

2020 ADELAIDE BIENNIAL OF AUSTRALIAN ART

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# MONSTER THEATRES

Mike Bianco

Biology | Environment

AGSA

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# Mike Bianco

## Biology | Environment

Mike Bianco was born in San Francisco, in 1981, and currently lives and works in Perth, Western Australia. His works of art frequently combine his many roles as artist, curator, researcher, activist, cook and beekeeper. He is deeply fascinated by ecology and sustainability, with a practice that spans sculpture, installation, and interactive or collaborative performances. Bianco's installations tend to engage audiences one-on-one and prompts them to think about their place within nature.

Although Bianco is concerned by global issues of climate crisis, he is not interested in using doom or fear to scare people into change. Rather, his tender performances and minimal installations offer radically new ways to think about inter-species dependency – our relationships to the plants and animals we live amongst. His works propose solutions and innovative methods for communing with the ecological systems we depend upon.



Mike Bianco with his beehive; photo: Emily Brink.

## ***Anthrocomb* (2019-20)**

*Anthrocomb* (2019-20) is a pavilion situated in the heart of the Adelaide Botanic Garden. The title of the work is a *portmanteau* – an invented term that blends the meaning of two words. In this instance, *Anthropos* is Greek for human and *comb* is the shortened form of 'honeycomb'. Bianco's portmanteau suggests a union between humans and bees.

Inside the *Anthrocomb* pavilion Bianco has created a bee bed and invites you to rest with the bees. Bianco was inspired by a Ukrainian folk tradition in which beekeepers slept atop their hives in belief of its remedial effects. The practice was considered to cure many different illnesses – insomnia, sinusitis, rheumatism – as well as improve one's general well-being. In the case of *Anthrocomb*, however, we are given the opportunity to lie down, close our eyes and simply be present in the company of another species. The scent, warmth, sounds and vibrations of more than 50,000 bees buzzing below help us reflect upon a species beyond our own.



Bees in Mike Bianco's hive, 2019

## ***Anthrocomb* (2019-20)**

The physical experience of *Anthrocomb* is bolstered by its setting. The Botanic Gardens are dedicated to the collection, cultivation and preservation of a wide variety of plants. They are a location for both leisure and scientific study. The history of plants useful to humans is demonstrated in the Adelaide Botanic Gardens' own Santos Museum of Economic Botany. The meaning of Bianco's *Anthrocomb* is reinforced by the gardens; the pavilion and the museum are united in their twin purpose of instruction and curiosity. As an intimate encounter between humans and honeybees, *Anthrocomb* helps us value and think differently about the non-human world.



performance still: Mike Bianco, United States of America, born 1981, Bee bed, 2016, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Perth; © Mike Bianco.

# Early Years and Primary

## Biology | Environment

### Responding

Describe the sensations of lying in the bee bed. How did it sound? What did it smell like? If you did not get a chance to experience the bee bed sit or lay quietly outside for 10 minutes, you may like to close your eyes to heighten your other sensations. What sounds did you hear? What did this feel like? What could you smell? Write a reflection about this experience.

Bianco is interested in Apiology (the study of honey bees). Conduct a bees investigation. What is pollen? What are the different species of bees? What is their ideal habitat? Why are bees such an important part of our ecosystem? If native bees became extinct, how would this impact the environment where you live?

Native bees play an important role in the environment, helping to pollinate our plants. Investigate what a bee-friendly garden consists of including the types of plants that will attract and support bees. Create a fun fact flyer to provide to members of your community about how people can create a 'bee restaurant', encouraging bees to visit their gardens.

### Making

Many local councils are building bee hotels to encourage native bees to feel welcome. As a class make your own bee hotel to be placed in the school grounds. Research how to maintain your bee hotel and devise a plan for the ongoing upkeep of it.

Inter-species solidarity is important to Bianco. Is there another species or perhaps an environment that you feel a strong connection to? Create a work of art that celebrates this relationship.

Research plants and flowers that attract bees. Collect a variety of images to use as reference, or perhaps these already exist in your garden. Create a series of drawings of these plant and flowers as a tribute to the Australian native bee.

# Secondary

## Biology | Environment

### Responding

Bianco is interested the use of bee products for medicine. In what way can bee products be used for medicinal purposes. What other native plants are used for medicine?

Australian native bees play an important role in pollinating our native plants and generally do not produce honey. Research human-induced environmental changes that have resulted in a steep decline in bees around the world which pose a threat to food production. What are some methods we can put in place to manage the environment to ensure bees can thrive?

*Athrocomb* is interactive and requires audience participation. Investigate other artists who have created interactive and participatory works of art. What are the benefits of interactivity? Write a response to the statement '*Art is no longer a spectator sport*'. **Tip:** Marina Abramović, Tania Bruguera, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Carsten Höller and Lee Mingwei,

### Making

Create a performative or interactive work of art that suggests the benefits of interacting with other species or highlights the importance of the natural world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century despite technological advancements.

Bianco is interested in a blend of art and science and is constantly thinking about how we engage with our world. Create a work of art in a medium of your choosing which highlights one aspect of the relationship between art and science.

Create a children's book with illustrations and a short narrative that will inform children about the importance of bees in our ecosystem. Communicate that bees are not dangerous. Suggest instead that we need to respect them like any other creature we share our planet with.



# Mike Bianco

## Resources

### Articles & Books

Bianco, M., Cooper, J., Fournier, M., Riley, B., “Protecting our Food Systems: Responding to Honey Bee Population Decline in Michigan”, *Michigan Journal of Public Affairs*, vol. 11, 2014,

<http://sustainability.umich.edu/media/files/dow/DOW-Global-Impact-Bee-Populationxx.pdf>

Miraudo, S. “Cyborgs, ecosexuals and a bed made of bees: inside Perth’s strangest art show”, *The Guardian*, 3 August 2016,

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/aug/03/cyborgs-ecosexuals-and-a-bed-made-of-bees-inside-perths-strangest-art-show>

Perpitch, N. “Art and science blurred in exploration of human relationships with other life forms”, *ABC News*, 25 October 2016, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-10-25/art-and-science-project-explores-relationship-between-people-an/7963574>

Salleh, A. “Bio-artists turn thrush into an artwork and create a rockstar in a petri dish”, *ABC News*, 13 August 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2019-08-13/bio-art-set-to-provoke-discussion-about-science/11370262>

Wilson, L. “Radical Ecologies”, *Artlink*, 26 August 2016, <https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/4520/radical-ecologies/>

### Websites

Mike Bianco, artist website,  
<http://www.biancoprojects.com/>

### Video

“Hivecubator at Science Gallery London”, *Vimeo*, published by Mike Bianco, 30 July 2019,  
<https://vimeo.com/350893981>

“Perth Artists S02E07a: Mike Bianco”, *YouTube*, published 15 May 2018,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mdljRIPaA>

“Radical Ecologies Artist Interview: Mike Bianco”, *YouTube*, published by PICA Perth, 28 July 2016,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QHebxkbkpQ>

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