



# Rolling in the deep

Like standing at the foot of a mountain, Auckland artist Grace Wright's twisting, turning paintings make you feel grounded yet draw you right in.

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Lately, artist Grace Wright has been interested in painting as kind of a spiritual experience, and her large-scale works certainly do urge you to expand your mind a bit. They're a continuation of an ever-developing style that began to emerge in her fourth year at Elam School of Fine Arts, when she says she let go of using images of the body and instead began to paint "a sense of bodiliness".

Auckland-based Grace says that for her, painting is about creating a meaningful and physical experience in the digital age. "I've been working at a larger scale so that the audience can stand in front of a painting equal to or bigger than the size of their body that draws them in and at the same time returns them to a state of being present and engaged in the now."

**Grace, we love your colour combos – what attracts you to this palette?**

Creating contrasts in my work helps convey a sense of dynamic force within the picture plane. They make it twist and pull, and surge in and out. I use bright, crystal-clear jewel tones and offset this clarity with dirty, 'ugly' colours. I also create contrasts by painting some colours in gloss and others in matte.

**How do your works come to life?**

I start by hand-stretching the canvas, and then build the grounds in curving shapes with gesso [a surface primer]. This creates a contrast in the way the colour acts when it's painted over top, either sucking into the raw canvas or gliding over the gesso. I never know what the final painting will look like because each gesture or block of colour I add is informed by the layer beneath it. In this way, each work has its own character, because it references itself.

**Last year, you were selected for Hawke's Bay gallery Parlour Projects' first residency, for which you created**



**an 11 x 6m work. Now you're set to exhibit with them as part of the Auckland Art Fair in May – what will you be showing?** I'm excited to be exhibiting a new series of paintings measuring 1.2 x 1.5m. In these works, I'll continue developing the concept of artificial space within the picture plane and using contrasting colours, lines and curves to create the sensation of falling into the painted surface.

**Outside of art, what inspires you?**

I've recently returned to contemporary dance, and being able to express myself through movement and music is having a positive effect on my work. Real moments of transcendence are inspiring for me and I often find them in music – like being at a gig and hearing a certain sequence of chords that elevates your soul. ♣ [gracewright.net](http://gracewright.net); [artfair.co.nz](http://artfair.co.nz)



**SQUIGGLE TOPS** A typical day in the studio for Grace, who's also studying part-time towards a Master of Fine Arts, sees her arrive early and work solidly all morning, music on, stopping only for a coffee. "I'm a morning person, so I try to arrange my day so that I paint when I'm fresh, then stretch canvas and gesso in the afternoon," she says. "Time spent in my studio is a really physical experience for me and I love the labour of it." The playful nature of Grace's artworks is reflected in the names she gives them, including *Sweet Sixteen* (above), *Much Ado About Something* (top right), *Hearing Damage* (opposite, top, left) and *Head Over Heels* (opposite, top, right).

