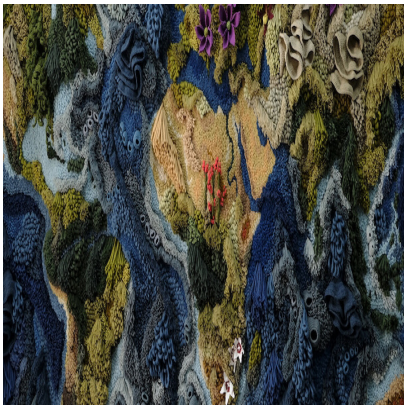

Under the Sea: Vanessa BarragÃ£oâs Coral Creations

Description

Vanessa BarragÃ£o and her work

Portuguese textile artist Vanessa BarragÃ£o makes vast, richly textured and all-encompassing textile creations resembling the flora and fauna of coral reefs, rendered with the traditional crafts of crochet, hand-tufting, felting, embroidery and macrame. On one hand, she draws our attention to the unfathomably complex wonder of coral reef systems, which she calls âcities at the bottom of the sea.â Yet her art is also a grave warning about the state of these reefs today, which are becoming increasingly damaged and destroyed by climate change.

From a young age, BarragÃ£o felt a deep connection to the ocean. She grew up in a coastal city, where the ocean was a commanding force. But it was during childhood holidays to the Caribbean that she truly felt the magnitude of the oceanâs ecological significance. It was also during her childhood that BarragÃ£o developed an affinity with fabric and textiles. She says, âMy grandmothers are knitters and do a lot of crochet and this influenced me so much.â

Wall-based tapestry by Vanessa BarragÃ£o

Years later, BarragÃ£o studied Fashion and Textiles at Lisbon University. It was textiles, in particular, that really piqued her interest, as she explains, âI love old things, collecting stuff from the garbageâ¦ I like things with a story and maybe it is because of this â¦ I realised that my focus should not be on fashion design but on textiles.â

As a young graduate, she took up work with a textile factory in northern Portugal, and it was here that she witnessed first-hand just how wasteful the industry could be. She recalls, âI realised how much discarded material they produce every day and to them these materials were unusable, but for a person like me, these were amazing materials.â In 2014, BarragÃ£o opened her own design studio, which, from the outset, took an ecologically aware approach. She says, âI started to produce my own yarns, using natural wool and getting into ecological dyes.â

Vanessa BarragÃ£o at work

BarragÃ£o has also worked predominantly with recycled or discarded materials in a bid to reduce the amount of waste being produced in the textile industry, noting, âAll the materials used come from the deadstock of several local factories which are first cleaned and then selected to be reused in my projects.â She adds, âI believe this is a solution for our planet and this is my mission â to show my audience the importance of recycling, and that sometimes we do not need to have money to create an idea in our minds. We just need solutions.â

BarragÃ£o has found the greatest inspiration for her work within nature, and particularly the coral reef, which has been a recurring theme in her practice for nearly a decade. In fact, her ever-expanding practice has become an homage to the hidden wonders of the coral reefs, whose infinitely complex textures and surfaces she renders intricately with painstaking, hand-made processes, creating a huge range of tapestries, wall-hangings, rugs and, more recently, sprawling sculptures spanning entire rooms, which capture the wild and untameable beauty of nature.

The 20-foot-wide tapestry was developed to commemorate the partnership betw
Gardens.

Yet there is also a stark warning within BarragÃ£oâs practice; she says her

brightest colours tell us what the coral reef used to look like, while her pale, washed out sculptures show what is gradually happening as it dies out. BarragÃ£o explains, âI have people arriving in my studio, asking why I add colour to my pieces, because they do not know that coral reefs are naturally colourfulâ¦ the coral reefs are not white, they are white because they are dying.â Thus, her art holds a vitally significant message that can be carried over into the next generation, as she points out, âWe cannot only think about the human species, because this planet is not only ours and this is a mentality that must be taught.â

CATEGORY

1. TEXTILES
2. TEXTILES IN COMMUNITY

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