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An Oxygen Mask And A Burning Credit Card: Rob Tarbell's Amazing 'Smoke Art' Technique



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Stood in a face mask and fire-proof overalls, Rob Tarbell burns a series of everyday items – credit cards, sometimes, or photographs – and watches the smoke snake upwards.

Anyone watching him might be tempted to call the fire service, unless they were to glance up and see what he's really doing –creating his latest batch of 'smoke art'.

By skilfully manipulating the flow as it rises, Tarbell 'draws' images onto hanging pieces of paper.

The results are these vivid portrayals of circus animals, a series he calls *Smoke Rings*.

Animals are an ideal subject for this unusual technique as the wispy 'brush strokes' of the smoke are perfect for creating a sense of energy and movement.

At the same time, Tarbell claims *Smoke Rings* is all about control.

["The performing animal images in the *Smoke Rings* parallel the drawing process."](#) Tarbell explains on his website.

"The trainer must recognise and respect the innate nature of an animal when trying to modify its behaviour to achieve a desired outcome: eg 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."

Tarbell lives in Virginia, America and has exhibited and sold work both nationally and internationally. He also donated part of the proceeds from showing *Smoke Rings* to animal welfare charities.

See the pictures below: