



Press Release

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Henry the Polar Picasso

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Just like people, animals do better when they have interesting hobbies. Polar Bears specifically look forward to new and challenging experiences, so when Henry, the nearly 3-year-old polar bear from Australia had the opportunity to paint at the Cochrane Polar Bear Habitat in Northern Ontario, he was curious and creative.

As the only facility in the world dedicated solely to polar bears, the Cochrane Polar Bear Habitat Bear Keepers are constantly creating interesting things for the bears to do. Although the Habitat's other resident, 6 year-old Ganuk has already painted, the chance to squish paint between his polar paw claws was novel to Henry.

"Henry's first time painting was very enriching for him. He seemed to enjoy the new smell and feel of paint on his paws. At first he wasn't sure if he should eat it or walk through it, but he got the hang of it quickly. We will continue to use this as a regular enrichment activity for Henry in the future," said Conservation Co-ordinator Dylan McCart.

There are many zoos in the world that create art by placing the animal's paw in paint, then pressing art paper to the paw while the animal is anaesthetized. Very few get the animals to do it voluntarily. The Polar Bear Habitat learned the trade from one of our expert advisors, behaviourist JoAnne Simerson who originally tried it with polar bears in San Diego.

Henry's first painting muse was pig fat. Non-toxic paint was spread near the opening to the holding room, then art paper was placed in strategic locations, interspersed with Henry's treats. While one Bear Keeper opens the series of bear locks and gates, the other encourages Henry into the room. The trick always is to get the polar bear back outside before he *really* gets into his artwork (or perhaps isn't satisfied with it – we're not sure which), often deciding to tear and rip the pieces apart.

His first session was with red and blue paint for a reason. "As Henry was sent to us all the way from Australia, we thought it only fitting to use the colours of their flag in honour of his homeland," said Manager, Karen Cummings. "One of the very first 5 paintings was sent to Sea World, Australia in appreciation of their trust in us to care for this extremely precious gift."

Sea World Director of Marine Sciences, Trevor Long said it is great to see that Henry has settled into his new home. "It is wonderful to see Henry enjoying his new environments at the Cochrane Polar Bear Habitat. He has always been a playful bear and painting is an extremely enriching activity for him," Mr. Long said. "Henry appears to be a talented painter with his first session producing an array of artistic pieces which would make for a very unique souvenir."

Henry is now over 600 lbs. and his first real winter coat is giving him a very fluffy look. He's also becoming a true Canuck – now preferring moose meat to fish.

The first 4 of Henry's original art pieces are available on the Habitat's online store at www.polarbearhabitat.ca and priced between \$250.00 and \$300.00, plus tax and shipping. All proceeds go straight to operating and maintaining the facility, including feeding and housing our polar bear guests.

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