

Selvedge

DESIGNER EDGE



BECKY ANNE TILSON



Becky Anne Tilson has had many varied and interesting careers. She's practised cosmetology, cleaned houses, taught preschool children and waited tables. She's also worked at a zoo, retail store, salon and sandwich shop. Finally, she found her calling, as a gifted needlefelter and embroiderer, specialising in hooped animal designs.

Her work is the result of combining two dreams – a yearning for a signature craft style that she could call her own and a hankering for a rural idyll with llamas grazing on lush pastures. She's now got both – sort of! Her stitching style is charming, with a look that is purely hers, but her llamas have to make do with fields of fabric, rather than rolling acres.

Right from the start, alpacas and llamas were her subjects of choice. Their “fluffy faces, long eyelashes and funny little walks” had her creative ideas running wild, and she created everything from South American llama hoops, complete with tassels and pompoms in ‘fiesta’ colours, to sweet and soft designs featuring alpacas carrying baskets filled with cottage-garden blooms.

These days, however, Becky has broadened her scope, creating the likes of felted bison, pigs, bears, whales, horses, deer, okapis, sloths and foxes. (“I get bored making the same thing over and over,” she admits.) And they're all made extra charming thanks to the addition of intricate floral elements – flower crowns adorning their heads, wreaths around their necks and baskets overflowing with blooms on their backs.

Becky uses two different techniques to achieve her desired effect – needlefelting (to get the ‘fuzzy’ look for the animal’s coat) and embroidery (to create delicate flowers and ‘woven’ baskets and

blankets). “I got the idea to mix wool and embroidery when I was trying to think of a way to get that ‘fuzzy’ look. I thought about gluing furry material onto the fabric but figured it would be difficult to push my needle through the hard glue. Then I remembered my felting skills. I had a ton of wool lying around. It took some trial and error to find the right material, though. For the basket idea, I thought about what llamas/alpacas do ... they carry stuff! My favourite things to embroider are flowers, so that’s where I went from there,” she says.

Using a water-soluble pen, she begins by sketching the outline of the animal on combed cotton fabric. When the wool is needlefelted into place, Becky can begin her favourite part of the process – choosing the thread-colour scheme. “Sometimes, I look at a bouquet for inspiration, but most of the time I just embroider whatever comes to mind,” she says. “I prefer to use six- and seven-inch hoops when displaying my art. They seem to be a decent size for most animals to fit in and look good hanging on the wall. I am currently experimenting with oval hoops, and that’s been a lot of fun. I like the extra length they add, especially for the whales!”

Whatever her process or hoop shape, she’s clearly on the right track with her business, since her Etsy store keeps her busy, with customers praising her needlework skills. Friends new to her work can sometimes be a different matter. “I love trying to describe what I make to others. They usually have a very confused look on their faces as I tell them about needlefelting. I am surprised by how many people have never heard of it.”

But Becky will keep persevering with her explanations and creating work that makes her happy. “My need to create is definitely just that, a ‘need’. I feel at my best self when I’m creating something. It brings me so much joy when I can bring to life an idea that’s been floating around in my head.”

To find out more about Becky Anne Tilson, of Fuzzy and Flora, visit her Etsy store ([fuzzyandflora.etsy.com](https://www.etsy.com/shop/fuzzyandflora)) and follow her on Instagram (@fuzzyandflora).

– Janai Velez

