

ON SHOW

Entertainment, television & the arts
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YOUTHFUL VETERAN: Dolezel with her award-winning painting.

PICTURE / JULIA THORNE

No fear of No 13

By PAT BASKETT

For Auckland artist Jenny Dolezel, 13 is lucky: she's won the Royal Overseas League's 13th annual Open Exhibition award, bringing her total of awards, scholarships and grants to 13, and to 13 the number of overseas exhibitions she's participated in.

Not a bad tally for a 32-year-old whose career is little more than 10 years into the making. Her work, *Life Doesn't Frighten Me*, was selected from more than 400 submitted by artists aged under 36, from 21 Commonwealth countries.

"I just have to do it," she says. "I've been doing it since I was about two."

Dolezel had the highest marks in the country when she entered the Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland. She held her first solo exhibition as a second-year student because, she says, she wanted to know how people reacted to her work.

Encouraged, she set about finding opportunities to exhibit overseas and now the list of countries where her paintings and prints have been shown reads like a traveller's dream: Chile, Yugoslavia, Tokyo, Belgium, Poland, Germany, the Ukraine. In 1993 she was artist-in-residence at the Fresno Art Museum in California where her stay ended in a sellout exhibition.

Venues in New Zealand weren't neglected, however; in some years she participated in as many as four shows around the country.

Finding the time to paint among all this means being businesslike and disciplined, Dolezel says. When she's not

painting she's writing letters and organising exhibitions.

"You have to be very professional. It's a very competitive world out there."

And while she's attending to the business side, always in the back of her mind, lurks a painting.

"When I've done all the mental preparation, then I just go for it. I tend to work quite manically, for long periods of time."

This means all night, if necessary, rather than for regular hours every day.

Her cheerful optimism masks the driving force behind her passion and her feverish activity. As an artist she feels she has something to say.

"It's almost like you're a messenger," she says, serious now. "I have to share this vision."

The basic figure of her vision is familiar to visitors to the Aotea Centre from the mural she made for the foyer. It features the clown-like face with the conical nose which appears in nearly all her works. She describes it as symbolising the creature that lives inside everybody and her paintings as depicting the circus of life.

"The figure takes on a guise, or a disguise, and shows our vulnerability."

Dolezel has a commission to paint a 3m by 6m mural in a Sydney restaurant. She's excited at the technical challenge — the painting has to be embedded into the plaster wall which can be viewed from both sides.

"It will keep me living for a few months."

What's it like, I ask her, being a successful artist?

"It's the best thing in the world. It's terrific! It's such a buzz!"