

# Kudos to the bees



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STAFF REPORTER

Where nature and aesthetics meet is where the art of Aganetha Dyck begins.

Having enjoyed residencies all over Europe and Canada, the celebrated Dyck is now the 2007 recipient of the Manitoba Arts Council Award of Distinction, which recognizes distinguished Manitoba artists.

Dyck's creative output, a product of her prairie roots, is unique, if not incomparable: one-of-a-kind art objects covered by beeswax.

"I collaborate with the bees," says Dyck. "I could never do this by myself."

The extent of the bees' involvement has been, she explains, the basis of some misconceptions. "Some people think I just put [an object] in the hive and go home for the summer," says Dyck. In reality, the process demands constant observation—lest the object be completely entombed in beeswax.

Dyck usually begins with an idea in mind, and gives the bees "an object that I have a reason for." What defines her process, however, is simply "letting the bees take over."

Dyck does perform some after-work: painting, scraping, and applying heat. However, she says that the bees often create something completely unanticipated. One striking example was Dyck's "Hanger" series. Dyck gave the bees the tattered remnants of some of her mother's crochet work. To her surprise, the bees built upon the existing patterns, giving the material the appearance of having been evenly dipped in wax.

"At first I thought, well...I'm human, I can think a lot better than creatures, right?" Dyck laughs. "I don't think that anymore...I could never come up with some of those things, ever."

The emphasis Dyck places upon the bees' contribution extends to exhibitions, at which she prefers to have the bees present in the gallery. Fortunately, Dyck says, most galleries have been accommodating, and it is this element of the sublime that has gotten the most reaction from visitors, inspiring both awe and fright.

Regarding the work as visual art, Dyck says that "people tend to think it's beautiful... because of course the honeycomb...is an architectural

wonder." And from her observations, people are not put off by the work's unconventionality, "because it's so based in nature, because it's so connected to the environment."

A self-described "very intuitive person" who is more comfortable with visual language, Dyck seems more at ease talking about the bees than the art, and she speaks as much from a naturalist's perspective as an artist's. Her human collaborators include Dr. Mark Winston, Professor of Biological Sciences at Simon Fraser University, who among other scientists has been helping her "have a dialogue with the bees."

"I'm trying very hard, with queen bee pheromones, to see if I can draw with the bees, paint with the bees," Dyck says. "I don't know if they're trying to talk to me or not. I hope they are. I keep telling myself they are."

Scientists are constantly learning new things about bees. Dyck cites, for example, a recent Simon Fraser University study which discovered the use of several once unknown chemicals for communication. It has only been in the last 100 years or so, Dyck says, that science has looked at bees—and only in the last 40 to 50 years has it "been really looking at them."

A concern of Dyck's is that much of the wild honey bees population has died. Among the causes are new diseases, deforestation, crop changes, insecticides, and "you and I not planting enough flowers."

"That usually surprises people," Dyck says. "If we didn't have beekeepers, our food supply would be 30 to 50 percent less. That's pretty scary."

What is encouraging for Dyck is how her work seems to encourage people to learn more about bees. Her artists' talks have frequently been enriched by the input of attending beekeepers and scientists.

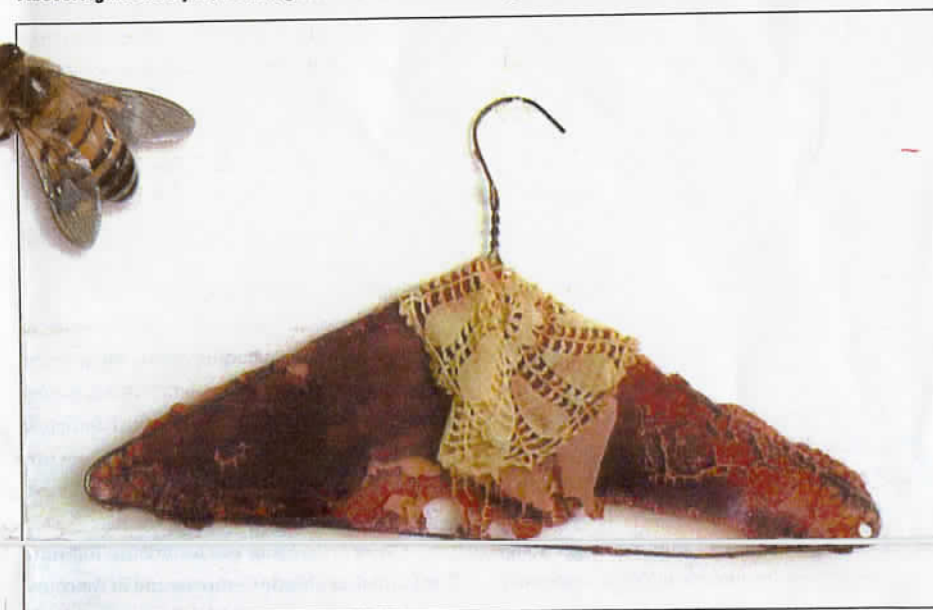
As an artist, Dyck herself continues to seek out new aesthetic possibilities in the "whole other world" of her busy friends: about three years ago, Dyck, collaborating with artist Richard Dyck, began creating scans of hive interiors. This has won her further recognition worldwide, with the scans being shown all over Europe, and Canadian embassies promoting her as an important Canadian artist.

And, as ever, Dyck possesses unwavering admiration for the bees themselves: "I'm interested in their language, interested in their way of being, and interested to know what they can tell us about the world."

## MANITOBA ARTIST AGANETHA DYCK HONORED WITH AWARD OF DISTINCTION



Above: Aganetha Dyck, *Drawing with the bees*. Below: Aganetha Dyck, from *Hanger Series*.



Aganetha Dyck, from *Pivot series*.