



## TALKING EYES: CAPTIVATING ANIMAL PORTRAITS BY ROZELLE CLOETE

**Meet Rozelle Cloete – artist that have the talent to spread love with her paint brush. Rozelle has been making waves in the commercial art scene with her popular, playful portraits of pets especially dogs.**

Based in Ogies, Rozelle and her husband live as crop farmers producing mainly soya and maize, while also managing a small cattle stud. Although she works as a full-time artist, Rozelle also handles the accounting side of their farm in Mpumalanga.

When Liezel van Bergen, Sales & Marketing Executive Pet Food, a subsidiary business within the AFGRI Group, saw Rozelle's work per chance in a gallery, she fell in love with the bright colours and expressions of Rozelle's pet portraits, and knew she had to meet the artist in person. Unbeknownst to Liezel at the time was the fact that Rozelle and her husband are loyal clients of AFGRI, with their crop financing and insurance managed by Unigro. To add to serendipity, Rozelle and her husband's five dogs are fed exclusively on JOCK Dog Food!

Taking the connection full circle, JOCK launched a campaign in February for pet parents on social media. Share your furry child's photo with JOCK for entry into the lucky draw to stand a chance, wherein return your four legged child will be painted.

One lucky entrant will receive a portrait of their dog painted by Rozelle.

We recently caught up with Rozelle to find out more about her remarkable story and to get a closer look at her incredible works of art.

**Tell us about your journey of becoming an artist and finding success in the South African market.**

I started out doing hand-painted signage for businesses and during this time, my mother, who paints a little herself, encouraged me to try my hand at fine art painting. I bought my first art materials thinking "Rozelle, you could have used this money for groceries" and created my first five paintings ever. Very proud of myself, I drove all the way to a gallery in Dullstroom, and would you believe, within two weeks all five paintings were sold! Greatly encouraged, I felt that this was the confirmation I needed that I was taking the right direction with my life.

**How do you go about creating these wonderful portraits?**

I work from photos to capture the personality and



*"I won't move on to the rest of the painting until I feel the eyes are speaking to me. I first start painting the animal completely and then I start bringing in the more colourful impasto elements and the textual phrases."*

expression of pets. As I paint, the animals I'm working on begin to slowly reveal themselves to me. I always start with the eyes. It's in the eyes where all the personality and emotion of the painting ultimately resides.

A picture "painting" speaks a thousand words, but including text in some way to express emotions is one of my unique characteristics. Sometimes clients will provide their own, but otherwise, I take a lot of time finding exactly the right words to express the emotion and heartbeat of the pet. I usually place the quotes somewhere where it won't overshadow the essence and subject of the painting, such as on the paw or the ear.

**Your current theme is mostly centred on animals, especially dogs. What is it about our four-legged friends that makes you want to paint them?**

Pet portraits are very popular with dog owners, so I get many requests for painting people's darling pooches because they want their memory preserved. My top sellers are Yorkies, Dachshunds and Scotties.

It's such a blessing to be able to create something so meaningful to people. Our pets provide us with unconditional love and become cherished members of our families. Whenever people start talking about their dogs, you can feel the conversation moving from head to heart.

**Tell us about your four legged children**

I am so grateful for Zoe and Nunu in my life. Twelve years ago, my daughter wanted a Dachshund, so we got Zoe. Needless to say, Zoe became my dog, sleeping with me in bed and following me around like a little shadow.

Eventually we got a friend for Zoe – a Basset named Lilo, but we ended up calling him Nunu (which is Zulu for baby) instead. Both Zoe and Nunu are my babies! Our dogs become our children, they're not just pets.

I therefore really understand my clients. I know how much their pets mean to them and how much they love them.

We connect on common ground. So producing a painting becomes more than just a job – somewhere on that canvas I connect with that little personality. I begin to recognise them as I paint their eyes, and they begin to speak to me. I want to offer inspiration, something special. I want my paintings to speak to people and give them joy. It's about love. This is why I love painting dogs. They offer pure, unconditional love with no strings attached, no prerequisites. I put a lot of love in every portrait. In a way my clients' pets become my children too.

To view more of Rozelle's work visit her Facebook Page or contact either Alice Art Gallery or Portchie Gallery.



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