

## DARWIN'S DREAM

### THE MAKING OF A MERCER ISLAND MURAL – RACHEL HOLLOWAY



I have worked as an artist for thirty years, as a painter, production designer and muralist. I studied art in the UK, culminating in a Masters Degree in Painting at The Slade School of Fine Art in London, and emigrated to Los Angeles in 1993 to work in the film industry. My early jobs included painting scenery, backdrops and creating artwork.



Collective Soul Music Video



Lexus Commercial Backdrops



I also designed sets for numerous A-list music videos and commercials. My jobs were always so varied - I could be building a set on a stage one week and making a parking lot look like a Mondrian painting the next. I have been lucky enough to travel all over the world making commercials and videos. I have always painted, renting my work to decorate sets for movie and television.

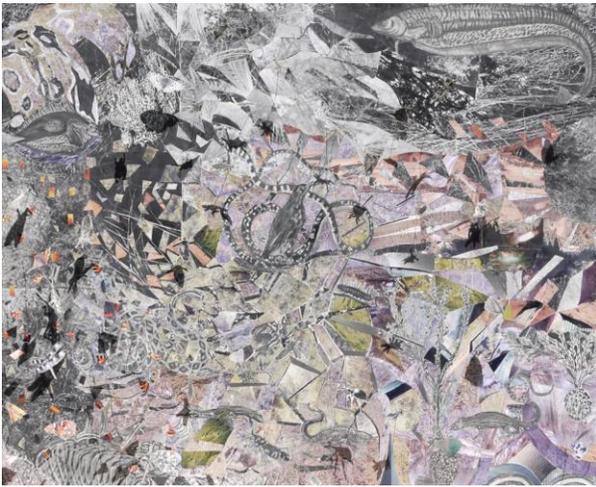


Set for Grandvia  
Commercial European  
Television



7 Up commercial

I moved to Seattle in 2011; I have been painting in my studio on Mercer Island and exhibiting in Seattle ever since. When the City announced a call for artists to submit proposals for a mural on West Mercer Way in the spring of 2016, it seemed like a perfect opportunity. I think the essence of living on this island is the tranquility; surrounded by the lake, we are cushioned from the hectic pace of life over the bridges. We have many unique habitats, so nature flourishes. I wanted to encapsulate this in the mural, as a sort of homage to the Pacific Northwest, and my life on Mercer Island. I drew inspiration from a painting that I made shortly before I moved here, titled *Darwin's Dream*. This was an exploration of fractal forms in nature, with insects, butterflies, fish and other organic forms. I simplified this work and expanded it to include the fish, frogs and birds, mapping the layout over a mock up of the wall ready for the submission.



*Darwin's Dream*, Drawing and Collage, 2011

The wall is 280 feet long and 14 feet high at its tallest point. It is in various thicknesses of poured concrete. The location, next to an I-90 ramp, has a great deal of traffic, and there is no water or electricity. I had to find various solutions for this location. First of all, I needed to spray paint the mural to work over the many ridges in the wall surface. Secondly, I needed to transfer the design onto the wall in a quick and easy manner because the road could not be closed for me to project the image at night, and I was only allowed restricted work times during the day. I created templates for each animal, bird and plant in the mural, projecting them onto acetate, and hand cutting them in my studio. These were quite large (some measured 17 feet long), so I assembled many of them in pieces. I mapped out the design with these templates, which curtailed the need to grid or project the design and saved a lot of time on-site. I used an industrial generator to power three air compressors and an extra air tank, which enabled me to bring on 2 assistants. I also used an industrial airless to prime and seal the concrete wall with an anti-graffiti clear coat that will protect the mural from UV rays and vandalism.



Rendering for mural

With all the equipment purchased and rented, I then realized that it would be physically impossible to transport everything that I needed everyday, so I had a storage pod installed near the wall to store the generator, scaffolding, paints and ladders. I finally enlisted my two talented artist friends on the island, to help me paint: Eliza Brown and Sophie Stilon. It was physically hard work with very high temperatures, but, with their help, it was a smooth experience.

I want to thank every person who cheered us on, from their passing cars to the notices on Next Door and Facebook supporting us, and all the people who left their recycling containers for me to mix batches of color in. I would like to thank Sherwin Williams in Factoria for their quality paint, help sourcing the best materials to protect the wall, and giving me their paint tints so I could hand mix my own colors on-site. I also want to thank Mercer Island Parks & Recreation for the job opportunity and assistance during this project: Sarah Bluvás, Diane Mortenson, Kai Fulginiti, An Tootil, Ken Brooks, the members of the Mercer Island Arts Council and artists selection panel. My deep gratitude to Sophie and Eliza for painting this with me; their talent, hard work, enthusiasm and ability to make me laugh bolstered me throughout the job.



Working shots from the mural

