

# Pigcasso... or a new Francis Bacon?



Pigcasso produces her best art when she can see the South African mountains, insists her owner, Joanne Lefson, who adds that the only part she plays in the colourful creations is to dip the brush in paint

**Aislinn Laing** Johannesburg

Her signed canvases sell to fans around the globe for up to £1,700 apiece and an exhibition of her work is about to embark on an international tour.

Not bad for a girl who has only just turned 21 months old. Especially so when you consider that she's a pig.

Pigcasso — as she has been christened — and her sister Rosie were rescued by Joanne Lefson from a slaughterhouse close to her home.

The animal artist produces her pieces by gripping the brush in her teeth and moving her head to lay acrylic paint on canvas. So impressive are the results that she has sold 44 paintings to fans in Britain, America, South Korea and Malaysia and last month launched her own exhibition, *Oink*, on Cape Town's Victoria and Albert waterfront in her native South Africa.

Her success has set her on the way to becoming a household name at home, and now her exhibition — featuring artwork that Ms Lefson describes as a light-hearted take on current affairs — is to open in central London next month, at a venue yet to be finalised, before moving on to Paris, Berlin and Amsterdam.

Ms Lefson, an animal welfare campaigner, said that her pig was a workaholic who rarely wanted to take a day



## Animal artists

- Ruby the elephant painted while at Phoenix zoo, Arizona, holding a brush in her trunk. By the time she died in 1998, sales of her art had made more than \$50,000 for the zoo's endangered animal fund with Ruby's most expensive painting selling for \$25,000. Thailand has several well-regarded elephant artists.

- Congo, a chimpanzee,

became a sensation when Granada's Zootime programme in 1956 featured him drawing and painting. The popularity of his work has long outlasted him. In 2005 three of his paintings went for auction alongside works by Renoir and Warhol and sold for £14,400.

- There are several commercial dog artists that paint with brushes held in their mouths. Arbor, a former rescue

dog in the US, sells most of her watercolours on eBay, with her highest priced work going for \$453.

- Koko, a lowland gorilla in San Francisco capable of understanding sign language, is also a highly proficient painter whose abstracts sell for up to \$350. Her work was displayed recently at the Gold Dragon Gallery in Florida.

off. "She's not a diva and it hasn't all gone to her head," she said. "She's still very humble. All she wants to do is eat, sleep and paint."

Pigcasso and Rosie were rescued when they were two months old and could still fit together in a shoe box.

"It wasn't a question of choosing her really, it was really a question of who was going to be caught," Ms Lefson said. "Pigs move fast and make a lot of noise and no one wanted to come. At that point, they didn't fully appreciate that this would be the best thing that would happen to them in their lives."

The sisters were the first residents of Ms Lefson's Farm Sanctuary SA charity in Franschoek, near Cape Town, which aims to promote awareness about the benefits of rescue pets, as well as sustainable farming.

It was still under construction when the pigs arrived and Pigcasso took a shine to the workmen's paintbrushes. "They were the only things she didn't try to eat or destroy," Ms Lefson said. "Perhaps it was the bristles, but she kept putting them in her mouth, so I set up a canvas and paints for her and it wasn't long before she set to work."

Her first creation was bought for R7,000 (£433) by a New York lawyer who was visiting the farm, and word has spread rapidly. One of her highest-selling pieces, entitled *Brexit*, featured

an approximation of the word itself in the colours of the British flag. It sold to a Dutch collector for £1,730. Ms Lefson maintains that she has scant influence on the creative process, but since pigs have limited ability to perceive colour, she picks out the paint and hands her a pre-dipped brush.

Pigcasso signs each canvas by dipping her snout in a mixture of beetroot juice and acrylic paint.

Ms Lefson said that her pig took inspiration from the scenery around her, and they often took day trips to Table Mountain or one of the beaches beneath it. "She loves to get the sand between her trotters and is happiest painting when she can see the mountain," her owner said.

Moving about has however become more challenging, for Pigcasso has become something of a porker, weighing 70st and measuring 6ft. "It's quite hard work for us," she said.

While Pigcasso's earnings more than pay for her keep and those of the other animals, Ms Lefson's wish is that she act as an ambassador for her kin, proving definitively that pigs should be valued more than their weight in rashers. "Pigcasso is a normal pig in many ways," she said. "She loves to sleep, take mud baths and eat, but she also loves to paint and by doing that she can make people see pigs in a different way."

## They dumped us! Town's French twin runs off with a rival

**Simon de Bruxelles**

Neglect has killed as many relationships as infidelity so it may not be entirely surprising that Bovey Tracey finds itself on its own.

For 15 years the small town on the edge of Dartmoor had not even inquired how its French twin was doing.

The answer that came back when the question was asked recently was "très bien, merci, we are doing very nicely ... without you". It appears that Le Molay-Littry, in Normandy, has formed a new relationship and there is no room for its former twin in Devon.

Chris Robillard, a Bovey Tracey

councillor, had been given the job of reviving the dormant twinning association and renewing the relationship with its French counterparts.

He explained at a council meeting that when he sent a *billet-doux* to town officials in France he at first got quite a positive response. But then passions cooled and Le Molay-Littry admitted it had found a new twin.

Mr Robillard said: "We haven't had any official contact with them for many years and they have now gone and twinned with another town near Epping Forest. Some towns are twinned with more than one place. When I asked them if they would like to remain

twinning with us as well they said they couldn't afford it.

"They were initially positive about the idea of renewing our friendship when I made contact towards the end of last year. But in the meantime they have had a change in the local government, a new mayor and other officers and the new regime has decided to say au revoir."

Mr Robillard who has family connections with France said: "I'm very much for *l'entente cordiale* and had planned a twinning event in March as well as a possible cultural exchange and tennis visit, but now I'm not sure what we should do. It's sad to report really. We



Bovey Tracey in Devon will no longer put the flags out for its French twin

should keep close ties with our nearest neighbours, so we'll need to find a new twin town now."

George Gribble, another councillor, said: "I signed the charter along with the town mayor way back when. It was vibrant and popular for a long time. There was even a street called Rue Bovey Tracey in the twin town. We had many exchange trips and football events."

The end of the affair means that Bovey Tracey will have to remove the twinning notices at the entrances to the town. Then there is the problem of what to do with one of its main roads: Le Molay-Littry Way.