



*Susanna*  
**BAUER**

Photography by Steve Tanner  
and Ian Kingsnorth





**SUSANNA BAUER** lives and works in Cornwall on the far South-West tip of the UK. With her extraordinary needlework on fragile leaves, she creates an intimate dialog with nature. The leaves are repaired, extended, embellished, reshaped, and combined using handmade lace crochet. The resulting forms are a meditation on the beauty and intricacy found in the natural world around us, and a reflection of complex and tender human relationships both within ourselves and our environment.

## OUR INTERVIEW WITH SUSANNA IS JUST A TINY VISION INTO HER INSPIRED WORLD:

### WHERE DO YOU LIVE?

I live in Penzance, a small coastal town in Cornwall in the South-West of the UK.

My studio is in the center of town. It has big sash windows and I can see the sea in the distance.

### TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF.

I was born in the South of Germany, where I have lived until 1996. I have grown up on the edge of a small town, close to woods, fields, rivers and lakes, not far from the mountains (The Alps).

Since learning the techniques around the age of 6, knitting and crochet have always been present in my life. I have also always had an affinity to nature and started learning about plants in my grandmother's garden, when I was a small child.

In my teenage years I had a holiday job in a plant nursery and garden design company, and I knew about landscape architecture as my mother worked in an architect's office for a while. After school, it seemed like a good idea to study landscape architecture, as that would combine my love for plants and the land with my interest in art and design. During my studies I did a lot of work placements—in landscape architects' studios, on building sites with a landscape construction firm and in a botanical garden in France.

Around the same time I also had connections to the film school in Munich and through helping out on film shoots I heard about the job of model makers and special effects people, which then totally grabbed my interest and very much connected to the part of me that always enjoyed creative construction. This eventually led me to train as a model maker for industrial design, and in 1996 I moved to London to work in the film and advertising industry.

My model making years took me away from the natural environment for a while. I immersed myself in a world of creativity of a different kind, everything was possible; I learned to make anything from robots to puppets, film sets and spaceships, and I trained in all different techniques, sculpting, colour work, engineering...most of all I enjoyed miniature work.

For many years I balanced my time working in London with visits to Cornwall in the far South-West of the UK, where my partner Paul Fry, also an artist, lived.

Eventually my love for nature found expression again when I started to study at art school, part-time while still working in model making workshops. Ideas from that time formed the basis of the work that I do now.

In 2010 I permanently relocated from London to Cornwall.



### WHAT ROLE HAS BEING A CREATIVE PLAYED IN YOUR LIFE IN THE PAST?

I have always enjoyed making and creating and throughout my whole life and I was very fortunate throughout my childhood being surrounded by a lot of creative influences among family and friends. I have learned crochet, embroidery and other craft techniques at school. My grandmother was a seamstress, my mother a keen knitter and among my parents' friends were fine artists, an

actress and a potter, so I had a very early exposure to various creative worlds.

I have not set out to become a professional artist. Towards the end of my school years, my plan was to study biology, but then I decided to study landscape architecture and later I became a model maker. There has always been an artistic thread throughout my life and the way my professional life has moved along different paths has brought me to the point where I am now.

### WHEN DID YOU START CREATING?

In the widest sense I have been creating ever since I can think, whether that was building paper landscapes into matchboxes as a child or making Christmas decorations, string puppets or knitting socks. I made objects for craft markets, sold small abstract sculptures in a lifestyle shop and during my landscape architecture studies, I created and planned environments and fabricated inventive maquettes for projects.

With model making, I chose a profession that engaged the creative maker brain on an everyday basis, finding the best ways to visualize a designer's ideas.

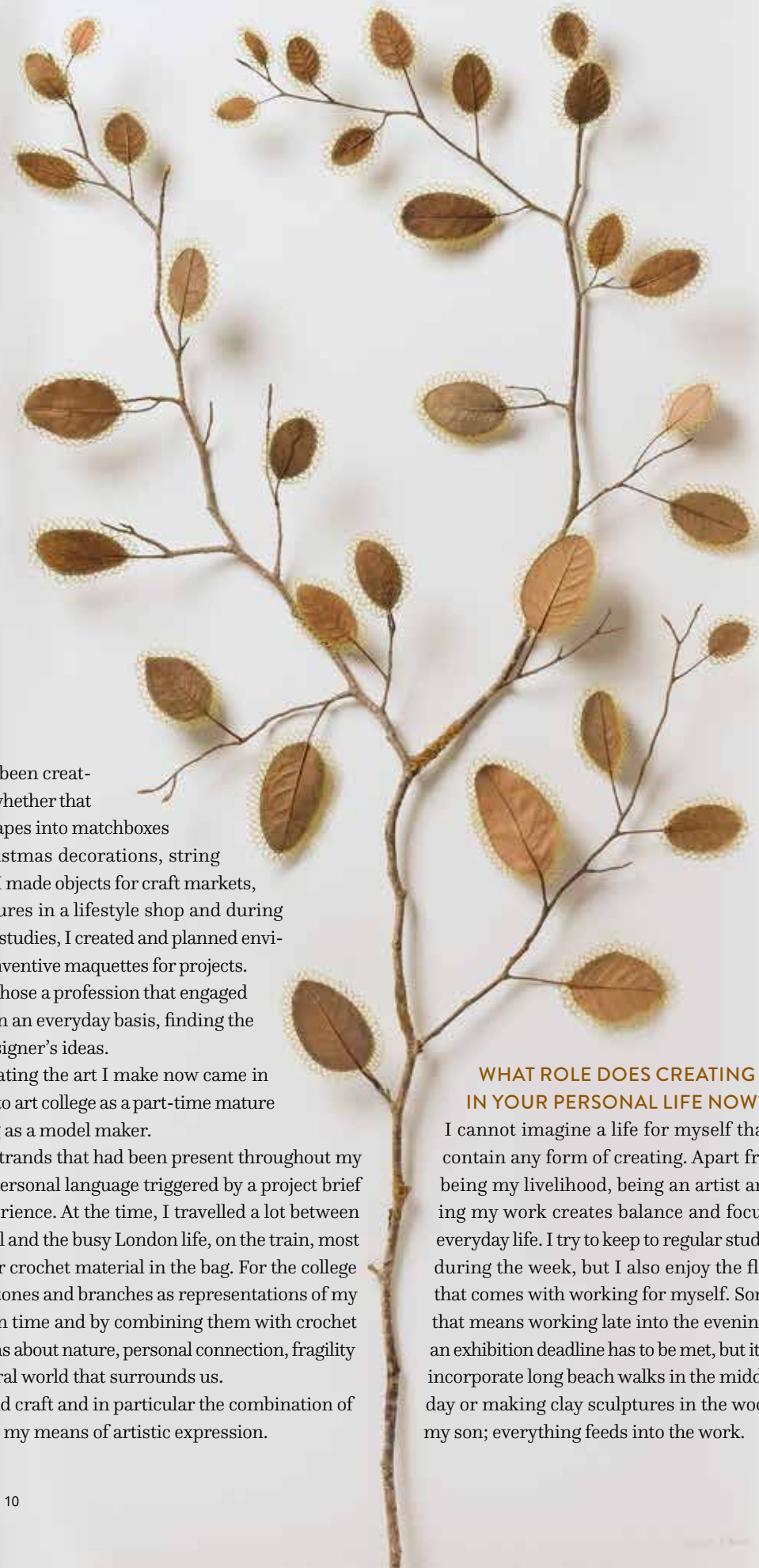
But the first step to creating the art I make now came in 2007, when I decided to go to art college as a part-time mature student while still working as a model maker.

The different creative strands that had been present throughout my life merged into my own personal language triggered by a project brief entitled Container of Experience. At the time, I travelled a lot between the wild nature of Cornwall and the busy London life, on the train, most of the time with knitting or crochet material in the bag. For the college project I collected leaves, stones and branches as representations of my memories and moments in time and by combining them with crochet they became my meditations about nature, personal connection, fragility and the beauty in the natural world that surrounds us.

The fusion of nature and craft and in particular the combination of leaves and crochet became my means of artistic expression.

### WHAT ROLE DOES CREATING PLAY IN YOUR PERSONAL LIFE NOW?

I cannot imagine a life for myself that didn't contain any form of creating. Apart from now being my livelihood, being an artist and making my work creates balance and focus in my everyday life. I try to keep to regular studio hours during the week, but I also enjoy the flexibility that comes with working for myself. Sometimes that means working late into the evenings when an exhibition deadline has to be met, but it can also incorporate long beach walks in the middle of the day or making clay sculptures in the woods with my son; everything feeds into the work.





**WHEN, WHERE, AND HOW DID YOU LEARN HOW TO DO WHAT YOU CREATE?**

My work is very much the result of the path my life has taken and the skills I picked up and developed along the way. I have found my own personal visual language with the combination of crochet and leaves—something that I have never seen anywhere else before and which has become essential to the work I have been doing for over 12 years now.

My model making training has given me the skills to work on a very detailed level and I could use the basic knowledge of crochet that I acquired in childhood to teach myself the more complicated processes of lace and pattern work.





#### WHAT ARE SOME OF THE STEPS IN YOUR CREATIVE PROCESS?

Collecting leaves forms a big part of the work and I am very selective about what I bring back to the studio. I have a couple of favorite trees that I visit regularly, but I am always open to new finds, whether it's on a walk in the local woods or on far away travels. I prefer to work with fallen leaves, I like their various shades of soft browns.

All my leaves are dried thoroughly before I use them for a piece of work, sometimes for weeks or months. I store them at my studio, hung up or pressed flat, some are stored in boxes. I like to be surrounded by them for inspiration, but only a small selection of the material I have collected will get chosen for a piece of work.

The actual making process is very slow, I tend to work on a few pieces at the same time, alternating between them.

Once a leaf or a branch work is finished, it is framed behind conservation grade glass, which filters out over 99% of UV rays. The sun's radiation is one of the main factors that contribute to the decay of a leaf along with exposure to moisture, insects, microorganisms, but thoroughly dried and protected from these influences, leaves can be kept for a very long time.

#### HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR CREATIVE STYLE?

Intricate, detailed, meditative, subtle, calm.

#### WHERE DO YOU FIND IDEAS AND YOUR INSPIRATION?

Inspiration for my work comes from the natural world, patterns and shapes I capture on walks, conversations and the people in my life and around me.

The beauty of nature contains everything, the richest variety of colour palettes, the most intricate constructions and designs and we can find ourselves within it, being a part of this authentic world.

I have the greatest respect for nature, I admire the persistence and the energy of even the smallest plant in finding its place and the immense beauty of all the natural life that surround us—and this goes not only for flowers or ornamental plants.

The intricacy of some so-called weeds or the fine details of grasses, veins on leaves or patterns in tree barks hold a never-ending fascination. The inventiveness of nature from the impressive presence of a huge tree down to the intricacy of a tiny dried seed head never ceases to amaze me.

But this delicate balance of growth and renewal is so easily disturbed and although nature has this incredible ability to restore itself and recover, on a global scale the collective human influence is a real threat to this fragile equilibrium.

But looking very closely—and my work very much requires detailed attention—opens my view up to this bigger picture.





“ADOPT THE PACE OF NATURE:  
HER SECRET IS PATIENCE.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

#### WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE WITH YOUR CREATING?

There are many big challenges that come with creative work, like the ‘finding enough time to work’ challenge, an ongoing juggle of meeting deadlines and finding the time to play with new ideas and balancing it all out with family life.

And the constant challenge of staying organized with the work and the admin around it. It’s amazing how much time goes into things that have nothing to do with the actual making of the art.

Whenever something seems somewhat unpredictable and daunting, like planning a big commission or taking the financial risk of preparing for an exhibition without knowing if anything will sell, I try to see it as a chance to grow and trust that the work will go the right way.

#### WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST ACCOMPLISHMENT?

I am very grateful for the way my artistic career has developed ever since I started pursuing this path. It has been a gradual

development, which started by following an inner drive to do my own work and along the way I have been given amazing opportunities to show and sell my work.

I’m not sure if I can name a single ‘biggest’ accomplishment, every step of the way so far felt like a big success and there have been several ‘firsts’ that will always stick in my mind as big achievements—first time showing my work publicly during an open studio week, selling my first piece of work, first commission, first time showing with a gallery, first time showing at an art fair, first solo show, first exhibitions abroad...every new step feels like a challenge and gives me the driving force to learn and expand boundaries.

But there is also a very different feeling of accomplishment and that is the feeling that sets in when a new piece of work emerges, or a new idea takes shape for the first time and it works. Literally the biggest success, in terms of size, was a large piece of work (entitled Awakenings) made with a whole branch, which is almost as tall as me. But I get equally excited about a tiny intricate leaf piece that communicates a certain feeling.



**Susanna Bauer**  
www.SusannaBauer.com  
INSTAGRAM: Susanna\_Bauer

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