

Paper rhinos

The idea was simple, the execution extraordinary. Save the Rhino, an organisation better known for its feats of derring-do, was to hold an art exhibition. We began by writing to around 50 unsuspecting artists, friends who'd been known to dabble at weekends, and family members we thought could be coerced into loyal support.

The approach letter read: "By way of a challenge, we're asking artists to contribute a work on paper, inspired by the theme - unsurprisingly enough - 'Rhinos'. The interpretation is entirely up to you."

We were amazed by the response. Total strangers rang up, saying they'd heard



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Examples of illustrations still for sale:

1. George Tsatsos
2. Mark Hankinson
3. Nadja Broadbent
4. Harriet Bane
5. Andy Beck
6. Terri Winding
7. Luis Morris
8. Marcus May
9. Ecko
10. Carol Robertson
11. Trevor Sutton
12. Colin Keane

about the exhibition and please could they send us a picture. The rhino network extends far and wide: Dominique Salm, a professional artist, heard about us while on safari in Tanzania from lodge manager Jimmy Greenwood, who'd been on our Rhino Climb Kilimanjaro in 2001. Laura, who runs the Space Gallery - the venue for our exhibition - asked if we'd like her mother to do a picture for us. Not having the faintest idea who her mother was, we said yes please, and then were astonished when a rather beautiful watercolour arrived, signed "Camilla Parker Bowles". Rhinos move in mysterious ways.

Opening the post each morning was a delight. Another joy was finding out why artists had wanted to do a picture for us. Nadja Broadbent, who contributed six pictures, was charged by a rhino on the first day of her honeymoon, and ever since has created visionary works including text and image, rhinos, unicorns and the Virgin Mother. Carol Robertson, who exhibits at Flowers East, said:

"I paint abstract formations of circles and stripes. I'm not known for my wildlife studies, let alone of the rhino. So it was a great surprise when Save the Rhino invited me to contribute to the exhibition but I really enjoyed the challenge. I once came very close to being turned over in a car by a black rhino in the Tsavo National Park in Kenya. Believe me, I got a close-up of those amazing horns. Then it came to me: I'd make a concentric formation of rhino horns. It's never that simple though, particularly as each of the five species of rhino has a different type of horn!"

In the end, over 130 artists sent us works in pastel, pencil, pen and ink, oil, gouache, collage and papier-maché. Hanging Day was rather less traumatic than we had imagined. We hung all the works, identically framed, in a grid on every flat surface available at Space Gallery, ready for the Private View on 10 December.

It was great. Lots of happy shoppers and lots of pleased artists. The GSCE art class from Ravensbourne School in Bromley came the following afternoon to see their works mounted and framed; five of them had been red-dotted. After costs, we made about £4,000 profit, an excellent result. Not all the works sold, so if one of your walls has a rhino-sized gap, please log onto our website for your own Private View.

Thank you to all the artists who so generously contributed works, to everyone who bought a picture, and to the Space Gallery for allowing us to take over the venue for a week.

Cathy Dean