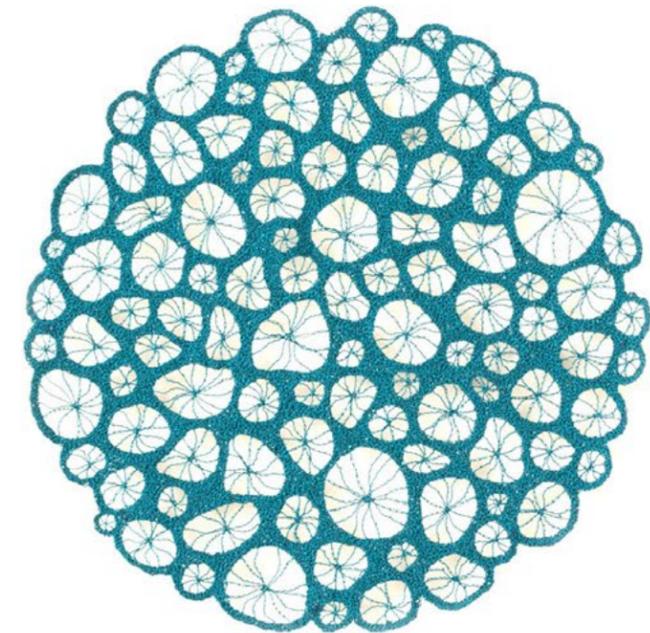
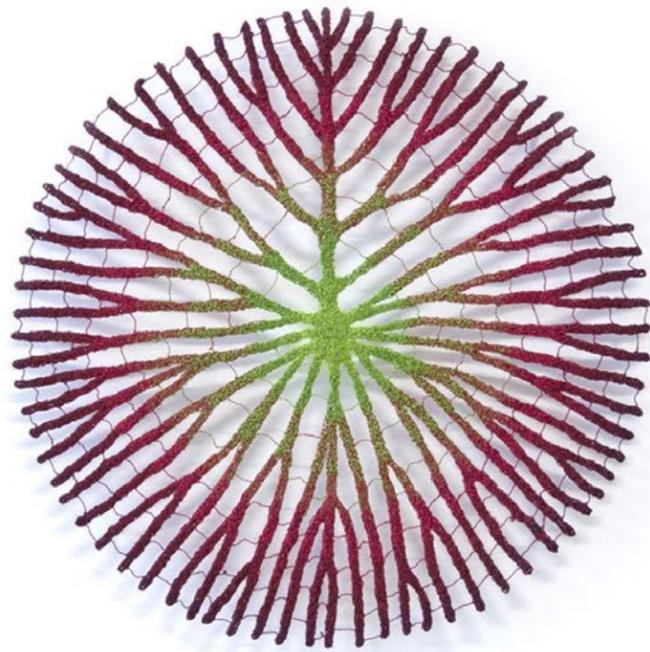
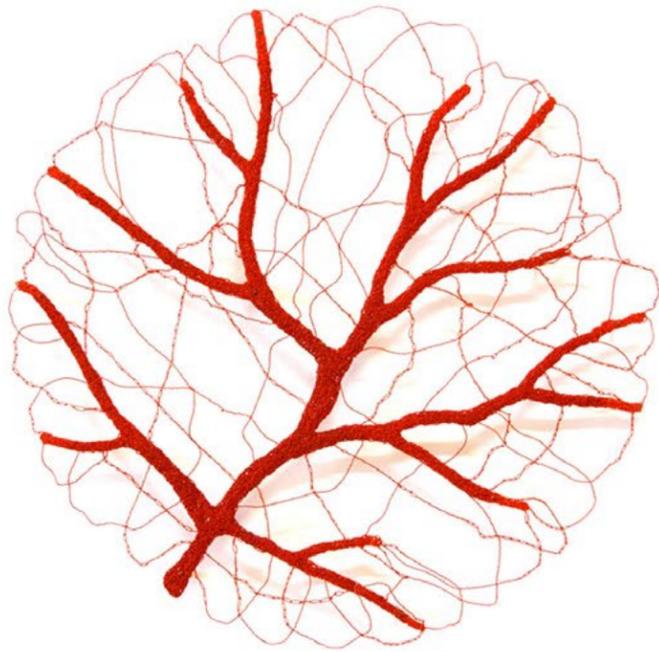
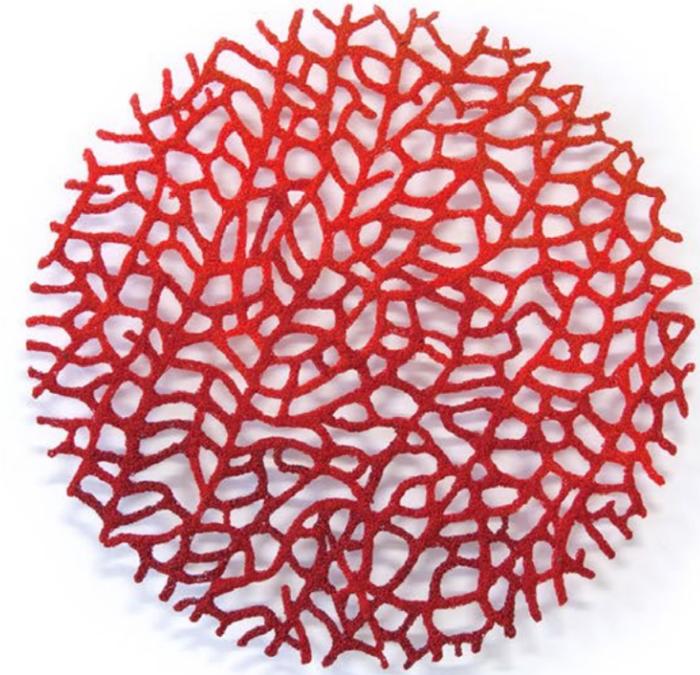
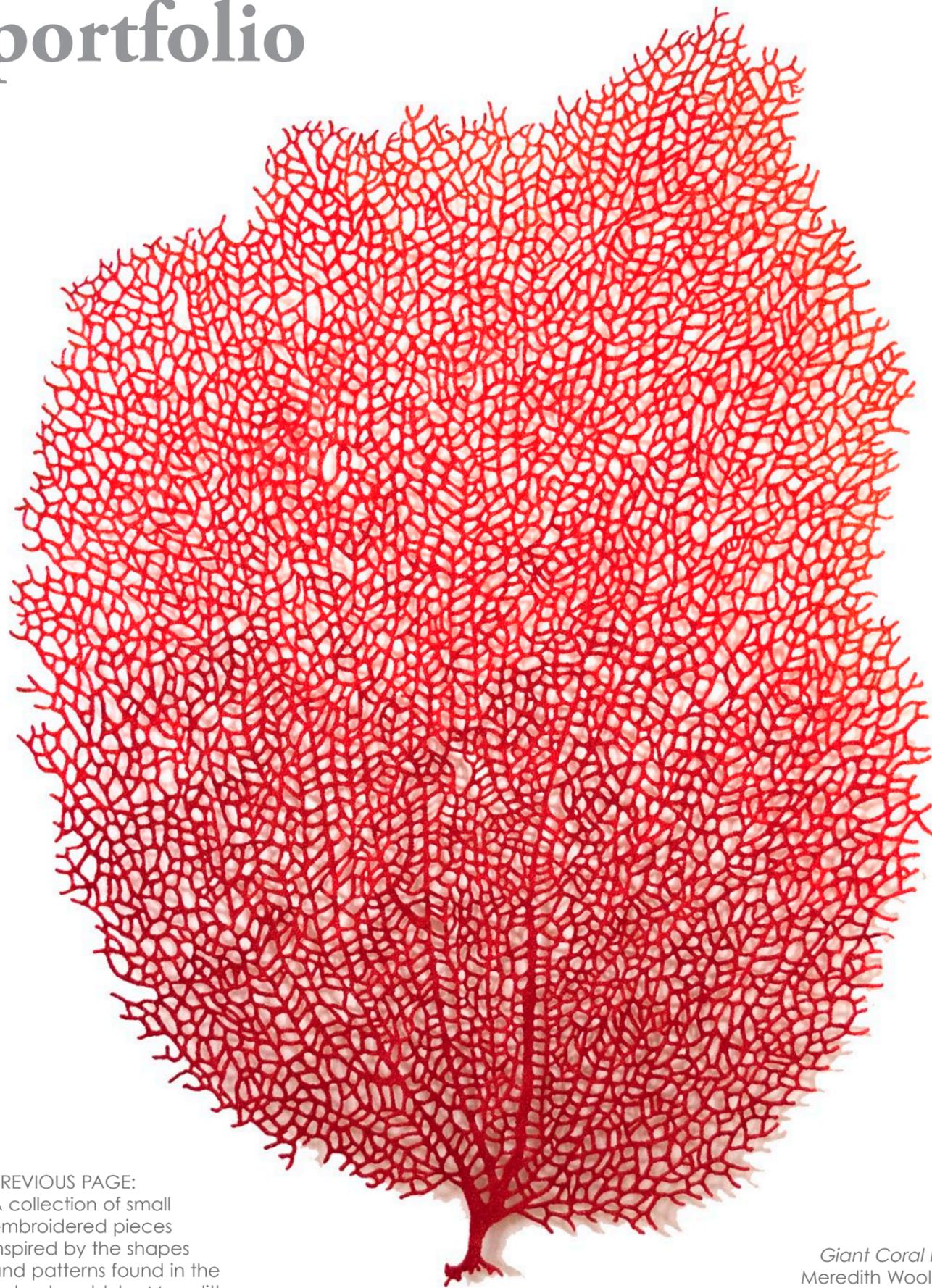


Meredith Woolnough



P O R T F O L I O





PREVIOUS PAGE:
A collection of small embroidered pieces inspired by the shapes and patterns found in the natural world, by Meredith Woolnough, Embroidery thread and pins on paper

Giant Coral Fan, by Meredith Woolnough. Embroidery thread and pins on paper, 100x120cm



Star Coral Bowl, by Meredith Woolnough. Embroidery thread 20cm diameter

Text edited by Gunild Symes
All artwork and photos by Meredith Woolnough

Meridith Woolnough is an Australian artist from the coastal region of Newcastle in New South Wales. An avid diver, she creates intricate embroidered traceries of underwater forms highlighting their natural beauty as well as their fragile nature. X-RAY MAG interviewed the artist to find out more about her unusual technique and keen interest in forms found on reefs.

X-RAY MAG: Tell us about yourself, your background and how you became an artist.

MW: I have always loved making things. As a child I was always painting, drawing and creating. So it seemed very natural for me to study fine arts at university once I finished up high school.

I didn't expect to come out of uni and become an artist. That didn't seem like a 'real job' or a 'proper career', so I did what many art students seem to fall back on and I became a teacher.

I worked as a high school visual art, textiles and design teacher for several years before I started to exhibit my own embroidered artwork as a bit of a side project. The response to my work in these early exhibitions was so overwhelmingly positive that in 2012 I decided to throw in the teaching towel and pursue this seemingly unrealistic dream of making it as an artist.

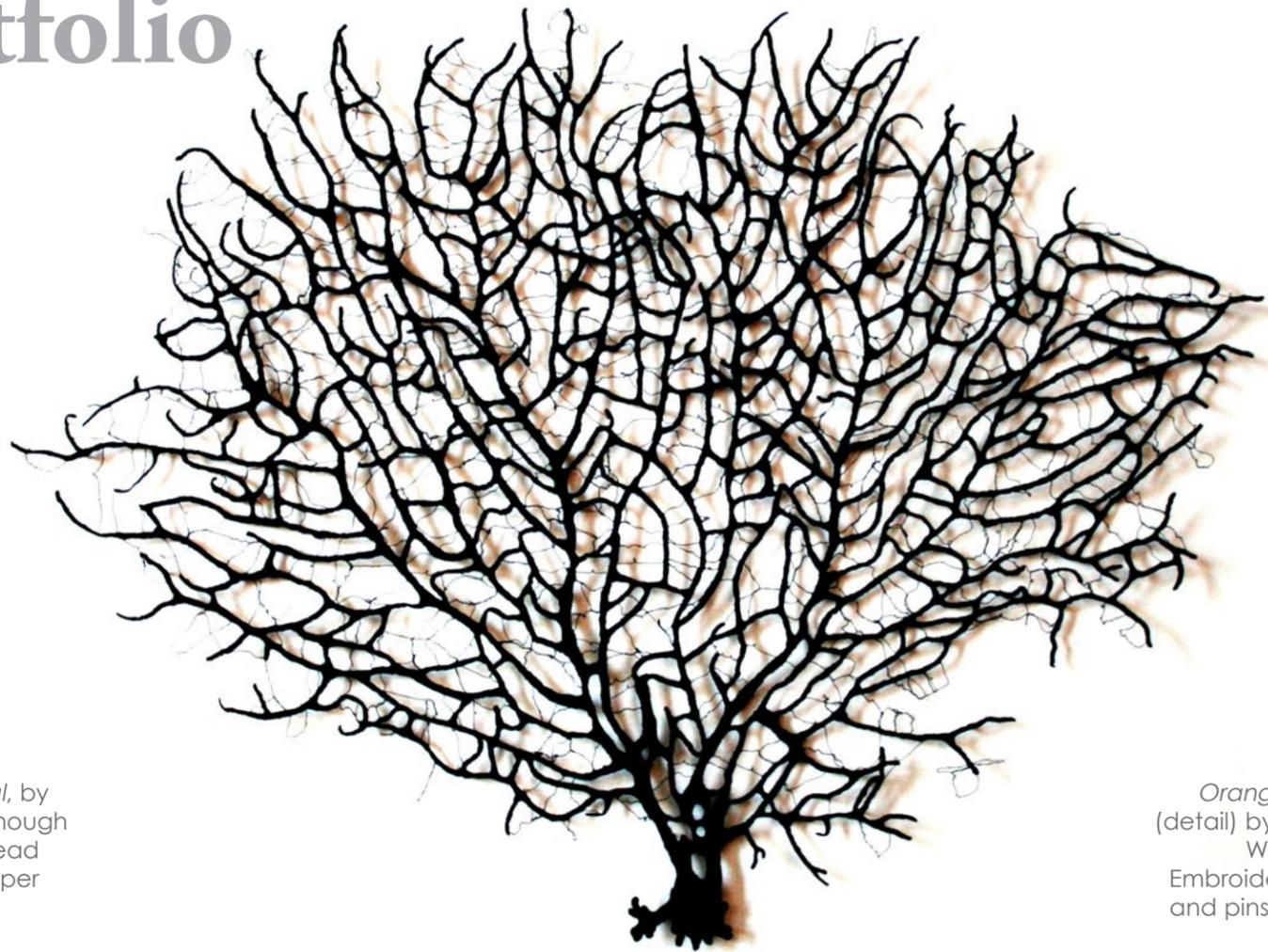
It's been a rocky road at times but things have kept growing, and

I feel like I am finally starting to make it all come together. I have had some really successful exhibitions, won a few awards and people seem to want to collect my work, so I must be doing something right.

Sometimes I can't really believe that I am doing this as a job. I feel like someone will come along any day now and tell me, "Okay, you have had your fun, but now you need to get back to a real job." I hope that day never comes.

X-RAY MAG: Why coral and ocean specimens? How did you come to this theme?

MW: I have always found the ocean to be an incredibly inspiring place. It is so alien and bizarrely beautiful down there. Everywhere you look there is something to see and discover.



Black Fan Coral, by Meredith Woolnough
Embroidery thread and pins on paper
103x92cm

I vividly remember the first time I snorkeled on a coral reef as a child and the beautiful colours and structures of the coral blew me away. Everyone else was looking at the fish—and yes, the fish are amazing and beautiful—but I was fascinated by the corals themselves. I just fell in love with those delicate structures.

This love for coral obviously stayed with me, and I started to work with coral specimens in my embroidered work around 2009 when I created a series of small embroidered pieces inspired by various coral shapes and structures. The series was vividly coloured with the exception of one little piece in the corner that was perfectly white and almost lost in the white paper and frame—a subtle comment on the issues of coral bleaching.

X-RAY MAG: How did you develop your artwork with embroidery and textiles over time?

MW: The particular embroidery technique that I use was something that I developed when I was in my final honours year at university. For that year I chose to work with a process of drawing with a domestic sewing machine onto a water-soluble base fabric so that I could create embroidered pieces that were liberated from the base fabric. By taking embroidery 'off the fabric' I could create very sculptural pieces and the possibilities were endless. I am still working with that same technique, and I keep finding new ways to work with it and push its limits.

X-RAY MAG: What is your artistic method or creative process? How do you

create your artworks?

MW: My work starts with a clear idea for a design—usually a pattern or a structure that I have seen in nature such as a coral branch or a shell—something that sparks my interest. I will then sketch on paper until I am happy with the balance of the overall design, and I'm sure that the structure will translate to embroidery well.

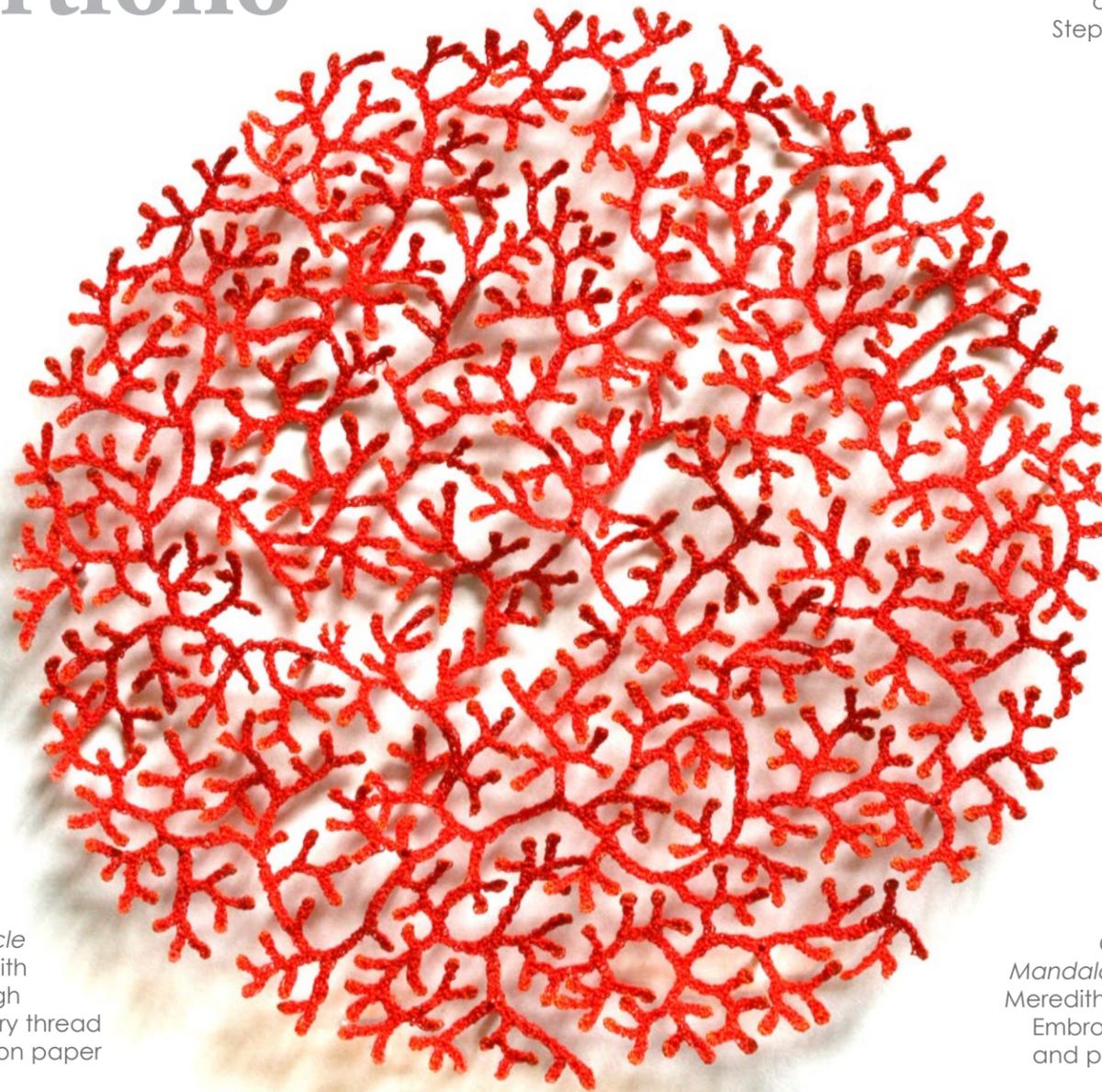
Once the design is finalized, I will transfer the design onto a sheet of water-soluble fabric and embroider the piece. My process is basically drawing with a sewing machine and building up the design so that it is all connected and very dense.

Then when I dissolve the base fabric away, I am just left with my stitched structure. I have developed a way of displaying the works so that they

Orange Nautilus (detail) by Meredith Woolnough.
Embroidery thread and pins on paper



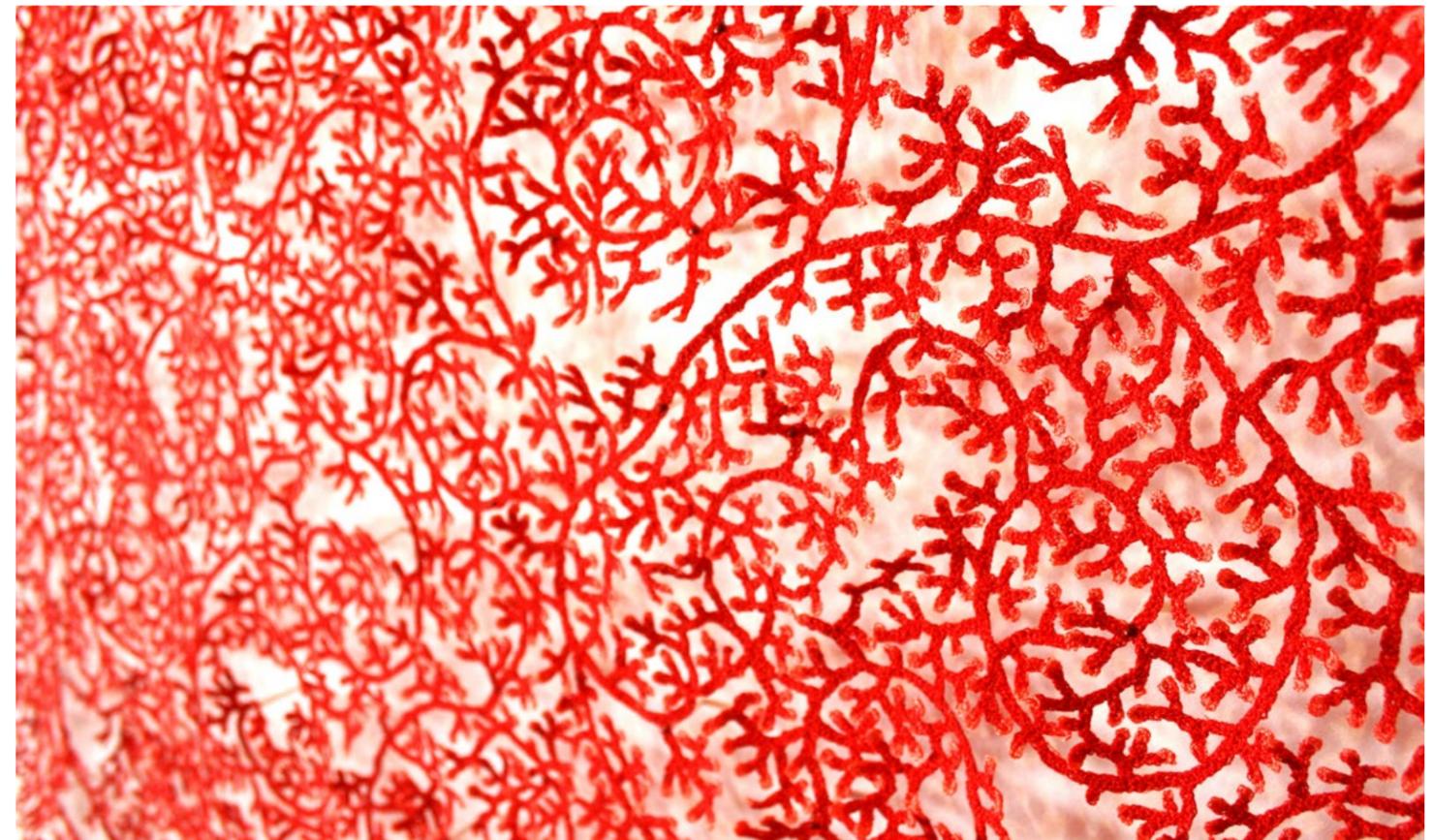
Meredith Woolnough at work in her studio. Photo by Stephanie Owen



Cluster Coral Circle
by Meredith Woolnough
Embroidery thread and pins on paper
40x40cm



Coral Cluster Mandala (detail), by Meredith Woolnough
Embroidery thread and pins on paper



appear to float off the backing board, so that they cast dramatic shadows in the right lighting.

X-RAY MAG: What is your relationship to the underwater world and coral reefs? Are you a scuba diver or snorkeler and how has this influenced your art? In your relationship with reefs and the sea, where have you had your favorite experiences?

MW: I have grown up in and around the ocean and always have had a deep love and

respect for it. I learnt to scuba dive on a holiday to the Great Barrier Reef in Queensland, Australia, when I was 19, and I fell I love with the sport.

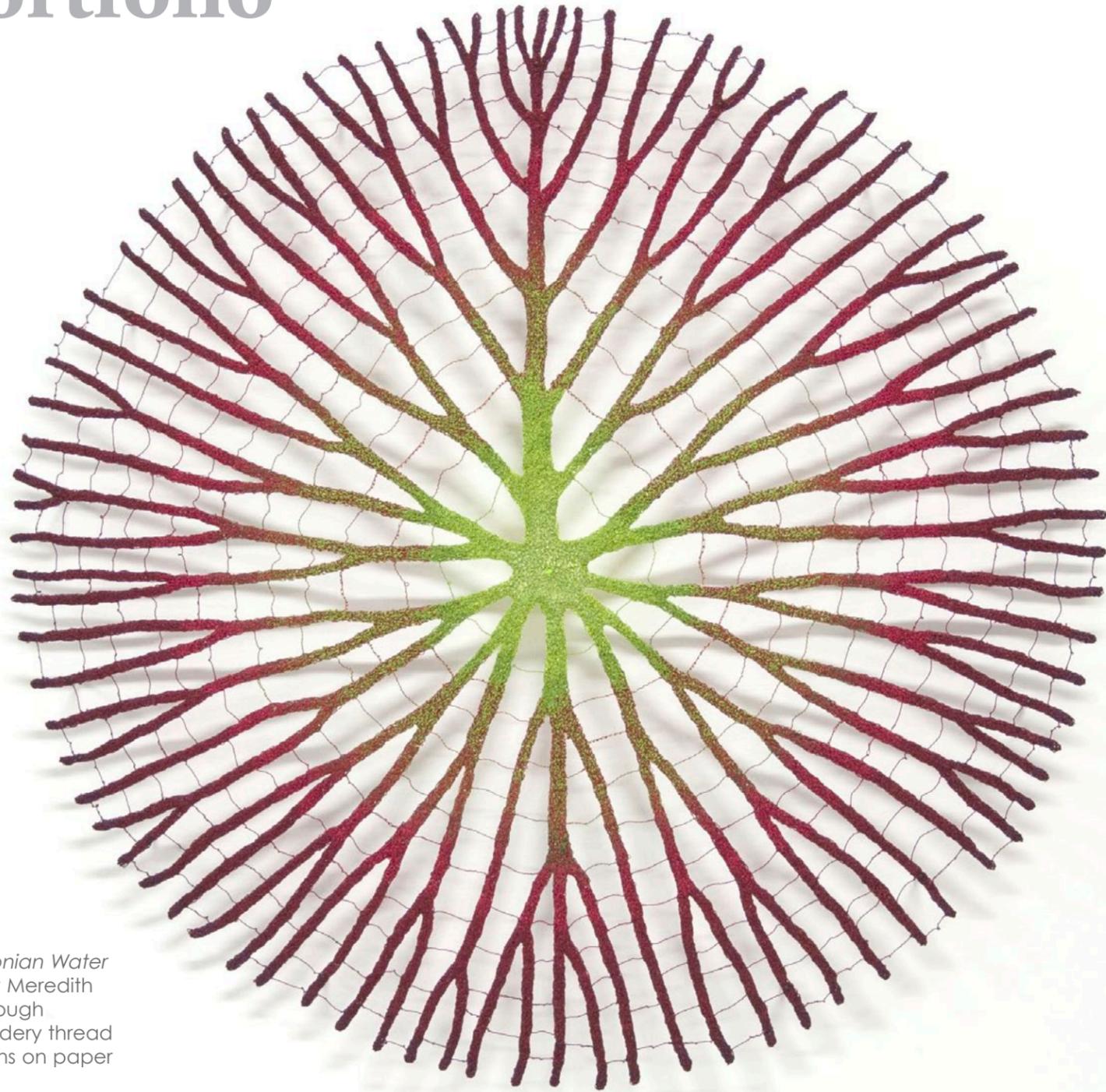
Diving gave me the freedom to stay and observe the reef in a totally new way; I could go down and see coral from every angle and to get up close like never before. It was very liberating.

Since then whenever I plan a holiday, I try to go somewhere that will give me a new diving opportunity. Last December I was lucky enough to visit Palau, which

is a magical place, both above and below the waves. The diving there is some of the best in the world, and the quantity and variety of ocean life I saw was phenomenal.

For a coral fanatic like me it was just amazing to snorkel around the rock islands in Palau. Because of the slow moving currents around the islands, the coral grows into amazing unconstrained shapes and forms.

X-RAY MAG: What are your thoughts on ocean conservation



Amazonian Water Lilly, by Meredith Woolnough
Embroidery thread and pins on paper



Sea Spiral
by Meredith Woolnough
Embroidery thread and pins on paper

and coral reef management, and how does your artwork relate to these issues?

MW: Like so many other divers, I am deeply concerned about the threats that our oceans and reefs face, and my work always has a subtle environmental undercurrent through it. My coral work in

particular reflects upon the use of coral as an adornment for our homes and our bodies. The tradition of collecting fragments of the natural world for display in our homes is common, but we rarely stop to reflect on the ethics and the environmental impacts of the practice. I hope that people will see my work as the

piece of coral that you can feel good about putting in your home.

X-RAY MAG: What is the message or experience you want viewers of your artwork to have or understand?

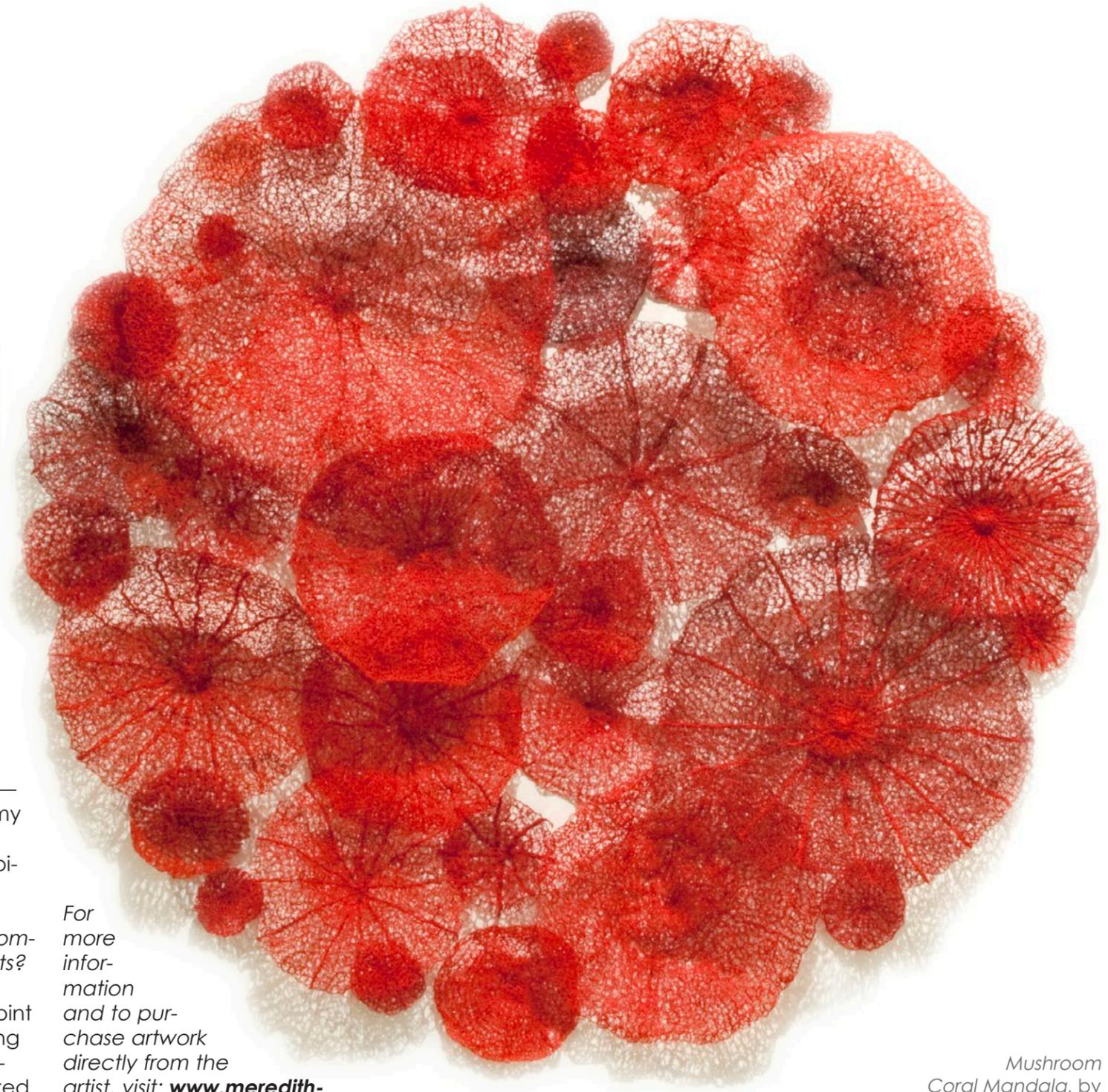
MW: I hope that when people see my

work they are fascinated by it and want to learn more about not only the artwork itself but also about the life forms that I am depicting. I want people to look closer, to question, and in doing so, discover. My work seems to resonate with people who already have a love for the ocean, but I hope that my work may inspire

people to go and see the reefs for themselves and appreciate the amazing environment that is just beyond our shores.

X-RAY MAG: What are the challenges and/or benefits of being an artist in the world today?

Mushroom Coral Mandala (detail)
by Meredith Woolnough
Embroidery thread and pins on paper, 95x95cm



MW: Trying to make this crazy dream of being an artist a reality has been the most challenging but satisfying thing I have ever done. It's a crazy job, the hours are long, the work is often frustrating, there is very little financial security, and you never know what's going to happen next. I have had to quickly learn how to run a small business and all the marketing and administration elements that go with it—most of which they don't teach you at art school. But despite the difficulties and insecurities, I love that I have found a way to turn my creative ideas and visions into a product that people enjoy—it's a great adventure.

X-RAY MAG: How do people/children respond to your works? What feedback or insights have you gained from the process of showing your work to various audiences?

MW: People are generally fascinated with my work and can't figure out what it is—which I guess makes sense; it doesn't look at all like traditional embroidery. With some of my coral branches, people often think they are real pieces of coral until they get up close, and then they are often even more confused. I love that my work can instill such a sense of wonder in people.

X-RAY MAG: As a teacher what is your approach or philosophy in sharing your knowledge and experience about art, corals and ocean specimens?

MW: Although I am not in the school classroom anymore, I still love teaching and have really enjoyed being able to teach my processes to others through workshops and master classes. Some artists are very protective of their pro-

cesses and techniques, but I enjoy sharing what I have learnt, and it's great to see how people take it into new directions. Funnily enough, when I teach the embroidery process, there seems to be lots of coral inspired embroideries being created in the workshops—I'm not sure if that comes from my influence or if coral patterns just lend well to this particular embroidery technique.

X-RAY MAG: What are your upcoming projects, art courses or events?

MW: I am at a bit of a turning point in my work right now. I am starting to work towards more instillation-based pieces that will be mounted directly onto walls, rather than framed. I'm looking forward to the challenges and opportunities that this type of work will create. □

For more information and to purchase artwork directly from the artist, visit: www.meredithwoolnough.com.au or visit the artist on Facebook: www.facebook.com/meredithwoolnoughartist

Mushroom Coral Mandala, by Meredith Woolnough
Embroidery thread and pins on paper, 95x95cm