

## Deborah Kruger



**Kimono (2019)**  
79.5 x 65 x 1 inches  
screen printed fused recycled plastic bags, stitch, pellon, acrylic paint



**Vortex (2018)**  
59 x 5 x 29 inches  
screen printed fused recycled plastic bags, stitch



**Kansai (2018)**  
69 x 72 x 1 inches  
screen printed fused recycled plastic bags, stitch



**Homeland (2019)**  
40 x 49 x 4 inches  
screen printed fused recycled plastic bags, stitch



**Conflagration (2019)**  
57 x 78 x 3 inches  
screen printed fused recycled plastic bags, stitch, waxed linen thread, wire thread



**Habitat (2019)**  
37 x 47 x 3 inches  
screen printed fused recycled plastic bags, stitch



**Casanare (2018)**  
59 x 114.5 x 1 inches  
screen printed fused recycled plastic bags, stitch



**Accidentals - work in progress (2020)**  
87 x 165 x 4.5 inches  
screen printed fused recycled plastic bags, stitch, waxed linen thread



**Turbulence (2018)**  
64 x 100.5 x 1 inches  
screen printed fused recycled plastic bags, stitch

American artist Deborah Kruger moved to Mexico a decade ago and creates beautiful installations and sculptures based around “endangered birds, endangered indigenous languages and the ecological disasters that are ravaging our world”. Since 2016 her work comprises of handmade feathers constructed from screen printing onto recycled plastic bags “I aim to make work that is both beautiful and meaningful.”

Firstly where are from, where do you live and work now?

I was born and raised in New York City, where I grew up going to museums and seeing public art. However, I never felt entirely at home in a city and I spent the next part of my life living in a small college town in Western Massachusetts (USA) where I spent a lot of time walking in the woods. Ten years ago I moved to Chapala, Mexico located on the largest lake in the country. We renovated the second floor of our house for my studio. It has four skylights, high ceilings and plenty of long pin-able walls. I also have a smaller studio in Durham, North Carolina (USA) where my family lives.

What is your background in textiles?

I attended Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) in New York City and graduated with a degree in textile and surface design. For the first eight years of my career I worked as a wallpaper designer for corporate textile divisions and also as a freelance artist. You can see the impact of my textile education on my entire body of work. Although my work is embedded with content, it also has a strong decorative element. I aim to make work that is both beautiful and meaningful. Maintaining a textile sensibility even though my work is made with plastic is important to me aesthetically. I have been inspired by the Pattern and Decoration movement and I like to follow artists who make work with recycled materials like El Anatsui and Chakaia Booker. A fiber artist who has had a big impact on my work is Olga de Amaral from Colombia.

How do you describe your work?

A curator once described my work as textile paintings and I love this term. It rejects the false hierarchy of art vs. craft and elevates and honours my materials. I also create sculptures and installations for the wall and on the floor. All of my work concerns itself with endangered birds, endangered indigenous languages and the ecological disasters that are ravaging our world. Most of my work is feathered whether it is wall hung or three dimensional.

You have a very specific technique, how did you discover it?

I had an epiphany in 2016 when I realised that the content of my work was not well integrated. While I do not believe that art has to entirely speak for itself, it must have a clear visual voice in order to be heard. Over the course of a year, I experimented with various new ways to make feathers. After much trial and error, I ended up silk screening images of endangered birds on fused recycled plastic bags. I also use waxed linen thread, sewing and text in my work. You can learn more about this process on two of my videos listed below. There were times during this pivotal year that I felt despairing about whether I could figure a new option. However, I couldn't go back to what I was doing and just pressed forward until I had a solution. We cannot be complacent with our work. It's essential to keep moving forward even when we feel unsure or lost. That's the only way to keep the work evolving.

Your work now is very cohesive as a collection. Was it always like this or has it evolved over the years?

There's definitely a more cohesive look to my work since I figured out how to make feathers three years ago. When I look back at my work since 2000, I can see its evolution. Twenty years ago, I was using fiber and encaustic and the feathers had just started appearing. Over time, feathers became more predominant. Throughout this period, the need to write artist statements and proposals helped me refine my conceptual underpinnings and I became more clear about how important it was to refer directly to endangered birds as the central theme of my work through the lens of abstraction. I find it so much more visually intriguing for the work to refer to birds rather than look like birds.

Can you briefly describe the process of creating a piece?

New work emerges in two general ways. I keep a journal where I sketch and make notes about ideas, research and process. I write down all my ideas so that I don't forget any. Later, I distill the best ideas and pursue them. For the map-based pieces, I research maps of places where habitat fragmentation has led to loss of bird species. The series based on the map of Cambodia is a good example. I sketch out the piece and then copy the map outline onto acetate. I use an overhead projector to enlarge the map and trace it onto my Pellon background. Often a piece generates ideas for other pieces. For example, the new mural piece called *Accidentals* (see image of work in progress) has inspired an entire new series of work for the wall and for free-standing vessels. In this piece, I am using long strips of my silk screens instead of feather shapes. I find that the pieces under construction 'talk' to each other and ideas from one piece turn up in another. New pieces often have a mind of their own and although I may have started with one idea, the piece may insist on going in another direction. It is my job to obey!

I know this is a very broad question but how long does a piece take?

Like many artists, I work on more than one piece at the same time. Since all of my pieces use silk screened recycled plastic bags, my production process continues throughout the year so that I have an ample supply of feathers in a wide range of colours. There are so many steps to making my work that it is really impossible to say how long a piece takes. However, in the year and a half before my last solo show, I produced 11 new pieces that ranged in size from half a metre wide to three metres wide.

Your work has been exhibited in and is in collections of numerous galleries and institutions. How did this come about?

Unless you have a gallery advocating for you, you have to do this work yourself. Creating visibility for your work means that it's essential to educate yourself about the power of social media and to have an easy-to-navigate website. I still apply selectively to exhibitions and have been fortunate to have many opportunities as a result. I also cultivate relationships with curators who appreciate my work and they have included me in many museum and gallery shows. I continue to reach out to galleries who would be a good match and hope that I find one to represent my work internationally.

Do you have any advice to aspiring textile artists?

It's important to find your own distinctive voice. Do not be swayed by trends, which come and go. Be true to your own vision and materials. Find a mentor that will cheer you on. Surround yourself with people who believe in you. Do not listen to negative opinions from others or from yourself. Find ways to be healthy and positive. Carve out a room of your own even if it's only a table. But it's better if it's a room with a closed door! Be patient and persistent. Your children will grow up. You will get some lucky breaks. Be grateful for what you have. Don't ever give up on yourself. Ever! Ultimately your career is in the studio so make things you love.

What is your career highlight to date?

My career highlight is my upcoming solo museum exhibition at the Palacio de La Cultura y Los Congresos (PALCCO) in Guadalajara, Mexico. The show was scheduled for February 2021, but has been postponed like most museum shows, to February 2022. This show will feature sculpture, wall reliefs and several installations that will demonstrate the scope of my work. Frankly, I am relieved to have the extra year! I am already deep in preparations and am working steadily so that I won't have to panic as I approach the opening.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about?

Two years after I moved to Mexico I started 360 Xochi Quetzal, an artist and writers residency program (see website below). Since then, we have hosted over 75 artists, writers, and performers from every continent. Some of them became friends and colleagues. All of them were touched by the magic and beauty of Mexico. Treating yourself to time away from your daily responsibilities is a powerful way to deepen your art practice and network with other creatives who understand your passion and lifestyle.

<https://deborahkruger.com>

 [deborahkrugerstudio](#)

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YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzm3cdSdew8AlkyfOwuxVPQ>

Linked In: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/deborahkruger53>

Residency Website: <https://360xochiquetzal.com>

Deborah Kruger Art & Process Video: <https://youtu.be/FzUzWZi5w1A>

Contemporary Art Museum(CAM) Video: <https://youtu.be/4vTQcSDDY2o>