

A common thread

PL Henderson compares the work of May Morris with Portuguese artist Vanessa Barragão

Despite being separated by over a century, the textile works created by English artisan Mary 'May' Morris (1862–1938) and contemporary Portuguese artist Vanessa Barragão have much in common. Not only do these two hugely gifted creators share a focus on inspiration from the infinite beauty of Nature, but both are also driven by specific cultural and ecological values encoded deep into the very fabric of their expression and production. Reaching beyond the splendour of its rich visual appeal, the work of Morris and Barragão is entwined in the complex historical inheritance of a female-centric craft, in parallel with altering perceptions of the natural world.

The philosophical debate on human relationships with Nature, in the context of the growing industrialised Victorian society into which Morris was born, was an ever-evolving subject. However, while 19th-century theorists were unleashing wild 'Mother Nature' from the constraints of pre-Enlightenment fear and domination, the natures of women were deemed to necessitate extreme socio-economic and cultural control.



May Morris embroidering at her home, c. 1920s.
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