

Vanessa Barragão



P O R T F O L I O





Coral Garden, by Vanessa Barragão (this page and previous page). Created with 100% recycled wool, 300cm x 400cm x 500cm. Displayed at "Domotex" solo exhibition in Hanover, Germany, in January 2019, and "OneFifteen" solo exhibition in Taipei, Taiwan, in July 2019.

Portuguese textile artist Vanessa Barragão creates beautiful, exquisite artworks inspired by the textures, shapes and forms of corals and invertebrate life found on ocean reefs. Employing handmade ancestral crafts, she uses only sustainably sourced upcycled materials. X-Ray Mag interviewed the artist to learn more about her creative process and perspectives on sustainability in the textiles we use as well as eco-conscious consumption in our daily lives, as she aims to raise awareness of how these affect the planet's fragile ecosystems.

Text edited by G. Symes
All artwork by Vanessa Barragão
Photos by Studio Vanessa Barragão

X-RAY MAG: Tell us about yourself, your background and how you became an artist.

VB: I had dreamed of being a fashion designer all my life until I actually started studying fashion design in university. There, I realized that it was not what

I wanted for myself at all and more importantly, I realized how wasteful and polluting the fashion industry really is. Afterwards, I felt I had to do something about it, however small of an impact I could make.

X-RAY MAG: Why coral reefs and underwater themes? How did you come to these themes and how did you develop your style of textile artworks?

VB: During my childhood, I used to travel with my parents and sister to the Caribbean. That was where I saw coral reefs for the first time and this image has stuck with me ever since. Their colors and textures, and all the life forms surrounding them, were fascinating to see up close.

Visiting year by year, their loss of colors and the environmental degradation surrounding the area were obvious. From then on, my art and my mission of raising

Close-up view of *Coral Garden*, by Vanessa Barragão. The piece aims to raise awareness about coral bleaching caused by pollution and global warming, which is affecting reefs around the world.



portfolio

Nostalgia, by Vanessa Barragão (below). Created with 100% recycled wool, palm leaves and tencel, 250 x 250cm



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THIS PAGE: Work in progress and close-up detailed views of *Nostalgia* by Vanessa Barragão (right column)



awareness became connected. I have always loved to draw and create things manually, many times using artisanal techniques that have been passed on and taught to me by my grandparents.

X-RAY MAG: Who or what has inspired you or your artwork and why?

VB: My inspiration and interests were always very much based on nature. For example, that time I saw corals

as a child was a big turning point in my creations, even then.

My biggest mentors are, without a doubt, my grandparents. They taught me most of the techniques I apply to my work and they are, to

The artist at work on various pieces at her studio in Portugal

portfolio



The artist Vanessa Barragão (above) in front of her massive 20-foot wide tapestry artwork, *Botanical*, which emulates the map of the world, with the diverse ecosystems and topography of the planet represented by various colors of yarn: blues for oceans, greens for forests, warm tones for deserts, and white for polar regions. The artwork was commissioned by Kew Gardens and Heathrow Airport in London, United Kingdom, where it has been exhibited since July 2019.

Close-up detail views of *Botanical* by Vanessa Barragão (right and top right)



this day, a big part of the creative process behind my tapestries.

X-RAY MAG: What is your artistic method or creative process?

VB: First of all, the materials I use in my artworks are 100 percent recycled and sourced by myself from textile factories all over Portugal. All the waste I have collected over the years would go to the trash otherwise. All yarns collected go through a meticulous selection and cleaning pro-

cess to ensure that they can be used in my tapestries.

From that point on, the creative process is very spontaneous. Most times, I do not make any sketches, and the works grow very naturally and spontaneously, according to my mood, to the people around me, the weather, etc.

X-RAY MAG: What is your relationship to the underwater world and coral reefs? Are you a scuba diver or a snorkeler and how have your experiences underwater influ-

enced your art? In your relationship with reefs and the sea, where have you had your favorite experiences?

VB: Even though I spent my childhood vacationing by the Caribbean and having lived all my life by the sea until today, the sea still frightens me! I am not a scuba diver, but the experience that has impacted me the most underwater was snorkeling in Raja Ampat—the range of colors, variety of life forms, and the stunning scenery I saw there was just amazing.





Bleached Coral, by Vanessa Barragão. Created with 100% recycled wool, 125cm x 200cm. This piece aims to raise awareness and urge reflection upon how our actions contribute to global warming and pollution, negatively affecting our fragile coral reefs, even in remote areas of the world. The artwork was displayed at the "Change is a Team Sport" exhibit at the Adidas Studio/Superbowl in Miami, USA, in January 2020.



Detail of *Bleached Coral*, by Vanessa Barragão

X-RAY MAG: *What is the message or experience you want viewers of your artwork to have or understand?*

VB: With my artworks, I intend to raise awareness of how important recycling, upcycling old items, and preserving artisanal methods of production really is and how our consumption habits need to

change—many things we buy are unnecessary and come from very wasteful industries. We need to buy consciously.

X-RAY MAG: *What are the challenges or benefits of being an artist in the world today? Any thoughts or advice for aspiring artists in ocean arts?*

VB: In my opinion, it is important that every artist expresses a thought, a feeling or idea through his or her art. That is my main mission behind each piece I create.

The biggest challenge as an artist is that you always have to come up with new ideas, different from the rest, and sometimes this can be exhausting.

I think one of the biggest benefits of

being an artist in today's world is the possibility of being able to share it with the whole world using social media platforms like Instagram, which can open many doors.

X-RAY MAG: *How do people—adults and children—respond to your works?*

Gerl Coral (below) by Vanessa Barragão, and detailed close-up (right). Created with 100% recycled wool, 120 x 230cm

Barragão



Melissa's Garden, by Vanessa Barragão, was inspired by the artist's experience snorkeling the colorful coral reefs of Raja Ampat, Indonesia. Created with 100% recycled wool, 120 x 145cm



VB: Just like with real corals, people are always very tempted to touch my artworks with their hands—and not just children, adults do it too! I find it very curious because this is not something people usually do with paintings, sculptures or even rugs. But I do understand that the variety of textures is very inviting to the touch, just like corals are! [ed. – But please don't touch corals—they are indeed fragile].

X-RAY MAG: What are your upcoming projects, art courses or events?

VB: I am currently working on a public art project in Taiwan, which I will unveil in a few months. I have also been creating pieces for private clients. I would love to

teach some online courses—a lot of people ask me about it, but so far, I have not had the time to do so. Hopefully, in the future, I will.

X-RAY MAG: Lastly, is there anything else you would like to tell our readers about yourself and your artwork?

VB: I rarely get the chance to speak to an audience of sea divers and snorkelers, so I want to take this opportunity to challenge you to share your underwater photos with me! Inspiration is always welcome. ■

For more information, go to the artist's website at: vanessabarragao.com or Instagram [@vanessabarragao_work](https://www.instagram.com/vanessabarragao_work) or Facebook [@vanessabarragaoartist](https://www.facebook.com/vanessabarragaoartist).

Inside the artist's studio in Portugal (left)