



# ART OF SUSANNA BAUER

by Mike Holmes

**S**usanna Bauer often walks along the lanes and gardens near her home in Penzance, Cornwall looking up at the trees. She glances up at the leaves, noticing how they overlap, move back and forth on a branch or fall to the ground. The leaves are the source of her remarkable and delicate artworks that combine nature with finely worked crochet lace. Her main inspiration is derived from a number of tree species found on the mild Cornish Coast. Bauer also works with leaves from other parts of the country and those brought back from journeys abroad.

Born and raised in Bavaria in southern Germany, Bauer studied Landscape Architecture at the **Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich**. She then worked for 17 years as a model maker for films, advertising and other artists before continuing her studies at **Camberwell College of Art**. Susanna learned how to crochet as a child in Germany and

began to combine her craft abilities with her love of nature while studying in London. When Bauer met her partner, the painter and sculptor **Paul Fry**, he was living in Cornwall and introduced her to an unfamiliar, beautiful and wild part of the country. For many years she divided her life between Cornwall and London. Her time spent in Cornwall filled and fueled her artistic inspiration and also reconnected her to childhood memories of growing up next to the woods on the edge of a small town in Germany. In 2010, after the birth of their son, she permanently relocated to Cornwall.

The use of leaves has allowed Bauer's work to develop in terms of complexity of form and subtlety in content. She began by crocheting tight coverings over found objects such as pebbles, sticks and other detritus in the local landscape. The handwork called attention to specific textures or forms of the stones and sticks. The first leaf Bauer used incorporated a

simple single crochet line around its edge. This led to years of exploration and invention.

The large, leathery leaves of Magnolia trees inspire many of her pieces. The color, size, spots, and veining of every leaf is unique. This individuality invites close and mindful observation of Bauer's intricate yet restrained interventions or the subtle interplay between nature and handwork. The simple archetypal form of the Magnolia leaf lends itself to many kinds of interpretations. Bauer wants the viewer to draw their own conclusion. Connections in life and nature are at the heart of Bauer's art.

To prepare the leaves, each one is carefully washed and dried just as botanists would prepare plant specimens. They are strung along the walls and hung on cloth spins in her studio waiting for use. Working with a very small crochet hook, Bauer carefully pierces the dried leaves and crochets intricate lace fringe around the perimeter. Pieces with multiple leaves are handled spatially; the lace can overlap or interact between separate leaves. What Bauer finds "particularly interesting is the variation in shape and texture in different leaf types. It's like having a variety of canvases to work with." For example, Sycamore leaves have finer veins and are especially fragile.

Bauer approaches her interventions in a number of different ways. Frequently, she crochets a border along the edge of a leaf. Pieces including *Adornment*, *Bordure*, and *Aura* encourage the viewer to look closely to discover a pattern of veins which extends outward and eventually converges with the stitched edges. Her aim is to slow the viewer down so they may take notice of the nuances in her work.

Bauer speaks about the importance of not only recognizing the craft of her work but also the dialogue between the handmade and the natural world. Groupings of individual leaves are connected by binding them together. Sections of leaves are cut out in circles, flipped, and reattached or swapped with other leaves to highlight differences in color or texture. A single cut circle is raised up from the surface, almost as if it is being pushed from below. Or a perfectly crocheted cylinder pierces through a curled leaf or falls below to create new volumes as in *Core*. The contoured edge becomes the focus of your attention. This focus is delightful.

Left page: **Susanna Bauer** portrait. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Top: **Susanna Bauer *Union*** 2017, magnolia leaves, cotton thread, crocheted, 9" x 10.5". Photo: art-photographers.co.uk.

Bottom: **Susanna Bauer *Core II*** (side view) 2015, magnolia leaf, cotton thread, crocheted, 13.5" x 10.5" x 2". Photo: art-photographers.co.uk.







In her series *Web*, a vein structure is echoed in magnified form within a net woven around the leaf. The cotton web invites the viewer to dive even deeper into the intricate microcosm of plant cells and the complicated inner structures that we carry within us.

The precise geometry of a circle is used in many of Bauer's pieces to contrast with the irregularities found in nature. In *Moon XXX* a circle of pale thread replaces the body of the leaf, leaving only the delicate veins, or a full moon rising from the surface. In *Cube Tree No. 7* the woven leaves have been transformed into cubes while still attached to the twigs from which they grew.

Left page: **Susanna Bauer *Web V*** 2019, magnolia leaf, cotton thread, crocheted, 15" x 10" (unframed). Photo by the artist.

Top: **Susanna Bauer *Cube Tree No. 7*** 2019, magnolia leaves, cotton thread, wood, crocheted, 19" x 13.5" x 13.5". Photo: art-photographers.co.uk.

Bottom: **Susanna Bauer *Moon XXX*** (detail) 2019, magnolia leaf, cotton thread, crocheted, 15.75" x 15.75". Photo: art-photographers.co.uk.

Even the color of the cotton thread is carefully considered. The tonal range of Bauer's work is subtle. The leaves are varying hues of tan and brown with the stitching in contrasting colors of beige or ivory. The thread may also be the exact color of the leaf, creating a seamless connection between the natural surface and thread.

When describing her work, Bauer explains that she uses "the ornamental quality of traditional crochet work as a means to express her reverence for nature, but the technique is also applied in a more unconventional way as a method for constructing sculpture." During a phone interview, Bauer emphasizes that although many people focus on the wonderful craftsmanship of her pieces, it is the interplay of the handwork and nature that she wants to explore. The artist points out how the fragility and individuality of the leaves not only highlight our relationships with each other, but also our relationship to the natural world. As the world watches in horror while the forests of the Amazon burn this year, we must remember that our futures are intertwined with nature. We are not separate from nature but part of it. Forests are Life.





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Bauer divides her artwork into two- and three-dimensional categories. However, the 2D pieces worked in a single plane still retain visual mass. The 3D pieces showcase the leaves being manipulated on branches. Alternatively, large, framed “collections” of leaves form a hybrid natural history. The titles of Bauer’s pieces also invite multiple interpretations. *Connect*, *Link*, *Reunion*, *Encounter*, and *Aligning*, describe specific stitched interventions that reflect the tenderness and care required in our daily lives.

Top: **Susanna Bauer *Aligning*** (side view) 2016, magnolia leaves, cotton thread, crocheted, 13.5" x 10.5" x 2.75".  
Photo: art-photographers.co.uk.

Bottom: **Susanna Bauer *Path IV*** 2019, magnolia leaf, cotton thread, crocheted, 15" x 15". Photo: art-photographers.co.uk.

Bauer's many years as a maker have given her the confidence to follow her instincts and to be open to experiments; wherever they may lead. New work comes from the progression of past pieces, and others out of the blue. Consistency is found in the balance between her handwork and rescued natural elements. One might assume that the crochet work would overwhelm individual leaves, but her careful restraint allows the artwork to be experienced in subtle interplay. The viewer is drawn into the work, slowly. It is a quiet and lovely dialog formed between the leaves and thread. Bauer describes this interplay as "a way of expressing individual stories." They are indeed fascinating stories.

[susannabauer.com](http://susannabauer.com)

—Mike Holmes, a California native, graduated from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks with a degree in Geography and studied jewelry and metalsmithing at The California College of the Arts, Oakland. Holmes is the owner of Velvet da Vinci gallery. He has organized more than 100 exhibitions, given talks and written internationally on contemporary jewelry and craft.

**Susanna Bauer Collection (Two by Two)** 2015, magnolia, plane tree, oak, eucalyptus leaves, wood, cotton thread, crocheted, 29.5" x 29.5" x 2". Photo: art-photographers.co.uk.

