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# MailOnline

## That's one way to burn a living: The artist who creates amazing pictures using SMOKE

By [Nick Enoch](#)

**UPDATED:** 17:10 EST, 26 January 2012

At first glance, these works look like standard charcoal-smudged paintings.

That's close, but no cigar - because they have, in fact, been created by smoke.

The amazing pictures were created by Rob Tarbell, who achieved the effect by burning everyday objects, such as photos and credit cards, and then capturing the smoke on paper attached to the ceiling.



**Elephant and Swami Noah: One of Rob Tarbell's haunting images created using smoke. The yellow tinge shows where the paper has been slightly burned**



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**Swami Noah with Zebra: Rob has been using smoke as an artform since 2007**

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**Elephant Trick (2 Balls):** The smoke is created by burning everyday objects such as photos and credit cards

When Rob decided to try to control smoke - an idea he first toyed with in 2007 - he realised he needed to channel



it, while still letting it do what it did naturally.

To him, this sounded like animal training - and for that reason, he created images such as dancing horses and zebras.

And in the series, called Smoke Rings, the performing animals - taken out of their natural habitat and trained to jump through hoops or balance on platforms - appear almost ghost-like, their wildness tamed.

'The performing animal images in the Smokes parallel the drawing process,' Tarbell said on his website.



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**Flying Alinga Jump: In trying to control the smoke and yet let it do what it naturally does led to Rob using performing animals in his imagery**



**Anna Alinga Backbend on Zebra: The images are taken from a series called Smoke Rings**





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**Flying Alinga Balance:** On his website, Rob says: 'The trainer must recognise and respect the innate nature of an animal when trying to modify its behaviour to achieve a desired outcome... The same is true in working with smoke'

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'The trainer must recognise and respect the innate nature of an animal when trying to modify its behaviour to



achieve a desired outcome: e.g. training a bear to dance or training a horse to walk upright.

'The same is true in working with smoke.

'The inherent properties of smoke must be respected, then permitted to - and yet discouraged from - acting naturally.'



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**Anna Karma Fala on Elephant: Rob also says: 'The inherent properties of smoke must be respected, then permitted to - and yet discouraged from - acting naturally'**

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**Danger, man at work: Rob wears fire-retardant clothing while he creates his images**

Given the dangers of creating his work, Rob wears fire-retardant clothing, with a carbon filter unit and fresh air system with full facial mask.

He originally set up his studio in a metal garage.

More recently, he had a special room built adjacent to his house to keep all his artistic endeavours isolated.

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Smokoshop!

- [Leg-iron](#) , Aberdeen, Scotland, 27/1/2012 20:33

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Impressive stuff, bet he has a stiff neck though.

- [Stevo](#) , Rotherham, 27/1/2012 13:15

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Yeah, I like those.

- [Bond, Dave Bond](#) , Basildon, 27/1/2012 12:59

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It reminds me of the pictures you see in flames on a fire...

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How beautiful!

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Ethereal art

- [Rob](#) , Bristol, 27/1/2012 10:17

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what an innovative man!

- [ww](#) , eee, 27/1/2012 08:34

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Very unusual, and much better than the tripe that passes for art in many galleries these days.

- [Alice](#) , Oxfordshire, 26/1/2012 22:53

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Published by Associated Newspapers Ltd

Part of the Daily Mail, The Mail on Sunday & Metro Media Group

