

FACT SHEET

Joana Vasconcelos Fact Sheet

- Born 1971 in Paris, France—lives and works in Lisbon, Portugal
- Website: joanavasconcelos.com
- Studied Fine Arts, Jewelry Design, and Drawing at AR.CO (Arts and Visual Communication Center) in Lisbon
- For the 51st Venice Biennale (2005), the artist showed *A Noiva* (“The Bride”), a 20 ft. tall chandelier created from over 14,000 OB tampons
- First retrospective was in Lisbon in 2010
- She was the first woman and the youngest artist to exhibit at the Palace of Versailles in 2012
- She represented Portugal at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013 with her project, *Trafaria Praia* in 2013
- Recent solo exhibition *I’m Your Mirror* at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in 2018 was extremely popular

ABOUT VASCONCELOS’S PRACTICE

- Vasconcelos examines the present through critical readings of Western mythologies and iconographies
- Work explores mainstream values, habits, and customs to investigate personal and collective identity with respect to gender, class, and nationality
- Her practice involves appropriating everyday objects and meticulously reworking them, often calling upon artisanal techniques affiliated with female labor and employing craft-related materials such as textiles
- Assigns new meanings to the transformed items, reflecting on the tensions between high and popular culture, private and public, local and global, tradition and modernity
- Work is ambitious in terms of content and visual impact, often monumental in scale, and unites several different mediums (ceramics, fibers, sculpture, installation) and techniques (crochet, embroidery, lace-making, lighting)
- Frequently uses non-traditional fine art materials, particularly textiles to create monumental evocative sculptures; works that intrigue, inspire, and entertain the viewer
- Artist employs a 50+ person team of craftspeople, engineers, and architects to execute her ambitious projects

ABOUT HER VALKYRIES SERIES

- *Valkyrie* series focuses on feminine strength, triumph, and trailblazing through telling the histories of many women
- Series of large-scale and mixed media textile sculptures that take over the space; often grand in scope, colorful, and detailed
- In the Norse mythology, the valkyries are warrior goddesses
- Created from a vibrant patchwork of textiles and fabrics (silks, velvets, cotton) combined with knitting, embroidery, and/or crochet and embellished with tassels, crystals and beads, fringe and/or pom poms
- Initiated in 2004, her first *Valkyrie* sculpture is small, covered by knit fabrics in very intense colors. Since this work, her *Valkyries* have gradually taken on a larger scope

ABOUT VALKYRIE MUMBET

- A large-scale, site-specific installation commissioned for MAAM's grand opening, specifically designed for the Stephen D. Paine Gallery
- Marks Vasconcelos's first U.S. solo museum exhibition
- Honors Elizabeth "Mumbet" Freeman, an important figure in MA history. Freeman was an enslaved woman who sued for her freedom in the MA courts in 1781; she won and thereby helped make slavery illegal in MA
- Constructed of colorful capulanas from Mozambique (East African country and former Portuguese colony for 400 years, until 1975), first *Valkyrie* to feature capulanas
- Vasconcelos's parents were raised in Mozambique (c. 1940s–1960s)
- Elizabeth Freeman owned a necklace of gold beads, represented in the sculpture by yellow pom poms and metallic beads

ABOUT CAPULANAS

- Capulana, also known as African print or Dutch wax cloth, is a type of brightly colored cloth, commonly used by women, with a multinational origin and trade history
- A capulana is usually ~3' x 6' in size and features figurative or geometric patterns; commonly worn by women and extremely versatile: used as skirts, dresses, headwraps, baby-carriers, shawls, bags, etc...
- Owning many capulanas is a symbol of wealth and status for urban and rural women

- Capulanas can be used to communicate messages—printed patterns may include political slogans, public figures, proverbs, religious images, or decorative elements
- According to Wacy Zacarias, an African print specialist, the history of these fabrics across African nations is complex, many contemporary textiles that are viewed today as iconic “African prints” are an imitation of Indonesian *batik* that was brought to West Africa by the Dutch textile company Vlisco in 1852
- Many of the oldest designs originated in India and the Middle East
- Starting in the late 15th century, Portuguese traders began importing and trading textiles made abroad for other local goods (including people, who would then be sold into slavery) along the resource-rich East African coast
- Capulana-like textiles have been part of Mozambican (and Swahili) culture since the establishment of the Arab/Indian trade routes in East Africa several centuries before the Portuguese arrived
- Many contemporary African designers have reclaimed these textiles, creating homegrown 20th and 21st-century textile industries in their own nations