

# Conversātiō

## *In the company of bees*

ANNE NOBLE WITH ZARA STANHOPE AND ANNA BROWN



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New Plymouth, New Zealand

### RENOWNED PHOTOGRAPHER FOCUSES ON THE IMPORTANCE OF BEES

*Conversātiō* looks at the astounding practice of leading photographer Anne Noble, set against the issues of ecosystem collapse and climate change and examining what an artist can do in response. Its creative focus is on that most important insect, the European bee. Reminiscent of an artist book in its extensive visual content, its appeal is to a wide readership curious about art, ecology, science, literature and their intersections.

Through Noble's art and newly commissioned essays, the book traverses Noble's deep interest in how humans relate to bees. From images of communities of bees to tintype photographs showing the beauty of translucent bee wings, photograms from the wings of dead bees and a black and white series of electron microscope images, Noble's photographs present the hive life of bees in rich detail. Like the finest honey this book is a treasure.

### ABOUT THE EDITOR

**Dr Zara Stanhope** is Director of the Govett Brewster Gallery in New Plymouth. She is the former Curatorial Manager, Asian and Pacific Art at Queensland Art Gallery|Gallery of Modern Art, and the lead curator of the 10th Asia Pacific Triennial (APT) for 2021. She has been the Deputy Director at Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne; Director of Adam Art Gallery, Wellington; and Assistant Director, Monash University Gallery, Melbourne. She is an Adjunct Professor in the School of Art and Design at AUT University, Auckland, and at RMIT University, Melbourne. She has curated several major exhibitions and is a regular contributor to art magazines and journals.

### SALES POINTS

- The magnificent work of one of New Zealand's most renowned photographers
- Interest in bees and their critical role in ecosystems is on the rise
- Beautifully designed and packaged
- Bonus postcard and poster

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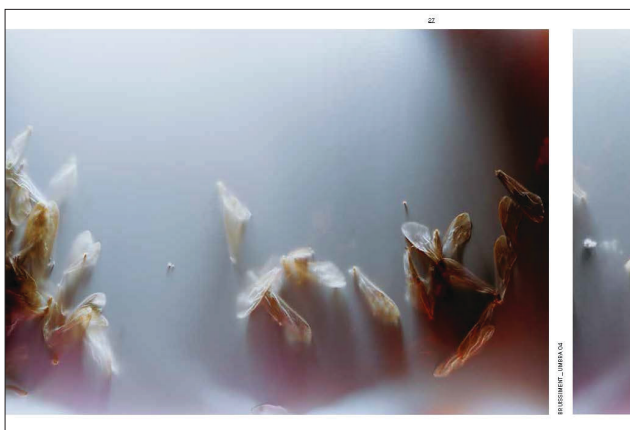
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Anna, you and I started talking about trees in your practice five years ago and we're still going! One of the many things that your ongoing project has inspired me in that there is more that we don't know about the subject of the hierarchy than what we do – raising lots of questions about our appreciation and understanding of the natural world scientifically and artistically. While being in our world, the world of the bee is not ours. I suggest part of your fascination with bees is that you are ever curious and then striving to close that in as a living system.

Can you tell me about how you developed your personal

*Anna, you and I started talking about bees in your practice five years ago and we're still going. One of the many things that your ongoing project has inspired me is that there is more that we don't know about the subject of the honeybee than what we do — raising lots of questions about our appreciation and understanding of the natural world scientifically and culturally. While being in our world, the world of the bee is not ours. I suggest part of your fascination with bees is that you are ever curious: always delving as closer to them as a living system.*

About 10 years ago I first killed a hive at the bottom of our garden, as many of our fruit trees were flowering but not setting fruit. To look after bees requires slowing down and learning through observation how the hive functions. Opening the hive with a friend who had once been a professional beekeeper, finding the queen and discovering the workings of the hive — its complexity and the beauty of bees both individually and collectively — was magic.

I often went out in the evenings to spend time watching the bees flying home. As the sun went down the low-angle light would catch the bees' wings, flashes of light coming and going. Over time, out of a kind of reverse, I began to see the world differently — as a complex inter-connected network of relationships that a colony of bees makes relatively visible.

Learning about bees and the hive became a passion. Bees are completely independent of you. They are *not* yours. Yet you have a *sense* of responsibility for the quality of their lives, their larger environment and the life you created for them. Is there a viable queen? How well is the colony? Is that the sound of a healthy hive? Are the bees fat and healthy or are the young bees struggling? Is there a flash of early-morning light hitting the hive to make the most of their day?

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## Mandym V. Srinivasan



Maryam Sirinwan speaking about  
Conservation at the Shumeng and Art Center

<sup>1</sup>Why am I awestruck by honeybees?

Why am I awestruck by honeybees? Let me answer. A forager honeybee sets out from her hive, typically performs a meaning-seeking search for food over a distance of up to 10 kilometers, and returns to her hive with a load of nectar and then literally makes a "bee line" back home. Upon returning, she regurgitates her bounty to her collector nestmates, who store the nectar in cells of the honeycomb. The returned forager then performs a specially choreographed dance to inform her nestmates about the location of her food source in terms of its distance and direction, so that they can also fly there to bring nectar back to the hive. Clearly, these creatures possess visual, navigational and cognitive capacities as par excellence, despite possessing a tiny brain that weighs about as much as a grain of sand. How many reactions then, runs down the list that makes honeybees tick – and tick so well?

This essay offers insights into honeybeeflight and associated questions through my research. In the first part, I describe how bees use their vision to guide and control their flight, as well as their navigation. The second part narrates how some of the principles gleaned from these studies are being used to develop biologically inspired strategies and algorithms for the guidance of autonomous aircraft. The third part explores the questions: how 'smart' are bees? What is the basis of their perception and cognition? Are bees conscious? The fourth part moves beyond individual honeybees, to explore the collective intelligence of the colony as a whole. In the fifth part, I recount my role (which was minor), and my experiences (which were very rewarding) participating in Arina Nolden's beekeeping project *Conversations in Britland* in 2008–9.