

CRIXEO

FALL IN LOVE WITH THE INTRICATE LEAF ART OF SUSANNA BAUER

BY [KEVIN KELLEY](#)
EDITED BY EMILY STEELE
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WITH A CROCHET HOOK, NEEDLE AND THREAD, SUSANNA BAUER WEAVES FALLEN LEAVES INTO DELICATE SCULPTURES.

The familiar crunch of dried leaves is one of the great pleasures of autumn, but when Susanna Bauer uses leaves to create highly detailed crocheted sculptures, she barely makes a sound with her tiny needles and fine thread. What compels someone to take a leaf and put a needle through it? Unlike our favorite knitted scarf that keeps us warm when the autumn winds stir, there is no practical utility for Susanna's leaf sculptures, but there are lessons about how we can speak and listen to leaves. In an interview for *Crixeo*, I asked Susanna how she approaches her extraordinary leaf art.

"I search for quietness inside myself. Looking closely and seeing which leaves find each other, or giving space to an idea to evolve into a composition. The dialogue with the work happens when I'm in the right state of mind. I can't work if I've got any concerns in my head or I'm feeling rushed. In that way, my leaves help me to center myself to an inner stillness that is very necessary to work but also to keep a balance in life."

Before working with leaves, Susanna was living in London, and her partner was living in Cornwall, in the far southwest tip of England. "Which is the complete opposite of London," Susanna said.

She went back and forth from the bustling city to the scenic countryside, and while walking around Cornwall she collected natural objects, which became "containers of experiences," a way of preserving memories of special times and places. It started with a stone that I covered in tight crochet, and went on to driftwood pieces, and then I just picked up a leaf and thought, "What can I do with this?"

Susanna has since moved to Cornwall and now has favorite trees that she routinely collects from. She often works with magnolia leaves. Magnolia trees drop leaves throughout the year, which Susanna collects and brings to her studio. I asked, since she works with such delicate leaves, if she likes the sound of crunching them as I do.

"I think...no," she said and laughed. "Maybe because I am just too close to them. In the studio, they do get crunched occasionally because I sort through them, and there are leaves that are just not right for the work, so they get a little crunched, and then they go back out into the cycle of nature."

Autumn has long inspired poets and other artists to reflect on the passing of time. Magnolia trees, like those Susanna uses, appeared tens of millions of years before modern humans, and the use of threads and stitching to make beautiful and intricate designs is one of the earliest of human arts. Susanna thinks about time as she collects leaves, which she captures at a particular moment in their life cycle. “In autumn there is that beautiful gradient from the green, over the yellows, over the reds, which I love, but my work is not really so much about the color; it’s about the feeling of the work, the subtlety, that balance between the tension and the strength and fragility, which is symbolized in a leaf. The form and compositions I use, translate something that we have in us.

“A lot of my pieces deal with relationships between us and nature, or even among one another or with ourselves, and I think that the fragility symbolized by a leaf can be translated into the delicate balance that I think we all experience in our daily lives and connections with each other; or you can also see it in us and our connection with nature, which is a very precarious and fragile relationship that is so easily unsettled. What holds us together? How much can it be put under tension? And then it comes back to quite literally the tension in the mechanics of the making process: How much do I pull this thread to create the tension that I need for the mesh that I’m crocheting or the patterns that I’m making? And how much can it be pulled before something rips?”

What is more autumnal than a leaf? Perhaps the memories we make when we interact with them.

“I grew up in Germany in a very small town, and on the edge of the town there is a small valley with really steep sides full of trees. In the autumn, all the hillsides of the valley were covered in thick layers of fallen leaves, and I remember climbing up the sides of the little valley with my friends and then jumping into the leaves and throwing armfuls of them. I’ll never forget that — rolling down these hills into these big, leafy cushions.”

When studying Susanna’s highly crafted sculptures, you might feel you’ve never properly looked at the curves and monochromatic colors of leaves before. Suddenly you can’t help but examine every minute detail of these small wonders.

“Looking at one of my leaf pieces makes people slow down, stop and take something we normally perceive as abundant and ephemeral and look at it in a different way. No two leaves are the same. It’s just like people. You look at them, and they all have their individuality. Even though we may perceive thousands of leaves on a tree as generic — they all fall down, they all group into a big pile, and they are all the same — they’re not. Every leaf brings its individual character to the work.”

Susanna’s microscopic stitching has given her a greater appreciation of the natural world.

“Working with leaves and crochet is a slow process. I get to know every little vein of each particular leaf that I’m working with. My work has opened my eyes to looking very closely at all the very small things that surround us that we normally walk past or over. An autumn leaf, in itself, is always something that people regard as temporary — it crumbles away, it’s discarded, it disappears, it’s gone — but by taking the leaf out of its usual cycle, it can take on another life.”

What’s it like to work with such a fragile and tangible medium in the digital era? “I find it very grounding,” said Susanna, “to stay first and foremost in the actual world because it’s all too easy to lose that connection. I make a conscience effort to be in touch with nature on an almost daily basis, and I think it’s important to slow down and look at what is real around us, and I hope that’s something my work reminds people of when they see it. Stop. Have a pause. Go outside.”

Susanna Bauer’s work has appeared in galleries in New York City, the UK, Switzerland and Japan. You can browse more of her work on her [website](#) and follow her on social media: Instagram [@susanna_bauer](#) and Facebook [@susannabauerart](#).

Kevin J. Kelley is a freelance writer and educator. His writing has appeared in Entropy, Thin Air Literary Magazine and The Good Men Project. [@KKelley author](#).