

By Merel Slootheer

Precious coral & aquatic matters

A tribute in triplicate





A tribute in triplicate

I sincerely love and appreciate nature. I consider it to be my one and only true muse. While working on my first wearable ocean inspired pieces, I started contemplating. I tried to structure my research, with this triptych as a direct result.

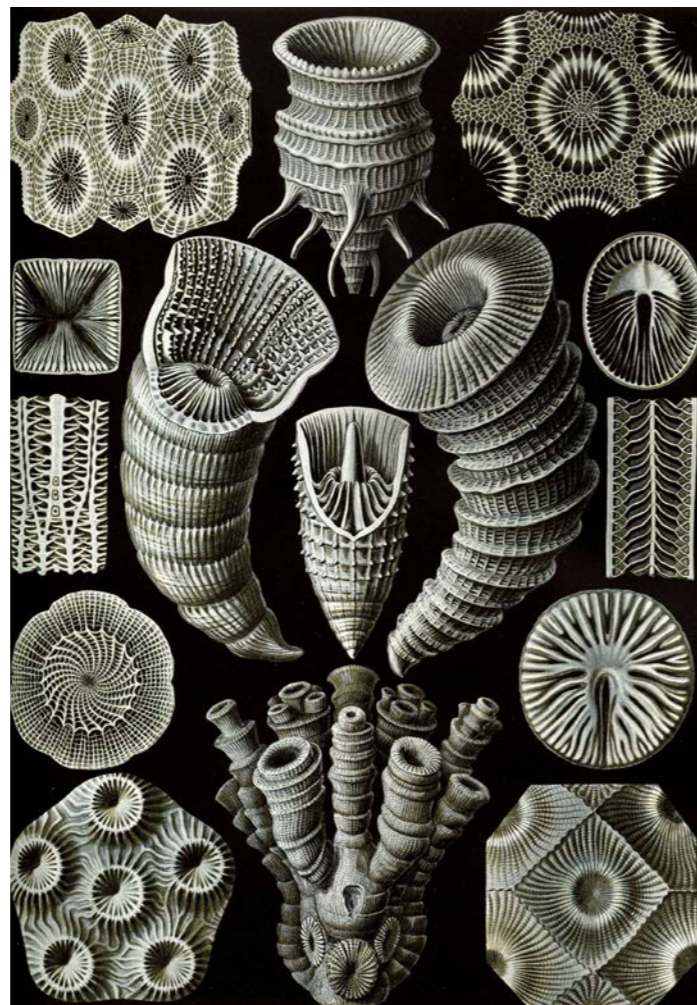
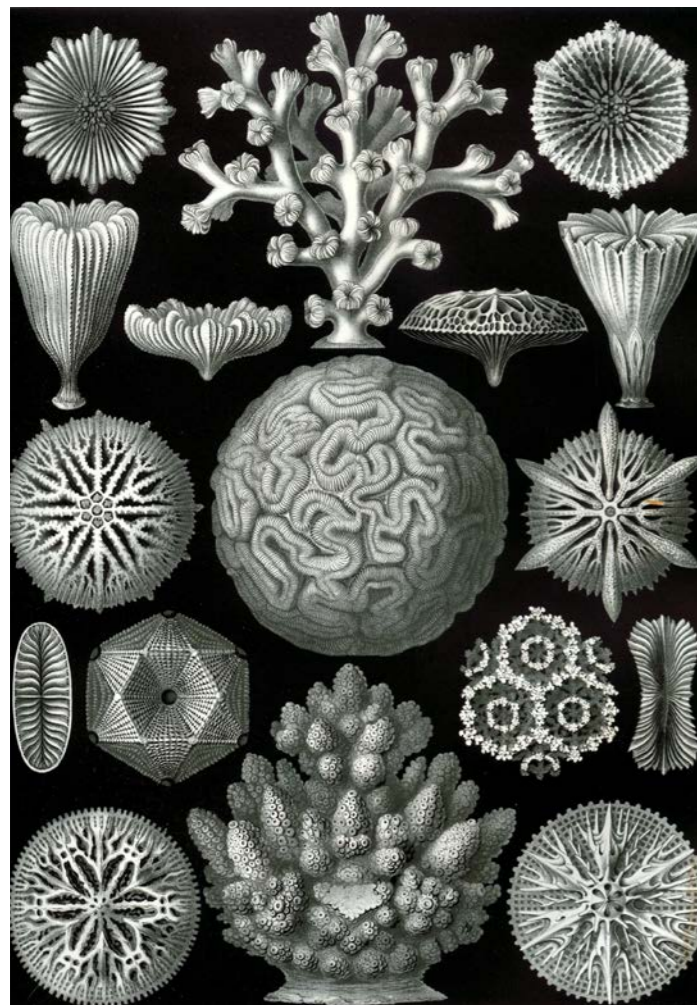
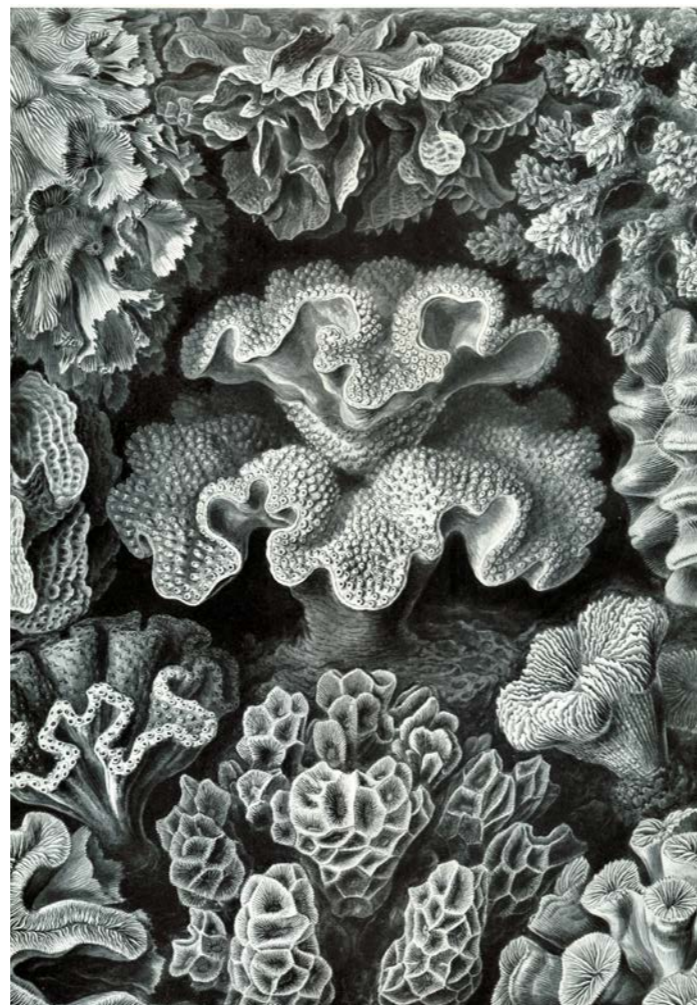
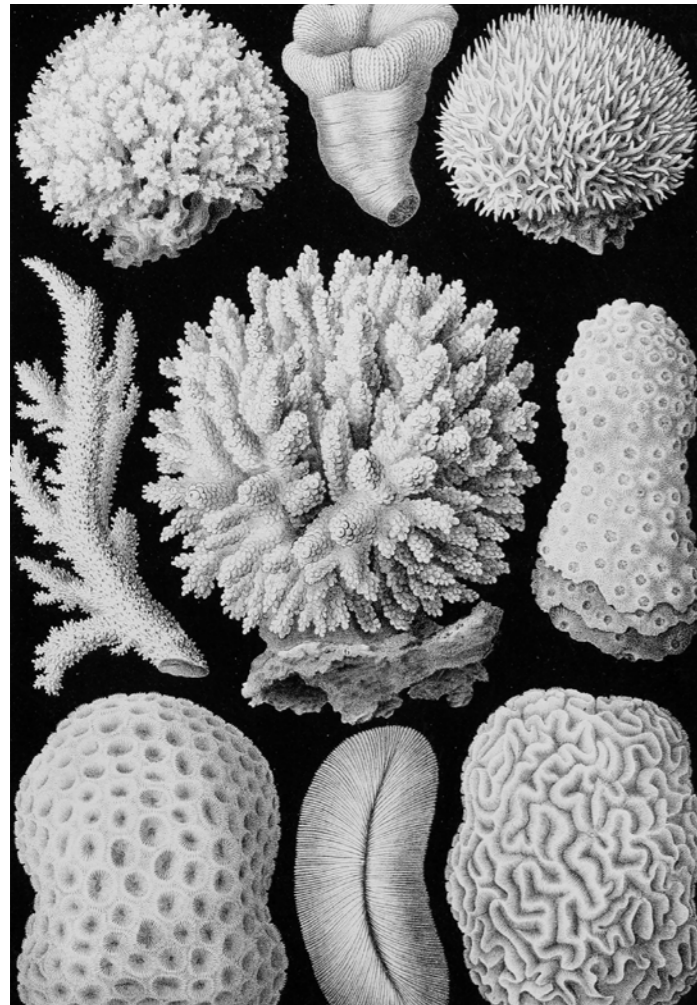
It's my first finished work in a slowly growing collection of different kinds of creations. All dealing with this one question:

what would (could or should) a true ode to (precious) coral, salty waters and everything naturally beautiful look like?



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Precious coral & aquatic matters

There's something about coral, a natural phenomenon so well known, yet so misunderstood, the name itself has become somewhat of an abstract concept...

My first introduction to coral was many years ago, while watching *The Little Mermaid* as a seven year old *Disney* fan. Mesmerized by this colorful animated world under the sea, I would have swapped my legs for a mermaid tail without any hesitation. Ursula, the sea witch, never made me that dubious offer. Luckily I might add. But I did make a textile mermaid tail for my Barbies, while fantasizing about being able to swim around the world.

As a little mermaid wannabe, I considered coral to be some kind of magical sea decoration. A lively collection of sea plants and underwater trees, a soulful and safe environment for fish and other animals to live in. Completely different from the nature in and around my city, coral looked more alive. Like plants with personalities, but a species part of the plantae kingdom definitely. I wasn't completely wrong, but not exactly right either. Coral reefs are one of the most biologically diverse ecosystems on earth, rivaled only by tropical rain forests. Reefs are made up not only by corals, but also sponges, crustaceans, mollusks, fish, turtles,

sharks, dolphins and many other sea creatures. So yes, the reef is a beautiful, natural habitat for anything (or anyone) living under the sea, but corals aren't plants, they are sea animals! One of the biggest misconceptions about the species would be this scientific classification. Corals are marine invertebrates in the class *Anthozoa* of phylum *Cnidaria*. Alright... What exactly are they? Well, ehm... Here we go!

There are soft corals and hard (or stony) corals, most are colonial. Each coral is built up by thousands of small polyps, each polyp can produce another. By budding they gradually develop a whole colony. A polyp is actually a little mouth surrounded by tentacles. Inside the tissue of this polyp live small plants, called micro-algae. These algae photosynthesize to produce nutrients, many of which they pass to the corals cells. The corals, in turn, produce waste products in the form of ammonium, which the algae consume as a nutrient.



The hard corals create their own skeleton, made of calcium carbonate, to strengthen the organism. This skeleton is the tissue and structure that connects all the polyps. In soft corals there is no stony skeleton, but the tissues are often toughened by the presence of tiny skeletal elements, which are made from calcium carbonate too.

During the day the plants inside the tissue of the polyps photosynthesize. During the night the plants sleep and the animal becomes active, using its tentacles to catch and eat everything that swims by. So coral consist of many polyps, but is in fact one animal with lots of polyps, that are part of the animal, that lives in a symbiosis with the algae, living inside of the polyps. It's simple and complex at the same time: my favorite kind of confusing.

Coral comes in many species, all having different shapes and colors. Some look like brains, others like rocks, they can be stringy, tree-like, fuzzy and so on. Basically every color you could imagine is represented by this class of animal, the most famous of them all being the precious coral, used for making jewelry. This tree-shaped genus is called *Corallium* and consists of 31 known species. It's the original source of inspiration for the color palette we simply call *coral*, a bright mix of red, orange and pink.

Precious coral jewelry has been around for decades, it's intertwined with ancient tradition and culture, linked to sacred properties and mythology. Coral jewelry is often associated with mothers, grandmothers and heirlooms. The part used for making the cabochons and beads is the hard skeleton of the animal. Personally, I consider precious coral to be precious, an emotionally charged material and technically hard to work with. It's organic, valuable, fragile and brittle.

The price of precious coral has been rising rapidly and excessively for years. Meanwhile the material has become extremely scarce. Jewelers are having trouble with their wholesalers, who are having trouble with their suppliers, who are having

trouble with finding any proper precious coral at all. We might not always notice what's going on beneath the surface of our salty waters on a daily basis. But we do experience these changes on land as a direct result of what's going on out of sight.

The coral reefs are in danger: they're bleaching, diminishing and gradually disappearing. What's left are skeletons covered in algae. One of the reasons that causes coral to bleach and eventually die is climate change. In the case of precious coral over-harvesting has been a problem for years. Over-fishing, plastic and toxic waste, the oxybenzone and octinoxate in sunscreen and other kinds of pollution are all disastrous for our ocean life.

Calling a material scarce is pretty common, but for animals we usually have some other, more empathic or respectful words reserved. Is it justifiable to consider precious coral merely a material at all? Don't get me wrong, you don't have to actually fall in love with coral (like I did), or feel sorry for it (like I do). I know my feelings aren't an indicator (I'm hyper emotional and suffer from severe anthropomorphism*). I know a polyp isn't cuddly, at least not like we, warmblooded mammals, are used to. However our salty waters are a source of life and the coral reef is an indispensable component of our ecosystem, something we learn more about every day.

What if we would be able to approach the ocean as a source of life only and not as a resource to exhaust? Could we use our human qualities to just look and learn, to document, to create new things? The ocean would lead by example for sure, and we could have smart insights. Not only to save what's almost lost, but also to prevent new possible catastrophes. Could we fall in love with something naturally beautiful and see it as a source of inspiration, a muse, to create for, not to take from? Would that longing, wondering and the feeling of infatuation ever be enough? Or was Sebastian right all along and is the human world really just a mess?

*Anthropomorphism is the attribution of human traits, emotions, or intentions to non-human entities.



necklace **Symbiosis 3**
by Carina Shoshtary

An ode; beautiful work by amazing artists

The beauty of an ode lies in the attempt to not literally copy the source of inspiration. An ode is never a competition, it's a compliment. An ode is like a hymn that describes the subject's beauty, but isn't trying to compete with it. Why would we try and rival nature? I found five amazing artists that use their skills and originality to create unique work. A fusion between imagination and experience, translated into work obviously influenced by natural beauty, but which definitely stands strong on its own merits.



*Carina Shoshtary
Delfina Emmanuel
Aisegul Telli
Meredith Woolnough
Evert Nijland*

Carina Shoshtary

Carina Shoshtary describes herself as a kind of modern hunter-gatherer as she finds the materials for her work in her immediate surroundings. She reveals its potential with both scientific curiosity and sensitive intuition. Her soulful jewelry looks like it still carries the history of these materials, their previous life, former use and meaning.

carinashoshtary.com



necklace **Multiclavula 1**



1 }

1 } brooch **The Secret Keepers (Blue 1)**

2 } brooch **Raduga Fossil**

3 } brooch **Where Blue Hides After Dark**

*Carina
Shoshtary*



2 }



3 }

Carina
Shoshtary

1 } earrings **Multiclavula 7**

2 } brooch **Symbiosis 1**



1 }



2 }

Delfina Emmanuel

The delicate ceramic work of Delfina Emmanuel is inspired by her place of birth, the island of Sardinia, an environment rich in marine life. Her works retain functionality, but go far beyond their practical purpose. Her objects, built by hand, grow slowly, from a meditative approach. This patience, devotion and determination is translated into each piece through exquisite execution.

delfinaemmanuel.com



*teapot **Morpharia***

*Delfina
Emmanuel*



1 } 1 bowl **KF Coral**

2 } teapot **Avatar Reef**

3 } 3 bowls **KF Coral**

Delfina
Emmanuel



vessel, cachepot, teapot **Abyss**

*Delfina
Emmanuel*



vessel **Seasequin**, teapot **Tea by the Pool**

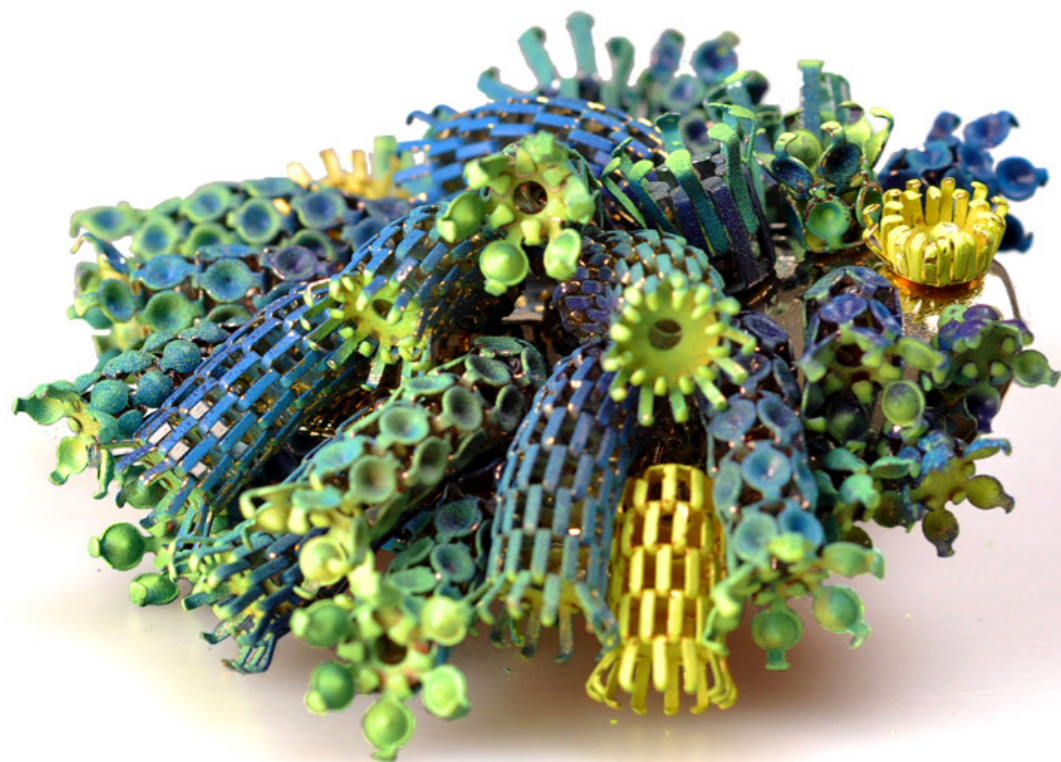
Aisegul Telli

The Undersurface Collection by Aisegul Telli is inspired by her exploratory dives in the Indian Ocean. Her small wearable sculptures tell the story of this magical place with its own rules, time cycle and gravity. The work is innovative, enchanting and seems to sprout straight from a beautiful underwater fairytale.

aisegultelli.com



necklace **Blue Reef**



1 }



2 }



3 }

1 } brooch **Zoa Flora**

2 } brooch **In bloom**

3 } brooch **Pearl section**

*Aisegul
Telli*

*Aisegul
Telli*



*Aisegul
Telli*

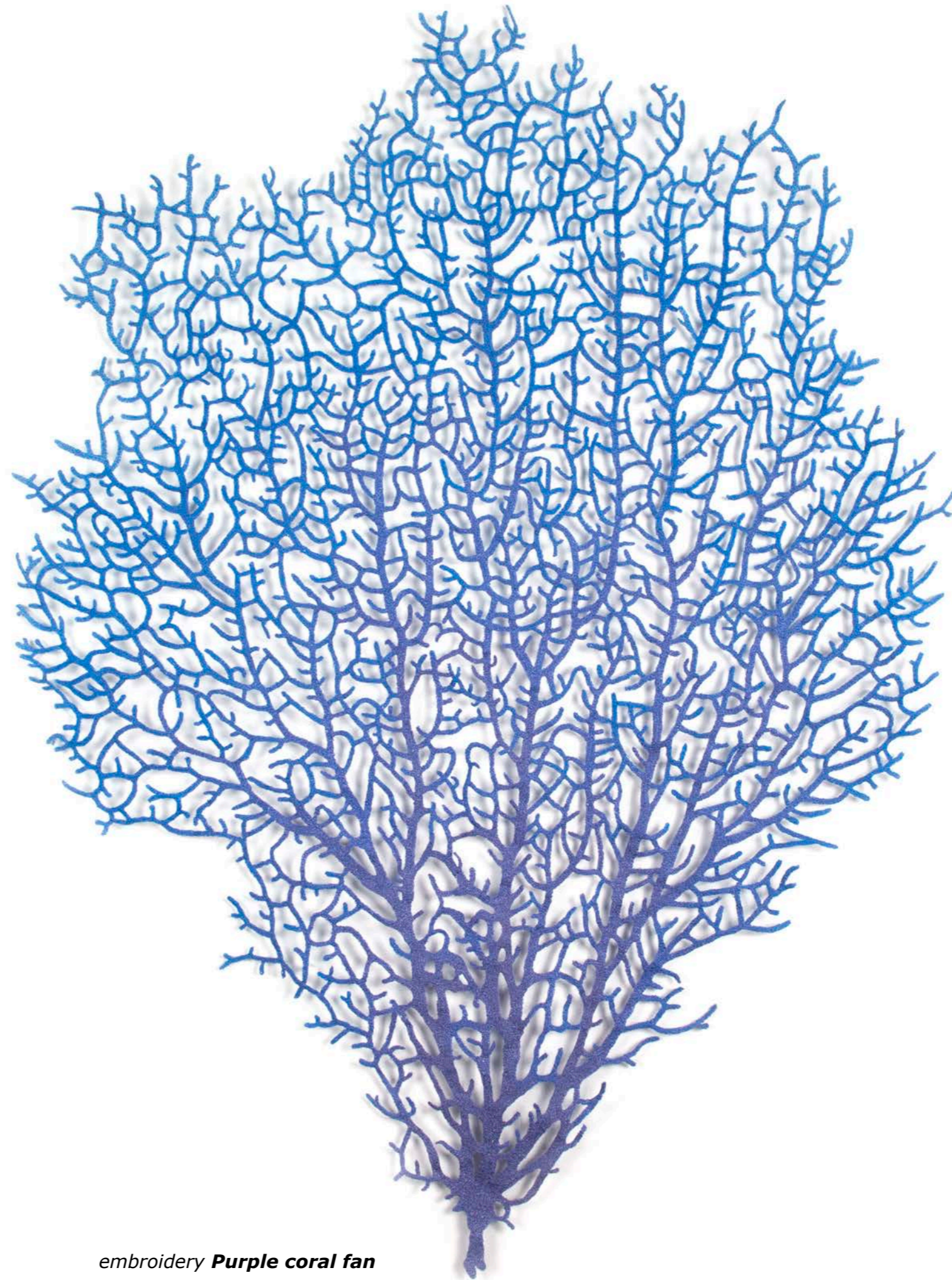


brooch **Blue Coral Isle**

Meredith Woolnough

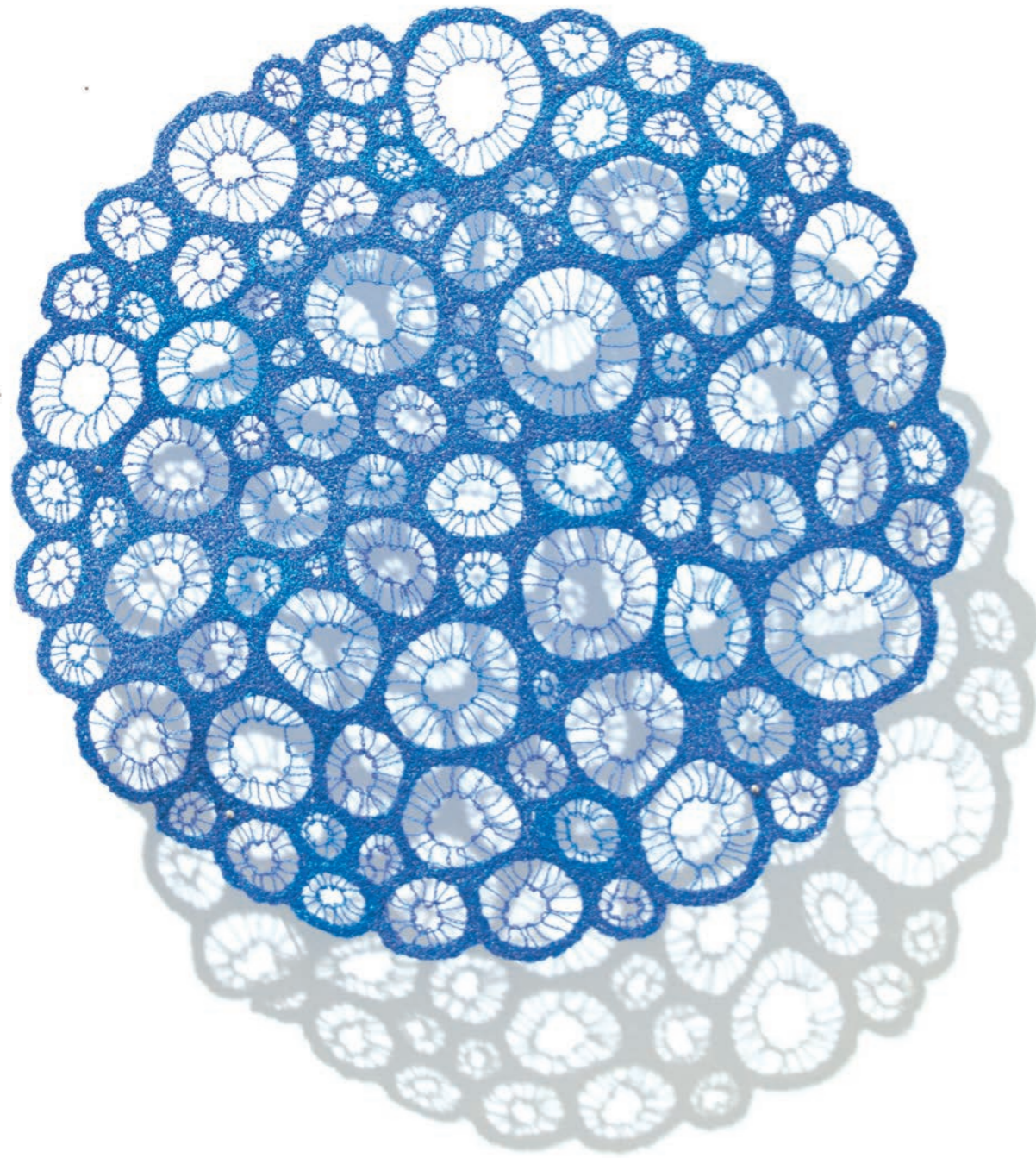
The elegant trceries of Meredith Woolnough capture the delicate beauty of nature in knotted embroidery threads. With the Fateful florescence series she addresses a relatively unknown phenomenon, coral glowing. These stunning shades of violet and blue are a type of swan song for coral. A beautiful fateful florescence as the coral transforms itself in a final attempt to survive this changing world.

meredithwoolnough.com.au

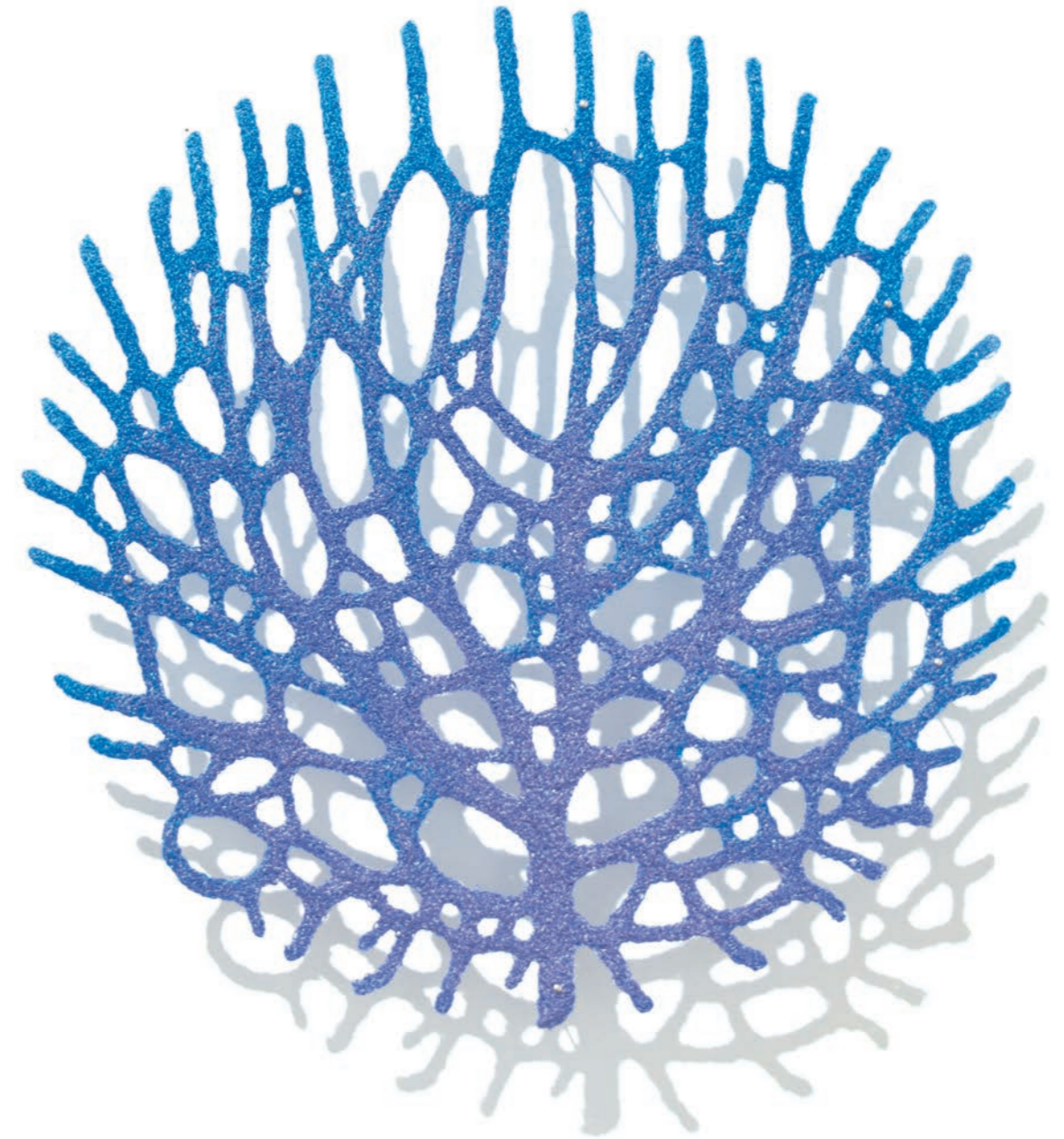


embroidery **Purple coral fan**

*Meredith
Woolnough*

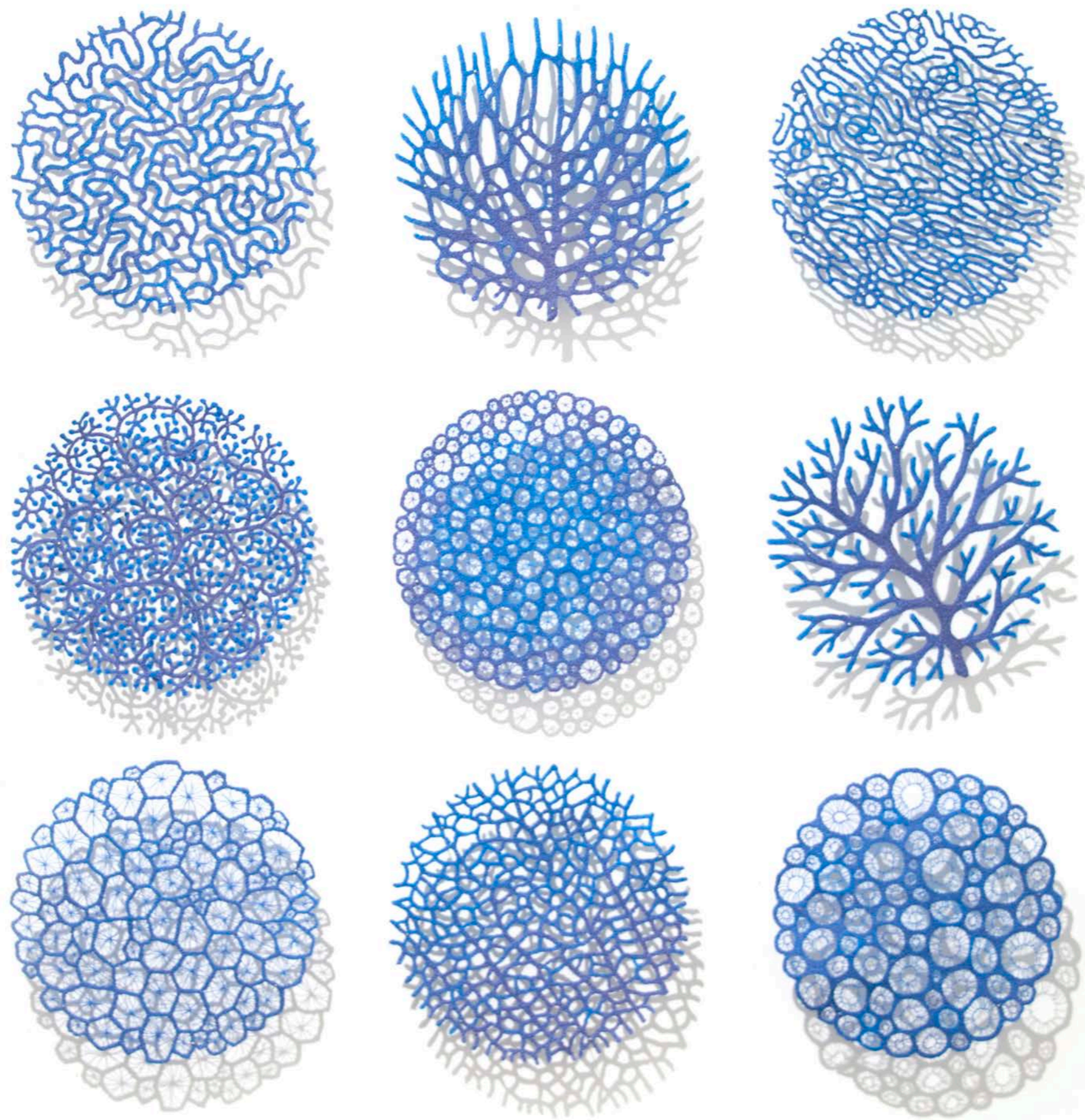


embroidery **Corallite study #1**
(from the *Fateful florescence* series)

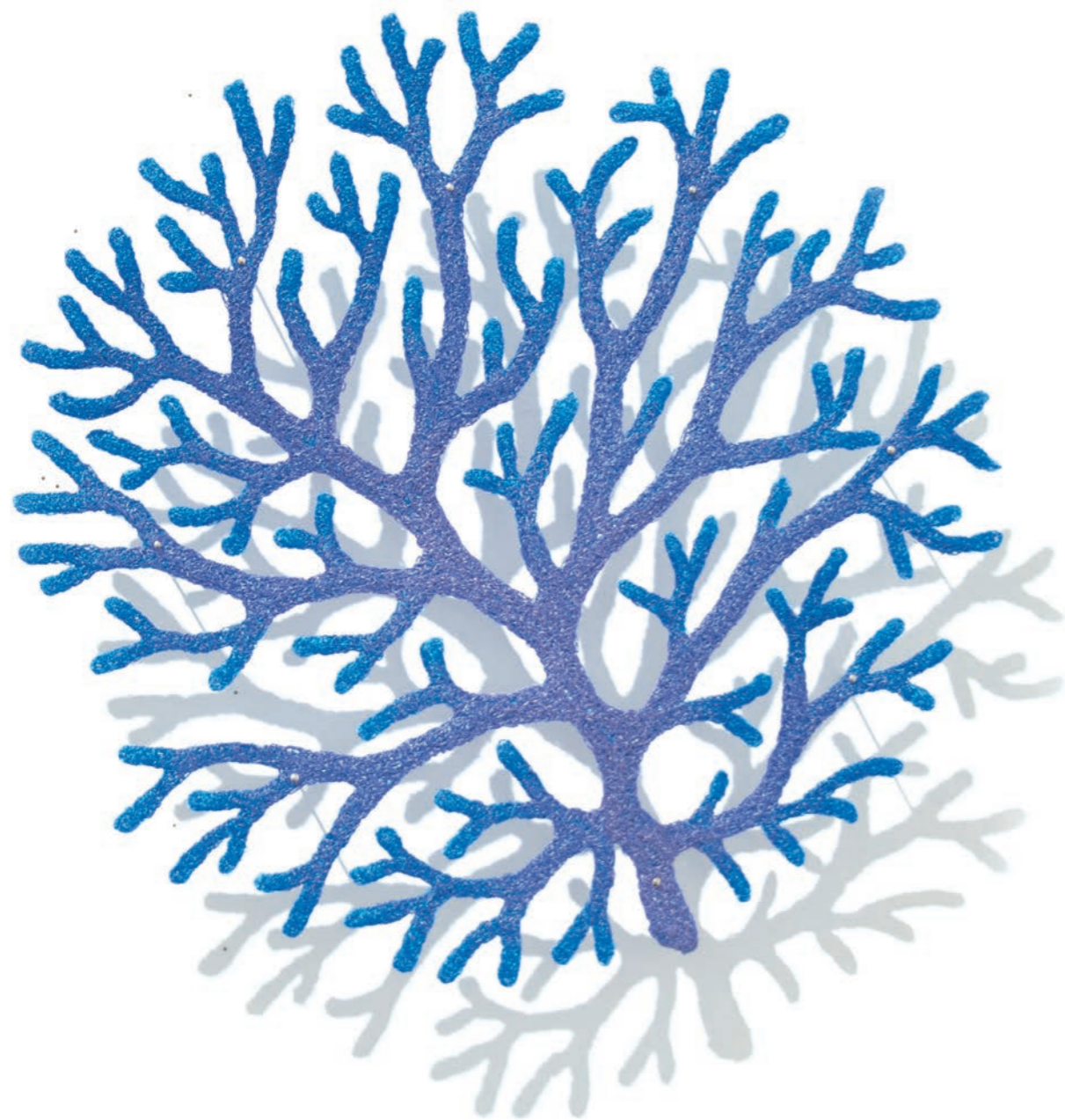


embroidery **Coral fan study**
(from the *Fateful florescence* series)

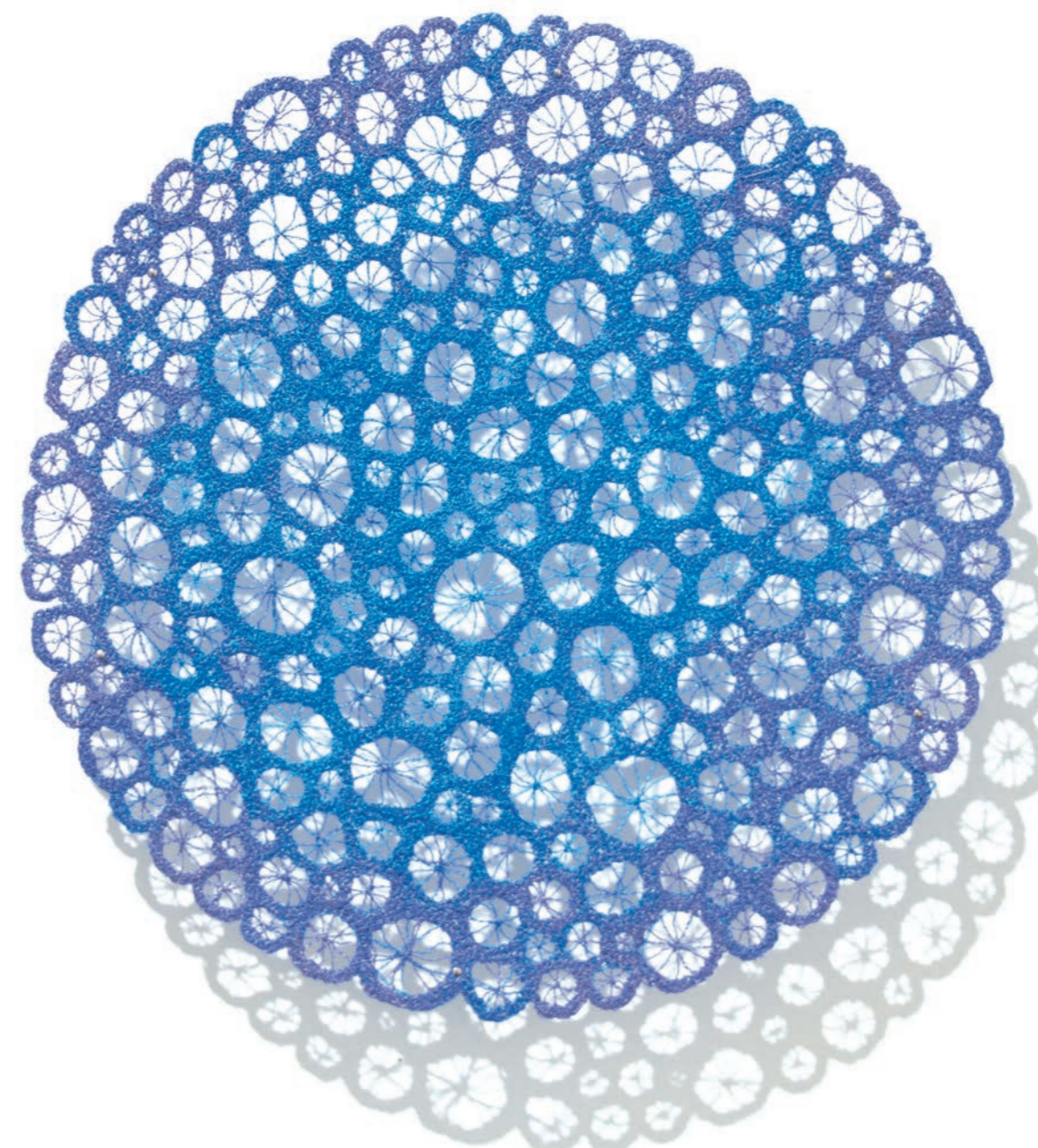
Meredith Woolnough



*Meredith
Woolnough*



embroidery **Coral branch study**
(from the *Fateful florescence series*)



embroidery **Corallite study #3**
(from the *Fateful florescence series*)

Evert Nijland

The sensitive jewelry of Evert Nijland deals with the concept of nature, imperfection and transience. He constructs his work by mixing traditional craftsmanship with contemporary and experimental techniques. His jewelry is made of a rich variety of materials which either live together in perfect symbiosis or give off a notion of friction and entrapment, much like nature and humanity.

evertnijland.nl



necklace **Red**



1 }



3 }



2 }

*Evert
Nijland*

1 } necklace **Paestum Red**

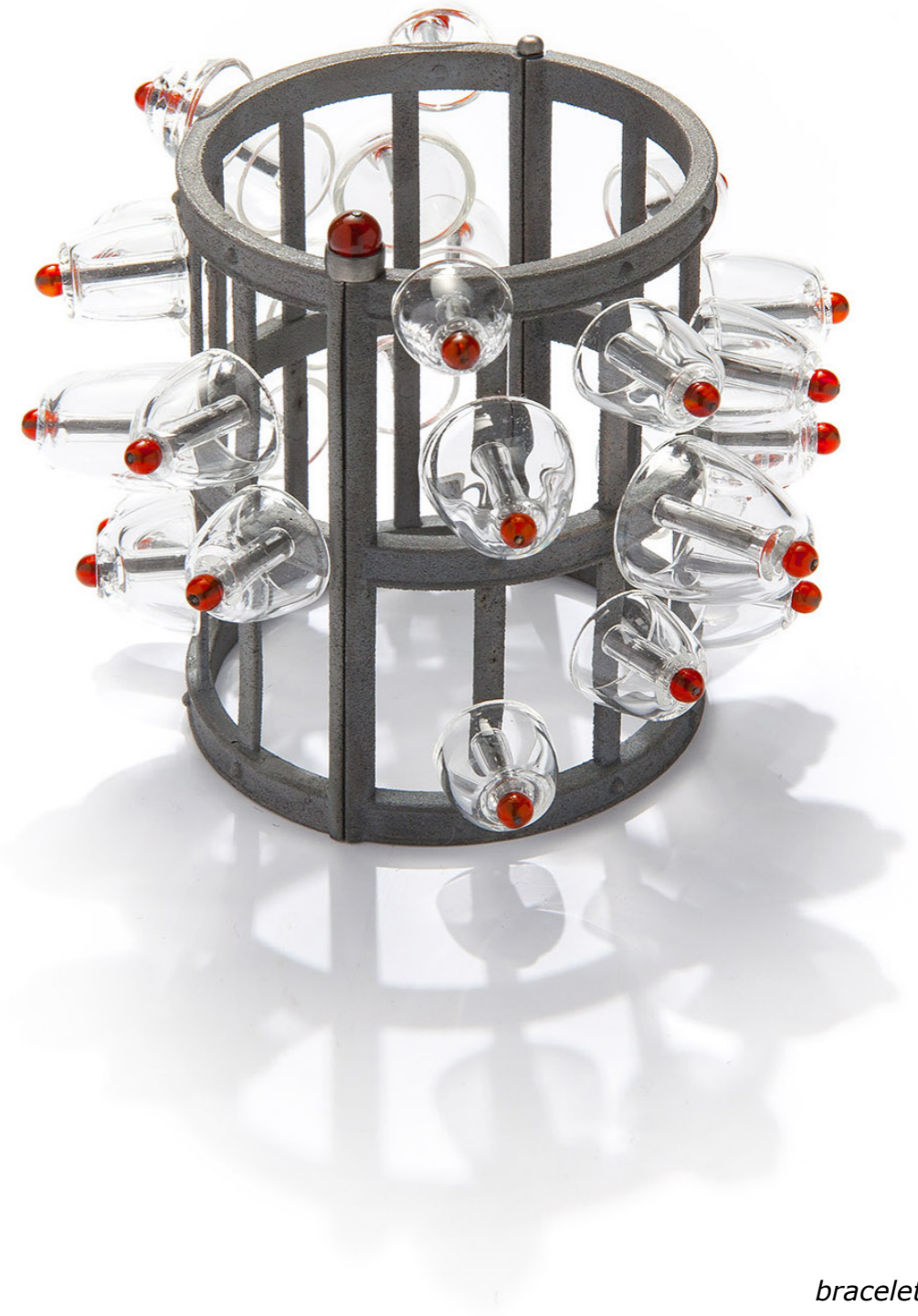
2 } necklace **Untitled**

3 } bracelet **Paestum Red**

*Evert
Nijland*



bracelet **Bubble**



bracelet **Carnelian**

*Evert
Nijland*



necklace **Blue**



A guide; conscious, coral, consuming

I've always been a precious coral lover, but I'm also a conscious consumer. So I did something super practical but not very romantic: I tried to analyze my original love for the material. I know, 'analyzing love' sounds crazy, almost like an oxymoron. However when you're trying to deal with new insights which color (or in this case bleach) your perspective on a subject matter forever, an analysis might just be the way to go.

After I finished my own list of beloved precious coral properties I started collecting information by other enthusiasts. The result of this research is a very practical guide to conscious coral consuming. Whether you're a precious coral lover, (wannabe) owner, or artist working with the material, this guide might show you some new helpful tips, tricks, insights or creative alternatives.

The main question to ask yourself would be: what exactly do you love about precious coral; is it the color, shape, origin or another quality?

Color

Let's start with the color of coral: so distinct and unique it has an entire color palette named after

it. If you're a fan of just the color aspect you might also appreciate completely different materials in this beautiful shade of red, orange and pink. There are materials that, when colored with the right pigments, can imitate precious coral quite convincingly.

Glass, porcelain and epoxy resin are great substitutes for repairing precious coral jewelry, especially in the case of replacing missing parts. When you want your jewelry to be made with actual gemstones you might be interested in jasper (opaque, reddish-brown) or carnelian (translucent, orange, orange-red). Both are varieties of chalcedony with a hardness rating of 6-7 on the Mohs scale.

Hardness might be something you would want to consider when you're aiming on durability:

Precious coral 3-4
Glass 5,5
Epoxy resin 6,5
Jasper 6-7
Carnelian 6-7
Porcelain 7



Shape

Precious coral is mostly cut into cabochons and round, oval or capsule shaped beads, but the original shape of the animal is tree-like. This shape is a very significant feature of the animal. Rough precious coral beads looks like little branches or antlers.

It seems the comparison is pretty specific in its direction. By (unwritten) rule the peculiar is being compared to the more common. Coral to antler, coral to branch, coral to tree, not the other way around. I would never say: "These trees in the forest, they're precious coral shaped" or "The antlers on that deer, they're precious coral shaped." Well from now on I probably will, but I would be purposely taking a fish or mermaid perspective on things. If your love for precious coral is purely based on the shape, jewelry made of or inspired by branches and trees might be a beautiful, natural alternative.

Origin

Next up would be the actual precious coral origin: the mysterious salty waters of the ocean. When our admiration for a material is directly linked to the source it (supposedly) originates from, are we infatuated by the actual material itself or by the idea of the material and the rich world it once belonged to? Precious coral isn't the only organic material used for making jewelry with a strong oceanic overtone. Pearls are equally associated with beautiful deep sea life. Another treasure, very suitable for making jewelry, would be seashells. Precious coral, pearls and seashells are all made of calcium carbonate produced by sea animals. The biggest differences between these three, beside their obvious external characteristics, would be the quantity in which they exist. Precious coral is threatened with extinction, wild saltwater pearls are extremely rare and seashells can be found in infinite amounts on beaches everywhere.

Natural or wild saltwater pearls grow within pearl oysters, which live in oceans. But most pearls are cultured or farmed and come from either freshwater mussels or saltwater oysters, cultivated in protected lagoons or atolls. Pearls are removed from the animal through operation, so when you are a vegan, you might want to avoid both pearls and precious coral. Seashells found on the beach are the exterior skeletons of animals that already left the building. They are the evacuated homes, the ruins of creatures that are long gone. Probably eaten by other animals like birds, starfish and mollusks.*

Availability and the amount of human intervention needed to acquire these materials explain the differences in value, but not necessarily in appreciation and perception of beauty. Are precious coral and pearls really more aesthetically appealing than seashells, or are they just less available and normalized?

If you're an ocean lover, you might also appreciate these materials (I know I do):

- beach pebbles
- sea glass
- drift wood

Tradition

Precious coral is known for being connected to cultural and historical traditions and like all gemstones associated with specific healing powers. Maybe your parents, grandparents or other ancestors used to wear precious coral jewelry. The appreciation for this kind of jewelry consists of so much more than the actual granted value expressed in terms of money. There's value you can calculate, pretty straight forward and obvious: rational value. Then there's value you can sense, built up by identity, different for everyone: emotional value. From history, to memory, to

*Mollusks are the ones that drill these little, perfectly round holes in shells, that look man-made, to eat its inhabitants.

beliefs and so on, emotional value is present in both heirlooms and so called healing jewelry.

I too own some vintage (almost antique) pieces, which I inherited from my grandmother. This material means the world to me, it's connected to my family history and therefore charged with emotional value. There are pieces I love to wear, and pieces I have disassembled to reuse and make new jewelry with. When you feel like you really (really) need to own actual, natural precious coral jewelry, a vintage piece or a new piece made with old material could be the way to go.

Maintenance

Now what if you're a precious coral owner and you want to keep your jewelry in pristine state? To be honest that's something easier said than done... With its hardness rating of 3 or 4 on the Mohs scale and the material being porous, brittle and fragile you should always treat it with caution and care (like a moderate version of Sméagol whispering: "my precious coral"). The list of maintenance tips for this particular material

consist of more don'ts than do's, but it basically all comes down to this: precious coral is an organic material.

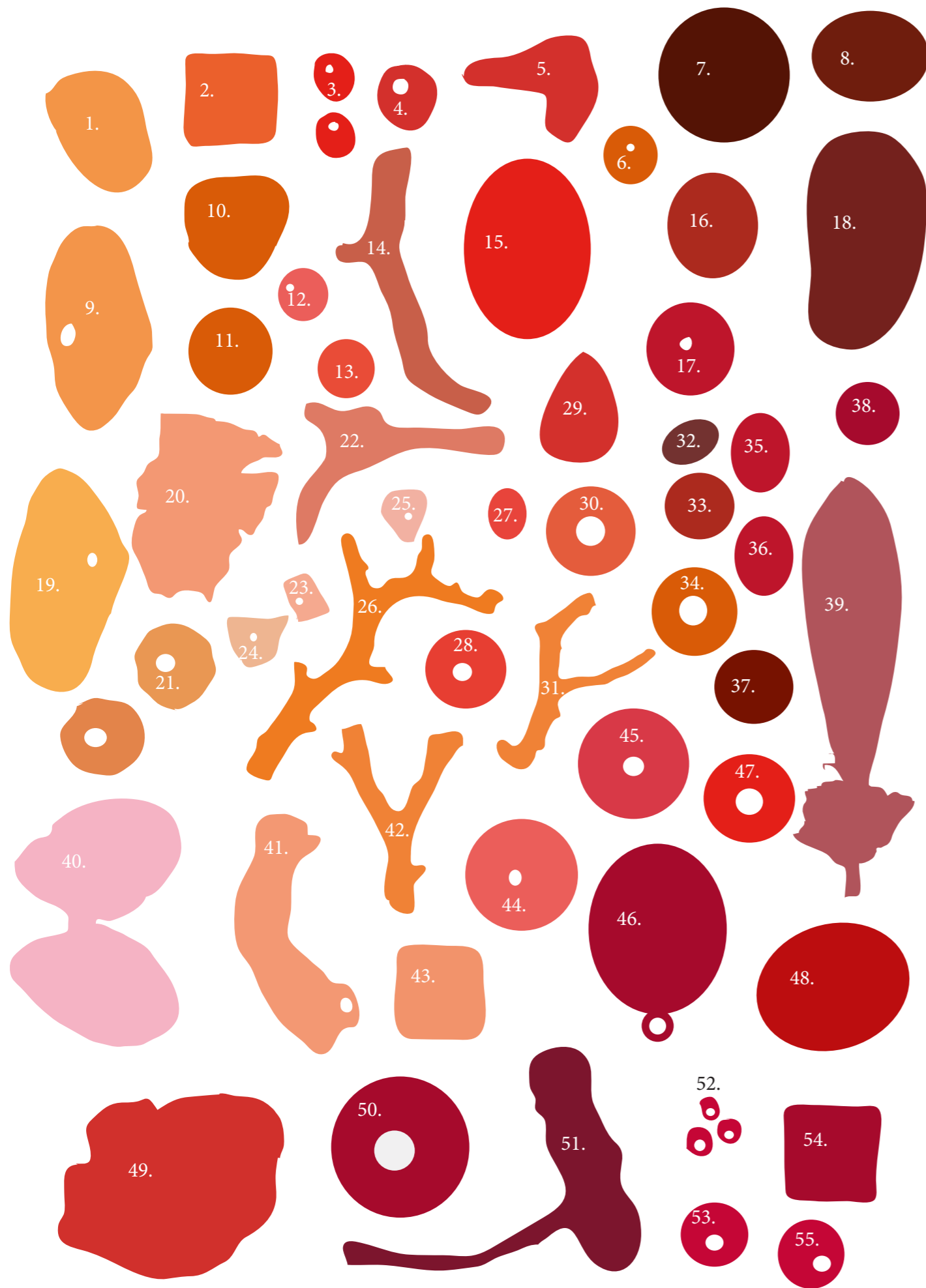
What if your jewelry doesn't stay pristine? There's one often overlooked step after breaking something before throwing it out: making an attempt to repair! When you want to replace missing or damaged parts of precious coral jewelry you could consider other materials like glass, porcelain and epoxy resin. If you want to use actual precious coral only, maybe try and look for vintage parts. They can be cut in to the right shape and dimensions by a jeweler or gemstone cutter.

When you value your jewelry because of its history, you could consider kintsugi, the Japanese art of repairing originally used on broken ceramics. This philosophy treats breakage as a part of the story of an object, rather than something to camouflage. Not everything is repairable, but wouldn't it be nice if we could at least try with traditional craft, new techniques or creative solutions?

Maintenance tips: precious coral do's and don'ts

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>Do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• remove dust with a can of compressed air;• clean by rinsing it with some room temperature water;• dry thoroughly with a soft cloth;• keep in box of its own or wrapped in a soft cloth. | <p>Don't:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• clean with household cleaners like soap, bleach or acids;• clean with ultrasonic cleaner;• clean with steam cleaner;• subject to a jewelry dip;• wipe off dust with a cloth;• let it make contact with cosmetics like perfumes, hairspray or bodylotion;• expose to extreme temperature changes;• expose to sunlight for prolonged periods of time;• wear against other gemstones;• wear while playing sports, exercising or during household chores. |
|---|--|





Precious coral gradient

1. Seashell, found on the beach of *Bloemendaal aan Zee* - Co M50 Y76 Ko
2. *Ministek*, plastic mosaic stone I used to play with as a child - Co M73 Y86 Ko
3. Precious coral beads, leftover from a necklace I made shorter - Co M96 Y97 Ko
4. Precious coral bead, leftover from a necklace I made shorter - Co M90 Y80 K11
5. Precious coral branche bead, part of a disassembled heirloom - Co M90 Y80 K11
6. Carnelian bead, material stock - Co M72 Y100 K10
7. Jasper round shaped, raw cabochon, material stock - Co M89 Y78 K78
8. Jasper oval shaped, spotted cabochon, material stock - Co M88 Y82 K65
9. Seashell, with a little mollusk hole, found in *Hargen aan Zee* - Co M50 Y75 Ko
10. Carnelian, tumbled, material stock - Co M72 Y100 K10
11. Carnelian, round shaped cabochon, bought in *Idar-Oberstein* - Co M72 Y100 K10
12. Glass round bead, leftover from a necklace I made shorter - Co M75 Y58 Ko
13. Precious coral round shaped cabochon, material stock - Co M81 Y78 Ko
14. Precious coral branche bead, part of a disassembled heirloom - Co M87 Y61 K9
15. Precious coral oval shaped cabochon, refurbished vintage piece - Co M96 Y97 Ko
16. Jasper oval shaped cabochon, material stock - Co M90 Y84 K32
17. Precious coral round bead, material stock - Co M98 Y75 K22
18. *Mancala*, plastic bean from an incomplete game I used to play - Co M95 Y85 K45
19. Seashell, with a little mollusk hole, found in *Hargen aan Zee* - Co M38 Y75 Ko
20. Copper leaf, material stock - Co M50 Y54 Ko
21. Carnelian faceted beads, part of a disassembled heirloom - Co M65 Y93 Ko
22. Precious coral branche bead, part of a disassembled heirloom - Co M87 Y61 K9
23. Precious coral raw bead, vintage necklace under construction - Co M62 Y90 Ko
24. Precious coral raw bead, vintage necklace under construction - Co M62 Y90 Ko
25. Precious coral raw bead, vintage necklace under construction - Co M62 Y90 Ko
26. Precious coral branche bead, vintage necklace under construction - Co M61 Y92 Ko
27. Precious coral oval cabochon, refurbished vintage piece - Co M84 Y75 Ko
28. Plastic round bead, found on the street - Co M86 Y80 Ko
29. Carnelian, drop shaped cabochon, material stock - Co M90 Y80 K11
30. Plastic round bead, part of a broken necklace I used to wear - Co M74 Y76 K4
31. Precious coral branche bead, vintage necklace under construction - Co M58 Y83 Ko
32. Garnet, oval shaped facet cut, material stock - Co M98 Y75 K22
33. Jasper round shaped cabochon, material stock - Co M94 Y45 K59
34. Glass, donut bead, part of a disassembled vintage piece - Co M72 Y100 K10
35. Carnelian, oval shaped cabochon, material stock - Co M98 Y75 K22
36. Carnelian, oval shaped cabochon, material stock - Co M98 Y75 K22
37. Garnet, round shaped facet cut, material stock - Co M100 Y100 K45
38. Ruby, round shaped cabochon, material stock - Co M100 Y65 K35
39. Gerbera, dried leaf, once part of a flower in a bouquet - Co M95 Y30 K58
40. Seashell, gift from an ex colleague as a goodbye present - Co M40 Y10 Ko
41. Plastic arm, once part of doll, the doll itself is missing now - Co M50 Y79 Ko
42. Precious coral branche bead, vintage necklace under construction - Co M58 Y83 Ko
43. *Ministek*, plastic mosaic stone I used to play with as a child - Co M52 Y58 Ko
44. Coral round bead, leftover from a necklace I made shorter for client - Co M75 Y58 Ko
45. Coral round bead, leftover from a necklace I made shorter for client - Co M89 Y65 K1
46. Enamel, on a piece of metal, vintage jewelry - Co M100 Y66 K35
47. Plastic bead, part of a disassembled vintage piece - Co M96 Y95 Ko
48. Plastic button, from my mothers workbasket - Co M100 Y98 K22
49. Plastic heart, part of a human anatomy model - Co M90 Y80 K11
50. Plastic thing, not sure what it is, found on the street - Co M100 Y66 K35
51. Cotton thread, part of a spindle of yarn, from my grandmothers material collection - Co M94 Y45 K59
52. Glass beads, part of a disassembled vintage piece - Co M100 Y65 K18
53. Plastic round bead, part of a broken necklace I used to wear - Co M100 Y65 K18
54. *Ministek*, plastic mosaic stone I used to play with as a child - Co M100 Y66 K35
55. Plastic round bead, part of a broken necklace I used to wear - Co M100 Y65 K18

Thank you;

I know that you know that I didn't work on this publication all by myself, right?

Mam, your infinite support kept me going, especially on the home stretch, when my vestibular system started to falter and fail. From technical graphic design advise, to contemplating about the content, to taking on practical tasks, you really, really helped me out. Thank you for everything!

Sven, your confidence in me is everything. Thank you for contemplating with me, pre reading every word, being honest, positive, enthusiastic and patient.

Aisegul, Carina, Delfina, Evert, Meredith, your work is amazing, beautiful and important. Thank you for your kindness, collaboration and patience.

Evert, your open-mindedness, enthusiasm and trust give me so much energy. Thank you for being a friend and colleague I can talk to about everything.

Joris, your tranquility is contagious. Thank you for pre reading and revising my writings where needed. Still waiting for the pedant remarks though.

Jolle, your willingness to help out and share in knowledge is so precious. Thank you for being a professional biology nerd and finding the time to pre read and revise my writings.



A deep dive; bibliography & other sources

Want to dive deep into the salty water with me?



Images

Cover

Illustration: Pareidolia, precious coral.

Work by Merel Slootheer

preciousmatters.com

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Madonna and Child

Barnaba da Modena

1367

Städel Museum

staedelmuseum.de

An introduction } 4

Arabische Korallen von Ernst Haeckel:

Kalkgerüste todter Arabische Korallen von Tur

Ernst Haeckel

1875

Kunstformen der Natur, plate 69: Hexacoralla

Ernst Haeckel

1904

Kunstformen der Natur, plate 26: Hexacoralla

Ernst Haeckel

1904

Kunstformen der Natur, plate 29: Tetracoralla

Ernst Haeckel

1904

An introduction } 6

The Mermaid

Howard Pyle

1910

Delaware Art Museum

delart.org

An ode } 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15

Work by Carina Shoshtary

Materials used almond shells, glass, graffiti, oyster shells, paint, seed pods, silver, wood,

Photo's by Mirei Takeuchi

carinashoshtary.com

An ode } 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23

Work by Delfina Emmanuel

Materials used ceramic, semi porcelain clay, painted oxides and stains, gold luster

Photo's by Sussie Ahlburgh, Batoo Showghi,

Sylvain Deleu

delfinaemmanuel.com

An ode } 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31

Work by Aisegul Telli

Materials used black pearls, brass, glass, iron, pigments, steel

natural chrystal, natural stone, resin, silver, pigments,

Photo's by Aisegul Telli

aisegultelli.com

An ode } 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39

Work by Meredith Woolnough

Materials used polyester embroidery thread

Photo's by Meredith Woolnough

meredithwoolnough.com.au

An ode } 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47

Work by Evert Nijland

Materials used carnelian, elastic, flock, glass, gold, leather, silver

Photo's by Eddo Hartman

evertnijland.com

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Schelpen en zeegewassen

Henricus Franciscus Wiertz

1809

Legaat van mevrouw M.E. van den Brink, Velp

Verwervinglegaat nov-1905

Rijksmuseum

Rijksmuseum.nl

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