





WILD at ART

Award-winning Sussex artist Sophie Green sells her hyper-realistic paintings to fund conservation projects helping endangered species

WORDS: Karen Pasquali Jones ♦ PHOTOS: Sophie Green

TOP:
Sussex-based Sophie only paints vulnerable wildlife that is endangered

LEFT:
Sophie has exhibited her paintings at Cop26 and in exhibitions to give endangered animals a voice

Deep in the Friston forest, near the Seven Sisters, a menagerie of endangered animals can be found: rhinos, tigers, elephants and even a polar bear.

Each has a name. Venture up close and you can see the pride – and vulnerability – in *Majesty*, an East African lion’s eyes, and every wrinkle on the leathery trunk of *Survivor*, an elephant that looks defiant. But these are not animals

that have escaped from a zoo or exotic beasts being kept as pets in the Sussex countryside. They are the work of conservation artist Sophie Green who uses her art to save endangered wildlife.

And Sophie, who was so anxious as a child she didn’t speak to anyone except her family, creates hyper-realistic paintings to give the animals a voice. ‘I paint animals to

save animals,’ Sophie, 30, says. ‘Animals have always been close to my heart. As a young child, I was a selective mute, which meant that I couldn’t speak outside of the family home until the age of seven. I was very introverted and spent almost all of my time outside with nature and wildlife, or reading books about animals.

‘I know what it’s like not to have a voice. Animals can’t speak

for themselves so I want my art to do that for them.'

Too scared and tongue-tied to talk to anyone except her parents and older brother and sister, Sophie found solace with her cat, Rufus, and drawing animals in nature outside.

'I was so shy I just couldn't speak to anyone but my family,' she says. 'At primary school I had to record myself reading a book because my teacher didn't believe I could do it. At home, I was chatty but everywhere else I couldn't utter a word.'

Growing up, she volunteered at a wildlife sanctuary so she could study animals up close.

Now, even though she only achieved a 'C' in GCSE art – 'because they wanted me to draw things I wasn't interested in, I only wanted to draw animals' – Sophie is one of the world's top wildlife and environmental artists and is giving back to the vulnerable species who, like her as a child, can't speak up for themselves.

She travels the planet, taking photographs of some of the 40,000 endangered creatures the International Union for Conservation of Nature say are under threat of extinction because of climate change and human intervention.

The resulting paintings of tigers, giraffes, gorillas and whales, among others, are exhibited and sold to raise funds for global conservation projects.

Priced anywhere between £10,000-£20,000 per piece, Sophie recently donated a painting to Tusk and the African Community & Conservation Foundation (ACCF), where it sold at auction for \$24,000.

Now she wants to scale up her exhibitions – she held a



'Animals are not responsible for any of the struggles that they face due to human encroachment'

major one in November called *Impermanence* at London's Oxo Tower Gallery and previously exhibited at COP26 – to make an even bigger impact.

'All of my pieces are based on a species or a current conservation issue that has drawn my attention,' she explains. 'My recent expedition to the Arctic brought forward so many issues in terms of the wildlife, climate

change, and ice melting that for a while a lot of my pieces were polar-themed.

'But I'm drawn to a range of endangered animals, including ones that not many know about, such as the pangolin, which is trafficked for its scales that are used in Chinese medicine. Animals are not responsible for any of the struggles that they face due to human encroachment,



TOP:
Sophie uses proceeds from her paintings to fund conservation projects

climate change, and it is a no-brainer for me, that as many people as possible should be trying to make a difference for the voiceless.'

Sophie, who in 2021 was awarded the 'medal of excellence' from the Artists for Conservation Foundation for her outstanding work within the wildlife and conservation sphere, donates a large proportion of her income

to wildlife and conservation charities worldwide. Those who benefit include the RSPCA, Explorers Against Extinction, David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation, International Fund for Animal Welfare, Jane Goodall Institute and the Marine Conservation Society.

She has set up her own Impermanence Project Fund where donations and 30 per cent

of sales from the *Impermanence* collection will go towards supporting vital conservation work, from safeguarding the snow leopards of the Himachal Pradesh in India, to conducting research on threatened marine species including sharks and turtles and planting seagrass around the UK to protect seahorses and help fight climate change. Right now, Sophie is back ▶



Majesty the East African lion was completed the day Queen Elizabeth died



Sophie's own project fund helps to save endangered wildlife like the panther

in her Friston Forest log cabin with a small vegetable patch, and dreaming of organising a touring exhibition around Sussex of paintings of local wildlife including owls, foxes and badgers.

She is also busy planning a trip to Tanzania this year and would also like to visit the Galapagos and Costa Rica.

'I don't like to travel too much because of my carbon footprint, but I have always wanted to go there to see the wildebeest migration and I would also love to go to the Galapagos and Costa Rica,' Sophie says.

'I like to use my own photos for my paintings and do it to not only find sources for my inspiration and creativity but to save the animals I see.'

'There are very few species that aren't affected by human behaviour, climate change and our encroachment onto their land,' she adds. 'I'm passionate about animals and saving vulnerable and endangered species. I hope my art can speak for me – and for them.'

sophiegreenfineart.com ♦



Sophie's paintings look real

'There are very few species that aren't affected by human behaviour'