

# Selvedge

## DESIGNER EDGE



Layers of machine stitching and lots of hanging threads are signature elements in many of Miyuki's works.



### MIYUKI SAKAI

While experimenting at art collage in Kyoto, Japan, Miyuki Sakai switched brushes for a sewing machine and paints for thread. Now, with close to 30 years' experience and about 150 colours of thread at hand, the San Francisco-based artist has created 'illustrations' of everything from supermarket products to dressing-table accoutrement, all with free-motion machine stitching. Realistic images are created with thread, which make viewers look twice and look closely. It's surprising how radical a traditional medium can look – still lifes with a new, fresh face. But it's the 'coloured-in' style of the artworks that really adds to their charm – lots of swirls and cross hatching and long, loose thread ends. Miyuki groups objects together to create the perfect composition, then adds evocative elements, such as flickering candles and steaming-hot dishes, to enrich the mood.

And she's not afraid to go outside the lines, quite literally. Ragged edges have become a signature style, as have her 'deliberate errors'.

"I don't mind some mistakes," she says. "I move the fabric randomly under the needle of the sewing machine, and sometimes my fingers go right under the needle. Ouch!"

For this reason, Miyuki lists Band-Aids as one of the essentials for her trade. Another is polyester spun sewing thread – her thread of choice is Schappe Spun, from Japanese company Fujix. Along with a rainbow of coloured threads, all Miyuki needs is a sewing machine that does straight stitch. A darning presser foot



isn't even required; the pressure of a regular presser foot is simply reduced to achieve the required effect. She layers stitches to create the image, making the work heavy and textured. The challenge is blending shades and tones. Many different-coloured threads are used, but bobbin colours aren't changed as often as upper cottons. Each form is finished off with dark outlines to punctuate the dramatic effect.

Miyuki was drawn to sewing from a young age, as her mother is a professional dressmaker. The trouble was that she was never allowed to touch the equipment.

"Her sewing machine is her business tool. She didn't

want me to break it," Miyuki says. But she was clearly impressed enough with her mother's skills to learn the basics and then adapt them to suit her own talents and requirements. And she has proved herself a unique artist in the process.

Last November saw her first children's book published. Called *Fruit Pancake*, it's printed in Japanese and is filled with lots of yummy stitched stacks of pancakes and vibrant slices of fruit. And it has all the charm of her actual embroideries.

Visit [www.miyukisakai.com](http://www.miyukisakai.com) to browse Miyuki's virtual art gallery. There are more than 200 artworks on display (and that's only about a tenth of her entire portfolio).

– Janai Velez

