

COVER STORY

"It was the most exciting and meaningful creative experience I have ever had"

BY CATHERINE TARLETON
North Hawaii News

Waimea artist Calley O'Neill works with paintbrushes, pencils, palette knives other tools of her trade to create works like the striking Hawaiian murals, "Keanakakoi" and "E Mau Na Waiwai O Hawaii," at the Kings' Shops.

She also works with an elephant.

No, really. In fact, O'Neill has just returned from

London where two of their collaborative "inter-species" paintings were finalists in the 2009 Wildlife Artist of the Year (WAY) competition, founded by 25-year veteran wildlife artist and activist David Shepherd, CBE. Although not among the top winners, "Farewell Beloved" and "The Right to Exist," featuring a tiger and giraffe respectively, were evaluated by a panel of international artists and art critics, including Shepherd himself, alongside human

artists' work, without the judges' knowledge.

"He was in a major wildlife art competition — and he's wildlife!" said O'Neill. "I think that's outrageous — the coolest thing ever."

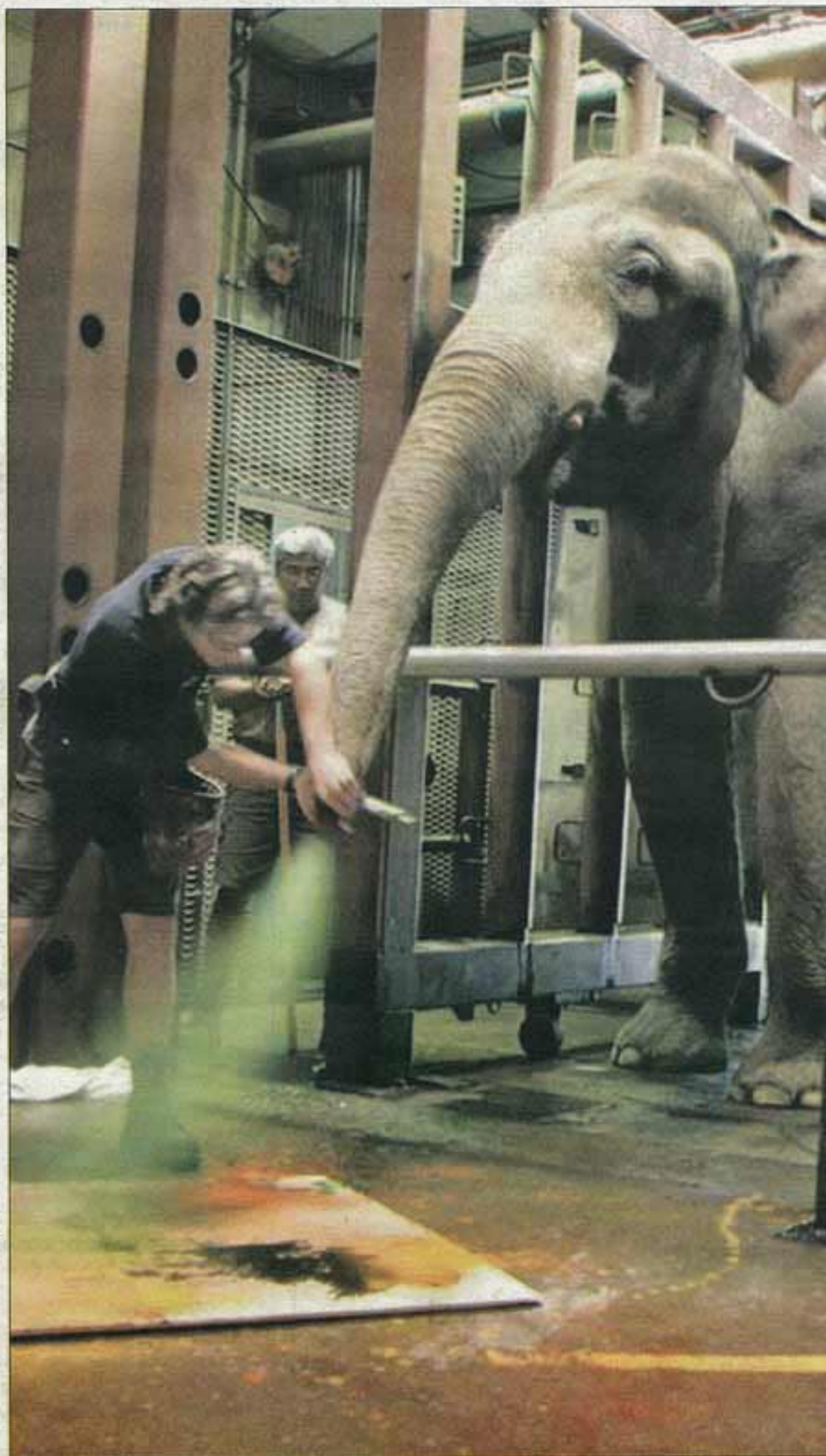
Rama is a 9,000 pound Asian bull elephant who lives and works at the Oregon Zoo. O'Neill is a 28-year Hawaii resident, artist, mom and yoga teacher. Rama uses paintbrush or "airbrush" techniques with his trunk to lay down a colorful backdrop; O'Neill details figures in the foreground, adds intricate borders. Their work focuses entirely on the world's endangered species, a lifetime passion of O'Neill.

The collaboration began serendipitously three years ago, when O'Neill was vacationing in the Northwest with daughter Liana and son Noa. On their last day before the flight home, O'Neill had an urge to visit the zoo. They were in the right place at the right time for Rama's weekly painting demonstration, and O'Neill was captivated.

"I immediately told Noa 'I have to work with him, and I could take his work out to the world,'" she said. "After the show I heard myself offer an on-the-spot proposal to Jeb (Barsh, Rama's keeper). I wanted to create this collaborative touring exhibition to help build a life support system for endangered species."

O'Neill holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, summa cum laude from Pratt Institute in New York. A prolific artist and muralist, her works grace public spaces such as the Campus Center at University of Hawaii at Manoa, The Lodge at Koele, Hawaii Maritime Center, the Kings' Shops, Annunciation Church (stained glass) and many others. She also has a Masters Degree in social ecology from Goddard College in Vermont.

"Bio-agriculture is my realm," she said. "This (working with Rama) was 'full circle' for me, as in my



Rama and his trainer at work.



Artist Calley O'Neill in her Waimea studio.

From the cover.....

The left photo is of the work done by Rama the elephant while the piece on the right is the finished product painted by artist Calley O'Neill.

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