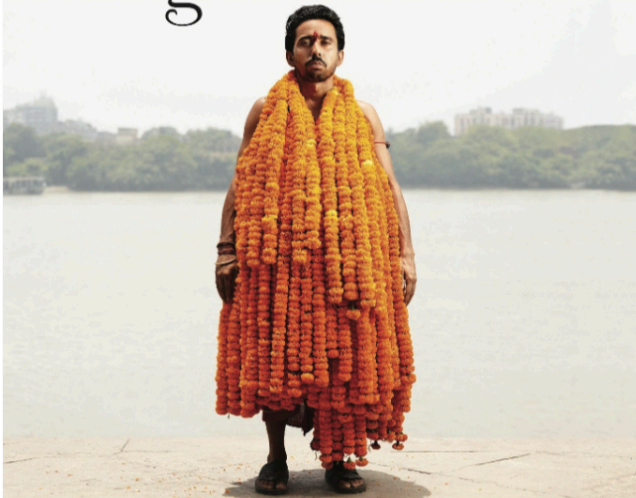




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BAGS OF PERSONALITY

Zacarias1925

Have you ever wanted a woven basket artwork? A Donald Judd in wicker perhaps? At last our prayers have been answered as we enter a golden age of basket weaving; pioneering this movement is a Manila based company in the Philippines called Zacarias1925. The woman at the helm is Rita Nazareno and she creates bags like no others you have even seen. Exquisite artworks in their own right that can sit equally well on your hip or your shelf. These pieces have a deeply modern aesthetic yet are steeped in a tradition of hand basket weaving and made exclusively at a workshop founded by Nazareno's grandmother in 1925. The company was originally known for embroidery made from pineapple fibres and a range of various handmade items. The line of matriarchs running the business was continued when Rita's mother, an only child, took over and focused specifically on bags. This was after a fortuitous suggestion made by a Japanese client; that they apply the intricacy of their weaving skills exclusively to bags. The S.C.Vizcarra brand still operates today as, quite literally, the mother company making bags of a more classic design.

Around 2005 Nazareno was called by her mother to return home and start running the business. She took the plunge, leaving a successful career as an Emmy award winning TV producer in the USA, and immediately enrolled at London College of Fashion. She had a clear idea from the beginning what she wanted to achieve and knew a few years in London would give her the cutting edge she needed to move

the family business forward and give it her own stamp. Nazareno wanted to retain the craftsmanship and skill of the traditional techniques but was also determined to create something unexpected and contemporary. The result was her own spin off brand, Zacarias1925, named after her grandfather who was a sculptor; indeed, her own work is extremely sculptural which feels like a fitting tribute.

Her concepts stem from the workshop itself which, unusually, has artisan craftsman creating every part of each product from start to finish. An extraordinary group of people, some of whom are second generation weavers and have worked for the family for 30 or 40 years. Nazareno is quick to point out that everything is made possible because of their skill and commitment. She can go to them with a specific idea; it could be the roof of the Guggenheim in Bilbao for example, and they have the skills to represent it through weave, as a three-dimensional object. Her work often has a stunning asymmetry to it, quite unlike the more traditional basket weaving seen in the UK, for example. Undulating, architectural forms constructed from cane 'spokes' are fleshed out with strips of hand prepared leather woven through as the 'runner'. Natural materials such as willow, cane, leather, water hyacinth and seagrass are used adeptly to create almost futuristic forms. Ergonomics intrigue Nazareno; her Bilbao bag nestles cleverly on your hip taking the shape of human form into consideration. This notion was challenged further recently

when a fashion client asked her to create a wicker corset. Perfectly sculpted to a woman's torso, this piece manages to be utterly unique yet somehow feels like something we should have seen before: but haven't.

In fact, much of her work leaves the viewer with this sensation. There's primal quality to working with these materials and techniques yet they lend themselves perfectly to Nazareno's modern vision. She is deeply inspired by contemporary art (she has shown some work at the Venice Biennale), film and architecture; and it's these reference points that make the pieces so interesting. She cites Jacques Tati, Fontana, Frank Gehry, Donald Judd, and Barnett Newman among her diverse muses. Collaborative work with artists has led to creating some woven objects that are more like vessels than bags. Colour is also an important factor to Nazareno and this sets her work apart from many other kinds of basket weaving. Bold, saturated colours like Yves Klein blue; vividly unnatural, are woven in stripes next to red, yellow and green in a 'Pop Art' palette most unexpected from these materials. Sometimes woven in different colours and sometimes painted onto the fibres this colourful palette gives her work a charming whimsy.

These are bags with personality, wit and a sense of humour. They mimic with intelligence; a portable box like structure turns out to be a fake TV set bag with the screen woven in contrasting colour - it even reveals a slot where you can rest your phone for hands free viewing. The variety ▶