

Hive of activity

When bee season ended in the fall of 2006, Adam Makarenko made what he thought was a natural decision.

"I decided to create this world of bees on my own," he says.

Makarenko, 34, had spent three years photographing the insects, but wasn't through with them when the weather turned cold. He set to work making bees out of string and clay, and suspended them above tiny beehives amid an eight-foot mountain range. He photographed several miniature landscapes and, eventually, a narrative took shape. This place was called the Langstroth Range and the series of photographs became *The Miniature Apiary*.

It was for this series that he won *American Photo* magazine's Image of the Year award in the personal work category. Winners in other categories include Annie Leibovitz and photojournalist Michael Kamber.

Makarenko's imagined story goes something like this: A Scandinavian geologist discovers the Langstroth Range (about 200 miles northeast of Dawson City) while searching for gold. Instead of gold, he finds two types of bees. There are giant, introverted mountain bees, and smaller honeybees who produce addictive, spirit-lifting honey. He puts the bees in hives, and breeds them to become larger. People flood to the valley to get in on "the great bee rush." The geologist, tired of his bees, moves on to the giant mountain bees. He enters their cave in the mountains, and is never seen again.

Makarenko's tale unfolded at the same time as last year's true bee tragedy came to light. Last April, a dramatic decline in bee populations in the U.S. worried the photographer, who says he feels spiritually connected to the creatures. The *Miniature Apiary* wasn't just about his love for bees, but their vulnerability in a world that belongs to humans.

"When the colony collapsed, my focus changed," he says.

Stories aside, Makarenko's photos were picked for their aesthetic, among "tens of thousands" of entries, says Miki Johnson, senior editor of *American Photo*. Editorial staff narrowed submissions down to 20 to 50 artists, and then a small group of judges selected the winners.

"It had what we call a very individual eye," Johnson says, referring to how identifiable Makarenko's work is. "With the miniature style photographed in a cinematic way. It jumped out at us."

"I remember picking up a copy of *American Photo* magazine and thinking, 'This is a great magazine; I'd love to be in there someday,'" he says.

When he got an e-mail saying he had won the competition, he couldn't believe it.

"I didn't feel like it was real. I'd just been working so hard and not really getting anywhere. It felt good." Makarenko pauses, then corrects himself: "It felt great."

■ Makarenko's first solo show opens on Jan. 17 at Pikto Gallery in the Distillery. His work can be found in the current issue of *American Photo*.

Kate Robertson, *National Post*



ADAM MAKARENKO

Makarenko's prize-winning photo is praised for its cinematic qualities.