



Artist Yvonne Levenston with some of her wildlife artworks.

# Fight for survival gets an artistic helping hand

DANNY GOCS

ARTIST Yvonne Levenston's passion for the plight of gorillas and orangutans in the face of growing threats to their environment has become a central focus of her art.

About 30 of her latest works featuring the animals will be on display at the Art Melbourne 2010 exhibition, which opens next week at the Royal Exhibition Building in Melbourne's north. Sydney-based Levenston is one of four artists attending the exhibition on behalf of the May Street Studios in St Peters.

"Environmental issues are important to me. I'm conscious of the fact that I want to leave a world for my children and grandchildren where these animals live and breathe," she said.

Levenston said her family background plays an important part in her art.

"My mum left Berlin with her parents in 1938 – a year before Kristallnacht. I am very conscious of the fact that I might not have been here except for the decisions of my grandparents and the courage to make those decisions," she said.

"Gorillas and chimpanzees are about evolution and also about loss, so in a way I am coming full circle in my art."

Levenston said her large paintings

focus primarily on the faces of the animals – the result of considerable research including many hours at the Taronga and Melbourne zoos viewing the orangutans and gorillas in their sanctuaries and behind the scenes.

"I would spend all day at the zoo and make sketches and take photos, and go behind the scenes and talk to the caretakers."

Levenston has also been involved with the Jane Goodall Institute's conservation projects for gorillas and orangutans, which helps raise awareness of the plight of the animals, especially the loss of their habitats by the deforestation work in Malaysia and Indonesia for palm oil production, which costs the lives of up to 50 orangutans each week.

"I want to make people aware of the problem facing these animals. Next year, I hope to visit Borneo and see the orangutans in the wild. I'd like to visit places where there are endangered species and to do work to help them."

The artist said her interest in painting began in earnest five years ago, after many years working in the recruitment industry.

"I attended a week-long art course and felt that was where my passion lay and decided to follow my dream," she said.

Levenston graduated from the

Sydney Gallery School last year with a printmaking major, and was a finalist in the 2009 Marrickville Contemporary Awards exhibition.

It has been a busy month for the artist, with her works appearing in four exhibitions – earlier this month she had work on display at the Royal Sydney Easter Show, and after Art Melbourne 2010 she will exhibit at the Sydney Balmain Watchhouse and be part of the graduation exhibition at the Sydney Gallery School.

She has also curated exhibitions at The Great Synagogue, where her husband Simon sings in the choir.

The Art Melbourne 2010 exhibition is at the Royal Exhibition Building, Carlton, from April 22-25. Enquiries: [www.artmelbourne10.com.au](http://www.artmelbourne10.com.au).

## Fun of the fair

THE Art Melbourne 2010 exhibition showcases the art of hundreds of artists from around Australia and overseas, with many of the artists on hand to discuss their works.

The fair offers the chance for first-time buyers and seasoned collectors to seek out new artists and browse through thousands of artworks.

Events include free art walks with experts, activities for kids and Off The Wall, which focuses on budding artists.