

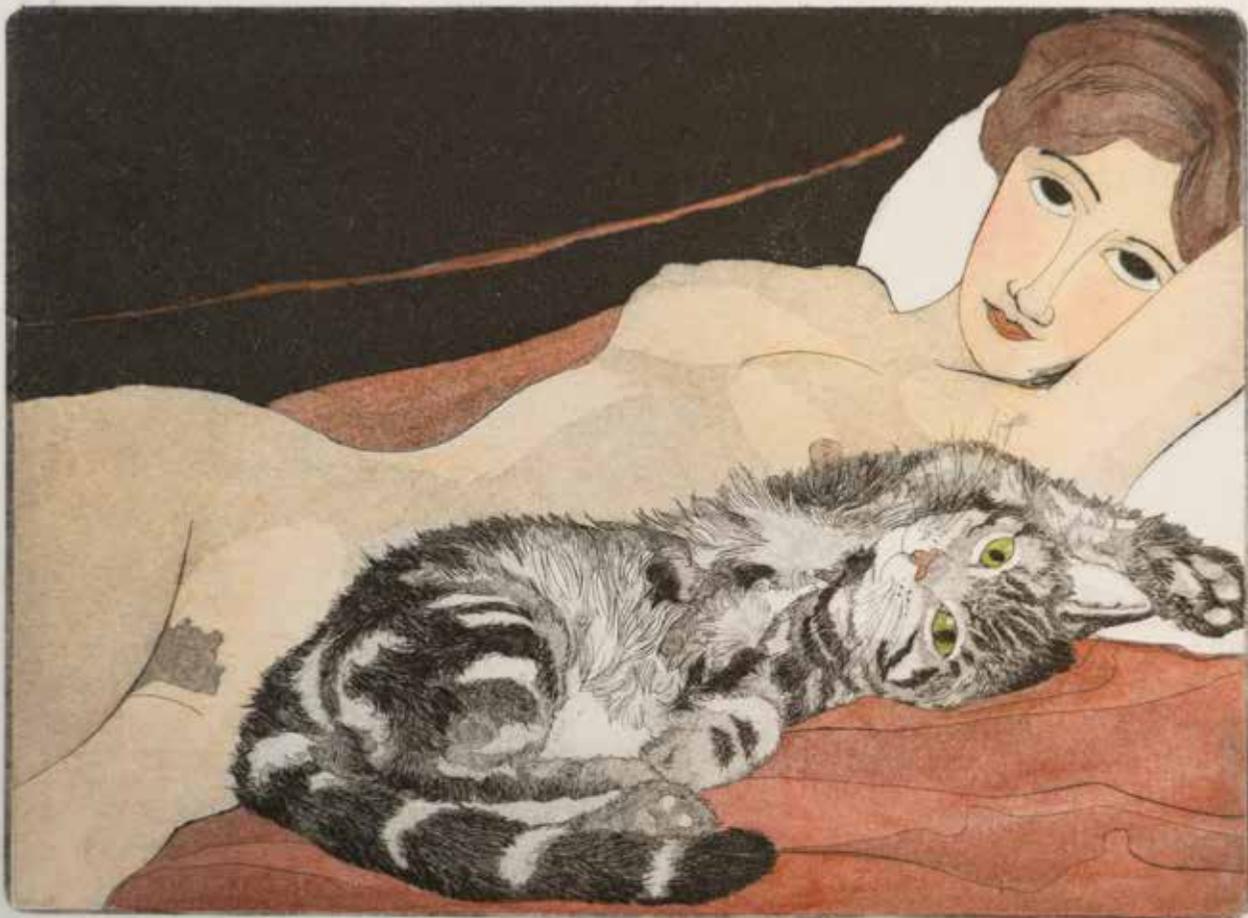
RAPHAEL

Artist's Muse

IT'S FAIR TO SAY THAT RAPHAEL WAS A UNIQUE CAT. Was he the full quid? Sometimes we wondered. But after some initial bumps in the road, he managed to carve out for himself a happy life, albeit largely constrained to the environs of our little flat in Waverley.

He would go out if the opportunity arose (we did not encourage this), but in reality, he seemed to quickly regret the decision to escape and it was rarely difficult to get him back inside, where he would retake his residence as master of a small island in the living room.

His kingdom was a small, off-tan, ugly plastic foot stool from the very worst of the 1970s, but for him it represented sanctuary and ownership in an apartment dominated (not in a nasty way) by two much larger, older cats – Amadeus and Hoffman. This was one of two stations upon which he felt safe. The other was on the back of the living room couch, nose pressed close, but not touching the head of the sitter. This way he absorbed copious amounts of TV although he never expressed an opinion as to which channel we should watch.



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Artist's Models - Raphael and Modigliani Nude

Stapleford 1994

Raphael had appeared in our pocket-sized, but pleasant back garden along with another slightly older kitten, who had obviously been unwanted and dumped. The other kitten was wild with insane eyes, but tiny Raphael, though all at sea, was curious and measuring his options.

We lived upstairs in a block of four units just up from Bondi Beach. One of those dark brick blocks that seem to absorb all the bright Sydney sunlight and appear sullen and uninviting from the outside. Ours had a decent garden with a large frangipani tree that was welcoming to small kittens. The other cat was



JANE STAPLEFORD AND RAPHAEL

Jane Stapleford's animals have characters that steal the hearts of art lovers. Most especially, Jane's cats. It was Raphael who stole the hearts of many, including my own, even after his ascent into cat heaven in 2003, and he continues today to feature in her paintings and limited editions.

Cat lovers will agree that there is no cat to compare with a beautiful tabby, that wonderful domestic creature which is not a breed but distinguished by the pattern of its coat - and Raphael had the most elegant tabby coat.

Jane was born in Tunbridge Wells in Kent, spent her early childhood in India and migrated as a child to Australia with her family. She graduated from the National Art School in East Sydney and then headed for London in 1967 where she attended St. Martin's School of Art and began her art career selling paintings to private collectors and through galleries.

Jane returned to Australia in 1969 and forged her artistic career over the following years, exhibiting with major galleries and accepting commissions, such as from the Prime Minister's Office, Japanese corporations and the American Ambassador in Canberra.

Many of Jane's most dedicated admirers and collectors will know her not from her paintings but from her work which falls within the Australian craft movement, frequently featuring her unique world of creatures, from nature as well as fantastical.

Jane's relentless output of commissions, works for her highly anticipated exhibitions and her exquisitely hand crafted pieces which may be decorative, sculptural or like pieces of jewellery, is legendary. And a beloved cat continues to feature as just one aspect of her remarkable career.

Jane Stapleford's most recent exhibition, including works featuring Raphael, was at Day Fine Art in Blackheath NSW in October 2020.

Opposite: Raphael in the library
Below: Jane Stapleford with Kismet



A treasured little cat, much beloved by collectors of cat art around the world, people still ask after him

adopted by a brave friend, but Raphael, we think with the aid or acceptance of the other two cats, decided we were the best bet for comfort and safety, even though all four sets of occupants had fed him.

One day he appeared bleating at the back door, scampered in when the door was opened and hid under the kitchen cabinet for the next several weeks. We put cat litter there and food and gradually he would venture out. Tiny and insignificant in this harsh world, we woke one day to find him curled in between the other two cats. His acceptance was confirmed and his little life assumed a pattern that continued for more than ten years until we finally moved to Blackheath at the turn of the Millenium.

As I've said, it was a limited but happy existence, but that was perfect for me as he was ever-present, not camera shy and became my muse. His pretty

features and soft, short hair with its detailed swirls of earth colours allowed him to be transported into my imagination and off to whichever place my mind travelled. That's how he got to meet Vincent van Gogh and Amedeo Modigliani and all my heroes. Raphael didn't give much away about himself. He seemed content to be the enigmatic observer until one day we discovered why that might be when we caught him demolishing the marijuana plant that my son had sneaked onto the front balcony. Clearly there was a Bohemian side to him and this was also a blessing for us, because the plant was in plain view of the road below.

But that was about as far as it went for outward displays. He was generally content to sit and observe without passing judgement.

Nothing really changed when we moved up the Mountains. We got a new couch, in a much larger living room in a much larger house, but he dutifully took up his perch behind the heads on the back of the couch and said nothing about the goings on around him.

Raphael was thirteen when time caught up. He had outlived the other two cats that had so generously welcomed him into their domain and throughout that time had quietly inspired me to paint and etch dozens of times.

Opposite:
Raphael and his cabinets of curiosity, watercolour 2020

Below: Raphael spends an evening with Toulouse-Lautrec at the Moulin Rouge, handcoloured etching 2001



50 Raphael spends an evening with Toulouse-Lautrec at the Moulin Rouge. Stapleford 2001



A Night in the Museum of Two Folk, Land of the Conquistador

Elyseus 1888





...it has something to do with his enigmatic look and non-threatening nature that seems to ensnare the viewer.

A treasured little cat, much beloved by collectors of cat art around the world, people still ask after him in a way that has not happened to the same degree with the many other cats I've had and painted. I think it has something to do with his enigmatic look and non-threatening nature that seems to ensnare the viewer. Whatever it is, little Raphael has always been a crowd favourite, as he was for us.

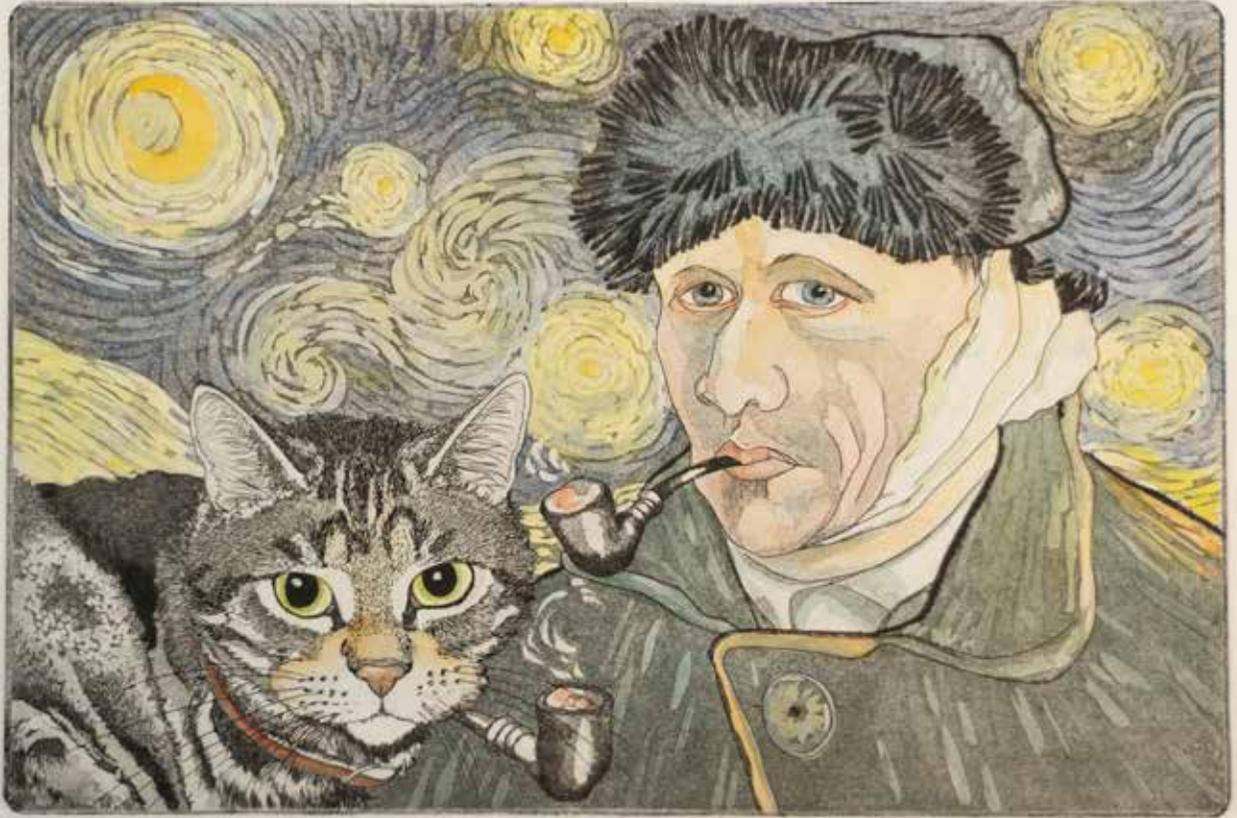
Opposite:
Top: Raphael and van Gogh share a quiet smoke on a starry night, handcoloured etching 1999

Below: Raphael and van Gogh, handcoloured etching 1993

This page:
Raphael and Vincent's Sunflowers
Below: Raphael 1989-2003, handcoloured etching 2003

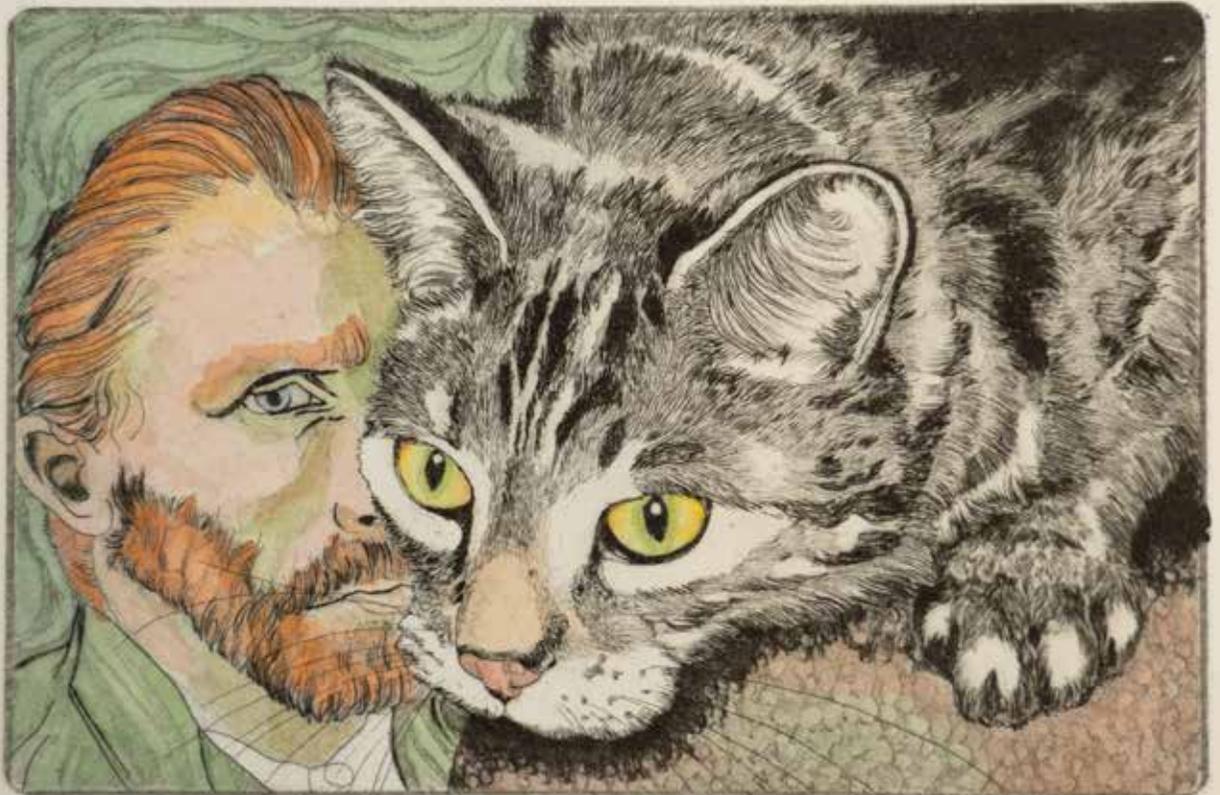


1/2 Raphael - 1989 - 2003. Rest in Peace. Stapleford 2003



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Raphael and Van Gogh share a quiet smoke on a starry night. Stapleford 1993



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Raphael and Van Gogh

Stapleford 1993

Raphael in his Garden of Heavenly Delights, watercolour 2018



Raphael in his Garden of Heavenly Delights. Stapleford MXXVIII

