

# Selwedge

## DESIGNER EDGE



### ABIGAIL BROWN

There's a menagerie of handmade creatures in artist Abigail Brown's London studio. And they're real attention-grabbers, even though they have to compete with the likes of acrobats and totem poles. Make a quick visual stop-off at the monkeys swinging from the ceiling, by all means, but we recommend you direct your gaze primarily at Abigail's bird sculptures, which will have you all of a flutter. Her beautiful winged fabric sculptures have been featured on the pages of some of the world's spiffiest magazines, not to mention decorating the



windows at Liberty stores.

"The birds have been part of Liberty of London's windows on numerous occasions, and I'm always so proud to see them in there. I get a lot of requests for magazine shoots, too," says Abigail, "but, sadly, can't take part in most, as I make to order and don't generally have anything in stock."

Over the course of eight years, Abigail has created around 100 bird species, all fashioned from wire and natural fabrics (cotton, linen, wool and silk). What started out as a request from a friend has turned into a full-time job – and a passion. Ultimately, her feathered friends have all but ousted her other subjects; she now works on them six days a week.

"I enjoy the ease of the shape and then exploring their unique characteristics – each with a different stance. They were well received, so I just continued with them, gradually getting into studying real species and making them more and more realistic, as I went. Until recently, I hadn't really taken much time to watch birds in nature; it was far easier to observe from photos. But, over the years, my interest has increased, and I now go out on bird-watching trips.

They've got me!" she says.

After Abigail has studied a particular bird species, she sews her design, inserts a wire skeleton, stuffs the body and shapes the feet. The next step is creating 'feathers'. "I decorate them with tiny scraps of fabric in the closest match to the real bird, but without getting too hung up on that. It's all an interpretation," she says. The joy for her is bringing her fabric pieces to 'life', shaping the weave to accommodate the intricacies of the birds' bodies and fraying the fabric edges to mimic the genuine article.

Her sculptures range from 10 to 40cm in height, and Abigail says she finds the larger sculptures the most challenging. "A peacock and pheasant have been the largest so far, and I find it hard to work on that scale. Stuffing them can be a big challenge, and it's my least-favourite process."

Abigail did take a little time off birds recently to put together an exhibition for the Auguste Clown Gallery, in Melbourne – with a theme inspired by animal mythology. For the show, she created a group of papier-mâché animal gods. "I'm interested in the different forms of worship – the objects used, the form the animals take and the artistic styles of each different culture," she says.

We'd all be keen to see whatever else Abigail Brown turns her hand to in the future, but wouldn't it be sad to see the birds fly the nest? They're winged wonders, we think.

Visit Abigail's website, [www.abigail-brown.co.uk](http://www.abigail-brown.co.uk), to see her digital aviary, or you can contact her via her email, [abigail@abigail-brown.co.uk](mailto:abigail@abigail-brown.co.uk).

- Janai Welz

Portrait photograph: Emma Collins. Bird photographs: Abigail Brown