

GOING OUT

ART: SOPHIE CAPE

Brush with death transformed to art

ON February 17 this year, Sophie Cape was painting alone on an Austrian mountainside when a terrifying roar of wind heralded an avalanche. The Sydney artist was buried, along with four large canvases laid out on the snow.

Cape credits her survival to her past life as an elite skier, which gave her the skills to withstand the natural disaster. The same avalanche engulfed Dutch Prince Johan Friso, who was skiing in the next village. Cape says the prince has been left in a coma.

It was -30C when the avalanche hit.

"It's like being dumped by a hideously big wave," Cape says. "You don't know which way is up. I was able to pull myself out, but the works were gone."



Cape eventually found all four canvases and was actually very pleased with the damage they sustained. "One is full of holes from the pickaxe from digging it out," she says. "But that's part of the process. It's exactly what I wanted, because I use what's in the environment."

Cape's life is replete with tales of danger, all of which she laughs off as "me being an idiot". Ten years ago, she retired from downhill racing after breaking 52 bones in a terror fall.

She hadn't even been near snow since then, until her artist's residency at the five-star Anberg Hotel in St Christoph put her in the path of the avalanches.

"I have a knack for getting myself into extraordinary situations," Cape says.

Her mother Ann Cape is a Sydney painter. This year, both were finalists in the Fortis Grand prize for portraiture, and gave a joint floor talk.

Cape dubbed her seven St Christoph works the "avalanche series" and is showing them this week at the Hong Kong International Art Fair 2012. Two have already sold.

As for her next body of work, she's waiting to see what her next "silly escapade" will be.

ELIZABETH FORTEQUÉ

Works by Sophie Cape can be viewed at The Joan Gallery, 61 Arny Rd, Woolahra, NSW 2512, sophiecapem.com



Sophie Cape and her work, Memento Mori