

THE ARTS

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‘Stay true to your art’

Astoria-born-and-raised artist thrives in New Zealand art scene

By **HEATHER DOUGLAS**
FOR COAST WEEKEND

Bold, colorful, uplifting, fierce: Visual artist Mica Still’s artworks often feature bears, tigers, wolves and other animals that frequent her dreams. Known for her murals that have appeared all over the world, Still recently held a solo exhibition in New Zealand entitled “Hope Land” — the first solo show for the Astoria-born-and-raised artist in five years.

Though she’s now based in New Zealand, the Astoria-Megler Bridge brought Still’s family to Astoria in the first place. Her grandfather worked on the concrete pillars, while other family members worked in the mills and as fishermen.

Still notes, “My grandmother worked the ‘green belt’ at the plywood mill — in fact, she was the very first woman to work at the plant.”

Fairly recently, Still’s stepfather retired from over 30 years of working at Astoria Warehousing, and many Astorians might remember Paper Moon Scrapbooking, a shop run by Still’s mother and her business partner from 1998 to 2005.

At Astoria High School, Still found encouragement from her art teacher, Nancy Kem, especially during her last few years in school.

“I’ve always had good teachers that encouraged me,” Still says. “Mrs. Kem took me under her wing and pushed me to take art history at Clatsop Community College during my junior year; she also set up a meeting for me at the Pacific Northwest College of Art in Portland.”



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Astoria-born-and-raised artist Mica Still, who now lives in New Zealand, works on a mural in Auckland, New Zealand.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

A finished mural by Mica Still in Auckland, New Zealand, featuring her signature vibrant colors and dreamy animals.

Still graduated high school in 1993 and left for Portland the same year. In 1994, she began to attend Pacific Northwest College of Art.

When Still left Astoria — a place she characterized as “very depressed with very few outlets for a creative teen” — she described herself as a “kid in a candy store” when a drawing professor at PNCA encouraged her to attend a summer art program in France. In 1995, she found herself doing on-site sculpture

on the streets of Pont-Aven, and cold rainy Astoria seemed far away.

From France, she traveled to Scotland, where she met a boyfriend. She followed him to New Zealand in 1998 — but soon the boyfriend was an ex, and Still fell in love with the area’s vibrant art scene.

These days, Still is settled in New Zealand with her partner and young daughter enjoying a thriving art career.

She speaks fondly of her hometown. “I think we were



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Mica Still, born and raised in Astoria, is now a successful artist based in Wellington, New Zealand.



PHOTO BY HEATHER DOUGLAS

You might spot a moving mural by artist Mica Still in her hometown of Astoria — some of her wolves are painted on her uncle’s work truck, Scott Still’s Home Remodeling.

very lucky to grow up here,” she says wistfully.

Still has memories of her father, a commercial fisherman based in Oregon and Alaska leaving for months at a time.

“During the Cold War era, my father would come back

with amazing stories, like the time he was fishing near the Aleutian Islands and his boat drifted over the Russian border,” she recalls.

Still also notes how Astoria has changed during each of her biannual visits: “The first thing that happens when

places get popular is the prices climb and artists can’t live; it happened in Wellington — all the studios got priced out of the town. I think Astoria’s created something quite awesome with the evening

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