



*Dreaming bee 2*  
*The Honey Trap 2*  
*Sacred Honey 1*  
 6mm clear acrylic mount with archival metallic print  
 51 x 76cm 2011

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### TO bee or not to bee?

Everyone is talking about bees. Bees are the buzz at the moment. For those with an ear to the ground, a finger on the pulse and a sweet tooth, the beehive is the ideal community: intelligent, ethical and attuned to changes in the land and seasons. Honeybees get things done, not just because they are busy little house-proud individuals, but also and crucially because they are each one of a single-minded team. (i) As a swarm they communicate creatively, cohabit morally and solve problems that no one individual bee could solve alone. As a model of collective will and adaptation they are an inspiration to our own species, which by contrast is disunited, conflict-ridden and self-polluting.

Humans have shared a long history with the honeybee. For centuries men have cultivated beehives not only for their treasured stores of nectar, but also for the bee's trans-species services as pollinator of orchards and crops that are essential for human survival. Bees have their own herstory, too, for each hive is a strict hierarchy, with a queen at the hive's centre, infant princesses and infertile all-female workers who form the vast majority of the hive population. Freya Mathews points out that the worker bee, as pollinator of plants, is in a sense bi-sexual. The drones are small companions to the very large, idle males who eventually compete with one another to mate with the new queen-to-be, before the worker bees get rid of them.

The unique waggle dancing of individual worker bees is a sophisticated form of reporting precise information about the outside world to the hive. This complex communication has led philosophers to ponder whether bees "think" and are altruistic.



*Dreaming Honey 1*  
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Freya Mathews concludes that "The individual honeybee...seems unquestionably to be a distinct locus of mind –of cognition, conativity, agency, intention and communicativity –and hence to qualify as an individual in its own right." Furthermore evidence suggests, she claims, that the "superorganism," the hive, "indeed has a mind of its own."

While such knowledge and speculation about the honeybee informs Megan Evans's ongoing bee project, her fascination emerges from a uniquely aesthetic perspective. Hence her art is not simply a mixed media experiment that offers specimens and documentation of different aspects of individual bee's lives. Nor is it solely decoration around the theme of the honeybee. It is rather a series of affects, human experiences and imaginary scenarios that have evolved in response to the bee. Most importantly, Evans's art is an homage to collectivity, and a passionate bid for the survival of art as a force for change towards a sustainable future. After all there is a sting in the bee's tale of collective harmony, which hovers over the hive like an aerosol can poised to expel its toxic fumes. Bee populations around the world are diminishing at an alarming rate. The dreaded varroa mite is rampant in the Pacific region and threatens to cross Australian shores soon. The mysterious Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) is greater concern on the global scale. Worker bees are abandoning their fully functioning hives in droves, deserting their queens, eggs and larvae. This confounding malady has been attributed variously to GM crops, pesticides, climate change and stress caused by the corporate demands of industrialized production. It does not bode well for the survival of the honeybee, and is a frightening portent for humankind.

Helen McDonald, 2011

Dr Helen McDonald is an author, art historian and honorary fellow at the University of Melbourne.

i. Not all bee species are social. For an stimulating and informative article on the bee from a philosophical perspective see Freya Mathews's "Planet Beehive." Ibid, p.3.



*Grace 1, 2, 3 and 4*  
 Blown glass and honey  
 Dimensions variable

## Megan Evans THE BEE PROJECT