

To begin, could you share a little about your professional journey until you took on the Susana Neto Textil Art project? What were the achievements that deserve to be highlighted and the challenges you faced along the way?

I started in the Textile Industry, in the century-old Tarf factory, in Pevidém, where I had the opportunity to be responsible for 50 employees in the manufacturing and packaging section and deal with both the organization and management of production and subcontracting.

It was a real experience at all levels, at a time when factory workers were seen as people without opinions, and, practically one by one, I gained their trust and, from then on, the work began to flow and obstacles were overcome with a lot of help. It was a great school for me at the beginning of my career, because it was a company with state support that hired recent graduates for positions that would not have been available to us under other circumstances, and with the supervision of a great mentor.

The factory couldn't resist and I received an offer to be a SAP consultant, which I immediately accepted. It was also a very intense experience, in which I learned to work with very tight deadlines, with a lot of demands, often having to solve complex problems with little support, as we were sometimes alone and out of the way. It was a huge learning experience in time management, the ability to overcome problems under enormous pressure and, often, having to learn an extremely complex system on my own, based only on documentation.

I then started working in the SAP team at Grupo Rar, where I spent many years.

When I had my first daughter, 17 years ago, and being away from my family, without family support, I decided to start my journey as an entrepreneur, so that I could have more flexible hours.

At the time, before the great crisis of 2008, I set up a spa, which, having been one of the types of business that was immediately affected during that period, I kept it for 5 years, until I no longer thought it would make sense to continue.

However, at that time, I worked with two major luxury brands, and had high-quality partnerships, where I learned a lot about a very unique and special context.

I identify very much with the demand for quality at the highest level, both in terms of service, as well as customer service, the environment, the care and attention we dedicate; also how much we learn to improve in a context that asks us to exceed expectations.

Having maintained the Spa during this period, without having left the SAP area, as I had initially planned, and with a young daughter, without family

support, meant that I had to take a break to recover and rethink the future.

I have always been very connected to culture and the arts: I took the general violin course at the conservatory and, throughout my childhood, I traveled a lot with my parents, who were also very connected to art, literature, theater,...

And, it was in art that I found support to help me slow down a little and, during that period, I did a postgraduate degree in illustration.

The following year, knowing that the Gaia City Council would like to have an arts hub that would be a reference in Cais de Gaia, I presented my proposal to boost this project, which was accepted, and I created the Atelier do Cais, a dynamic space with workshops, exhibitions and a store.

This space grew until it was no longer possible to continue after the pandemic, as it ended up being transferred to another department of the Chamber and may reopen when the space of the old Devesas factory is in operation as an arts hub.

During the pandemic, I began to study Botanical Printing in depth and to get in touch with people from all over the world who were developing these techniques.

I myself began to dedicate myself to researching our own flora and using the knowledge I had acquired in artists' workshops and in postgraduate studies to enhance creative results.

In 2019, I was selected by Citeve to join the itech green circle, at Modtíssimo, in Alfândega do Porto

From then on, I was always investigating techniques to improve the solidity and richness of the final works.

At the moment I work mainly with Interior Designers and Fashion Designers, on request.

I am always studying and I really enjoy continuing to interact with people from all generations and, currently, I feel that, alongside my creative work, I want to transmit to others what I feel can be an added value for others as well, namely in terms of my knowledge about the circular economy and entrepreneurship for the creative industries.

In recent years, I have always been studying these areas and I feel that there are some important specificities in entrepreneurship for the creative sector that make sense in a specific course.

I started to have more of this notion when, in 2022, I was selected, with 19 other Portuguese artisans, to join a World Craft Council Europe project, Crafting Business, where we had intensive entrepreneurship training for creatives in the crafts sector.

It was also from then on that I became more aware of the importance that craftsmanship has in the most iconic luxury brands and the importance of developing work in this direction, a path that is also very interconnected with

the circular economy.

Therefore, I am currently in talks with some higher education schools in the creative areas to move forward with this Entrepreneurship course in the creative areas.

What achievements are worth highlighting and what challenges have you faced along the way?

My biggest challenge came after motherhood.

I was raised in a family of very strong women, who were very dedicated to their profession. In my family, all opinions were highly respected, whether we were women, men or children. From the moment I was born, I felt that my voice had its own place and that it was valued on a par with the voice of any other member of the family.

However, from the moment I became a mother, and I was displaced from the rest of the family, that is, I didn't have a support network, I felt immense pressure to put family and home first and give up on my professional dreams.

But I've always felt that I have dreams and ideas that I want to achieve, and it's something that goes far beyond myself. I work a lot and study, I love exchanging ideas and making my contribution to society, and being limited in that way was what exhausted me and I had to start trying to work around Life so that I could achieve my professional dreams while also always being dedicated to my daughters.

For this reason, for a long time I was unable to commit to certain levels, as it was only recently that my daughters began to have more autonomy.

However, I have always been moving forward steadily and I have no doubt that I have acquired resilience and focus skills that have helped me immensely to understand that I have to focus on the objective, regardless of the demands that Life places on us.

I am sure that it was the most complex period of my life, when my daughters were young (one was born in 2006 and the other in 2014), going through the 2008 crisis, with two very demanding jobs, which was the Spa that I set up and as a SAP Analyst, without a support network, which taught me everything that now helps me to deal in a very practical and assertive way with adversity and with decision-making.

At that time I realized how important it is not only to manage time, but also how extremely important it is to manage energy.

We learn to notice whether it makes sense to use our energy on what is taking our focus away. We understand to what extent the people around us are nourishing us or draining us.

I had to learn to be very quick in making decisions and I started to filter out

everything that was just noise...

I learned these techniques over several years and had to put them to use when, in 2012, I could no longer sleep and could not find a solution.

This is the greatest source of pride for me, the fact that I managed to overcome that difficult moment and I managed to do it, even when they told me that I would have to continue to live with that reality and accept it.

But I felt, as I do, that I want to give more to the World and continue to build something edifying and I refused to give up.

And it is for this reason that I currently also have so much training and experience in Mindfulness and the Science of Happiness, as these techniques were crucial at that time and have continued to be so, to continue overcoming obstacles and being able to float in the demands of Life.

The fact that I started working voluntarily in this area made me realize how much everyone is, at all times, trying to overcome some demand in life.

This notion made me feel closer to others and became more natural and empathetic in my approach to others. Professionally, there ends up being a greater connection between me and the people I interact with, facilitating teamwork, negotiations, decision-making, etc.

I feel that the greatest achievements I have had are at an internal level, which allow me to always flow towards my goals, overcoming obstacles, building something solid that I identify with, always having a great desire to also leverage those who I feel are aligned in this objective of contributing to a more edifying Future and with a better quality of Life, building connections and bridges that allow me, and those around me, to be stronger, more united.

To better understand, as a creative in fashion and natural textile art, what are your main responsibilities and how would you describe your role as an entrepreneur and leader?

As a creative in this area, I feel I have a responsibility when it comes to:

- to the sustainability of processes, to the stakeholders I work with.

I work hard to meet best practices within the Circular Economy. I am constantly updating myself so that I can embrace these best practices as much as possible.

I also feel a huge inner motivation to share my knowledge about sustainable habits with the community, including my stakeholders, when I realize that they want to know more.

- I also feel the responsibility to always be working, studying, researching in this area, to achieve more original, higher quality and

longer lasting results.

I am constantly seeking to go further, with each job I do, trying not to repeat myself, seeking solutions in terms of aesthetics and quality, which are increasingly better and more appealing.

I also try to always study the market, try to meet people's wants and needs, but try to surprise them.

- I try to surround myself with other creatives or professionals, in joint projects, who do work that complements mine, in order to give life to the fabrics I create, whether in Interior Design or Fashion Design, the areas where I feel my work makes sense.
- I have an innate enthusiasm and motivation and I love motivating those who work with me, giving them support so that they can also surpass themselves.

I have no doubt that my characteristics that are beneficial to others also bring me a lot of return. But it is a healthy coexistence and interaction, win-win.

- Currently, I am also working with some art schools to embrace the challenge of teaching an Entrepreneurship course for creative people, as I feel it is time to share with young people the knowledge and experience I have acquired.
- Something that also characterizes me is an immense ability to generate several original ideas to solve challenging issues and I really want to be able to, together with creative students, work with them in order to give them tools to be able to materialize their ideas successfully.
- For me, being an entrepreneur and leader requires always being extremely well updated and informed about the various facets of the business and also about global trends.

It is important to have a greater capacity to take risks, so that you can be an example for others.

Of course, having less risk aversion also implies falling more, failing more, and, therefore, we need to have much greater resilience, an ability to follow what seems right to us, even if no one else is supporting us, even if no one believes in us.

However, over time, we are increasingly quick to analyze what could have gone better, or what could have been done differently, and move forward.

Being an entrepreneur and a leader means having the ability to create new, well-thought-out and studied paths, but it is always an act of

courage. And leading means seeking to surround ourselves with people who can complement us or help us evolve, and we, as leaders, must have the strength and ability to maintain unity and motivation among everyone, even in the most critical and demanding moments.

This project of yours brings with it added leadership. As a female leader in the sector, what values or principles guide your approach when leading services such as Sustainability, Circular Economy, among others?

From my experience, having worked in sectors that are much more traditional than the one I currently work in, I am certain that it becomes much simpler to lead with all the characteristics that are inherent to my female condition, in my current context.

I realize that I can show myself more openly, generating a more empathetic environment, in which people are more comfortable expressing their difficulties, desires, ideas,... thus fostering an environment of more assertive communication, focused on results, evolution and learning, limiting internal or interpersonal judgment, reducing internal pressure, in which people feel that they are united in working towards a common purpose and that they celebrate achievements, both personal and team, and that they come together when the team is facing difficulties or to support a personal demand.

Today, young people want to have a balance between their family and social life and their private life. And I believe that this balance is important and essential. If most companies are not yet prepared for this reality, it is essential that they understand that they need to renew themselves.

I also believe that female leadership promotes integration, tolerance, acceptance, and unity in a more natural way. Diversity, whether cultural or age-related, ... brings immense wealth to any organization.

I want my values to not only guide my leadership, but also inspire and motivate the people I work with with purpose and passion in projects that aim for a more sustainable and circular future.

We know that Susana Neto Textil Art also stands out for its vision of luxury, nature and appreciation of craftsmanship. What does this mission mean in practice and how does the brand promote it in its day-to-day activities?

I identify a lot with the current vision of the craftsman, working with extreme rigor, originality, combining tradition with design and art, creating his own brand that distinguishes him as unique.

Craftsmanship is associated with the creation of unique pieces, with their own soul, using the minimum of resources. There is extreme dedication in the elaboration of each piece, often designed specifically for a specific client, uniting the vision of the craftsman with the vision of the person who orders the piece.

This piece is, from the outset, cherished and valued, for its beauty, its timelessness, its attention to detail, and the materials chosen with the utmost care.

A piece created with dedication, manually, under these circumstances, has enormous intrinsic value.

It is art, but an art that has a utilitarian purpose. Its purpose is not to be observed but rather to be used.

All these characteristics of current craftsmanship, authorship, with its own brand, timelessness, perceived value,... Are inherent to the characteristics associated with luxury.

Luxury brands have always been associated with craftsmanship, as the most iconic luxury pieces come from the hands of the world's best artisans.

In recent years, the appreciation of artisans in the luxury world has given them the visibility and value they deserve, and luxury companies are proud to showcase the work of their artisans, the work that goes into their pieces. They have also played an important role in promoting and teaching the artisan work to which they are linked.

And, for the artisan who needs his time to create pieces of great value, both in terms of materials, research, design, aesthetics, process,... the best way to be sustainable, also at a financial level, is to opt for an approach at this level.

Luxury and craftsmanship are closely intertwined

Regarding the other two pillars of sustainability: social and environmental, the work of the artisan is also ideal, since it works at a community level, valuing it, supporting it, generating local development,... And, also at an environmental level, artisanal work in itself uses few resources, artisans are very careful with consumption, use of materials, energy, less transport,...

We know that this has not always been the case, but in recent years, mainly through organizations such as the World Craft Council, or even with the vision and support of the European Union, numerous initiatives have been developed aimed at preserving traditions, and building bridges between artisans and designers, and providing entrepreneurship training to artisans committed to making a difference for a more sustainable future.

Taking a general look, in what aspects does your project differ from other brands and projects with the same perspective, especially taking into account your innovative and inspiring mindset?

I look at the work I do as a path that encompasses:

- the creation of unique, beautiful, timeless pieces that promote a sense of well-being and a sense of belonging to Nature.

People feel how pleasant it is to own a piece that they can use in their daily lives, but that was designed especially for them, often even co-created with them. They perceive the pleasant feeling of receiving something that took time to create, but that has a very special meaning.

Having something that they cherish, that they take care of, because it is unique and beautiful and makes them feel good.

Pieces made with botanical printing are very rich, visually speaking, and convey a sense of tranquility. The colors of Nature vibrate in a way that is impossible to replicate artificially.

The aroma of the pieces themselves is very special and characteristic.

- to be an appealing source of knowledge about sustainability, the Circular Economy and Well-being, inspiring people who identify with the brand to also be ambassadors of transformation, embracing new habits and this common purpose, becoming a source of knowledge and inspiration.

Inspiring people to want to be part of something bigger and related to these three aspects: reflecting on their own consumption habits; embracing lifestyle habits more related to well-being: fewer objects, pieces with more meaning, more uplifting lifestyle habits and relationships; embracing this common purpose of the brand and those who identify with it and being ambassadors of this more uplifting way of looking at the world.

How does this approach translate into benefits for customers and business partners?

If there is something I see clearly and have no doubt, it is that both customers and business partners feel excited about being part of it and give their best.

When someone asks me for an order, I give an account of how the work is progressing, I show the paths I take, where I collect the plants, the tests I carry out until I manage to achieve the vision we have...

I notice how excited clients are, just like me. They feel that they are creating, with me, something that will be theirs and will have a special place, also because they are involved in this journey.

And I notice that when they receive the piece they feel a happiness that they want to share.

As for the partners, I understand that they want to follow this path of transformation with me, which involves a more circular design, less waste, better choice of materials, etc. We still don't always have all the solutions for our visions, but I see how willing they are to embrace the ideas I propose to them and they also give me theirs and we, together, get closer and closer to

what we want to achieve.

People feel that what they are buying or building is not just an object, it is also opening new paths to provide solutions for others to come, it is also forcing other stakeholders to realize that there is someone forcing new solutions, looking for new materials, for example.

Often, stakeholders themselves already have more sustainable solutions, but they do not put them first because they are not yet thinking about the circular economy. They may talk about sustainability but do not yet value how it can make a difference.

As I am very enthusiastic about the transformation that is happening at this level, I feel that I can convey to them this desire for them to also embrace this purpose. And, at the stakeholder level, I realize that they too are beginning to want to pass this message on to others.

**The world is changing – and business sectors are changing with it.
What challenges have you faced and, more importantly, how have you overcome them?**

I identify immensely with the current world, although I am fully aware that the fluidity that exists, at all levels, forces us to find anchors and roots.

I understand how important it is to take care of our body and mind in order to have energy and balance in an extremely demanding and fast-paced world.

We also need to have a lot of focus and very well-defined goals, so that we don't fall into the temptation of getting lost in things that don't help us along our path. We need to have not only a great ability to manage our time, but also to manage our own energy.

An entrepreneur and leader works like an engine. He must have increased motivation and, on certain occasions, leverage and motivate those around him. His self-motivation must be excellent.

For all these reasons, today, more than ever, someone in this position has to be very selective about the challenges they take on and the people around them.

I often consider to what extent all the challenges I am taking on make sense. I often filter them and only move forward with a few.

Likewise, I increasingly look for people who position themselves in life with a similar mindset, not in terms of ideas, because I consider diversity to be fundamental, but rather in the terms I mentioned earlier.

Something that I also consider fundamental nowadays is the constant updating of knowledge, in a world where there is relevant news almost daily.

We can't embrace everything, but anyone who wants to break new ground needs to understand very well how the rest of the world is evolving, what is already being done and how, what the trends are in terms of consumption,...

And being aware of all the changes requires constant updating.

On the other hand, very positive work is being done in terms of opening doors to diversity, although there is still a long way to go. And I am talking about cultural, gender, age diversity, etc. And normalizing this diversity will bring enormous wealth and, certainly, innovative solutions.

Keeping up with updates on the Circular Economy is complex and demanding, but I keep up to date through courses and seminars, and I keep in touch with other people who work in this area.

On the community and consumer front, I try to inspire people through education and awareness events, adapting messages to be more accessible and relevant. Additionally, working with stakeholders who don't always have eco-design solutions that align with my ideas can be challenging. In these cases, I provide support and resources to help them find and implement suitable solutions, and we explore ideas together.

I enjoy being at the forefront of embracing the circular economy, but there are still times when solutions are not implemented to the level I would like. I take a continuous improvement approach, setting realistic targets. Overcoming these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach: education, innovation, legislation and community engagement.

Finally, we would like to turn the conversation back to Susana Neto. What are your future ambitions for your project?

The next step is to start working on larger projects with Interior Designers, mainly on lighting solutions. This was something that I had not yet embraced, mainly because I was not yet satisfied with the quality of my final work, in terms of the durability of the print. And I had not yet found a design that met the characteristics that were fundamental to me: eco-design, simplicity, originality, timelessness, beauty, rigor, versatility.

It took a lot of research, study and experimentation to achieve excellent botanical printing, both aesthetically and technically. I am very satisfied with all the investment I made, at all levels, and now I am confident and can move on to the next level.

I want this work to continue to be very personalized and rigorous, and it is not a work that can be done in large quantities and also has a size limit, due to its own technical characteristics. For these reasons, I see the solutions that I will now launch as being part of a more special room, for example, in a large project, or that piece that adds the touch that makes a difference in an environment.

On a more personal or professional level, what would you like to

achieve?

Since I followed this path of entrepreneurship, I have learned a lot, overcome countless demands, studied a lot, dealt with people who made me evolve a lot, and done my inner work...

And I feel like I have a lot inside me that I can transmit.

I have had the support of fantastic mentors in terms of entrepreneurship, however I realize that entrepreneurship in the creative industries has some particularities that must be taken into account. And I also realized that this entrepreneurial facet in schools in these areas still has a lot of room to evolve.

For this reason, I have been meeting with some schools with the aim of starting an Entrepreneurship course for creatives.

Along with the work I am developing, I would like to be able to work with students in these areas very soon, working with them on entrepreneurship projects, making it a reality.