

Selwedge

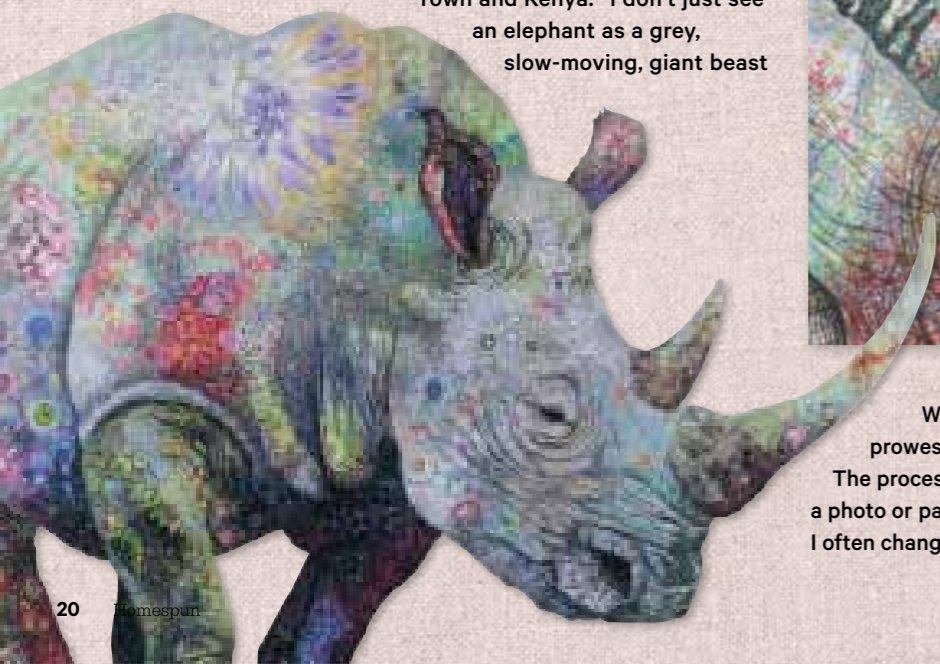
DESIGNER EDGE



SOPHIE STANDING

Deep within Sophie Standing's re-imagined African landscapes, birds perch on rhinos, aardvarks slump on the ground, resting, and lions keep a watchful eyes over their surroundings. What's unusual is their fresh aesthetic. They have delicate buds and full-blown blooms in pretty pastels and bright neons adorning them, contrasting with the mammoth size and dusty tones of real-life African fauna.

Sophie combines appliqué and free-motion stitching in her textile embroidered art, inspired by 17 years of living in Cape Town and Kenya. "I don't just see an elephant as a grey, slow-moving, giant beast



but as a deeply sensitive and awe-inspiring mammal. They feel so humble, and sense of excitement them, watching their this in my textile vibrant, colourful, by bringing them

"I try to create a different feeling of character in each one." The African wilderness is a magical place for Sophie. "We loved going on safaris and day trips into the bush. A couple of places where we lived in Kenya had animals on the property – wild ones. Hyenas, leopards and aardvarks and more would walk through the property during the night or at dawn. I have many camping stories, but I wouldn't want to scare the would-be campers out there! Anyway, it's all part of the fun. When you go wild-bush camping, you want the mammals to pass by you. That's part and parcel of the adventure."

make me I get such a when I'm up close to interactions. I try to show work, not just by using clashing patterns but also softness and depth," she says.



With these first-hand experiences and her creative prowess, Sophie makes unique machine-embroidered art. The process begins by choosing the image. "What works well as a photo or painting does not necessarily work for a textile piece. I often change parts of the mammal, like moving an ear back or

separating the legs a little to make it a nicer composition." She then does a detailed graphite drawing and enlarges the sketch to the dimensions she'd like her finished piece to be.

Weathered or mottled background effects are achieved by painting the canvases with acrylic washes, rubbing them in mud and leaving them to dry outside. A rinse in the washing machine removes excess paint and dirt before the design is added.

Sophie uses mostly Kaffe Fassett Collective fabrics and Liberty Art Fabrics Tana Lawn for the colourful surface design on the animals. "All my snippets of fabric are odd shapes and chosen at the time, often with not much forward planning. I sometimes think a piece will be predominantly blue and green but then it slowly changes to purples and pinks – it moves in the direction I'm feeling as I create it," Sophie says, describing the development of each work as she pins her chosen fabrics onto the outline, stitching them down and then embroidering all the intricate designs.

The textural and delicate characteristics of machine embroidery lend themselves to the finer details of the animals, such as the luxuriant eyelashes on the antelope, the elephant's lined face and the fluffy ears of the lion. The finished artworks range in size from 50cm square up to 200 x 130cm, but more often than not come in at 100cm square or slightly larger rectangles and are sold mainly through private commissions.

Sophie had exotic and vibrant tastes even as a child. "I always loved Oilily clothes [a brand known for its playful and colourful style]. I would swoon over Liberty Art Fabrics and dream of going to Guatemala and India to buy embroideries. So, I combined my love of fabric, sewing, mammals and fine art. These things have just come together organically over the years, and my textile art has evolved."



Sophie is in Australia this month, teaching workshops in Perth, Urunga and Geelong. The classes will be focused on creating starfish and shells textile artworks. Sophie will be teaching at: Handcrafters House (Perth, WA) from 4-7 March and 22-25 March; Caroline Sharkey Retreat (Urunga, NSW) from 10-13 March; Height's Sewing Centre (Geelong, Vic) from 16-19 March. Her classes are hugely popular, so you might end up on a waiting list – but worth a shot!



This remarkable artist moved to the Seychelles, off the east coast of Africa, last August, where the lush forests, pristine beaches and rare wildlife, such as fruit bats and giant tortoises, will no doubt become the focus of future artworks, but her core African inspiration will remain in her heart and her textile creations.

– Janai Velez

For more information on Sophie Standing, visit www.sophiestandingart.com.

