

Always stretch before you paint

Philip Wischer has discovered new branches of creating landscapes.

By KRISTIN OWEN

MELBOURNE artist Philip Wischer has a plan to export our trees to Japan that would delight most — including the greenies.

Wischer collects fallen tree branches only and fuses them to form gnarly frames, skeletons for his undulating oil paintings.

Value-adding. No logging required.

Wischer's works grew from an idea he has been chipping away at for some time.

The 28-year-old, who has been painting "since kindergarten", cannot remember when he first thought of stretching canvas over eucalyptus-branch frames.

Wischer says he had been thinking about it for years but only had the opportunity to try it out in the past four.

After two successful solo exhibitions in Melbourne — he sold nine out of 11 works at the last one — Wischer has decided to take his contorted canvases to Japan.

One of the private galleries in the ritzy Ginza district of Tokyo will be showing some of his work this June.

It can take days to produce just one canvas. The task is arduous, with some of the frames being two-metres long.

In the main, he finds the wood for the frames in the area he is about to paint and then stretches canvas across it while in the bush.

So each work contains a physical — and some would say spiritual — part of the landscape.

The way Wischer joins the wood is a secret he is not prepared to reveal, but says it took years of trial and error to perfect.

He uses eucalyptus branches because of their lovely curves.

The order in which he puts the tacks in the canvas as he is stretching it is crucial to the outcome of the "blank" canvas.

"The final stretch dictates shapes that you may not have foreseen," he says.

"It speaks to you before



New paint job: Philip Wischer at work on his novel art form.

Picture: DREW RYAN

you put the first blob of paint on.

"In a sense everything I do is an experiment."

Wischer spends three months a year in the outback, with only his 1969 Peugeot for company, collecting wood, taking photographs, stretching canvases and painting.

The rest of the year he

paints in a disused milking shed at the back of the oldest farmhouse in Fairfield, where he lives.

He also works at weekends for Melbourne City Mission helping intellectually disabled people settle into the community.

He calls his works social landscapes.

Many of his paintings deal

with the degradation and rape of the environment.

"A lot of these are environmental pictures that deal with the concept of social change," Wischer says.

"I don't say, 'Hey this is right or this is wrong'. I say, 'This is what's happening. What do you think about this?'"