



VISSI D'ARTE  
DI SABINO MARIA FRASSÀ

## OXYMORON OF ART: Deborah Kruger's recycled plastic feathers

The American artist, who has also had a base in Mexico for years, creates installations that reflect on the environmental and cultural risks of the present, discovering that the disappearance of the languages of the indigenous goes hand in hand with that of many species of birds.



"FRAGMENTATION". Courtesy of the artist

Deborah Kruger is a fiber artist who, through the use of recycled materials, denounces human neglect and raises public awareness of the extinction of birds and the loss of indigenous languages. Deborah Kruger is a renowned contemporary artist who has dedicated her career to creating unique textile artworks, using recycled materials to explore themes of great ecological and cultural relevance. Through her installations, sculptures and textile paintings, Kruger offers a powerful reflection on the threat of extinction of birds, the loss of indigenous languages and the ecological disasters that afflict our planet.

Throughout her career, Kruger has exhibited his work in museums, galleries, and universities in the United States, Mexico, Europe, and Australia. Her recent successes include being a participant of the International Biennial of Contemporary Fiber Art: Roots, Metamorphosis, Mixtures, in Valtopina, Italy and a solo exhibition entitled "Avianto" at the Museum of the Railway Station in Chapala, Mexico, as well as the acquisition of two of her large-scale environmental works by the [Museum of Arts and Design](#) (MAD) in New York, which will be exhibited in 2025.

One of the most significant aspects of Kruger's artistic journey is the way she integrated her training and life experiences into her art. Born in Queens, New York, Deborah studied textile design at the [Fashion Institute of Technology](#), and worked for ten years as a wallpaper designer, an experience that left an indelible mark on her approach to art, focused on pattern and decoration. However, it was only after an "epiphany" as she herself defines it, that she understood how to fully merge her artistic message with the materials and techniques she was using, taking her art to a new level of coherence and expressive power. The event that radically changed Deborah's life and career was what she defines as a "financial disaster" that forced her to relocate her studio to Mexico. What initially seemed like a tragedy turned out to be one of the best decisions of her life. In Mexico, the artist found the space, resources, and time needed to expand her artistic practice.



"ROPA ARCO IRIS". Courtesy of the artist

She now works in a collaborative environment, supported by a team of Mexican women who help her produce the thousands of feathers needed for her large-scale projects. This "team study" allowed her to think big and create museum-sized works, a goal that would have been impossible to achieve north of the border. With an artistic career spanning over forty years, Deborah Kruger embodies the idea that success takes time, dedication, and perseverance. Her path is an inspiration for all those who aspire to achieve their dreams, proving that it is never too late to achieve great goals. After the interview with the water artist Basia Irland, we decided to interview her to learn more about how art can become a tool for defending the environment.

### You have started to "live fully from art" in the last ten years, but have you always been a Creative?

Yes, of course. I studied Textile Design at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City and worked in New England as a wallpaper designer and technician, before the industry moved to the South of the United States and later to Southeast Asia.

### Your artistic research has long focused on the negative impacts of human beings on nature: from climate change, to the extinction of birds, to the loss of indigenous languages. How did you come to explore these themes?

Feathers began to appear in my work in the late nineties. Like life itself, they evolved gradually, starting from timid scraps of fabric to becoming small triangular feathers made of fabric and edged in encaustic. As I continued to draw and research endangered bird species, I realized that the factors that threatened the extinction of birds were also affecting indigenous cultures, especially languages. This overlap fascinated me, expanding my awareness of how the human tendency to dominate and colonize contributes to far greater losses than I had imagined. Thus, feathers have become a vehicle of thought and voice, made from recycled plastic.

### Where did this interest in native Mexican languages come from?

Every year there is an indigenous art fair held in Chapala, Mexico, where I have my production studio. The fair was conceived to create a market for that are handmade by families and small artisans. I usually host some of the artists myself. The artists come from all parts of Mexico, many of whom live in remote areas and do not even speak Spanish, but only their local indigenous language. Over time, I realized that the fair not only helped preserve their artwork, but also their indigenous language and culture, which is much more at risk than you might think. So while my first collection of bird drawings was based on the most endangered species at the time I drew them (during a residency in France in 2016), later I focused my attention on the endangered birds and languages of North and Latin America.



"RED FEATHER BASKET 2". Courtesy of the artist

### Where does this sensitivity and desire to defend the "weak" come from?

To understand my work, it is essential to consider that I am a child of the fifties and sixties, a generation that has experienced numerous seismic changes in the world. This contributes to my general sensitivity to losses in nature and culture. My grandparents, for example, left Eastern Europe before the Holocaust and arrived in New York, which became a center of Yiddish culture. I have witnessed the end of this cultural golden age in my lifetime, another inexorable demise.

### The use of feathers made of recycled plastic is central to your work. What led you to choose this material and how does it contribute to the narrative of your art?

Although I believe that art should not speak entirely for itself, I think it must have a voice. In my attempt to hone that voice, I realized that creating feathers with a material that contributes to bird loss was a contradiction I wanted to highlight. Plastic represents contemporary consumption, and this relentless consumption is what is driving habitat loss and human-induced climate change. Both of these impacts are devouring habitats at such a rate that it is difficult for humans and all other living creatures to adapt fast enough to survive.

### So it seems that you have summarized all your life experiences in recent years, don't you?

I would say that it is inevitable. My training in design at FIT was rigorous, especially when it comes to research. We were expected to use the textile lab at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) to study the design motifs of various cultures around the world, and we had to document the samples we produced. Creating books (and walls!) of samples has become an obsessive aspect of my artistic practice. Integrating research as part of my textile training stayed with me and paved the way for my research on endangered birds and languages. I believe that a successful artistic practice is the product of authenticity and the incorporation of our unique aesthetic and cultural ecology. My current work has grown out of self-reflection, allowing me to anchor the works not only to the content that interests me, but also to the techniques of my field, such as manual screen printing and hand weaving.

### So what relationship do you have with handmade process?

In an age where digital processes also dominate these activities, there is something to be said about returning to the manual skills of my youth. This, perhaps, is another way to preserve a knowledge base that is eroding in the tides of technology and manufacturing. I think there's a reason we're seeing a return to slow sewing, slow foods, and slow fashion—all ways to slow down the pace of creativity and help us stay more in the present.

### To conclude, how do you maintain the balance between aesthetic beauty and conveying a powerful message?

I love this question because it gets to the heart of what I consider successful art. The balance I seek is between content and form, beauty and horror, abstraction and narration. These are the critical points that always require gentle calibration. The content of my work is very sad, but transmitting it through the lens of pattern, decoration and beauty makes it more digestible, even for me, the artist.

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