



## Art for bees' sake

Stephen Fleming, co-editor

**On the edge of the legend-rich Somerset Levels, a young artist is taking inspiration from the creations of honey bees and communicating a contemporary message about their plight.**

Jacob Trood has grown up in a family beekeeping tradition, starting with his grandfather, Neil Trood, and his father, Tim, who began beekeeping together four decades ago. Bee motifs abound in the cottage kitchen and the subtle scent of beeswax pervades the atmosphere.

On the wall, time has stopped at exactly four o'clock and virgin beeswax comb hangs down, like the beard of a well-groomed Old Father Time, preventing pendulum movement. Jacob had collected a swarm in the clock cabinet and the bees quickly set up home, only to realise within a day or two that the space was too small and that, like time, they must fly. Fortunately, the absconding swarm hung up in the garden hedge and was promptly rehoused in the family apiary. But not before the bees had spent some time and left their mark in the clock. The clock has stopped and, says Jacob, "We are left with the idea that the bees used everything they knew to try to get it working again but are stuck without the mechanical knowledge of humans."

Time is a recurring theme in Jacob's work. "A time limit can put people under pressure to act," he explains. "Without the pressures of time, we may delay action – the chance to say we don't need to do anything if it won't affect us in our lifetime."



Jacob has worked with various time devices – from an hourglass to a sundial – adapting them to show that time is running out for bees and that human intervention is needed. He is about to begin his third year Fine Art degree course at the University of the West of England in Bristol and, as a young artist, has quickly found a message he wants to convey through his art and broken down traditional barriers between art and science.

### Artistic roots

Jacob, now aged 21, first became involved with bees by, in his own words, "getting in the way" of his beekeeping father and grandfather from about the age of 12, with an uncomfortably memorable moment occurring at age 15, when he received stings on each of his knees just before his school exams.

Alongside the beekeeping tradition, artistic talent appears from time to time in the Trood family. Neil, Jacob's 87-year-old grandfather, is artistic and recalls his own great uncle, William Henry Hamilton Trood, who was a renowned Victorian artist specialising in paintings of dogs. "Even at the age three, Jacob showed very early promise," says Neil. "He would draw a house – the usual box shape for a child. Then I would draw a house [with perspective] and even at the age of three, he could understand the difference."

As far as they know, the family beekeeping tradition is four decades old has now entered the third generation. Grandfather, Neil, and father, Tim, had taken up beekeeping together – "in the pre-Sheriff beesuit era," recalls Tim with a rueful grin. They liked to experiment with bees and so Jacob has grown up in a stimulating environment that has prepared him to explore his artistic talents with bees.

Now it seems almost inevitable that Jacob would draw bees. At first their anatomy interested him but, as he researched his subject matter, he began to realise their plight and this gave real meaning to his art, a rich seam that he has mined ever since.

One of his early works was a wall of honey. For three months, 260 half-pound jars of honey were stacked up, five-feet wide and six-feet tall in a wooden frame, in his grandfather's living room. The honey wall, an artwork probably worth £1000 in materials alone, has since been consumed.



Photos: Richard Rickitt and Stephen Fleming