



# ESSENCE OF DOG

Sculpture by Holy Smoke

By Susan Tasaki



**W**HEN THE WELSH ARTIST known as Holy Smoke was seven, her father taught her how to sew. Years later, inspired by a photograph of an embalmed Egyptian dog, she put that skill to good use when she took her art in a new direction, creating the first of what has become a substantial collection of sculpted dogs. Working in layers of natural linen and vintage fabrics, using wire, needles and thread as her tools, Holy Smoke creates textile sculptures that one reviewer likened to “three-dimensional sketching.”

The collection comprises canine figures ranging in size from roughly 8 to 24 inches, and the materials she uses call to mind her subjects’ tactile qualities. These evocative, introspective works convey dogs’ unique spirits and

sometimes, a sort of melancholy and physical fragility as well.

Holy Smoke trained in fine art at London’s Royal College of Art and has explored nature-centered themes throughout her career. Although sculpture has long been her primary focus, she has also experimented with painting and drawing.

In a recent email exchange, Holy Smoke discussed the process and thoughts behind her soulful dogs. Following is an edited excerpt from that conversation. Since, like most people, we’re always curious about an artist’s inspiration and process, that’s where we started the dialogue.

*All dogs inspire me. My first dog, Travis, was a big black bear of a dog with a fantastic, laid-back personality. My present dog, Balzac, is a Gordon Setter cross, a sensitive soul who likes to be a part of everything that’s going on. He is very expressive and makes a great model.*

*When I begin a piece, I start with the head, first forming the skull, then deciding on the body posture and building the frame accordingly. I work from photographs and sketches, although usually, I have an idea of what sort of emotion I am trying to achieve. The dog’s face and character seem to emerge gradually, a little like the process of drawing. Fabric is layered and stitched into place.*

*The natural threadbare nature of the fabric really helps portray the scruffy dog look. It also has a subtle quality that changes a little depending on light, which helps with shadow and tone.*

*So far, people have reacted in very positive ways to the sculptures, responding with both laughter and tears. The most frequently heard comment is that they convey an “essence of dog.”*

**holy-smoke.co.uk**





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Holy Smoke's work will be featured, along with paintings on fabric by Jennifer Corker, in the exhibit "A Special Breed" at Flair Galerie in Arles, France, from December 5, 2015, through January 16, 2016. [flairgalerie.com](http://flairgalerie.com)