

# Your WADHURST

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**Meet our Village Person**  
– sculptor Camilla Le May

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# The Village People

*Introducing Camilla Le May*

We dedicate a page or two of every issue of Your Wadhurst magazine to someone interesting from our local community. This time, we catch up with sculptor Camilla Le May.

By **Juliet England**

Camilla has a long association with Wadhurst, having grown up locally on her parents' small mixed farm in the area. This early exposure, which included competing on horses trained at home, sparked a love of animals and wilderness that endures to this day for the 42-year-old.

"Horses were very important to us, so my youth was a formative time in developing a love of animals. Then I went to South Africa in 1999 on a Society of Wildlife Artists bursary award. This was my first experience of African wildlife in the wild, and it just blew me away.

"It inspired me to go back and live in South Africa for much of the next seven years. I taught art to children there as well as doing my own sculpting."

From a young age, Le May also loved clay modelling, which she was introduced to at St Leonards Mayfield School. However, it was some years later, after encouragement from the late Sir Eduardo Paolozzi during a masterclass at Edinburgh Art College, that she decided to pursue sculpting as a career. Her work ranges from silver jewellery to a life-size bronze of the Household Cavalry horse Sefton (survivor of the Hyde Park bombing), which the Royal Veterinary College (RVC) commissioned, and which has been viewed by the Princess Royal.

Le May was also the inaugural Artist in Residence for the RVC, a position which allowed her to attend dissections, and learn about animal anatomy from experts.

### The start of the project, Sudan bronze



Sudan with Oxpecker

She says: "This gave me a better understanding of the anatomy of different species, and of the mechanics when in motion." She also led sculpture workshops for RVC staff and students.

Over the last 16 years, her work has been shown in well-established and highly respected galleries, and bought by private collectors all over the world. An associate member of the Society of Equestrian Artists, she has also received awards from the Society of Wildlife Artists and the British Sporting Art Trust, and was twice shortlisted for the David Shepherd Wildlife Artist of the Year award (DSWAY).

Le May's work is first modelled in wax or clay before being cast into bronze.

She adds: "Because I have worked in a bronze foundry myself, I am very particular about the finish, and do all the waxwork, final chasing and many of the patinas myself."

Her love of animals and wilderness means that Le May now splits her time between the UK and Kenya, where she sculpts wildlife directly from life, in their natural habitat. She works from her mobile studio – a converted Land Rover.

"This way I can better capture my subjects' character, behaviour traits and anatomy."

### Sefton and Camilla



"Increasingly, I am sculpting particular individuals rather than a generic species type. While Wadhurst is definitely at its best at this time of year, I like to escape the long winters and seek inspiration in Africa whenever I can, although when I have commissions in the UK this is not possible.

"I enjoy sculpting animals for various reasons. I am fascinated by animal behaviour. I also love capturing their beauty, form and movement in clay, so it's a constant source of inspiration for me to spend time with my subjects."



Another big part of what Le May does is raise as much money as she can for wildlife conservation, by selling her work in charity auctions and by donating a percentage of what she makes from private sales.

To date, she has raised more than £71,000 (and counting) for charity – two thirds of which is wildlife-related. They include the Tusk Trust, Wild Aid, Big Life, Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, Save the Rhino, the Perfect World Foundation, Retraining of Racehorses, The Household Cavalry Foundation and The Ol Pejeta Conservancy.

### So what is she working on now?

"My most recent project was to sculpt Sudan, the last male Northern White Rhino (NWR) in existence. For this, I spent more than four months sculpting him from life in Kenya. I learnt so much about rhinos and the tragic situation of the NWRs near extinction. The first edition of Sudan raised \$3,000 through the Wild Aid gala auction in LA to go towards laboratory equipment needed for endangered species at The Ol Pejeta Conservancy, where Sudan lives with the last two females. The work is being used to raise funds and awareness. I sculpted the flighting oxpecker with Sudan as a statement about the impact of extinction on other species who share a symbiotic relationship. A bird flighting from Sudan also serves as symbolism of the soul, soon to leave the elderly rhino and the species' inevitable extinction when he dies.

"Since finishing Sudan, which was shortlisted for DSWAY, I'm working on an exciting commission of a beautiful racehorse, Golden Horn, who was the best turf horse in the world last year, winning the Derby and the Arc amongst others.

"And I'm planning to return to Kenya, where I will carry on sculpting African wildlife. I'm extremely lucky to be able to spend my time doing something I love so much."

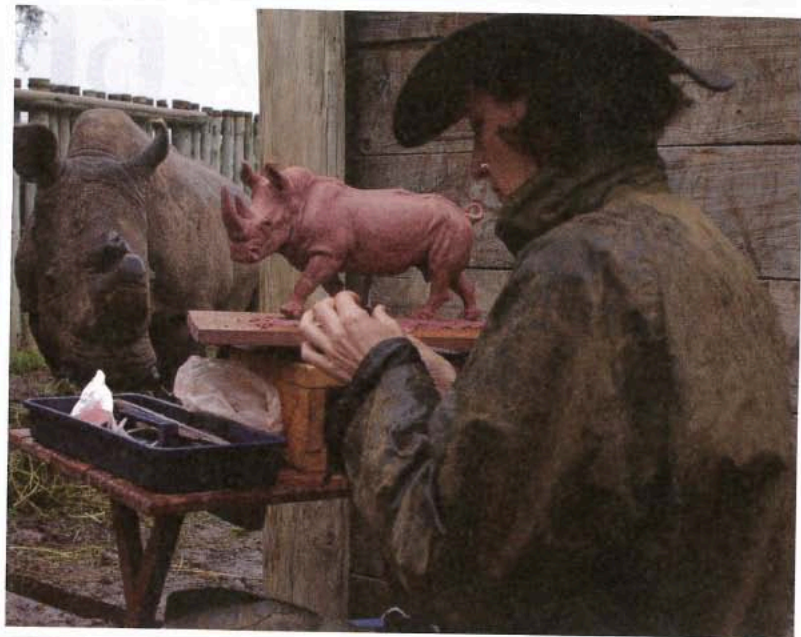
Finally, as ever, we finish with a few light-hearted questions to let us get to know the person behind the artist a little better.

**Q: What three things would you take to a desert island?**

**A:** A radio, although I'm not sure whether that's allowed! For Radio 4 and the BBC World Service. Also a tarpaulin with rope to string up for shelter and, of course, Badger, my dog!

**Q: Which four people would make up your ideal dinner party?**

**A:** Roald Dahl, Bugatti (sculptor), Lyall Watson, Sir David Attenborough.



**"This way I can better capture my subjects' character, behaviour traits and anatomy."**

**Q: What is the last book you read and the last film you saw?**

**A:** I generally set no time aside for films or reading as I'm just so busy with my work. However, the last movie I caught was *The Revenant* – a powerful and beautifully shot film with a strong message on man's historical abuse of wildlife and our environment. It depicts a hauntingly beautiful wilderness and touches on the raw, harsh reality of nature. As for books, I only read two books a year! I last read Tony Fitzjohn's *Born Wild*.

**Q: What is the last CD or download you bought?**

**A:** I haven't bought music for a year or so. For the same reason as I've given above.

**Q: Describe yourself in seven words.**

**A:** Perfectionist, driven hard worker, outspoken wildlife campaigner.

**Q: And ... all-time favourite holiday/travel destination?**

**A:** I loved Tobago and Jordan (Wadi Rum) for holidays, but my repeat work trips to Africa – Kenya in recent years – and being based in the bush are constant sources of inspiration, and it is in Africa that I tend to be happiest, amongst nature and in such a vibrant setting and with a tropical climate. For more information about Camilla Le May and her work, visit <http://www.camillalemay.com/index.php>