

# Emma's talent is hard to hide

An unusual artist will be showcasing her talent at Henley Festival this summer. **Caroline Cook** found out more

**O**N FIRST glance the canvas on the wall shows a bird of prey, staring out from an intricate wallpaper background.

But look a little closer and you'll notice the eyelashes on the model standing serenely behind.

The captivating wall hangings are the work of Australian skin artist Emma Hack who spends between eight and 15 hours painting her models into their background.

"You look at it and see the bird straight away and then you realise it's standing on something and it's a person's arm," she says, speaking to *Times Leisure* from Australia.

"They are quite beautiful to have on your wall and you see all these small idiosyncrasies in the work."

Emma, who will be bringing her enchanting artwork to Henley Festival this summer, first became involved in skin art after face painting children when she was at school.

"I was doing some make-up artistry and my teacher saw my talent and said why don't you start painting down the



Henley Festival visitors will be able to see Emma Hack at work on her extraordinary pieces of art

body. I was always interested in fashion and thought I would start painting clothing. It evolved from there," she says.

Her earlier work, like 2004's Cabaret Collection featured nude models painted into their clothes but her art has evolved to become more illusionary with the Birds of Prey Collection in 2011 and her latest, Mirrored Whispers.

"There are some things I don't realise when I'm painting because I'm trying to do it quickly," says Emma. "When I hang it on my wall I just fall

in love with them because of the little things happening in them that I didn't realise."

For each of her pieces Emma paints her models' bodies, an art that requires them to stand still, sometimes painfully still, for hours on end. "The longest was the first one of the wallpapers, and that took 19 hours," she says with her friendly Aussie twang. "My models that I use are regulars that I have worked with before so they are kind of used to it and they know there's going to be a lot of pain involved and standing still."

"But once you get on a roll it can go quite quickly. A lot of them will push through even when I know they're feeling a lot of pain. And being able to get that picture at the end, it's the most important bit for them to look peaceful and that's the hard thing. They are amazing people because I

don't know if I could stand still for that long."

One of Emma's models was singer Wouter 'Wally' De Backer, better known as singer/songwriter Gotye who stayed at the top of the UK charts for six weeks with single Somebody That I Used to Know.

In the video Gotye and singer Kimbra are painted in a series of patterns which evolve through animation.

"The director Natasha Pincus said she had this idea and I said I had been wanting to do that myself for ages," explains Emma.

"She sent me Wally's music and I loved it. I loved the song and I love his voice, he had an album of songs and he was quite popular here. His voice is piercing and I thought I would really like to work with this guy."

"He's a sweetheart, very easy to work with. When you work with well known people it can be difficult but he was very giving and let us do what we

needed." The Gotye video took 23 hours to film as Emma had to paint various body parts, let the animators film them, and then start again with the next design.

And visitors to Henley Festival, this July will be able to watch Emma at work with live skin painting demonstrations running during the festival.

"It will be my first time in Henley. I think it will be fun," says Emma. "My husband is English so we have been back for holidays and to see his family and I was over there last year."

"The English public love what I do, it's really fantastic. The way they embrace what we do is beautiful. I cannot wait to go back over there."

■ Henley Festival runs from Wednesday, July 4, to Sunday, July 8. Other performers include Sting, Lulu, Ollie Murs and Katherine Jenkins. For more information visit [www.henley-festival.co.uk](http://www.henley-festival.co.uk).

## CIRCUSCENE

# Maybe I'll just stick with the day job!

Jugglers, stilt walkers and plate spinners will be entertaining the crowds at the Wokingham Diamond Jubilee party next month. **Becky Barnes** ran away to join the circus for a day

**T**HE principle that practice makes perfect was certainly true when I went along to meet Circus Scene.

Unless you are blessed with good co-ordination, balance and flexibility – which I am not – you're not going to be walking the tightrope within half an hour. But that's a good thing, right?

Otherwise all the talented people performing in circuses and shows around the world would be out of business. However, despite my lack of circus flare, I decided to give it a go.

Finding the Circus Scene van at the Wokingham Town Council family fun day was easy, as 17-year-old performer Jonathan Stevens was trotting about casually on a pair of stilts.

It was raining – not ideal conditions for learning to juggle – but that wasn't going to stop us.

First up was plate spinning. Cathy Valentine, who runs Circus Scene, was on hand to show everyone the ropes (thankfully not the high wire) and to demonstrate how to get that plate

spinning around. It was just as well there was no china crockery on hand as it took a good few goes to get my plate to stay on the stick.

After managing to spin the plate a few times I was probably the best novice plate spinner in the field, brushing over the fact that my competitors were all under five years old.

Next up was the juggling. Two balls were fine but it was a struggle to get further than three, despite Cathy and Jonathan being very patient and very helpful teachers.

Apparently, the technique is all about throwing the ball into imaginary corners above your hands and getting into the rhythm.

Hula-hooping was also on offer, and a lot of the youngsters proved to be very good at this indeed.

I wasn't great but I'd be keen to master the skill as a keep-fit play – just maybe not outside where anyone can see me.

The young people who perform with Circus Scene are examples of how practice makes perfect, and many of them have been learning from a very young age.

They will be dazzling Diamond Jubilee party-goers in Wokingham on Sunday, June 3, providing a colourful spectacle while people tuck into their lunch underneath the bunting.

■ For more information on Circus Scene visit [www.circus-scene.co.uk](http://www.circus-scene.co.uk).



Becky tries her hand at plate spinning with the help of circus maestro Jonathan Stevens