leather corner sofa starting from

\$3,995

instead of **\$5,180**



pai
his
sku
fas
wo
po
coi
of
in
ex
set
on
hy

art
Ba
dif
of
eve
(a
pla
an
liv



Phoebe is Dead/McQueen made headlines around the world last year when it won the lucrative Doug Moran portraiture prize

painting *Phoebe is Dead/McQueen*, showing his five-year-old daughter lying under a skull-printed scarf designed by the late fashion designer Alexander McQueen, won the prestigious Doug Moran portraiture prize – the richest in the country – last year. Philip Bacon, owner of one of Australia's leading art galleries in Fortitude Valley, comments, "His extraordinary skill as a draftsman really sets him apart. He is, without doubt, one of the most important and talented hyper-realist artists in Australia."

Such recognition has also led to artist residencies in Paris, Milan and Barcelona. "The approach to art is so different in Europe. Art isn't a daily part of people's lives here but in Europe it's everywhere. When I was in France my (art) student card got me into so many places! The response was, 'Well you're an artist, you must come in!' They just live it and breathe it every day."

Michael works from photographs and his work, by his own admission, can be all-consuming. "When I was working on *Echo* (a two-metre by three-metre monochrome inspired by his trips to the Palace of Versailles) I was painting for up to 16 hours a day for three months.

"When I'm choosing a subject, I let it hibernate and then if I still like the concept in a few months time, that's when I go back to it.

The isolation of his work can be challenging. "It does get lonely, but you find ways to break it up. I'm a compulsive list maker; you set yourself funny little goals. You can get excited about the mail coming, but you need to be disciplined."

Julie Ewington, Curatorial Manager of Australian Art at the Queensland Art Gallery says Michael's work is amongst the best of its kind in the country.

"Michael's done residencies abroad – he's a very serious artist. When you look at his work you realise how complex it is. He does a picture within a picture; it's very intense and studied. Critically, the importance of Michael's work was recognised immediately. There's a really strong contemporary arts scene here in Queensland and, basing himself here, Michael certainly adds to that."

Philip Bacon is excited about Zavros' evolution as an artist. "When I look at the work he's doing now, and see how he's growing I know his work will only get better and better. He has a very long career ahead of him."

Zavros is also forward thinking in his approach to art in the broader community. "While good art can make us question our existence, I see art as having a changing role. If you look at what GoMA is doing, for example, that art is the new entertainment. It's more than just elegant ideas, it's a blockbuster movie. Art is seeping into our lives in such a different way now through technology. There are even phone apps for art now."

So organic is Michael's talent that when I ask what he might have done had he not been an artist he stares at me blankly. I suspect he has never considered such a thing. "Um...I like gardening. But even when I'm doing that I'm sculpting the hedges, I can't help it. I think whatever is around me, whatever I'm doing, I find the art in it."



We are all on this journey
We actually care for our
We promise we will support
We will give them wings to fly
and a soft landing.

Deborah McKern, Director, Seasons Living



Seasons Living
a whole new way in