

# LOOKING to Spain



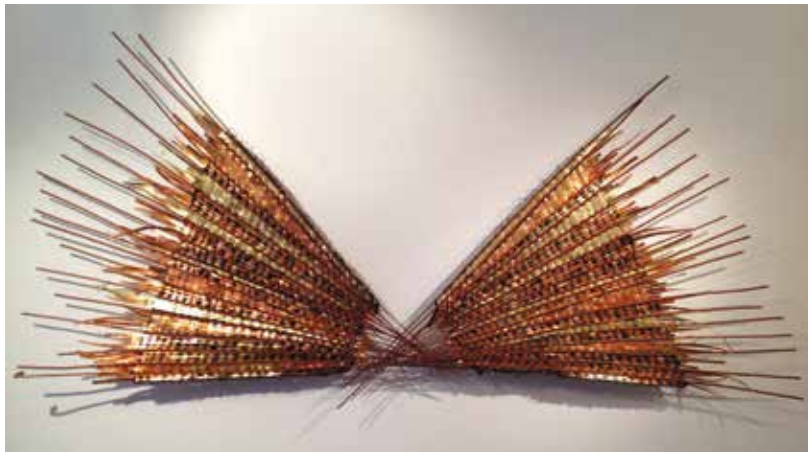
Spain, at the western-most end of the famed European Silk Road, has a long and deep cultural connection to textiles, both in manufacturing and in art. Diane Franklin recently visited the Iberian Peninsula and gives us a look into the current state of Spain's fiber art in this year with Madrid hosting the World Textile Art Organization's 8th Biennial of Contemporary Textile Art this coming fall.

## JOANA GOSLY

While in Madrid, I spent several hours in the weaving studio of Joana Gosly, an American who has lived in Spain for almost 40 years. Her work, reminiscent of the work of the Colombian artist Olga de Amaral, though not actually inspired by it, is a study in contrasts. In her tapestries, Gosly combines the most unlikely materials: gossamer silk threads from Laos with strips of metal, metal warps with shimmering silk wefts, or gold leaf with plaster.

Gosly is an experimentalist. She has spent much time learning how to use her materials and has pushed them to fascinating limits. Inspired by weathered surfaces, she learned to use acid on metal to produce beautiful iridescent patinas. Having seen gold leaf in Italy, she bought many varieties of it and began to apply it to the materials she uses in her weavings, eventually reproducing

BY DIANE FRANKLIN



OPPOSITE PAGE  
TOP: Joana Gosly,  
**Prisma**; 2016; brass  
and copper wire,  
silk, mounted  
on plexiglass;  
tapestry weave;  
75 x 62 x 25 cm.

BOTTOM:  
Joana Gosly

THIS PAGE TOP:  
Joana Gosly, **Save  
The Monarch**; 2016;  
gold leaf on brass,  
copper wire, mixed  
thread and wicker;  
tapestry weave;  
77 x 190 x 5 cm.

BELOW: Joana Gosly,  
**Aqualung**; 2016; silk,  
copper wire, gold  
leaf on iron support;  
tapestry weave;  
75.5 x 57 x 6 cm.

She was also influenced by sculptor Eduardo Chillida's small prints on metal. His use of metal enthralled her, and thereafter she incorporated metal into her own work.

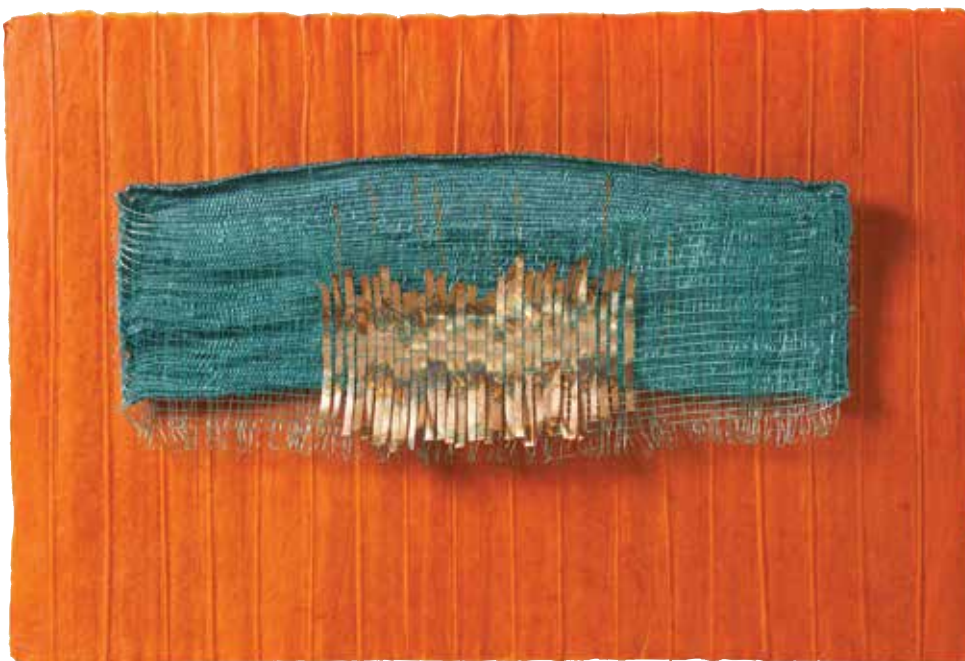
Dendel reinforced Gosly's love of ethnic art and taught her some braiding techniques that she later reproduced using metal. Grau-Garriga taught her to look at art purposefully and emphasized the importance of making a statement with one's work. He also pioneered techniques for adding dimensionality to weaving, techniques that Gosly continues to use in many of her sculptural pieces.

When asked about the textile scene in Spain, Gosly mentions that she has had difficulty in interesting Spanish galleries, museums, or critics in her work. However, she did represent Spain in a major textile triennial in Poland in 2016, and has exhibited throughout Europe.

## PILAR SALA VALLEJO

As I entered Pilar Sala's third-floor studio in a lovely old Spanish building in Alicante, on Spain's southeastern Costa Blanca, she welcomed me into a veritable feast of plant and paper art. Every room was full of her work or raw materials—on the floor, walls, and tables. Even the refrigerator was crammed with tubs of paper pulp. There were large wall pieces made from braided palm fronds, artists' books and paper sculptures, large paper collages, baskets full of raw materials and finished work, and small pieces combining paper, wood, and stone.

ROCCO GARCÍA



## Diane Franklin

is an artist, teacher and writer living in Boston, Massachusetts. She is also the author of *Dyeing Alchemy, a Primer and Workbook about Procion MX Dyeing*. <https://dianefranklin.com>  
The author wishes to thank Lala de Dios for her enormous help in arranging the visits to the artists interviewed and for interviewing Teresa Lanceta in Spanish, using the author's questions. She also wants to thank Joana Gosly for serving as a translator for the author's interview with Pilar Sala.

TOP: Pilar Sala Vallejo, **Libro Escutura Historia de una Palmera (History of a Palm Tree)**; 2018; recycled handmade paper from wild plants, fabric from the palm tree trunk; book sculpture, free technique; 50 x 85 x 40 cm.

CENTER: Pilar Sala

BOTTOM: In the Studio of Pilar Sala Vallejo



DIANE FRANKLIN



Sala has always been creative. As a child she mixed water with local clay and made vases, sewed for her dolls, and learned about the plants in her family's country house. Though trained as a pharmacist, she quickly abandoned that profession to focus on the plants that had enchanted her as a girl. Most of the methods she uses in her work are self-taught.

Sala's inspiration comes mainly from the natural world, although she may have been unconsciously influenced by the seagrass baskets and braided water containers she saw as a child in eastern Spain. All her work has a contemporary feel. Even the sculptures she made from palm fronds and sisal two decades ago feel very modern. Her current work—sculptures, collages, and books made from the vegetal paper she fashions from every imaginable plant—could fit into any recent paper exhibit.

INÉS VILLEPARISIS



Passionate about paper, Sala is very deliberate in investigating the kinds of paper that can be created from each plant. Her materials are cuttings from her country house or weeds from the side of the road. She processes each plant using a minimum of chemicals, and then transforms the resulting pulp into artistic objects. Occasionally she combines the finished artworks with wood or stones, but almost never with manmade materials.

At the end of our visit, I asked Sala about the textile scene in Spain. She told me that it is difficult to exhibit work and noted that textile art is not valued by cultural institutions or critics, except perhaps, in anthropology museums. She felt that the art world makes a clear distinction between art and craft, considering only painting and sculpture as art, and that functional or craft items are devalued.



TOP: Pilar Sala Vallejo, **Libros Libres Son de Mar (Free Books)**; 2016; 16 paper art booklets from an installation on metal columns, recycled paper, snails, beach materials; manual paper fabrication; 120 x 60 x 65 cm, (variable for installation), 16 x 21 x 4 cm (open booklet).

CENTER: Teresa Lanceta

BOTTOM: Teresa Lanceta, **Tato (Adiós al Rombo [Farewell to the Rhombus] Series)**; 2012–2013; painted fabric; embroidery, darning, sewing; 250 x 150 cm.



CARMEN LANCETA-ARAGONÉS

## TERESA LANCETA

Another important textile artist in Spain is Teresa Lanceta. Although I was not able to meet her in person, I did visit an exhibit that included several large pieces of her work. Lanceta describes herself as an autodidact. Trained in contemporary history, she never contemplated becoming an artist, despite always being involved with fiber in some way. Her work includes paintings, drawings, collage, writings, and videos, in addition to tapestries.

Over a period of six years, Lanceta traveled to Morocco and worked with women weavers in the Atlas Mountains. She was fascinated by their work and the stories it told. These textiles inspired her to teach herself to weave. Her other influences included Navaho and Pre-Columbian weavings from South and Central America.

Lanceta is the only contemporary textile artist whose work has been shown by a major Spanish contemporary art museum and well-known art galleries in recent times. In 2000, the Reina Sofia exhibited her weavings alongside Moroccan rugs and tapestries from the early and middle twentieth century. Prior to that her work had been seen only in private collections. In 2015, Madrid's Minimum Space Gallery mounted her moving *El Paso del Ebro* exhibit that included five tapestries, along with her writings commemorating the last battle of the Spanish Civil War. Recalling stories from her grandparents about this horrific four-month battle, she recorded her thoughts as she traveled to Barcelona from Alicante twice a week, across the Ebro River. Over the years, her work has been shown in numerous exhibitions and biennials—including the 2017 Venice Biennale—throughout Europe and Latin America.

Lanceta attributes her success to her persistence, coherence, and hard work. Currently, she is involved in collaborative projects with other artists, none of them textile artists. She also teaches at Escola Massana, where she focuses on the process and act of making art.



TOP: Teresa Lanceta, **Mayo** (left); 2003; wool, cotton; plain weave; 195 x 140 cm.

**Don Felipe 13** (right); 2003; wool, cotton; plain weave; 267 x 163 cm.

BOTTOM: Teresa Lanceta, **A Bert Flint (To Bert Flint)**; 1999; wool, cotton; plain weave and supplementary weft; 230 x 110 cm each.



DANE FRANKLIN

## LALA de DIOS

I ended my visit to Spain by spending half a day with Lala de Dios. De Dios is the president of the European Textile Network, one of the founders of the Association of Textile Creators of Madrid, the owner of a weaving studio, and an extraordinary networker and mover in the European textile world. Much of our conversation focused on the textile scene in Spain. She echoed what I had already heard from the fiber artists I'd interviewed, namely, that opportunities for exhibition of textile art are few and far between and are mainly in the form of international textile biennials, often held in other countries, but occasionally in Spain.

One of the ironies of the current textile scene is that, historically, Spain has had a long tradition of valuing textiles. Baskets, silk weaving, and flamenco costumes are important parts of the Spanish heritage. Valencia once had a thriving silk trade and production. Even today, Valencian women wear festival costumes made from elaborately embroidered silks costing hundreds of euros a meter.

Despite this history, young textile students are learning to create textiles only for practical uses such as product or fashion design. Most cannot find ways to support themselves as fiber artists. All the artists I interviewed, despite their skill, talent, courage, and determination, have had to support themselves through other means.

One positive sign of change may be the opening of a new branch of IVAM (Valencia's contemporary art museum) in Alcoy, which is organizing an exhibit on the history of textile art. Hopefully, this is the beginning of a new look at and appreciation of Spain's textile heritage and its contemporary manifestations.

To see more of the work of these artists, visit their websites: [www.pilarsala.net](http://www.pilarsala.net) | [www.joanagosly.com](http://www.joanagosly.com) | [www.teresalanceta.com](http://www.teresalanceta.com).



MIKEL ESKAURAZA