

ALL IMAGES © MEGAN ZANIEWSKI / STUMPWORK EMBROIDERY & THREAD PAINTING STITCH 3-D NATURE MOTIFS BY MEGAN ZANIEWSKI (C&T PUBLISHING, 2024)



Megan's incredibly detailed designs document the textile artist's love of animals and nature



Megan Zaniewski

DELVE INTO THE MAGICAL WORLD OF EMBROIDERY ARTIST MEGAN, WHO USES STUMPWORK TECHNIQUES TO CREATE NATURE-INSPIRED DESIGNS WITH A THREE-DIMENSIONAL TWIST!

Words by Daisy Game



Since setting up her Instagram profile four years ago, Megan has connected with almost 200k stitchers

“You can’t discover your limits if you don’t take risks and try new things...”, says embroidery artist, Megan Zaniewski. Inspired by the likes of Chloe Giordano, Sarah K Benning, Tessa Perlow and Emillie Ferris, Megan uses fabric and thread to create a stunning selection of designs inspired by the natural world. But there’s a Zaniewski-style twist: Megan’s creations are just about ready to jump out of the hoop...

The artist uses stumpwork techniques to create hyper-realistic, 3D designs with incredible, lifelike appearances. From harvest mice nestled in cosy winter nests, to vibrant tree frogs climbing up windowpanes and majestic swans with wings outstretched, Megan is on a mission to grow her stitched menagerie one animal at a time.

“Nature has always fascinated me”, the artist tells us when asked what it is that she finds so enticing about the subject: “I think a big reason for that was my dad; I grew up in the Texas hill country, where he created an undeveloped haven for native plants and animals around our house. He always encouraged me to spend time outdoors, to quietly observe, and to notice even the smallest creatures”.

And notice them Megan did. Flick through her Instagram feed, and you’ll be stopping to tap on – and marvel at – each and every post. You and almost 200k fellow Megan-enthusiasts, that is. Since setting up her profile in 2019, Megan has become something of an internet sensation. “I started my account without any expectations for it to become anything more than an outlet to share my embroidery, and more importantly, to talk to other

embroiderers”, the stitcher explains. But not long after Megan started sharing her work with the online sewing community, her patterns began to make a real impression. In the four years since, Megan has connected with a huge number of stitchers – beginner and experienced alike.

Although Megan loves all animals, great and small, she has a special place in her heart for those of the winged variety: “Birds will probably always be my go-to favourite subjects to embroider”, says Megan: “I love them because they are so easily observed. We live in a suburban neighbourhood, but we still have over 15 different species that visit our backyard daily. I began using stumpwork techniques to create wings that pop up in 3D because I wanted to capture their unique beauty mid-flight, and to create pieces that felt alive – as though the birds might fly out of the frame...”

Despite the exquisitely detailed, highly accomplished nature of her work, Megan’s journey with embroidery hasn’t been a long one; she only started stitching after the arrival of her first daughter. “I wanted a creative outlet that I could pick up or put down easily without a lot of preparation or clean-up. My embroidery projects often travel with me,

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whether it's to the park, or beach, or my kids' after-school activities", she tells us. And it's not just to the park that Megan carries her work. Her stitching frequently ventures further afield still: "We move every couple of years, but we're currently located in Biloxi, Mississippi on the Gulf Coast. The beach, forests, and marshlands provide so much inspiration", Megan tells me of her family's nomadic lifestyle. Each move offers something new, and Megan enjoys combining the different landscapes for stitching inspiration: "I keep found objects, like bird feathers, shells and leaves, at my embroidery desk", the nature-lover reveals.

But no matter the environment in which Megan finds herself, she's excited to explore and document it through her distinctive, three-dimensional style: "I've always been interested in 3D embroidery because it has such a stunning, almost magical effect". The designer uses stiffened silks and cottons to cast her stitching spell; and when adding poseable, pop-up features to a design (like the wings on a butterfly or the petals on a flower) she'll opt for a wire slip. Padding is another of Megan's go-to techniques: "I like to embroider over a



padded base so that my subjects have a more lifelike shape. Padding is quite simple, but it can add so much depth and dimension to a design".

Although Megan's style is largely naturalistic, she enjoys taking the time to sew quirkier scenes, too. The patterns in her 'ab-duck-tion' series depict a web-footed fellow getting swept up, up and away into a floating UFO by a beam of embroidered light. The 'ab-duck-tion' hoops often feature interactive elements, like peekaboo flaps which, when lifted by curious fingers, reveal hidden characters.

"Having fun is an important part of the creative process for me. I like to incorporate a bit of whimsy and playfulness in all my work", says Megan. "I think it's just a way to occasionally reconnect with my inner child and remind myself that art doesn't have to be serious. Art can be joyful and absurdly silly too, or just whatever you want it to be!"

It's a lighthearted, can-do message that the artist is determined to get across through her new book, *Stumpwork Embroidery & Thread Painting: Stitch 3-D Nature Motifs*. Containing 15 step-by-step projects, Megan's beginner-friendly title aims to demystify the stumpwork process by breaking it down into bite-sized chunks.

"I think often, even for experienced embroiderers, the "Wow!" effect of stumpwork embroidery makes it appear too difficult, or even intimidating, to learn. And I think a lot of people who are interested in 3D embroidery feel unsure of where to start..." says Megan. "I want stumpwork to feel approachable, so I wrote my book to help guide readers of all skill levels get to grips with a few of the most effective and commonly used techniques in an easy-to-follow way".

Readers will learn how to stitch everything from colourful moths and majestic butterflies to iridescent hummingbirds and fluffy ducklings. And the projects aren't just for hoops, either. Megan shows us how to whip up beautiful accessories, including jewellery and tote bags, and embellish clothing and homewares, too. It looks like we'll all be stumpwork pros by this time next year...

Find out more about Megan and her beautiful new book via Instagram, @megembroiders, and browse her finished artworks at www.etsy.com/shop/megembroiders



Stumpwork Embroidery & Thread Painting: Stitch 3-D Nature Motifs written by Megan Zaniewski (C&T Publishing, £18.99), is packed with life-like and three-dimensional nature- inspired tutorials for you follow and fall in love with. Pre-order a copy now from www.ctpub.com