



# Karen Laurence-Rowe

*This is the first in a new series profiling wildlife artists and photographers.*

*"It's easy to feel the power and presence of an elephant when you paint them," says Karen Laurence-Rowe, "but you can't paint them back to life when they're gone." The founder of Artists Against Extinction, Karen Laurence-Rowe and supporting artists give up 25 per cent of sales to conservation groups.*



**Delta Willis**, the author of *The Hominid Gang* and publicist for Audubon, Earthwatch, and the *Survival Anglia* TV documentaries, interviewed Karen Laurence-Rowe.

**B**orn in Uganda, Karen moved around East Africa with her family to remote locations, where she and her siblings drew to entertain themselves. She refined her graphic design skills working in advertising in South Africa, but Kenya's spectacular wildlife pulled her back home. By 1989, she had her first solo show at the Robert Glen Gallery in Nairobi. Her earliest portraits focused on equine subjects, but she became versatile, using oils, watercolors or charcoal to portray wildlife. Her paintings sell internationally, including benefit auctions in New York and London for Tusk Trust and Helping Rhinos.

By 2012 she was named the David Shepherd Wildlife Artist of the Year. In 2015 she received the Simon Combes Conservation Artist Award. In 2017 she won the David Shepherd Personal Choice Award. Both Shepherd and Combes influenced her style.

Before painting in her studio, she immerses herself in a wild landscape, sketching and photographing.

"One of the most peaceful views I've ever woken up to has to be looking through the palms, then up at Mt Kilimanjaro. The rising sun slowly picks out the shapes of browsing elephants. They are never far away." While elephants favor swamps

near the Amboseli research camp established by Cynthia Moss, they can also wander long distances, even crossing the Tanzanian border. Sadly, some never return.

In a recent painting, pachyderms appear like a phalanx of ghosts emerging from the dust. As impressive as the largest land mammal is on any landscape, she gave their eyes a look of vulnerability. If you look carefully, you can see the pentimento of elephants erased from a much larger herd. Sadly this reflects the decline of elephants across Africa.

“It was an epiphany,” Laurence-Rowe reflects, “to lose eight elephants off the canvas. So just in case you thought painting was a relaxing hobby- think again! Sometimes when you have to remove weeks of work, it’s painful.” The

evocative portrait was titled, “Mothers of Sorrow.”

“There is still hope, but time is running out;” she says. Time ran out for Satao in 2014, but she brought the big Tsavo tusker back to life in a work that has him nobly facing death, called “Satao’s Last Stand”. After Mohawk was killed when he escaped Nairobi National Park, she painted a portrait of lions with hints of blood in the background.

“Not many people get this painting,” she said. “Nairobi National Park sits right on the edge of the heaving city. Fences were compromised by development. First a Southern Bypass

Highway, then a pipeline, and now the SGR railway threatens to cut through the middle. Mohawk, a very popular lion with visitors to the park, meandered outside. Rather than being darted for a safe return, he was shot dead.”

“The terrifying thing is, that as fast as I can paint the beautiful beasts of this continent, they are disappearing to the pressures of humanity.” she said. “If people do not act as one voice very soon, we will lose it all. Before that we will lose magnificent beasts such as elephant, a world symbol of strength and integrity. Oh how we have failed them!” ●

[www.karenlaurence-rowe.com](http://www.karenlaurence-rowe.com)  
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# PORTFOLIO



