





Susanna Bauer

A Poet in the Woods

BY SCOTT ROTHSTEIN

Small, intimate, and nuanced, the sculptures of Susanna Bauer express the intent of an artist thoroughly engaged with nature. In her hands, humble materials are reimagined into objects that resemble the familiar, only modified beyond expectation. Each work offers an acutely focused encounter. The ecosystem that Bauer renders is both of the world and of a territory slightly altered.

Using twigs, leaves, stones, and thread, she builds objects that respect the integrity of her materials. Her sculptures are curated events; natural elements are in a manipulated state, yet still essentially intact. The artist's presence is always visible in these delicate works, as she ever so gently transitions what she has collected into considered and defined sculptures.

Bauer illuminates nature in a heightened and magnified way, bringing materials out of their habitat and into a gallery setting. Her resolve to calibrate a mindful balance between found items and her response to them is always evident. With a consistent restraint expressed in every aspect of her work, she brings to form her affinity for things that are fragile and often overlooked by others. As she explains, "Vulnerability and resilience are central to the making of my work, but they are also at the core of human relationships and our dynamic connection with nature. There is a fine balance in my work between fragility and strength: literally, when it comes to pulling a fine thread through a brittle leaf or a thin, dry piece of wood, but also in a wider context—the tenderness and tension in human connections, the ephemeral yet enduring beauty of nature, which can be found in the smallest detail, vulnerability and resilience that could be transferred to nature as a whole or the stories of individual beings."

Opposite: *Cone Tree No. 2*, 2017. Magnolia leaves, cotton yarn, and wood, 34 x 26.3 x 6 cm. **Above:** *Collection (detail)*, 2015. Magnolia and platanus leaves, wood, and cotton yarn, dimensions variable.



Above: *Dwelling* (detail), 2013. Magnolia leaf and cotton yarn, approx. 20 x 10 cm. Left: *Connect*, 2015. Magnolia leaves, cotton yarn, and wood, 52 x 52 x 7 cm. Below: *Trythall*, 2013. Wood and cotton yarn, 52 x 52 cm.



Bauer tightly governs the viewer's experience, explaining, "My work is an endeavor to slow down the viewer and open eyes to the delicate balance that is inherent in our natural surroundings as well as within the human condition, reflected in our relationships with each other, but also within our environment." There is nothing ambiguous in these pieces. No detail is random. Every element is purposeful and realized with deliberate energy. While Bauer builds her objects with the skill of a craftsman, the conceptual foundation eclipses the strength of their fabrication. For her, ideas are important.

Bauer was born in Eichstätt, a small town in Bavaria, Germany, about 100 kilometers north of Munich. Her family lived at the edge of the town, across the road from a wooded area bordered by fields and farmland. These woods were Bauer's playground, a place where she spent time observing and exploring. When it was time to choose a career, she studied landscape architecture in Freising, near Munich. She worked in this profession for several years before becoming a model maker in London.

While solving problems for clients was both interesting and rewarding, Bauer desired a more personal and self-expressive endeavor. She started taking classes at Camberwell College of Arts, part of the University of the Arts London. There, she began to find and develop her creative identity. All of her past experiences, both professionally and personally, culminated in the sculptures that she began making in art school.

Not long after attending Camberwell, Bauer left London to live in a more rural setting. She settled in Penzance on the southern tip of Cornwall, where she built



Above: *Levels* (detail), 2015. Platanus leaves and cotton yarn, 52 x 52 x 5 cm. Below: *Cube Tree No. 5* (detail), 2015. Magnolia leaves, cotton yarn, and wood, 52 x 52 x 8.8 cm.



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a life and studio in a setting that, on a daily basis, exposed her to an inspiring environment. Bauer recalls that her “close outdoor connection took a bit of a break in my model making years, when I moved to London in 1996, but when I met my partner, the painter and sculptor Paul Fry, he introduced me to Cornwall, and this amazing part of the U.K. reignited my love for nature.”

Cornwall has always attracted artists. Barbara Hepworth lived in St. Ives, which is not far from Penzance. Naum Gabo, Alfred Wallis, and even Mark Rothko spent time in the area. London’s Tate Gallery has a small museum in Cornwall with an active exhibition schedule. The artists who have been drawn here come for the solitude and for the profound beauty, as well as the dramatic natural light that saturates this southernmost tip of the U.K.

In this compelling landscape, Bauer has built an impressive and personal body of work. She explains, “I love the fact that the landscape holds so much emotion for me, from the windswept briskness of the headlands and the soft lines of the almost jungle-like richness of the gardens to the dreamy calmness of leafy woods with little streams in the valleys and the bright expanses of sandy beaches framed with dramatic cliffs. It’s such a varied landscape, and there is always a place to go to and fill the senses whatever the weather. The view of a giant magnolia tree in bloom in bright sunshine can brighten my mind and mood for a long time, and having my hair blown around on the top of a hill surrounded by big granite boulders can have a cleansing and invigorating influence. What I bring back with me into the studio from these times outside all filters into my work.”

Bauer transforms experience into sculpture, building objects that acknowledge her collaboration with a landscape that quickens her. Like a poet choosing the right word, she carefully selects materials to reveal her perceptions and emotions. Her works invite attentive viewing and are best approached thoughtfully. Art and the natural world intersect in Bauer’s sculpture, perfectly conceived and meticulously articulated.

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