



# Elizabeth Jorn – bringing myths and legends to life

**Talented sculptor Elizabeth Jorn reveals the secrets behind her captivating works of art**

**H**ua Hin based sculptor Elizabeth Jorn isn't afraid of making a mess. Take a peek inside her garden workshop and you'd think a plaster bomb had gone off, spraying the walls and floor with a white gloop that has now turned to dust. It's a creative blast that results in bronze sculptures of irresistible form, many of which are displayed in countries all over the world.

Walk from the workshop and enter Elizabeth's immaculate home, and you see the fruits of her labor. Decorating her large living room and open staircase are many of her finest works; sculptures inspired by myths and legends, many of which explore the passage of life.

Malaysian born but Ireland raised Elizabeth arrived in Hua Hin 15 years ago with her late husband Jorn, a fellow sculptor who sadly died



last year after a lengthy battle with kidney disease.

Elizabeth had met Jorn 25 years ago in the Philippines when both were on a backpacking adventure. It was a meeting of minds that would not only spark romance, but also

a creative partnership that would result in stunning works of art.

Look around Elizabeth's living room and your eyes are drawn to shapes so round and smooth, they almost beg to be touched. But this is Elizabeth's aim.

"I really want to create things that people want to touch," she says. "I like to produce inviting curves, things that really please the eye."

Each piece has its own story to tell, and Elizabeth is keen for the viewer to make up their own minds as to what her sculptures mean. This is the magic of her work, but that's not to say everyone falls under its spell.

"I love the way people interpretate things differently," laughs Elizabeth.

"One lady looked at my sculpture of Venus and said: 'it looks like a lady with funny shaped boobs, no legs, and a big bottom!'" Ideas come to Elizabeth in many ways. Sometimes she may be making a cup of tea and a name and image pops into her mind. Sometimes, the



image may appear before her very eyes, such as in the case of her sculpture "The Horse."

"I was struggling with the form of that sculpture for some time," explains Elizabeth. "But one morning I woke up and looked at my bedroom window. I noticed that the folds in the curtain created the exact shape I was looking for, so I quickly grabbed my sketch book."

Elizabeth's brainstorming sessions begin with scribbles on pieces of paper before taking shape – both literally, and figuratively – out in the workshop. She also has a workshop on the second floor of her home where she ages her sculptures, and also treats them with gold.

Asked if she has a favourite sculpture Elizabeth is quick to respond. "I don't have a favourite, but the one that's most dearest to me is 'Moving Forward.'"

Depicting a sole figure journeying ahead in a boat, Moving Forward represents the notion that no matter what life throws at you, you've got to keep moving ahead.

Elizabeth may have faced difficult times with the loss of her husband, but looking around her home it's clear to see that her journey ahead is not one full of sorrow. It's one celebrating life through wonderful works of art.

*Elizabeth's sculptures are on display in Hua Hin at Sofitel Centara Grand Resort & Villas, Hua Hin, and Hilton Hua Hin Resort & Spa. In Bangkok at Art to Art at O.P. Place (art to art gallery' at O.P. Place tel. 022660187 ext 2211), and in Chiang Mai at La Luna Gallery. All Sculptures are available to purchase from Elizabeth's website: [www.elizabethjorn.com](http://www.elizabethjorn.com)*



# Part of the Process

FOUR INFLUENTIAL ARTISTS – ELIZABETH JOHNSTON, ELIZABETH ROMHILD, SAKUL INTAKUL AND GAVIN GOUGH – TALK TO **DEBBIE OAKES** ABOUT THEIR INSPIRATIONS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF ART IN HOME DECORATING, AND OFFER SOME PRACTICAL ADVICE ON HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT THINGS SO THAT YOU BECOME A COLLABORATOR IN THE ARTIST'S VISION

WHETHER YOU LIVE IN A TINY apartment or palatial home, your choice of art and décor creates the backdrop to your life and leaves a lasting impression on all who enter. Formal and graceful or fun loving and easy-going, your home is a reflection of you. Whatever your personal style a beautiful home is one that combines comfort with balanced colour and proportion. Décor items you select, whether true works of art or more common embellishments, add that element of spice to transform a living area into a home. As with most things, the more you understand yourself the closer you will get to creating the ambience that you want.

## The Floral Artist: Sakul Intakul

Renowned as Thailand's leading floral artist, Sakul Intakul says, "I have always loved plants and flowers, even as a child. But I didn't contemplate for a moment that it could become any kind of successful career." Life was to prove him wrong as he is now the author of a number of books that demonstrate his unique take on everything from intimate table decorations and royal commissions for Her Majesty Queen Sirikit, to his concepts for property-wide floral decor in hotels and resorts as well as enormous public installations.

"Deepak Chopra talks about synchronicity, that coincidences are not accidents, but signs guiding us to our calling. This was certainly true for me. Working as an engineer provided me with





**ABOVE FROM LEFT** Sakul avers that everyday arrangements like this one tend to be subtler than those for a party where the host is making more of a statement; a delightful dinner table arrangement uses space to highlight the flowers

valuable skills I would later need as a floral artist. The ability to think three dimensionally, for example, is an important prerequisite to creating dramatic spatial compositions. The building blocks necessary to create any complex three-dimensional form are the same: the harmonious juxtaposition of space, shape, volume and materials.

“Your choice of art should be guided by the space and the overall effect you want. A big sculpture, painting or floral arrangement with theatrical lighting can fill a space in a dramatic way or an understated piece for a corner can be beautiful and not overpowering. If you live with flowers in your home every day the arrangements will be subtler than those for a party, which are unique, created to make your guests feel special and welcome. Colours affect our mood because of the energy wavelength vibrating at different frequencies. I use them



accordingly. Some colours make you feel happy, outgoing and open minded, orange flowers, for example. White flowers calm you down and fill the space with tranquillity. There are chromatic considerations with culture, too. The installation I created for the Bulgari Hotel in Bali has white, green and red to represent the Hindu gods of Bali. I also use colours that complement interiors. The designers I collaborate with want original work that blends in with and complements their interiors. My wedding and party designs have more of a wow factor.

“There is work that I do that answers other people’s needs, and there is work that answers only my own creative inspiration, like those you see in my books. But I am quite stubborn. I try to comply with certain things, but like to do it my way, too. I take many things into account, especially the space. Without the context of that, without a boundary or reference point, the arrangement will be lost. Inspiration comes from culture, people, colours, the rhythms in music, even what I might be reading or where I am at the time, everything. Everything is connected. I like playing with form. There are classical arrangements, such as the classical, fan and L-shaped designs, but my compositions are more geometric, often with natural or man-made materials that act as a platform to stage the floral performers.

“The first thing that strikes you in a piece of art is beauty. When you look at something and see its exquisiteness, on a certain level you become one with that beauty. It is the same for everyone: there is a universal consciousness. Even in this world of form, it is possible to see we are from the same source. My advice is, don’t think too much. Thinking too much is the enemy of consciousness. Art should elevate,

inspire and add value to your life. The beauty of flowers is that they bring you into the moment of now. Their ephemeral quality reminds us now is the moment to breathe in beauty. Living with my compositions, I would like people to feel happy, to smile, or even cry – being moved and touched. That is universal. Whether art, flowers, a photograph or a good novel, the beauty in it is universal. Everything is personal, but beauty is beauty.”

“Hanging a colourful piece reflects a bolder personality.”  
Elizabeth Romhild

## The Painter: Elizabeth Romhild

Elizabeth Romhild's background is as multi-hued as one of her signature paintings. In the portrait of her life, Denmark and Armenia are the main colours with Iran, Indonesia and now Thailand as important shades. She says, “My husband and I moved to Indonesia when I was 26. The colour of the tropics, the light and shadow – even the smell of the cigarettes – were so exciting and stimulating to my senses. I met a group of artists and began painting. Doing is learning, so I practised, practised, practised. Then we came to Thailand and well, there's nothing like a big shake-up to inspire an emotional painter.

“For many years I told myself that I could never be a ‘real’ artist because I had no formal training. Conversely, I now realise there is no voice inside my head enforcing boundaries. I love to try new things and have to remind myself to follow the thread of who I am as an artist. Everything I do reflects what I feel in that exact moment, unbounded by technique; it pours straight from my soul onto the canvas. My current collection is so strong, the first time I saw it, I just cried. It's been three years since my last exhibition in Bangkok, so it means a lot to me to be able to share

this period of transformation. I am still focused on women, on sensuality, on eros, but I have started to see shapes in more abstraction.

“I am known for my use of colour and I do believe colour influences people a great deal. I hope that people feel happy or joyful living with my work as a part of their home, that it touches people deeply. In choosing art, you should be restricted only by your own daring. Hanging a colourful piece reflects a bolder personality. Some are more conservative and prefer to hang something safer, more conventionally beautiful in their homes. The most important thing when buying art is that it should be harmonious, not dominating. It helps to ask yourself, ‘What is this piece saying to me?’ As with all human beings, the artist grows

**LEFT**  
Elizabeth Romhild with one of her colour-drenched paintings





**ABOVE**  
**FROM LEFT**  
Sculptor Elizabeth Johnston, who likes to create pieces that people feel compelled to touch, with one of her creations; Johnston's *The Three Graces*

and matures, as does the content of his work. Sometimes the underlying message is learning, even for me because I don't really talk, I paint. Leo Tolstoy said, 'Art is not a handicraft, it is the transmission of feeling that the artist has experienced.' I believe that art is a means of expressing a language common to all human experience. There is no right or wrong message. In fact, sometimes people see things in my work that I never noticed. That is why I prefer not to name a work in a way that inhibits the flow of imagination. I never think during the creation process, 'What will people think?' It is good to let the imagination, the fantasy be free.

"I follow the way inspiration leads me, not what other people think. It is very important not to listen too much to what the galleries are saying. I am not afraid to try new things. If people like it, great. If they don't, fine. However, I get a real kick if people do understand and appreciate the language I'm speaking. Many artists have to give people what is expected of them because it is their bread and butter. I am fortunate and privileged in that I can paint purely from passion and emotion. I think that beauty is a question of taste that can be influenced by culture. It is important to remember that what you buy should be something you like to look at day after day, year after year."

## The Sculptor: Elizabeth Johnston

Elizabeth Johnston was born in Penang, Malaysia, spent her childhood in Singapore and didn't move to her parent's native Northern Ireland until she was a teenager. After graduating from art school she set about travelling, answering the call of her spiritual home, Asia. She met her Danish partner in life and in art, Jorn Bertram, in the Philippines. Bertram passed away in 2008, but Johnston continues to call the seaside town of Hua Hin home.

Her Elizabeth Jorn original sculptures are produced in plaster, wax or clay and then cast in bronze using the lost wax process. Finally, the sculptures are coloured with a patina or gilded. Today, Elizabeth Jorn sculptures can be found in private collections around the world. Laughing, Johnston says, "My best subject at school was always art, the only topic that didn't gener-

ate a 'could try harder,' comment from teachers, so I suppose that indicates where my heart was from an early age. Sculpture is my chosen medium because I've always been a hands-on person. Touch is a universal and intimate sensory stimulation, even before words, our most primitive response to the world. I create pieces that yearn to be touched. Sometimes I wish I were a painter because paintings are infinitely easier to send around the world to galleries and customers than bronze. But with sculpture, for some reason, I am infinitely more patient than when I try to paint. Even doing a fine art painting course at college, everything I produced was 3D.

"I love that bronze is reusable; a sculpture can be melted down to become another sculpture or a piece of jewellery. I love the continuity of life, its interconnectedness, that humanity's creative spirit stretches back into ages past. I believe art should enhance a space and if it does not it probably shouldn't be there. In some instances that means filling the space, but in a dramatic, rather than dominating way. Different art has different impact. Nowadays

"Art is created from an almost desperate bid to savour life."  
Elizabeth Johnston

with new building materials, many architects have become sculptors, their creations having a profound effect on our emotions. Colour, shape and form have a huge influence on people and the juxtapositions have subtle nuances that affect the psyche. The most appealing shapes to me are those that make you feel drawn to touch them, forms that attract you to be and feel connected, to caress hollows and flowing lines.

“When choosing art the response should be an almost visceral click. Unfortunately, other more prosaic responses usually come when reviewing the cost, considering the location, investment value or whether it will impress the neighbours. Ideals of beauty are often cultural, but I feel that on some primitive level there is a universal beauty or resonance that we are sometimes out of touch with. I think it is possible to be re-awakened to this beauty. Primitive responses and learnt ideas about beauty are intricately interwoven. The mutability of the human mind is at once both fantastic and frightening. Fashion is a daily reminder of this: one day we can scoff at a trend, only to find ourselves wearing it the next season. Beauty, or more accurately, harmony, has rules. Taste, however, is in the eye of the beholder. Taste is something that is developed over time within our social and cultural framework and can sometimes override the primitive response. This is why people say they learnt to appreciate art. I believe you don’t learn to appreciate, but rather you unlearn cultural aesthetics.

“Each of my sculptures has a different story but perhaps the message is the same. I think most art is created from an almost desperate bid to savour life and to express either its great beauty or immense ugliness. I choose to express what I consider beauty, although a hair’s breadth away lurks the dark side. The duality in things fascinates me. In our complexity, we are actually quite simple. I do care what people think of my work, but I would do it my way anyway. I am willing to do commissions if I feel I can respond in a way that satisfies myself and the person requesting it. I also do enlargements of pieces that I have already produced. I love to hear a piece is growing on a customer, that they haven’t become blind to it, but are loving it more and more with a deepening conversation.

“I hope people feel a connection, perhaps they are not even sure to what, but to something magical and elusive, like a dream. I don’t think what I have to say matters. I think how I live matters. I am, of course, pleased and satisfied if the audience gets it. Although I also am excited and amused by a response that is different than the one I had intended. Conversation can be solely to re-affirm your view of the world or it can be to challenge and stimulate. Likewise with art there is an element of mystery. The unknown is essential in everything, so I prefer not to give too detailed an explanation of what a piece is about. Titles are clues of varying clarity. I am inspired by the world around me, which sounds cliché, but it is true. Literally anything, from the veining in a marble wall to words or phrases in a book or movie, a myth, a magical image, an emotion inspires. I love the expression ‘an idle moment’ because while it seems there is nothing to ‘do’ the mind is creating. From there all art, all new ideas are born.”

## The Photographer: Gavin Gough

Award-winning travel photographer, Gavin Gough, who hails from the UK, has found Bangkok’s tropical light and central Asian location the perfect hub for his adventures. He is often on assignment, on commission or busy creating stock images for Getty Images and Lonely Planet. His photographs have appeared on the covers of *National Geographic*, *Geo*, *Vogue*, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian* and many more. Gough also co-founded the Bangkok Photo School where in his classes he makes photo-

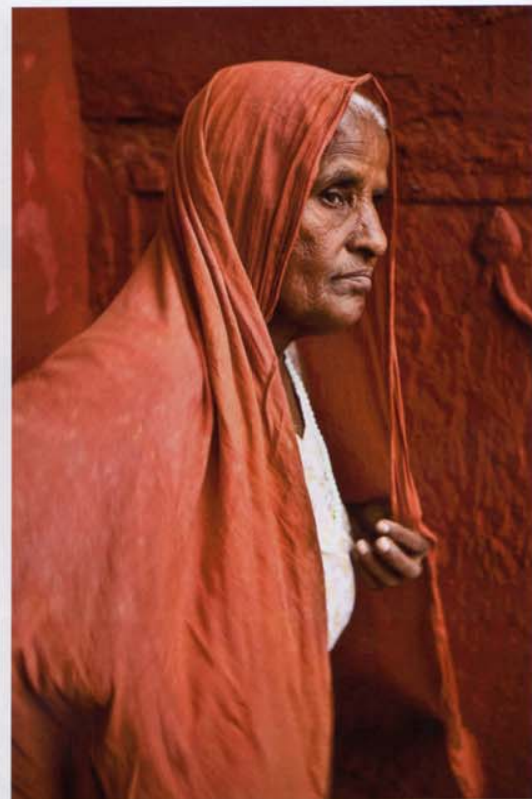
“With art there is an element of mystery.”  
Elizabeth Johnston

graphic theory fun, both in the classroom and on location. He also offers private workshops, providing the opportunity for locals and visiting tourists to spend time with a professional photographer in parts of the city rarely seen.

“In essence, I’ve always been a storyteller, somehow retaining my sense of adventure and child-like enthusiasm for the world. I am enchanted by the locations I visit, the people I meet and photograph. It would be impossible not to be buoyed by the warmth, generosity and hospitality I find when travelling. I hope that this sense of delight comes across in my photographs. Photography is simply the quickest and easiest means of communicating my experiences. More than just exotic locations and wild adventures, travel photography is about seeing our surroundings with fresh eyes and childlike enthusiasm. Ansel Adams once

**FROM BELOW**  
Elizabeth Johnston sculptures  
*Tapestry and Now*





**ABOVE**  
**FROM LEFT**  
 British  
 photographer  
 and photo-  
 graphy teacher  
 Gavin Gough's  
 work has been  
 published in  
 a host of  
 prestigious  
 publications  
**ABOVE RIGHT**  
 Gough's portrait  
 of an Indian  
 woman

said, 'There are always two people in every picture: the photographer and the viewer,' and I think that's true. The choices I make when creating an image affect the finished product and the viewers' own experiences affect the way they perceive it, so there's a collaboration. People who buy my work say they recognise something from their own travel experiences that resonates with them. Perhaps it's a sense of a common humanity. I'd like to think so.

"It is important to recognise that shape and colour affect our mood. It can guide the choice of the right artwork for the right space. It also helps if a buyer first decides on a theme for the space and a good idea to list descriptive words. If the room needs to be energetic and lively then the chosen art will be very different than if the room is designed to be restful or tranquil. Keeping those adjectives in mind will help buyers find the right work. It is also important to regard the existing ambience and pre-existing artwork. Art can do many things: it can dominate, controlling our view as we enter a room or subtly enhance the space. It's a delicate balance and often difficult to get right. I

don't suppose many artists would claim to adhere to rules and not many art buyers would want to be labelled as followers either. Art is very much an exercise in personal taste and I don't see how it could be otherwise. The artwork that takes pride of place in my home is a crayon sketch scribbled by my daughter. Her work might not fetch much at auction, but it's priceless to me. So perceived importance is key. Ultimately, if you like it, that should be reason enough to lie with it. I don't think that art created with other people's sensibilities in mind could ever really succeed. Artists tend to be driven by their muse and create work that communicates something about themselves. It comes from a strange, inner part of the psyche and you can't fake that. We all care what other people think about our work and artists tend to have fragile egos so it's good to hear when other people enjoy what we've created.

"I don't set out to make work that says anything. I simply like to capture those things about a place or person that I have enjoyed and appreciated. That's as complicated as my message gets. My images say 'this is what I saw and it captivated me,' no more, no less. So, although each image looks different, as the

"I don't set out to make work that says anything."  
 Gavin Gough



“My aim is to capture the important element.”  
Gavin Gough

simply to capture whatever I think is the important element of the scene that presents itself. When I'm teaching photography I encourage students to express the scene they wish to photograph in words before they lift the camera to their eye. I think this can help bring definition as every scene contains its own message. So many things can be inspirational. The willingness of local people allowing me to enter their lives for a short time is uplifting and reminds me that I really do have the very best job in the world. What could be more inspiring than that?" ■

**ABOVE  
FROM LEFT**  
A portrait taken in Bhutan and a still life shot in Bali

photographer, I am the link between them and it's my experiences that create a common thread. For people living with my work, I would like them to feel inspired and uplifted, hopeful and energised. My images tend to celebrate life; they are colourful and vibrant. I'm drawn to subjects that reflect positive aspects of human nature. I enjoy photographing festivals and celebrations, but also concentrate my attention on the everyday – market stalls and street life where the ordinary can be shown to be extraordinary. I'd like people who buy my images to feel that they have been part of the adventure. I think for all creative endeavours, there is one truth: once the work has left the privacy of the study or studio, it becomes the conceptual property of the audience. Their interpretations become as meaningful to the artwork as the creator's intention. There is something liberating about putting art into the public realm. The creative process is often very private and introspective, but when an audience participates, the work begins to live and breathe. So, anyone buying an artwork should recognise that they are a part of the process and their reaction is crucial.

“People love photography for the instant gratification. I don't have the patience to paint, or the skill. Photography allows me to capture fleeting moments as they happen. It requires a degree of concentration, along with an ability to recognise what Henri Cartier-Bresson described as the 'decisive moment'. Photography is one of the few disciplines that allow us to exercise both the right brain and left brain simultaneously. My aim is

## ARTFUL INTERIOR DESIGN

### SIZE MATTERS

When looking for artwork for a specific place in the room it helps to mentally limit your choice to a relevant size. Ask yourself, for example, if you want a piece that's larger than the sofa.

### RELATIONSHIPS AREN'T ALWAYS EASY

Do the colours in the composition love or hate the existing colours in your room? Can they work together to build a lasting relationship?

### TRY BEFORE YOU BUY

Ask the gallery if you can try it out in your space before purchasing or if it can be returned. Trust your instinct; you will know the right piece in the right spot.

### ALPHA OR OMEGA?

Is art the beginning or the end? Does it inspire or complete the design? Most professionals agree it can be either.

### WHEN IN DOUBT, ASK THE ARTIST, AN EXPERT AND YOURSELF

What's the artist's background? What does he think about having his art in residential interiors? Who is he creating for? What inspires him? Is he affected by how we see his work? What is the influence of shape and colour? What should people look for in themselves when they are buying art? Is beauty in the eye of the beholder or are there rules?