

Save our Seas

(enameled wall panel 60 x 90 cms - no longer available)



I made this panel in 1994 at Burnham Signs, a factory near London, Great Britain. I had never worked at an industrial enamelling plant before so I felt very fortunate at being given the opportunity to use their facilities and especially their large industrial kiln.

Save our Seas more or less 'happened by accident'. I usually made abstract works and in this case I had set out to make an abstract rendering of the sea, to fit in with a series in various techniques on the subject of pollution.

However, when I arrived at the factory, the steel panel I had ordered and which had been made and put aside for me to await my arrival, could not be found. I had been looking forward to starting on this enamelling session so I felt quite dismal when I was told that the panel seemed to be lost. The manager, trying to find a quick solution to this problem for which he felt responsible, offered me another panel of the same size. It had been made to serve another purpose, but he assured me that it could be used on the reverse side as this had been covered with a special background enamel on which I might continue working. I gladly accepted his offer and set to work, not knowing that a production number had been roughly inscribed in the top left corner of the panel. It did not stand out in the rough, blackish-grey and unfired background enamel and I did not notice it.

I started by spraying the panel with a black enamel. I live close to the sea-side village of Scheveningen and I am familiar with the ripples in the sand when it is low tide. I tried to reproduce this rippling effect by holding the spraying can very close to the panel, and by using more water than is customary in enamelling. This worked wonderfully well. However, when the panel had been fired the production number in the top left corner had now become clearly visible: it seemed to grin at me as if to say: 'Here I am and here I will stay.' So I took out my glass brush and set to work, trying to remove the offensive

number, but to little avail. I then tried to fill the deep grooves in the enamel with a black paste. When I thought that the number was no longer visible, I put on a second layer of enamel: a bluish tint which I had made out of several colours blue and green. This time I used a 'side-spray' , holding the spraying can very low (almost level with the panel) in order to make the 'waves' in the black 'take' the watery bluish green on one side only, thus making the waves stand out. As the panel was waiting for its firing at the side of the huge kiln, it looked beautiful... Alas, when it had been fired, there it was again: though it had taken on the colours I had just applied, the production number was as clearly visible as before!

I realised that more filing and filling up would destroy the wavy pattern in the top left corner and I concluded that I would have to out-smart the rascal which seemed set on polluting my sea. I said to myself: 'If I cannot get you to go, let me use you to my own advantage', and I thought up a strange little animal, (something a bit like a water flea...) to devour it. I put this right over the number, using a self-made stencil for creating the shape of the 'water flea', and enamel of a 'sandy' cream colour. The details were made in the sgraffito technique. When this was done, it looked very much alive to me but so very lonely... I felt it needed some friends, and I called up my fantasy to create these, giving each of them their own spot in my sea. When the panel had been fired, the offensive number was no longer visible. The sea creatures, however, looked a bit forlorn in their dark surroundings so, once again using a side-spray, I gave them some light, shining through from the world above them. The title came naturally:

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