



# TENDERNESS & TENSION: THE WORK OF SUSANNA BAUER

BY TRUDI VAN DYKE



A PLETHORA OF ARTISTS ARE CREATING WITH NATURAL MATERIALS. Perhaps this interface provides an outlet to express empathy for our negative environmental impact. But Susanna Bauer's work, made out of leaves and fine cotton threads, illustrates the elusive and fragile nature of life itself.

Bauer crafts two- and three-dimensional sculptures from dried leaves, twigs, and occasionally stones. Working carefully—with a patient hand, practiced eye, and very small hooks and needles—she uses crochet to embellish the leaves or as a method of constructing three-dimensional pieces.

Bauer's works are small and intimate and yet represent a dynamic interaction between the brittle natural objects and delicate, pliable thread. Training as an architect and previously working

in an industry where she made small models has influenced her work and honed her skills and her understanding of how to empower something small to have a large impact.

The German-born artist makes her home in a small corner of England where she is drawn to appreciate the beauty of nature around her and inspired to create her introspective works with simple materials and dexterous technique.

Each piece's journey begins with collecting the raw materials. It is a meditative process. Bauer finds tranquility and peacefulness while walking near her home, gathering the leaves and other natural detritus that she encounters. She doesn't preserve the leaves, but washes and thoroughly dries them before use to remove microorganisms and insects. She describes her studio as overflowing



with leaves, some very old, some new, but all waiting for her to transform, and at the same time, reveal them.

Sometimes a particular leaf will seem ideal for cutting, clipping, and crochet. Other works are started with a blank slate and an inspirational idea. Then she seeks the perfect element to develop the vision.

With leaves as her palette, Bauer applies cotton crochet thread in two ways. The crochet may be an embellishment showcasing the personality that resonates in a leaf's shape or texture. The delicate stitches may also become the vehicle for sculpture and construction. The crochet is visible and dexterously stitched through, on, and around the leaves. Bauer cuts, and rearranges, or uses natural imperfections as she studies ways that her crafting will bring her vision to fruition. It has taken patience and practice to learn

the characteristics of a variety of species and she is always learning and discovering the qualities of each species. Much of her current work is sculpted with magnolia and plane (sycamore) leaves. The shape of the magnolia leaves suggests a somewhat figurative interpretation as she explores their interaction with each other and with the crochet. The sycamore leaves are more intricately veined and have some three-dimensional qualities that the artist puts to use as she sculpts.

Bauer's two-dimensional pieces are sometimes as simple as one leaf with imperfections gracefully crocheted with patterns that provide a statement on the inherent beauty of the natural world. The artist doesn't want to improve nature, but observations of Bauer's work imply that she is in collaboration with nature. Scott Rothstein, writing in *Hand/Eye Magazine*, notes, "The idea that something so small, fragile, and insignificant as a leaf becomes the foundation of a sculpture challenges expectations."

Three-dimensional work adds another element. The leaves are stitched together in carefully planned ways that create a give



OPPOSITE PAGE TOP: Susanna Bauer BOTTOM: **Reunion** (Detail); 2015; platanus leaves, cotton thread; 36.5 x 31.5 cm

THIS PAGE TOP: **Restoration** (Detail) LEFT: **Restoration**; 2015; magnolia leaf, cotton thread; 29 x 21 cm



and take between and within the miniature sculptures. Bauer says that each sculptural piece goes further than its connections to the natural world. For the artist and her audience, there is a sharing of relationships developed and nurtured between leaves. It is rewarding to Bauer when viewers allow themselves to connect in some ways with their own metaphors of nature. Crochet becomes the perfect expression for Bauer who observes, "...how fragile

we are as human beings, subjected to the tensions and pulls in our connections and relationships."

Follow Bauer on Instagram @susanna\_bauer and Facebook @susannabauerart and visit [www.susannabauer.com](http://www.susannabauer.com).

TOP LEFT: **Ten Circles** (Detail); 2015; magnolia leaf, cotton thread; 52 x 52 cm  
BOTTOM LEFT: Susanna Bauer  
ABOVE: **Trythall**; 2013; wood, cotton thread; 52 x 52 cm