

ARTFORUM



Louise Despont, *Aconite*, 2021, graphite and colored pencil on antique ledger book pages, 74 1/2 x 94".

MUMBAI

Louise Despont

GALERIE ISA

Kamani Chambers, Ground Floor Ramji

Kamani Marg

January 13–March 15, 2022

With “In Resonance,” Louise Despont continues to enmesh the botanical and the spiritual through meticulous, meditative drawings elegantly rendered with graphite and colored pencil in her signature pastel tones. The show’s centerpiece, the massive *Aconite*, 2021, hangs on a wall of its own between two of

the gallery’s Corinthian columns. A poisonous plant that grows in rocky habitats, the aconite—also known as wolf’s bane—is widely used for medicinal purposes, even though scientific evidence has yet to confirm its exact healing properties. Delicately drawn hemispheric forms repeat like tiles over the grid of old ledger pages. Smudgy text from the paper’s previous life is visible in patches. On the left of the composition is a delicate organic blossom held together by ridged vines, while to the right, a bulbous stalk holds a sunlike kernel in its curling head.

On the adjacent wall, tender-looking bamboo is molded by hand and stitched into shapes that resemble flower diagrams, or even the human torso. Placed on naturally dyed cotton fabric, the form is reminiscent of Indigenous string instruments and bamboo craft techniques, particularly from South and South East Asia. The work is titled *Gelsemium*, 2020, after another poisonous flowering plant found in Asia and North America. Unsafe when taken by mouth, the plant is used to treat anxiety and loneliness, as well as to alleviate breathing difficulties, perhaps a nod to these times of contagion. Despont’s selection of flora is, as ever, precise and loaded with meaning. In this series, the distance between fear and healing can only be overcome with an act of surrender, courage, and belief.

— Mario D’Souza



TERUG^{NAAR DE}bron

Het plan was *een jaartje* wonen op Bali, om daar kunst te maken. Tot *LOUISE DESPONT* de razendknappe Spaanse architect *Alejandro Borrego* tegen het lijf liep. Zeven jaar en *BABY* Lorenzo later noemt de *SUCCESSVOLLE* New Yorkse kunstenaar het *paradijselijke* eiland haar *thuis*. 'Hier voel ik me veilig, kalm en *GEKOESTERD*.'

— INTERVIEW STEFANIE BOTTELIER, FOTOGRAFIE HANS VAN BRAKEL,
PRODUCTIE EN STYLING LINDA GÜMÜS GERRITSEN



*Het betoverende
uitzicht vanaf
de veranda.*



H

‘Het voelt heel dubbel,’ antwoordt Louise Despont (37), gevraagd naar de situatie op Bali na meer dan zeven maanden coronacrisis. ‘Nu er vrijwel geen toeristen meer zijn is er veel minder verkeersdruk, minder vervuiling en is het hier dus een stuk vrediger. Maar de bevolking is afhankelijk van het toerisme en met het aantal gevallen dat weer toeneemt en de ziekenhuizen die weer vollopen, weet je dat het catastrofale gevolgen gaat hebben voor de gezondheidszorg en de economie.’ Daarnaast konden de Amerikaanse kunstenaar, haar Spaanse partner Alejandro en hun tweejarige zoontje Lorenzo het afgelopen jaar ook niet op reis om familie en vrienden te bezoeken. Ondanks alles beschouwt Louise Bali nog steeds als een paradijs. Een paradijs waar de geboren New Yorkse zeven jaar geleden met slechts twee koffers neerstreek om er in eerste instantie een jaar te gaan wonen en werken. ‘Ik was al eerder kort op Bali geweest en wilde nu meer ontdekken van de cultuur en de natuur. Ik was gewend om één expositie per jaar te houden en had bedacht dat ik ook hier zou kunnen werken. Voor die tijd had ik in India gewoond, maar dat was nogal belastend als vrouw en op den duur zelfs uitputtend. Hier op Bali is dat zo anders. Dit eiland en de bewoners hebben zo’n fantastische energie; je voelt je hier veilig, kalm en gekoesterd.’

Toen ze ook nog eens verliefd werd op architect Alejandro Borrego en ze twee jaar geleden ouders werden van Lorenzo, zijn ze zich alleen maar meer gaan wortelen op Bali. New York en het leven in een stad mist ze eigenlijk niet. ‘Natuurlijk, ik mis mijn familie en vrienden en dat ik zo maar naar een museum of galerie kan gaan, maar hoewel ik ben opgegroeid in New York en gewoond heb in drukke steden als Montreal en Delhi, leek het wel of ik er steeds minder tegen kon. Alles was zo overweldigend; ik was alleen maar bezig om binnen die drukte een cocon van rust voor mezelf te creëren om te kunnen werken. Hier heb ik rust en ruimte in overvloed en leef ik met het ritme van de natuur en de seizoenen. Die eenvoud is mooi en verfrissend.’

De magie van tekenen

‘Ik heb altijd geweten dat ik kunstenaar wilde worden,’ vertelt Louise. Als kind en tiener volgde ze al cursussen tekenen en schilderen en ze woonde een jaar in Florence, waar ze zich verder bekwaamde in de schilderkunst. Toch koos ze er niet voor om naar de kunstacademie te gaan. Juist niet. ‘Op de kunstacademie kijk je naar kunst om over kunst te praten, om kunst te maken, om daar weer over te praten. Bovendien is iedereen zich daar zo hyperbewust van wat cool en populair is, en gaat het meer daarover dan over het maken.’ Dus ging ze naar Brown, een prestigieuze Ivy League-universiteit, waar ze de semiotiek van kunst studeerde; een studie die zich bezighoudt met symbolen en tekens binnen allerlei kunstvormen. Na haar studie keerde ze terug naar de kunst en →







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*‘In ons dorp bestaat een rijke
vliegercultuur; tijdens het vlieger-
seizoen staan de mooiste exemplaren
overal tegen de muren opgesteld.
Toen ik die constructies zag klikte er
iets in mijn hoofd, want bij het
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beel erg over vorm en symmetrie
– net als bij mijn tekeningen’.*



‘Iedereen zei dat het onmogelijk zou zijn om te werken met een peuter om je heen, maar het lijkt wel of we een onuitgesproken overeenkomst hebben; het is echt wonderbaarlijk.’

‘Ik ga niet zitten wachten op goddelijke inspiratie, wat mij betreft gaat het om *UREN* maken’

kon daar vrijwel meteen van leven, al duurde het even voordat ze haar signatuur gevonden had. ‘Wat ik in Florence had geleerd was supertraditioneel werken met olieverf en daar was ik tijdens mijn studie aan Brown mee gestopt. Toen ik weer wilde beginnen wist ik niet hoe. Ik voelde me op een bepaalde manier geïntimideerd: wat moest ik dan maken? Op een dag kocht ik een paar oude kasboeken, met mooie rasters erin en daar begon ik in te werken. Ik maakte inktvlekken, sloot het boek en begon dan te tekenen vanuit het patroon van de inktvlek. Zo ontdekte ik de schoonheid van symmetrie en leerde ik vanuit mijn onderbewuste te werken.’

Sindsdien werkt Louise voornamelijk met potlood op papier en houdt ze zich in haar tekeningen bezig met het creëren van geometrische, symmetrische en harmonische patronen met een sterke spirituele betekenis. ‘In mijn tekeningen onderzoek ik balans, en dan vooral in relatie tot gezondheid, welzijn en het milieu. De balans die nodig is voor alles om te kunnen functioneren, of dat nou relaties tussen mensen zijn, je lichaam of de natuur.’ In het begin van haar carrière besloegen haar tekeningen meestal één vel papier, maar gaandeweg ging ze op steeds grotere schaal werken door almaar nieuwe vellen toe te voegen, waarbij het wel zes maanden kan duren om een werk te voltooien. ‘Doordat ik op veel grotere schaal ben gaan werken en lang doe over een stuk, heb ik het gevoel van haast en ongeduld uit mijn werk gehaald en is het er voor mij alleen maar plezieriger en rijker op geworden.’

Zoektocht naar harmonie

De verhuizing naar Bali heeft het karakter en het wezen van haar tekeningen niet veranderd, vindt Louise. Hooguit komen de thema’s waar haar werk over gaat, de zoektocht naar harmonie en balans, nog meer tot hun recht, omdat ze voelt dat die zaken veel meer onderdeel van de Balinese cultuur zijn. Bovendien heeft ze in letterlijke zin op Bali ook veel meer ruimte om te kunnen werken zoals zij dat prettig vindt: met alle tekeningen die deel maken van het grotere geheel uitgespreid op de grond, zodat ze het overzicht houdt.

Wat wel een enorme impact heeft gehad is de geboorte van zoon Lorenzo. ‘Ineens kon ik niet langer zomaar elke dag uren achtereen aan een tekening werken. Maar ik wilde wel nog steeds dingen maken, dus begon ik de geometrische vormen van mijn tekeningen te vertalen naar sculpturen. In het dorp waar wij wonen bestaat een heel rijke vliegercultuur; tijdens het vliegerseizoen maakt iedereen zelf de mooiste vliegers van bamboe en die staan dan overal tegen de muren van de huizen opgesteld. Toen ik die constructies zag klikte er iets in mijn hoofd, want bij het maken van die vliegers gaat het ook heel erg over vorm en symmetrie – net als bij mijn tekeningen.’ Ze benaderde een getalenteerde lokale ambachtsman, die zowel vliegers als meubels maakt, en die zet nu op basis van Louises ontwerpen enorme bamboe sculpturen in elkaar ‘met hulp van slechts een scherp mes, touw en superglue’. Hierdoor kon Louise op veel kleinere – babyvriendelijke – schaal werken en bovendien ontdekte ze hoe fijn het kan zijn om samen te werken.

Het huis van Louise staat vol met de bamboe sculpturen die ze exposeert tegen een achtergrond van een frame bespannen met handgesponnen Javaanse katoen. Die laat ze verven door een lokaal Balinees bedrijf dat is gespecialiseerd in het plantaardig kleuren van textiel. ‘Ik ben dol op kleur en de invloed die het kan →





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hebben op ons onderbewuste. Wat ik interessant vind aan het combineren van de bamboe sculpturen met textiel, is dat ik kan experimenteren met wat kleur met het ontwerp doet. Ik maak twee- en drieluiken, allemaal met een andere kleur. Het is fascinerend hoe de vorm van de sculptuur lijkt te veranderen als je de kleur van de achtergrond verandert. Ik werk voornamelijk met tinten als indigo, donkergrijs, zachtroze en zachtgeel, maar eigenlijk zijn er geen lelijke kleuren als je met plantaardige verf werkt. Soms doen de structuren me denken aan lichamen, soms zie ik ook muziekinstrumenten of insecten erin. Ik ben erg tevreden met die stukken, voor mij scheppen ze ruimte voor bespiegeling en contemplatie.'

Dak van ylangylangstro

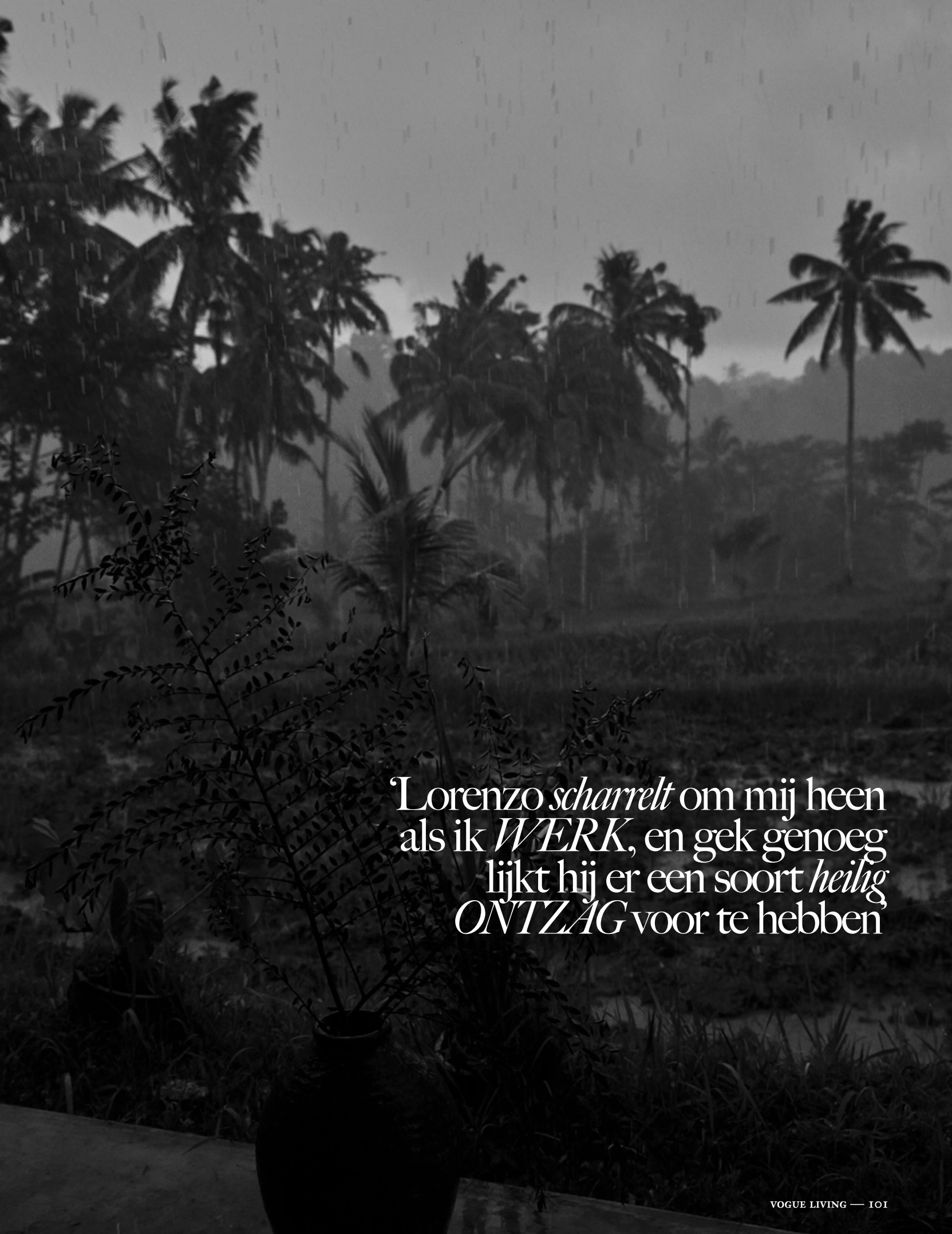
Het huis van Louise en Alejandro ligt zo'n drie kwartier rijden van Ubud, in de buurt van een klein dorp, maar redelijk afgezonderd en op een rijstveld – land dat ze leasen van een boer. 'We wilden een simpele, grote ruimte waar ik ook zou kunnen werken, ver van de grote stad en het drukke verkeer. Dit is echt een prachtige locatie, de ligging ten opzichte van de zonsopgang en het uitzicht vanaf onze veranda op de tuin en de omringende rijstvelden is spectaculair.' Hoewel de muren en het plafond van de vervallen schuur op instorten stonden, zagen ze direct de potentie van de ruimte. Ze bouwden het pand weer op, voorzagen het van een nieuw dak van ylangylangstro en hielden het qua inrichting vrij simpel.

Het huis heeft een grote huiskamer die ook dienstdoet als studio en aan weerszijden entresols voor de slaapkamers. De twee hebben allebei een uitgesproken mening en smaak, maar gelukkig komt die grotendeels overeen. 'Een van de fijnste dingen in onze relatie is dat we in staat zijn te communiceren via objecten, kleur en compositie en we vertrouwen blindelings op elkaars smaak. Onze conversatie als kunstenaar en architect is heel bevredigend. We hebben allebei specifieke ideeën over smaak en inrichting, maar als het gaat om het ontwerpen en indelen van een ruimte, vertrouw ik hem voor honderd procent. En als het over het interieur gaat weet ik dat ik de volledige vrijheid heb om de kunst, objecten, stoffen en kleuren te kiezen die ik mooi vind.'

Verzamelwoede

Dat gezegd hebbende, wil Louise nou ook weer niet beweren dat er sprake was van een 'interieurontwerp'. Ze heeft het gewoon gevuld met haar werken, kunstenaarsbenodigdheden en de dierbare objecten die ze over de jaren hebben vergaard. Op de loer liggende verzamelwoede probeert ze daarbij enigszins onder controle te houden. 'Wat dat betreft word ik in twee richtingen getrokken. Het idee dat je alleen dat in huis haalt wat je daadwerkelijk nodig hebt spreekt me aan, maar tegelijkertijd heb ik nogal de neiging om te verzamelen. Voor mijn werk is het prettiger als ik niet al te veel omgeven word door troep, dus eens in de zoveel tijd schoon ik de boel op, meestal als ik weer eens verhuis.' En dan is er nog het speelgoed van Lorenzo. 'Ik probeer hem mooi houten of kartonnen speelgoed te geven, maar ja, dan krijgt hij een afschuwelijk plastic ding en dan is dat natuurlijk meteen favoriet. Maar over het algemeen speelt hij met wat hij in en om het huis vindt. Ik kan hier niet online shoppen, dat scheelt de nodige troep.' →





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De keuken en de badkamer zijn eenvoudige, functionele ruimtes. Louise houdt ervan om dicht bij de natuur te blijven, dus is het huis niet voorzien van air-conditioning of gebarricadeerd met horren. En ja, dan kom je weleens een slang tegen, of lekt de regen naar binnen, maar daar lijdt ze niet onder. ‘Wat wel van cruciaal belang is, is dat haar tekeningen beschermd worden tegen de verwoestende effecten van de hoge luchtvochtigheid. Daarom worden ze bewaard in een speciale kast met een lage luchtvochtigheid. De tekeningen zijn te kwetsbaar om op te hangen, maar voor de rest is de enige kunst in huis van de hand van Louise zelf. Naast de grote sculpturen met hun stemmig gekleurde canvas decors, is Louise na de geboorte van Lorenzo ook begonnen met quilten. In eerste instantie wilde ze een dekentje voor hem maken, maar ze kreeg de smaak te pakken en ontdekte dat de geometrische patronen van haar tekeningen zich uitstekend lenen voor grote quilts die nu ook het huis sieren.

Kantooruren

Wellicht onverwacht voor een kunstenaar, maar Louise houdt er strikte werktijden op na. De dag begint om zeven uur, en na het ontbijt begint Louise om half negen met werken om door te gaan tot een uur of vier ’s middags. ‘Ik ga niet zitten wachten op goddelijke inspiratie, wat mij betreft gaat het om uren maken. Met deze aanpak haal je ook de druk weg dat je altijd moet presteren op het hoogste niveau. Als ik eens een mindere dag heb is dat geen drama, dan ga ik de volgende dag weer vol goede moed aan de slag en dan komt het wel weer goed. Dat betekent niet dat ik die inspiratie niet ken, ik heb dagen dat ik niet naar bed wil omdat ik zo lekker bezig ben of dat ik niet kan wachten om op te staan zodat ik weer verder kan. Maar dat gebeurt juist als ik lekker aan het werk ben; ik ga er niet op zitten wachten.’

Lorenzo scharrelt om haar heen tijdens haar werk en gek genoeg blijkt hij er een soort heilig ontzag voor te hebben. Als alles op de vloer ligt uitgespreid loopt hij eromheen en hij heeft nog nooit zomaar een van de bamboe sculpturen aangeraakt. ‘Tedereen zei dat het onmogelijk zou zijn om te werken met een peuter om je heen, maar het lijkt wel of we een onuitgesproken overeenkomst hebben; het is echt wonderbaarlijk.’ Ook voor iemand die zo van haar werk houdt als Louise is het belangrijk om te ontspannen. Die rust vindt ze in fysieke activiteiten, zoals yoga en lange wandelingen in de natuur. Louise en Alejandro hebben een kleine groep vrienden op het eiland met wie ze gaan eten of dagtripjes maken, maar door de huidige omstandigheden vermaken ze zich ook uitstekend met z’n drieën door te hiken, hutten te bouwen of schaduwpoppen te maken voor Lorenzo.

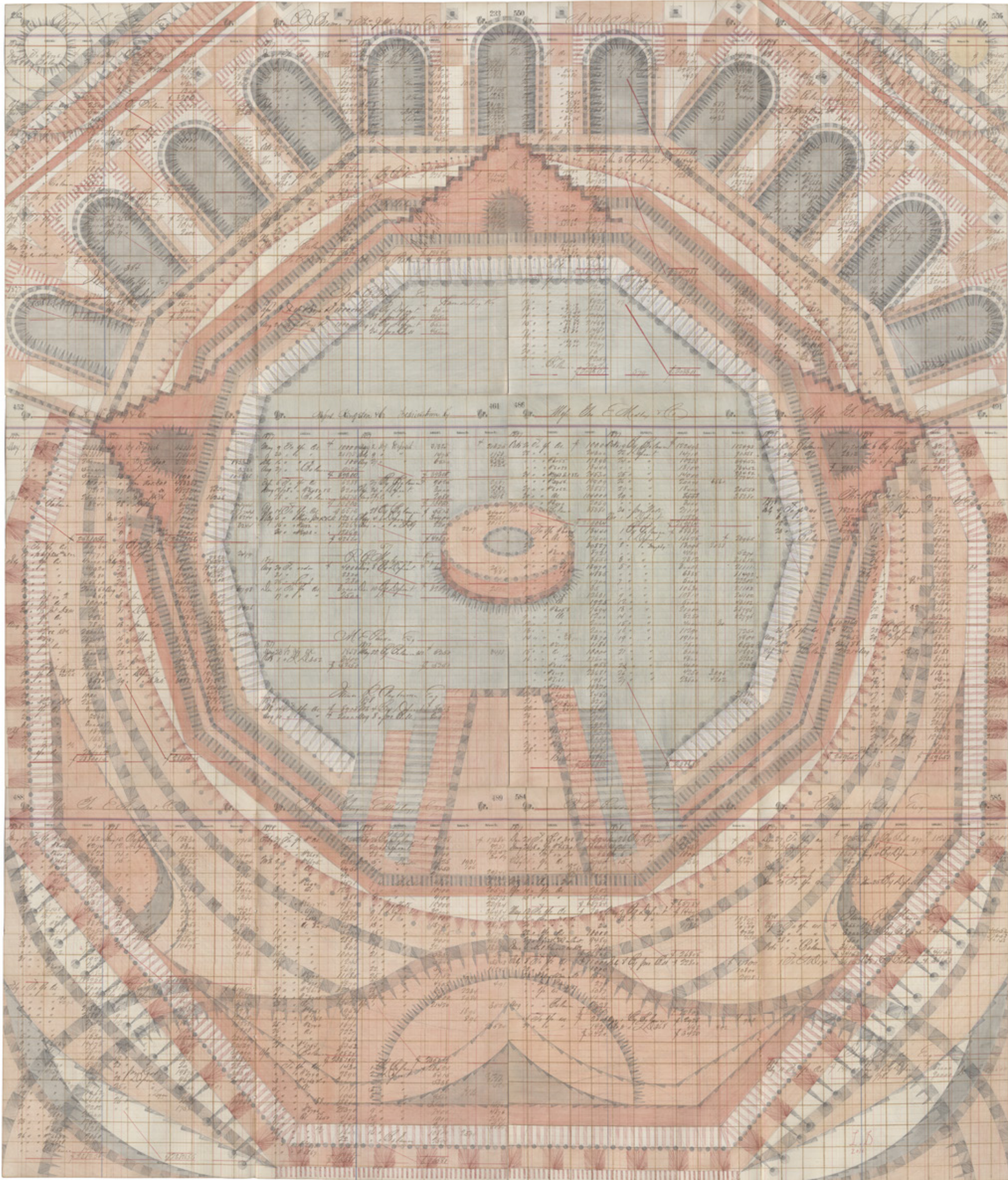
De crisis van het afgelopen jaar heeft haar nieuwe inzichten gebracht, of eigenlijk: de inzichten die ze al had versterkt. ‘Het is interessant om te zien hoe op dit moment duidelijk wordt wat belangrijk is en wat futiel. Mensen hebben ontdekt hoe ze troost en comfort voor zichzelf kunnen creëren: door te koken en te bakken, maar ook door tekenen en andere creatieve uitingen. Het werken met je handen, het ‘maken’ kan zo veel rust en vreugde geven. Als ik met mijn handen werk, lijken de beslissingen ergens anders vandaan te komen, alsof ze van buitenaf worden ingegeven. Dat vind ik het fijnst van tekenen: de kennis die vanuit je handen lijkt te komen en niet gecontroleerd wordt door je gedachten. Dat brengt mij zo veel tevredenheid en geluk dat ik niet zonder zou kunnen.’ —

Hair en make-up: Danine Zwiets. Assistent fotografie: Koers van Kremer. Assistent styling: Inge de Ridder

LOUISE DESPONT

By Kevin Greenberg

Right:
Louise Despont, Torch Ginger and Mask, 2017
Below:
Louise Despont, Decagon Stepwell, 2017



"I'm drawn to images that trace the movement of energy, or attempt to represent the invisible," says the artist Louise Despont. "I'm interested in the idea of a drawing that acts as a battery, or perhaps even a remedy. I believe in the power an image carries. It has a charge, an ability to affect and act upon you. It opens up a space like a window."

Despont's drawings, executed on grids of pages salvaged from faded, antique ledgers, resonate with the silent, inscrutable (and invisible) order of life—its energy, its trajectories, its whispered patterns, its radiant echoes. In Despont's work, complex geometric shapes intermingle against a backdrop of organic forms and architectural patterns that feel familiarly natural and organic. Yet together these elements, rendered for the most part in rich layers of colored pencil, introduce deep new realms of meaning into the viewer's consciousness.

Raised in the Tribeca neighborhood of Manhattan, Despont studied at Brown University, where she was awarded a Fulbright fellowship to study in India. She found inspiration in that culture's ritual symbol of the universe, the mandala, which routinely finds its way into her work. Now Despont resides in Bali, where she's in the midst of building a house for herself on a remote plot of jungle. She confesses she is captivated by the country's culture, its traditions, its climate, and the languorous, steady drumbeat of life there. "The sun rises and sets at the same time year-round," she says, "so there's a feeling that time is standing still—of being outside of time."

Gazing at one of Despont's large-form compositions, it's hard not to feel outside of time oneself. Her work resonates with the deep sense of calm that can only be imparted by the most beautiful, or unfathomable, artifacts of consciousness. Across the threshold of the readily recognizable (botanical forms, oblique architectural diagrams), Despont's work uncovers the depths of an unknown order, previously unglimped and unimagined, but

once revealed, transformative.

Despont, who maintains a voluminous collection of images, draws inspiration from a breadth of subjects: "Emma Kunz's pendulum drawings, Indian tantric art, miniatures and mandalas, Tibetan medical texts, Indonesian textiles," she says. Other areas with which she is particularly fascinated include "geometry and symbolism, drawings that are maps unto other realms, shifting and skewed perspective, explorations of the physical and spiritual body, mineral pigments and natural dyes."

"Sometimes I don't even know why I'm drawn to a particular image, but if I pay close enough attention and follow the thread, a collection of images will reveal themselves," she adds. "Image collecting can be a form of divination."

Lately Despont has allowed more readily discernible forms into her works: she recently completed a series depicting the flowers that often adorn her workspace, gifts from her boyfriend.

"I realized I hadn't drawn freehand from observation in years, and I was just enjoying the freedom of observing these organic forms. They are still lifes from my studio desk, a reflection of love, and a study of the beauty of nature's geometry."

Despont is currently working toward a show for Nicelle Beauchene Gallery in New York, set for next spring. "I'm still in the early stages," she says, "but I've been focused on the language and geometry of game boards and game courts—inventing my own game boards and interpreting them as portraits of people. I've been working with a homeopath recently and was struck by the inexplicable power of this method of healing. I think there's an interesting connection between the homeopathic method of unraveling symptoms of disease and paying attention to the symbolic language of dreams that relates to these game board drawings I'm working on."

Another possible avenue of exploration is pursuing the architectural motifs in her work

in three dimensions. "My boyfriend Alejandro Borrego is an architect and I'm excited about collaborating with him on projects," she says. "Since my show at the Drawing Center last year, I'm more interested in building spaces for my drawings and creating environments."

Anne Truitt, who was primarily known for her sculpture but also maintained a robust drawing practice for much of her life, relates a story about drawing's connection to the spiritual experience of transience. When Truitt was a student, she was assigned to dissect a lobster, killed by her biology instructor before her eyes. She was then given the lobster to cut open and document in drawn form.

"His life ended under my pencil, and continued in my pencil," Truitt writes. "The range of simple biological fact was presented in such perfect order and with such ardor for scrupulous methods of investigation that my whole understanding developed soundly. I was given a kind of map, like one of those plastic sheets that, placed over jumbled lines, startlingly organize them into a readable picture."

For Truitt, drawing had the power to perforate the veil between the worlds of life and death. Similarly, Despont's works gently, but insistently, direct the viewer toward the border that separates everyday experience from those spiritual realms that recede, hidden in half-light from the focused beam of consciousness. For Despont, it's a diaphragm that is supernaturally thin, and for her, the key to breaching it is the process of drawing: "When I was a kid, I must have watched [Tim Burton's] film *Beetlejuice* fifty times," Despont laughs. "There's a scene in the film when the 'newly-dead' couple finds a handbook explaining how their new reality functions. They learn that if you need a door then all you have to do is draw it. That scene has always stuck with me, because that's why I love drawing so much. Anything you need, any space you hope to access, you can draw it and it will become real."



Above:
Louise Despont, Stepwell Figures, 2017
Below:
Louise Despont, Heliconia Mask, 2017
All images courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York.

ARTFORUM

Louise Despont

THE DRAWING CENTER

35 Wooster Street

January 22–March 20

Louise Despont's "Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture" has a religious atmosphere. Visitors are asked to remove their shoes upon entering the museum. Despont's installation, an alternate universe containing two wooden chambers, is accompanied by a soft, live soundscape, courtesy of artist and musician Aaron Taylor Kuffner. Hung on the walls, Kuffner's robotic gongs, drums, chimes, and bells—collectively titled *The Gamelatron Roh Ageng*, 2013—play continuously to mimic the gamelan, orchestral music traditional to Despont's new home in Bali.

Despont's sacred spaces serve as elaborate framing devices for her drawings—explorations of the subtle energy that moves between human, plant, and various other animate and inanimate forms. In the second enclosure after the main entrance is the most striking display: four highly stylized drawings of the human body in meditative poses, each meticulously cross-sectioned as if they were anatomical drawings from another world. Despont has rendered these figures almost life-size on sheets of antique ledger paper, which contain faded names, numbers, and dates scribbled between stenciled lattices. The energy centers thought to lie along the spinal cord and head, according to traditional Indonesian metaphysics, are exposed by Despont's circular, compass-based lines and colored in with pastel hues of chartreuse, indigo, violet, and blood orange. Each piece gives insight into the transcendental, prompting soul-seekers to ponder their peripheries. What really inhabits the space between skin, air, and other beings? In this instance, it is the sound waves from Kuffner's machines, certainly, among other elements reflecting the nature of existence as Despont imagines it: a mélange of beautifully formulated and evanescent Frankenstein beings who usually remain unseen.



View of "Louise Despont," 2016.

— Heidi Harrington-Johnson

HYPERALLERGIC

Best of 2016: Our Top 20 NYC Art Shows

This list barely scratches the surface of the city's artistic offerings this year, from overdue retrospectives to surprising sides of artists we know well.



Hyperallergic | December 27, 2016

18. *Louise Despont: Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture* at the Drawing Center



Installation view, *Louise Despont: Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture* at the Drawing Center (photo by Claire Voon/Hyperallergic)

January 22–March 20

If you believe that there's some force or energy generated by the totality of mental effort being spent by people who are awake and conscious at the same time, you might call that, like a friend of mine does, the mind-net. During the daylight hours in New York City, the mind-net is up, and too many things arrive at the same time. For those who are sensitive to the city's relentless demands, it's more than frenetic, worse than noisy — it's essentially unmanageable, with only brief windows of accomplishment that let light through. But this exhibition shut down the system for a while. Louise Despont worked on graph paper (the kind you used to do high school geometry assignments on) to make large-scale drawings in soothing pastels, with a mix of human figures and geometric abstraction. The drawn lines in each work were said to represent the invisible structures and energy pathways that circulate through and around the human body. The drawings certainly were meditative, lifting me upwards and away to waft towards freedom. But the hold of the net was not fully broken until I heard the music of Aaron Taylor Kuffner's "gamelatron," an instrument he created that is a mechanized version of the gamelan, a traditional Balinese and Javanese orchestra of drums, vibraphones, bells, chimes, and gongs. Listening closely to the music as the patterns repeated, the drawings became endless mandalas for an infinite universe made available for me to explore. —*Seph Rodney*

Art in America

Louise Despont

at Nicelle Beauchene,
through May 24
327 Broome Street



Louise Despont has been showing her intricate drawings in colored pencil and graphite at Nicelle Beauchene since the gallery first opened; "Harmonic Tremor" is her fourth show at the Lower East Side space since 2008. Despont returns to South Asia (the works in her 2010 show were created during a Fulbright Fellowship in India), this time focusing on *canang sari*, a daily offering Balinese Hindus make to their supreme God, as well as the spiritual importance of volcanoes. (A "harmonic tremor" refers to the release of seismic energy that precedes a volcanic eruption.) The eight drawings in the show—some on only a few antique ledger book pages, others on a dozen or more that together form larger sheets—present abstract geometric forms and radiating sound waves layered over topographic depictions of waterways, volcanoes and other markers of the Balinese landscape.



Artist Louise Despont with an array of her drawings in her New York work space.

BRIGHT PROSPECTS

Wide-ranging in vision, these eight up-and-coming art-world talents are making waves and heading for stardom

In today's constantly expanding, hot-as-ever art world, the greatest thrill for many collectors, dealers, and curators is to spot talents early—before critical and market consensus makes them stars. On the following pages we profile eight on-the-rise artists—some well-known to insiders but poised for wider recognition and others whose voices are only beginning to be heard. Their work varies broadly in terms of style, from process-driven abstractions to daring reinventions of traditional genres and crafts. But no matter the medium or moment in their career, this much feels safe to say: Expect big things.

LOUISE DESPONT

Having developed a deeply meditative, highly controlled approach to drawing, Despont uses compasses and other

drafting tools to render wildly intricate motifs on antique ledger paper. The works range in size from a single sheet to dozens of pages. All lull the viewer into reverie with their richly layered geometric patterns. For inspiration, the peripatetic



artist—she splits her time between Bali and New York—pulls from subjects as varied as astronomy, literature, and architecture. “She’ll always be an artist’s artist,” says Dustin Yellin, a painter-sculptor whose Brooklyn nonprofit arts space, Pioneer Works, mounted Despont’s celebrated solo show this past summer. “But she’s an artist for the people too. She’s going to be everywhere.” One place to find her will be Manhattan’s Drawing Center, which is organizing an exhibition of her work for early 2016.

KASPER SONNE

Each hauntingly lyrical painting by this New York-based Danish visionary begins as a monochromatic canvas. Some he sets on fire, guiding the flames to leave graphic voids; others he douses with chemicals to tease out apparitional abstractions from the pigments. Sonne is in such high demand that there’s been an 80-person waiting list for his pieces at his New York gallery, the Hole. “When I first saw his works I found them beautiful, with an edge of something darker,” says collector Robert Suss, an early patron. “It’s that juxtaposition of creation and destruction—knowing something has been damaged while maintaining something mesmerizing.” Next up for Sonne is a 2015 solo show at Galerie Jeanroch Dard’s buzzy new Brussels space. →



Above: Kasper Sonne in his Brooklyn studio. **Left:** Sonne’s *Borderline (New Territory)* No. 19, 2013.

BOTTOM: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND THE HOLE, NEW YORK



From California, 2014, by Sam Moyer.

JOHN HOUCK

In the past year, photo works by this L.A. artist have landed in the collections of the Guggenheim and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. It's easy to see why. Houck, who studied computer science, architecture, and fine art, uses complex imagery to explore a broad array of themes, from digital technology to memory. The results range from crisply composed still lifes to the ombré abstractions of his acclaimed "Aggregates" series. For that ongoing project, Houck codes multicolor grids, which he prints, creases, and then photographs, creasing the results again (and often repeating the entire process) so that certain folds are three-dimensional and others exist only in



Photographer Daniel Gordon with his camera in New York. **Top:** His 2014 work *Summer Fruit*.

SAM MOYER

This Brooklyn artist has repeatedly tested the boundaries of painting—bleaching canvases or stitching Barnett Newman-like configurations from movers' blankets. But her sold-out show at the Rachel Uffner Gallery last spring marked a breakthrough for Moyer. Pursuing an intriguing vein in trompe l'oeil, she paired broken sheets of marble with canvases that were dyed to mimic stone and shaped to fit flush against the slabs. "She stepped up and took her surfaces and scales into realms less predictable," says critic Jerry Saltz. "She is striking her own ideas of composition and hopefully will take on other materials."

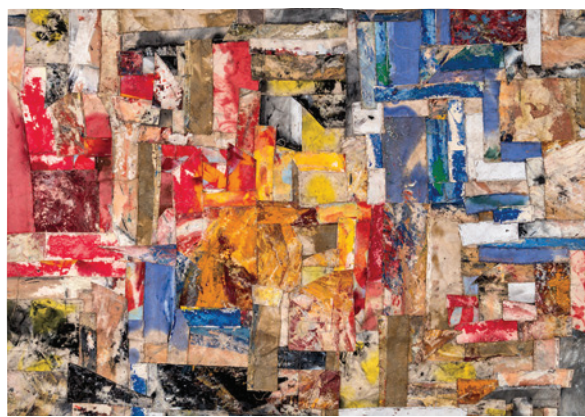
DANIEL GORDON

Meticulously arranged and undeniably gorgeous, the work of this Brooklyn photographer requires an almost perverse amount of preparation. Cutting up hundreds of images from magazines, newspapers, and printouts, he constructs elaborate three-dimensional collages—primarily still lifes or portraits—and photographs them against graphic backdrops, enhancing colors and shadows in postproduction before making a final chromogenic print. (His latest pieces are on view through December 20 at Wallspace gallery in New York.) His time-intensive labors haven't gone unnoticed: Earlier this year he received the prestigious Foam Paul Huf Award for a photographer under the age of 35.

An installation view of three recent works from John Houck's "Aggregates" series.



Below: Graham Wilson in his Brooklyn studio. **Right:** One of his 2014 paintings, *Who's Afraid*.



the picture. That his oeuvre defies simple categorization suits Houck's admirers just fine—he's scheduled to be in six exhibitions next year.

GRAHAM WILSON

Last winter's polar vortex sent many New Yorkers into a serious seasonal depression, Wilson included. But this Kentucky-born talent—then an art handler for Hauser & Wirth—used those doldrums to fuel a stunning body of work, shredding 50 of his failed canvases, soaking their scraps in mineral spirits and paint stripper, then weaving and wrapping those remnants into textured tableaux. After Hauser & Wirth director Anna Erickson saw them, she staged a pop-up show in Brooklyn, selling out the series. “Ever since, his work has been on waiting lists,” Erickson says. Wilson's first proper solo exhibition opens November 15 at Mon Chéri gallery in Brussels, with others upcoming at Milan's Brand New Gallery and Dublin's Ellis King.

JESSICA WARBOYS

Lots of emerging artists are engaging Mother Nature in their practices—few to more potent effect than this rising star, based in London. To create her coveted sea paintings, she applies raw pigment to damp folded canvases and submerges them along the shore, producing vivid swaths that echo the water's ebb and flow. These tidal works helped nab Warboys a fall 2015 solo show at England's Tate St. Ives museum. (The exhibition will also include her films, sculptures, and performance pieces.) “They're a mark of time and material culture captured as an actual event,” explains Tate curator Sara Matson. “They also resonate strongly with the Western tradition of landscape painting, from Turner to Twombly.”

TAKURO KUWATA

Ceramics, long marginalized in the contemporary art world, continue to gain traction among critics and collectors thanks to innovators like this Japanese dynamo. To realize his unconventionally elegant pieces, with their odd fractures and robust accumulations, he combines centuries-old techniques with brash experimentation—embedding rocks so that his vessels burst when fired, or covering his forms in precious metals that clump and ooze in the kiln. These works

have found prominent champions, among them tastemaking New York dealer Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn, whose Salon 94 gallery mounted Kuwata's first U.S. show in 2013, and auctioneer turned curator Simon de Pury. “He's got his own completely personal language,” says De Pury, who included Kuwata in a recent exhibition at the Venus over Manhattan gallery. “You can't escape being fascinated.”

—MICHAEL SLENSKE AND JAMES TARMY



A 2013 vessel with a pink-slipped-and-gilt exterior and a 2014 gilded bowl, both by Takuro Kuwata.

WHERE TO FIND THE WORK

Louise Despont Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York, nicellebeauchene.com.

Daniel Gordon Wallspace, New York, wallspacegallery.com.

John Houck On Stellar Rays, New York, onstellarrays.com.

Takuro Kuwata Salon 94, New York, salon94.com.

Sam Moyer Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York, racheluffnergallery.com.

Kasper Sonne The Hole, New York, theholenyc.com.

Jessica Warboys Gaudel de Stampa, Paris, gaudeldestampa.fr.

Graham Wilson Mon Chéri, Brussels, moncheri.co.

An installation view of some 2012 examples from Jessica Warboys's “Sea Paintings” series.



January 10, 2013

Louise Despont: ‘Tide Fulcrum & the Motion of Fixed Stars’

By KAREN ROSENBERG

*Nicelle Beauchene Gallery
327 Broome Street
Between Chrystie Street and Bowery
Lower East Side
Through Jan. 20*

Louise Despont’s drawings cherry-pick abstract motifs from various ancient cosmologies, coaxing them together with delicate strokes of graphite and colored pencil. They evoke astrolabes, zodiac charts and the work of the Swiss artist-healer [Emma Kunz](#), though they lack the visual and spiritual clarity of Kunz’s pendulum drawings.

Ms. Despont draws on pages from antique ledger books, which are interesting in their own right. She fills the sheets with neat, diagrammatic arrangements of floral starbursts and overlapping diamonds, her gentle shadings of pencil punctuated by the occasional dot of copper leaf. Often the graceful longhand of the ledger books is visible beneath the layers of drawing; their rows of numbers work with Ms. Despont’s patterns to conjure mystical calculations.



The [exhibition](#), which inaugurates the gallery’s lofty new space on Broome Street, feels overpacked; it could have done with fewer of the smaller, paired drawings, which become repetitive.

The big works, however, are ambitious. One of them, “Serpens,” transposes a Greek constellation onto an intricate Persian rug design. Green snakes wriggle across a rust-colored geometric background. Large images of stringed instruments, flowering gardens, and the head of Medusa anchor other multisheet drawings, lending some welcome order to Ms. Despont’s multifarious, pantheistic and generally bewildering universe.

NEW YORK OBSERVER

‘Louise Despont: Tide Fulcrum & The Motion of Fixed Stars’ at Nicelle Beauchene

By Will Heinrich 1/08



On yellowing pages from unbound antique ledgers, taking loose inspiration from constellation diagrams, alchemy, Himalayan mandalas, Emma Kunz and Persian carpets, Louise Despont draws with colored pencils. She also uses plastic guides that allow her to create, with rapid crosshatching, forms that read as triangles or circles—but only roughly. The soft pencil lines and these implicit Euclidean shapes work so forcefully against the structural precision of *Serpens*, a red, carpet-like pattern of diamonds and triangles with stylized green snakes drawn across 30 ledger pages hung in a tight grid, that it's hard to know where to look. The double ledger pages, each creased in the middle from its binding, are hung sideways, with only the

top halves affixed to the backing, so that the bottoms swing out gently and further complicate the pattern.

With *Serpens*, the answer may be to look neither at nor through, but into. But the 15 *Constellation Symptoms*, esoteric patterns on tall, narrow pages from an Indian ledger, usually framed in pairs, demand a more complex kind of looking. Drawn against green or blue skies contained in red grids, ornamented with white acrylic dots like needlepoint and small circles and squares of copper leaf, they waver over the line between foreground and background or drawn and undrawn, demanding impossibly equal attention to both.

In part, this is because the soft blues and greens sit so uneasily against the beige paper; *The Feast*, therefore, a seven-foot-wide panorama drawn in simple graphite with discreet yellow accents, functions more like an ordinary drawing. If *Serpens* is a moral argument against universalism, insisting that each little figure is its own subject despite the dominating mirage of a total pattern, then *The Feast* is a partially abstracted but still sensual vision of an amusement park heaven: steps, curves, fountains, flowers, domes, figure-eight shapes alluding to seated buddhas, and angled lines like ski-lift wires crossing wavy dark hills in the background. (*Through Jan. 20*)

THE NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN: ART

LOUISE DESPONT

At first glance, the artist's pencil drawings on vintage ledger pages appear to be geometric abstractions. But look closely and they resolve into fanciful images: a palace with winding staircases attended by elephants, an Oriental rug crawling with snakes, a fish rising up from the depths. Most take their shape from constellations, which enhances their mystical air. Numbers written more than a century ago (sometimes in Sanskrit) remain visible, grounding the ethereal in the mundane. Through Jan. 20.

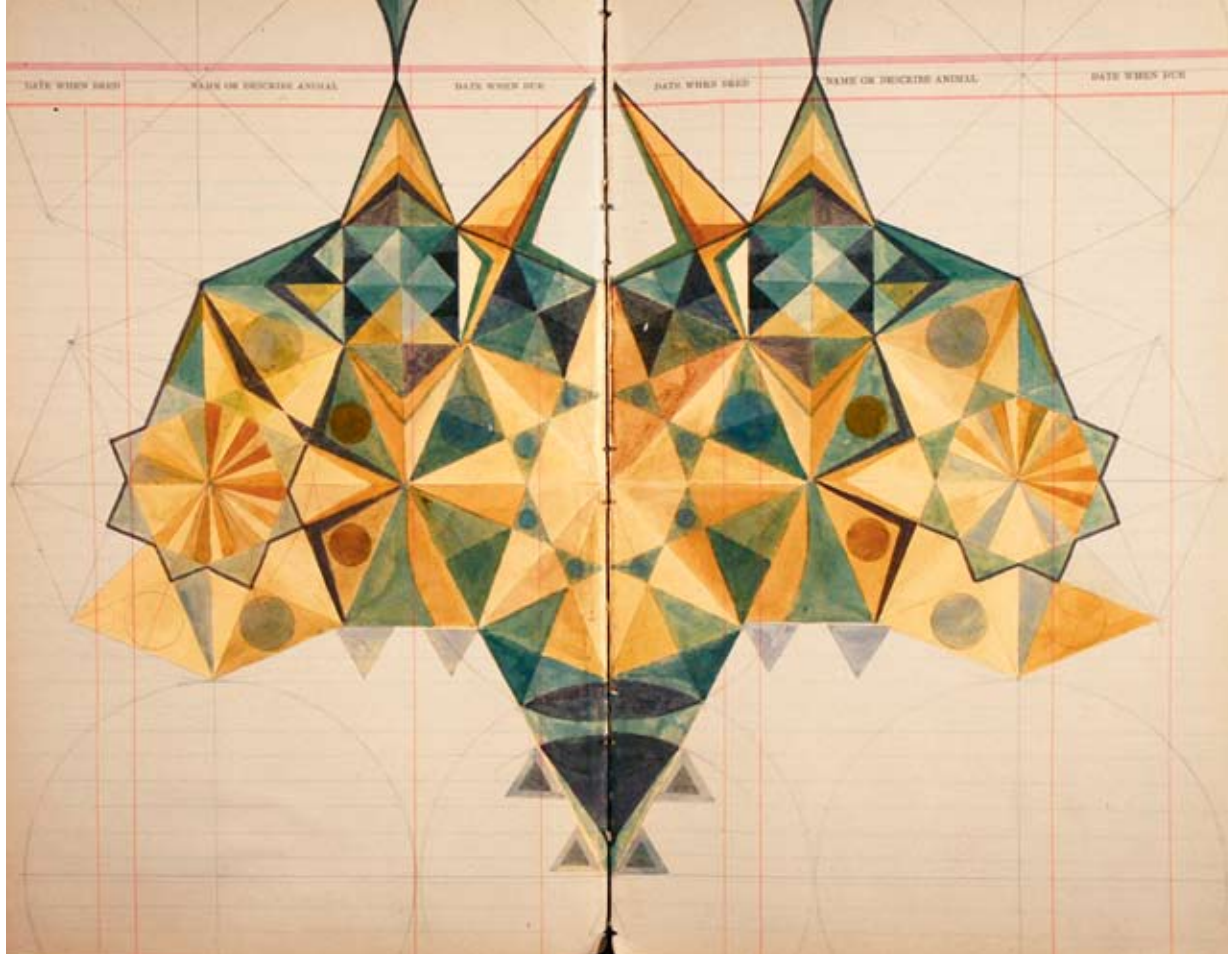
Through January 20

BEAUCHENE

327 Broome St., New York, N.Y.

212-375-8043

nicellebeauchene.com



Kaleidoscope Pages, 2006. Ink and graphite on antique ledger-book pages, 12½ x 15½ in. OPPOSITE: Despont at work at the Sanskriti Kendra, Delhi.

Holding Pattern

Louise Despont's esoteric geometries express the unseen energy of the cosmos.

by Andrea Codrington

The first time I visit Louise Despont's studio in Brooklyn, it is a cold Saturday, and she answers the door dressed for a winter's hibernation. Cocooned in a large sweater layered over what can only be described as a Secessionist union suit, her long dark hair loosely tied back, Despont looks as if she had stepped out of a fin de siècle tableau vivant.

Although she has just moved from Manhattan to this apartment in South Park Slope, it looks as if she's lived here for years. The comfortable warren of rooms composing Despont's floor-through form a compelling cabinet of curiosities. The wood floors are painted barn red and the walls lined with found photographs, architectural prints, natural-history reproductions, dried botanicals, and a series of intricately rendered graphite drawings on antique ledger paper that provides a consistent backdrop to her oeuvre.

"I started collecting vintage ledgers in Providence," says Despont, who graduated from Brown in 2006 with a degree in art

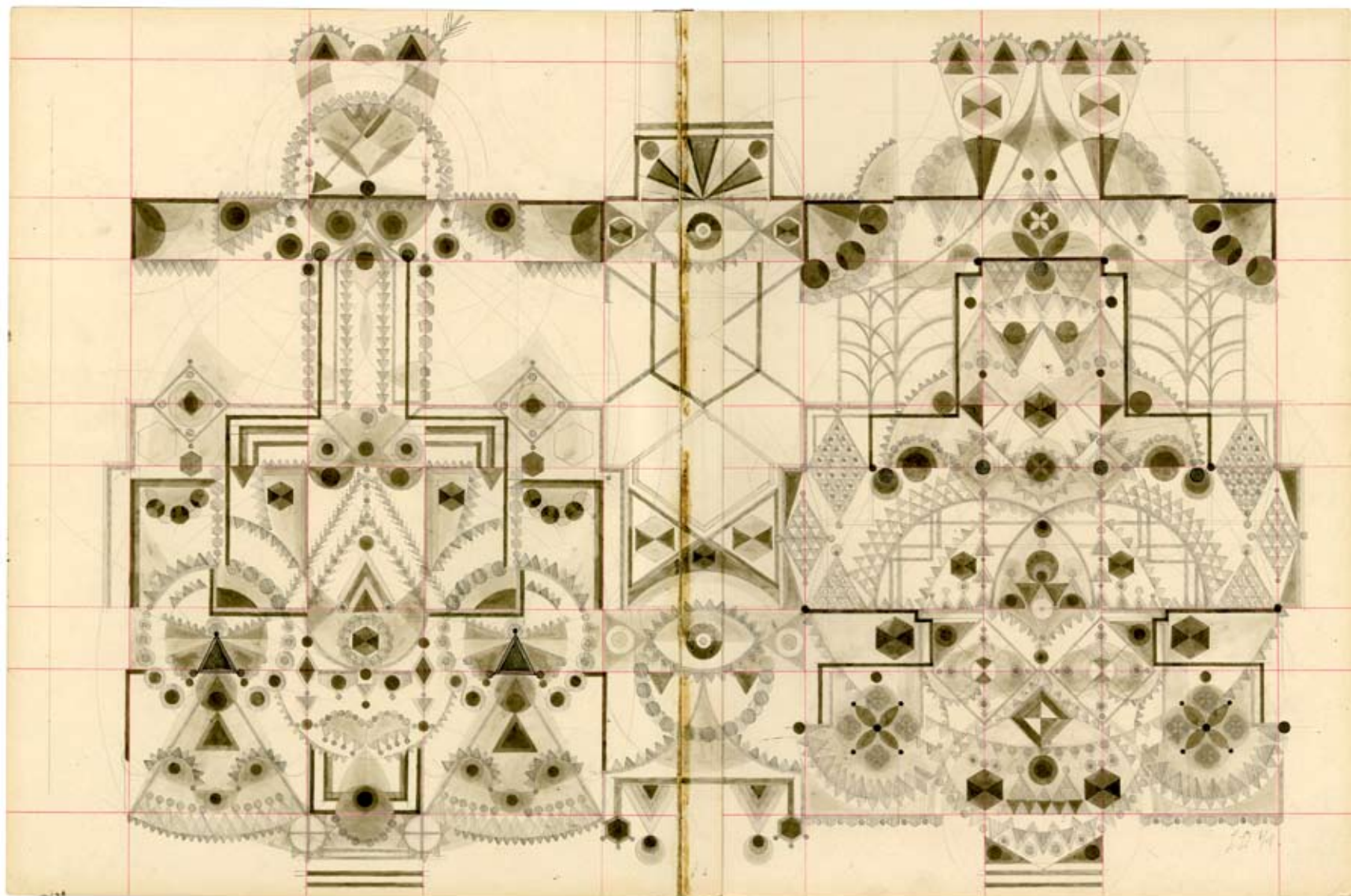
semiotics. "I found an old blank ledger in a mom-and-pop Portuguese market and bought it to keep class notes and visual ideas in." Intrigued by the boundaries imposed by the ledgers' varying hairline rules, however, Despont soon started filling in the pages' negative space with Rorschach-like ink forms and pencil drawings that played off the structure of the page.

Early pieces, such as her aptly titled 2006 *Kaleidoscope Pages*—a ledger spread adorned with symmetrical geometric shapes in subdued shades of gray and brown—are strongly reminiscent of the work of the early 20th-century artist mystics Emma Kunz and Hilma af Klint, and Despont admits to a fascination with both. A postgraduation trip to Switzerland to visit the Musée de l'Art Brut and the Emma Kunz Center intensified the artist's already avid engagement with arcana.

With evocative titles like *The Door*, *The Scale*, *The Hymn*, and *Writing Letters to the Shades*, Despont's work explicitly engages the



LOUISE DESPONT



Correspondence I & II, 2008. Graphite on antique ledger-book pages, 15½ x 23 in.

“Being in India is such an amazing lesson in color. I’m especially attracted to

idea of art as a channeling and expression of spiritual energy. She comes by her interests naturally: Her mother is a healer who works specifically with the distilled energetic patterns of plants. “My work is all about the process of researching and reading in these subjects,” says Despont. “I have a particular interest in cosmologies—esoteric as well as metaphysical—and am drawn to such works.” In addition to books on Greek mythology and Egyptian art, her apartment is filled with the writings of the 19th-century Swedish theologian and mystic Emanuel Swedenborg and the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner, whose 1904 *How to Know Higher Worlds* provides her current inspiration, with its meditations on the similarities and differences among animal, mineral, and plant forms.

Despont’s work is far more than Blavatsky-esque automatic writing, however. Her drawings display a rigor and attention to detail that testify to another fundamental influence: architecture. Her father—the renowned French-born architect Thierry Despont—supplied a bracing structural and intellectual counterpoint to the New Age spirituality of her mother. “I’ve always used drawing as mediation between the two influences,” Despont says. “Everything in my work is about balance and shifts.”

Despont creates her painstakingly filigreed drawings using archi-

tectural stencils and a compass—an object that is itself an esoteric symbol, representing a balance between the physical and the spiritual. The artist will spend in excess of 50 hours on a single drawing, building up an accretion of circles, curves, triangles, hexagons, and crenellations until the page is filled to her liking—which, more often than not these days, means asymmetrically.

Although these works are abstract, their ornate marks often take on uncannily pictorial aspects; the 2008 drawing *Tomb* features a softly undulant midsection that recalls breasts, while Swedenborg’s *Index* (2008) offers up a hollow-eyed skull. “I tend to work so closely on these drawings that it’s only when I back up that I begin to see the figurative,” says Despont. “The stencils are amazing tools. They constantly surprise me.”

While Despont’s drawings tend to project distinct—if unwitting—lives of their own, her seven-minute-long film *Experiments in Moving Drawings Parts I & II* (2007) takes things a step further. Set against an eerily resonant soundscape of gear clicks, clock ticks, train whistles, and cello and sitar strains created by Despont and composer Joshua Sullivan, the film’s stop-action sequences artfully animate her drawings in a kind of inkblot ballet of visual effects. Abstract forms proliferate like cells dividing in mitosis; closely spaced

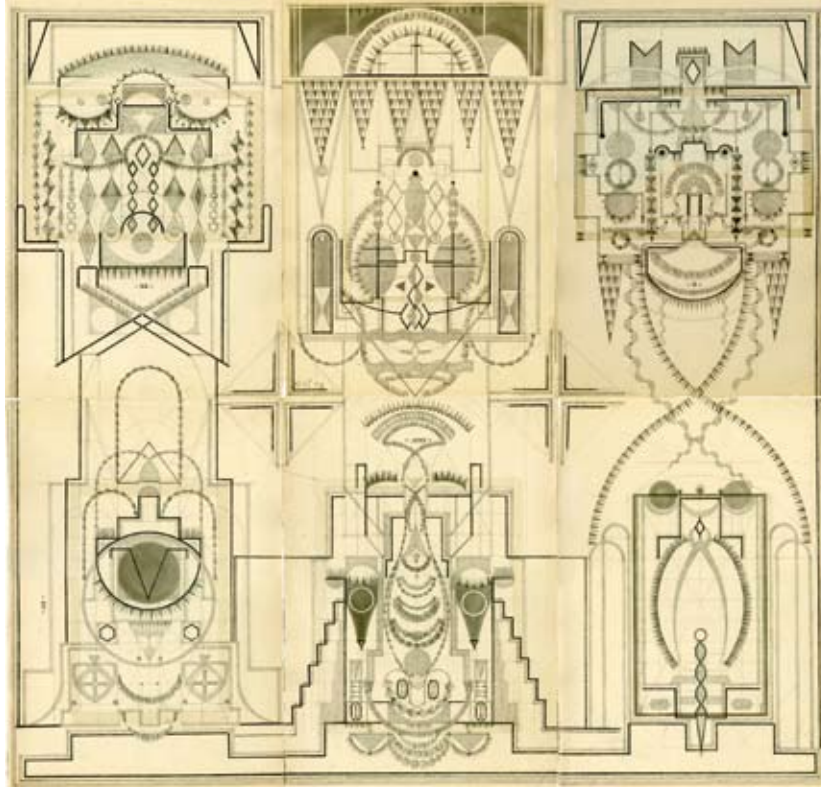
red and black lines glide across the page. Freed from the strictures of stasis, Despont's drawings hint at what Steiner termed "sacred rituals unfolding, before listening spectators, in mighty pictures."

That Despont's distinctive vision would flourish in motion comes as no surprise, given that she spent her years at Brown making experimental films, the last of which, her 16-minute senior thesis *And Lo, Guilharmenia* (2006), was financed by an award from the Princess Grace Foundation. Despont's most formative experience, however, was an internship in Stockholm with Swedish filmmaker Roy Andersson, whose psychologically freighted, chromatically muted features, such as *Songs for the Second Floor* (2000), play against painstakingly handcrafted set designs.

It was from Andersson that Despont learned about the power of color—or its absence. "At a certain point I got rid of color in order to focus completely on form," Despont remarks of her distinctly black-and-white drawings. Having handily mastered the monochrome, however, the artist seems ready to begin experimenting with color again, however tentatively. She points to a wall over a rough-hewn work desk piled high with books, ink pots, and driftwood. "I'm doing these washing drawings," says Despont, motioning to circles of softly blurred blue, gray, taupe, and brick that look like cutaway views of mineral specimens or, perhaps, exotic planets. "They're about alchemy, about the way that water becomes a conduit for color in an altogether mysterious way."

* * *

The next time I see Despont she is sitting on the floor hunched over an expanse of paper surrounded by hundreds of paper scraps. To be truthful, it is a photograph of Despont that I am looking at, and it is almost one year after our first encounter. She is now in Delhi on a Fulbright Fellowship and living in a Jainist artist residence in the southernmost part of the city, working on collages

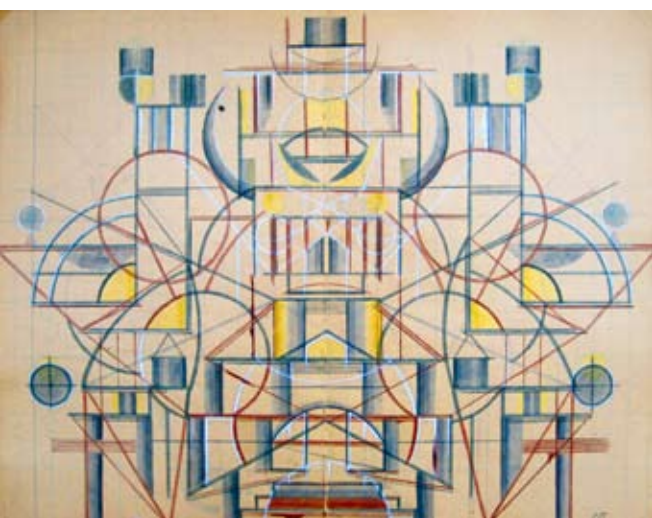


Swedenborg's Index, 2008. Graphite on antique ledger-book pages, 38 x 40 in.

poetic inspiration. "The crazy scaffolding, wood and rope ladders, hand-painted barriers, netting, lights, thick hazy dust, and pollution, topped off by massive staircases jutting into the sky, are both futuristic and strangely reminiscent of the Jantar Mantar observatories I've visited," she says. "They work day and night, and in the evenings they look like insane spaceships aglow with lamps and men and women carrying materials piled high atop their heads."

Despont came to India to study the Warli tribal paintings of Maharashtra, Rajasthani tantric drawings, and the oddly modern astronomical observatories she mentions, built by the 18th-century ruler and mathematician-cum-architect Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh. All three influences can be seen in her current production—outsized collages that depict impossible structures, elemental shapes,

the sun-faded tones and the incredible patterns and prints in the clothing."



Entrance to Emptiness, 2008. Ink, graphite, and gouache on antique ledger-book pages, 14 x 18 in.

to me over the phone. "I'm especially attracted to the sun-faded tones and the incredible patterns and prints in the clothing." Delhi is readying an extensive elevated train system for the 2010 Commonwealth Games, she tells me, and even this suggests

that in their visual language bear little resemblance to her ledger work—apart, of course, from her obsessive attention to detail and a sense of decoration that seems drawn from Gnostic wellsprings.

"Being here is such an amazing lesson in color," she says

and a proliferation of exotic patterns. "I've been spending many afternoons in various libraries and photo archives looking through the endless books on miniatures, wall painting, textiles, and Jain cosmology," she explains. "Mostly I've been working with the materials that are readily available, which are handmade natural-dyed papers from a factory just down the road, inks, and a lot of experiments with the Xerox machine in the main office where I'm staying."

In a few months, Despont will move on to Rajasthan, where she will study with female artisans in Kutch who are known for their extraordinary work with mirrored embroidery, and after that to Pondicherry, in the south, where she will be putting together a final animation and soundtrack inspired by her time in Delhi and Rajasthan and by the master filmmaker Satyajit Ray.

Although India's full impact on Despont's elemental and esoteric work has yet to be seen, one thing is certain: No matter where one is, the soul's secret language speaks to all who care to listen. And whether in northern India or south Brooklyn, Despont, for one, is sure to keep her ears open.

— Louise Despont will have a solo exhibition at the Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York, in September 2010, nicellebeauchene.com.

DEVENDRA BANHART SELECTS

LOUISE DESPONT

ARCHITECTURAL PRECISION
ON ANCIENT PARCHMENTS

**Freak folk musician
Devendra Banhart:**

"Louise has an amazing ability to imbue her work with an inner luminescence, something constant yet volatile, inexorable yet mercurial, held in harmonious captivity by the architecture of each piece. I can immerse myself and study every line within each grid, or step back and let the entire piece wash over me. These are blueprints to the inner firmament. Louise makes me wanna give up and keep trying."

Brooklyn-based Louise Despont creates technically precise pencil drawings that hint at an expanded state of mind. Almost psychedelic in their design, Despont's patterns and symmetries are subtly imbued with the artist's own coded narrative. "When I started working with architectural tools and geometrics it felt like I had discovered an abstract language of symbols," she says. "The patterns represent internal forms, directional movement and radiating energies. Rather than describing only the surface of the object, I use the patterns to simultaneously show the inside workings as well as the outside structure."

The majority of Despont's fine drawings are created on beautiful parchment paper taken from vintage ledger books used in Raj-era British India. Discovering a stash of the books while studying,

Louise became enamoured with the depth of colour and the fragility of the paper, thinking about the age and history of the pages themselves. "The paper had a memory that was told through its markings. The actual surface of the old paper is broken by these marks and it seems to invite the drawing in," she explains.

Despont's works were originally made to the scale of the books themselves but have now grown to take over up to 32 pages spliced together, allowing her to control the expansion of her abstracted characters and stories. "The early

drawings were simple symmetries and forms. I was interested in creating harmonic relationships between the two sides of the page. Eventually the drawings became more complex and began to echo structures, then organic forms - human, plant and animal."

Despont's images are inspired by a combination of history and detail. Tibetan thangka paintings, Persian rugs, tarot cards, cathedral and maze architecture and Indian Tantric and Shaker gift drawings are all elements she has examined. While taken from various cultures, there is a common thread between the different styles, each of which is created out of an incredibly time-consuming process. But it is this

process that is at the very heart of her work. "I think both the process and outcome of that process can be meditative and I'm interested in art that has a meditative quality. For me, drawing is a starting point to exploring energies and dynamics that are unseen but felt."

**Text WILLIAM OLIVER
Photography JESS GOUGH**



The New York Times

***Louise Despont: 'House of Instruments,'** through Oct. 24. The graphite and watercolor drawings in this fine show were done during a stay this year in South India. Geometry rules; the work's elaborate curvilinear designs were executed with drafting tools on the lined pages of antique ledger books. The effect is of fantastic growth rigorously contained, as in tantric diagrams and Indian temple and garden designs. At the same time, the spirit of pattern-obsessed Western precisionists like A. G. Rizzoli and Adolf Wolfli come to mind. Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, 21 Orchard Street, Lower East Side , (212) 375-8043, nicellebeauchene.com. (Cotter)

The New York Times

Friday, June 13th 2008

LOUISE DESPONT: 'THE PLANT LIFE OF SAINTS' A new gallery starts well with the solo debut of Louise Despont, artist, filmmaker and would-be visionary. Her geometric and foliate patterns, usually symmetrical, fill antique graph-paper ledgers with folk-art verve; her sculptures bring to mind early Carl Andre railway-tie sculptures supplemented with choice thrift-shop finds. The best impression is made by two short animations that give the drawings' patterns a chaste abandon. The antique appearance might be reconsidered, but promise is evident. Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, 163 Eldridge Street, near Delancey Street, Lower East Side, (212) 375-8043. nicellebeauchene.com; closes on Sunday. (Roberta Smith)

Art in America

The World's Premier Art Magazine

Dec'08

LOUISE DESPONT
NICELLE BEAUCHENE

Nicelle Beauchene, a new gallery on the Lower East Side, opened with Louise Despont's "The Plant Life of Saints," the first show for the artist as well. Over the past couple of years, Despont's stop-motion animations have screened in festivals across the U.S., but here her drawings and sculptures outnumbered the films. Despont credits a number of sources and theories, from tantric drawings to telepathy, but it is Emma Kunz (1892-1963), a Swiss healer, researcher, and later, an artist, to whom Despont owes the most. Like Kunz's, Despont's drawings feature precise geometric patterns, though Kunz's, seen mainly as an articulation of her spirituality and research, are less freeform and have a brighter palette. Despont sticks mostly to muted colors.

The gallery's narrow space, a few steps below street level, was filled with 11 ink-and-graphite drawings (all 2006 or 2007, most around 12 by 15 inches, though some as wide as 23 inches) and three assemblage sculptures. Despite the flea-market esthetic- the drawings are all on antique ledger pages and the sculptures incorporate splintered blocks of wood and old tools- the installation was not haphazard; everything seemed to have found its proper place.

The titles of the sculptures—*Relics from a Shipwrecked Desk (No. 1, 2 and 3)*, all 2008—gave the show a memorial air. Each one suggests a story via a few carefully chosen items from someone else's past, gently placed on top of two or three blocks of wood. In *No. 3*, a coil of braided hair sits atop a stump next to a gnarled branch, the whole thing resting against a rusty hand truck. *No. 2* includes a magnifying glass that enlarges a handwritten note and a black-and-white photo of waves.

The drawings, each spread across two side-by-side ledger pages attached as if they were still bound in a book, are less narrative. Some contain irregular stains and inkblots that look like flayed animal skins (*Plant Fugue No. 2*), others resemble diagrams of solar systems (*A Game of Nearness and Distance*), while a few, drawn with only graphite, approximate Native American rug patterns (*Composition for Helen Keller, No. 1*). A couple of the drawings include headers that indicate the ledgers' original uses, whether to record animal births, fire insurance accounts or business expenses.

In an easy-to-miss cavelike room in the back were *Experiments in Moving Drawings, Parts I & II* (2007), two 16mm films run sequentially and made from many of the drawings up front. Initially, the drawings don't seem to easily lend themselves to animation. But seeing them expand and contract in the film, accompanied by found sounds that are by turns clunky and delicate, we can tell how they (like the sculptures) are built up from layers of shapes, patterns, symbols and histories that Despont collects from mysterious, and occasionally mournful, sources.

--Leigh Anne Miller

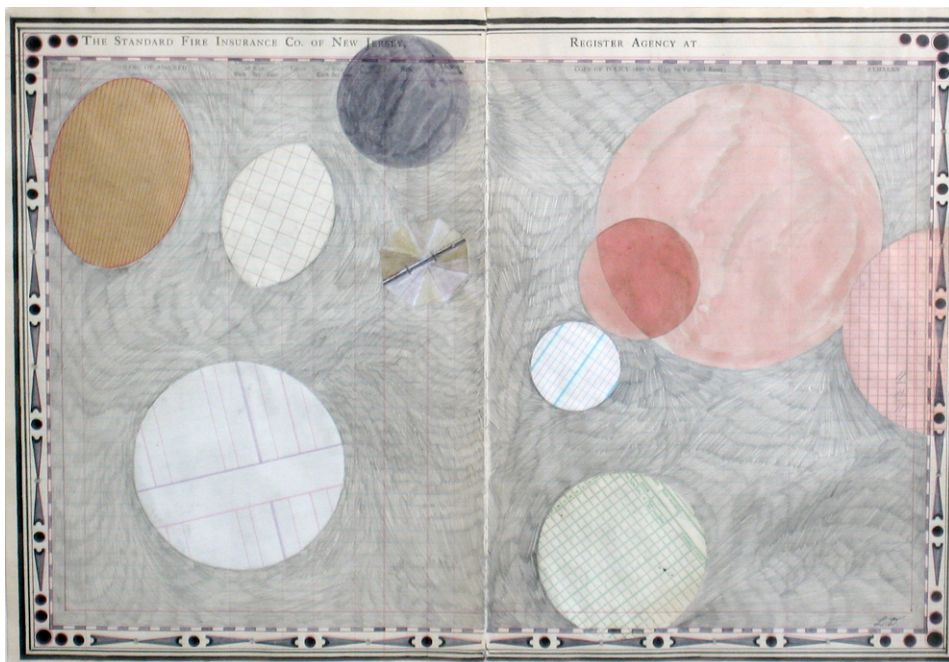


IMAGE: LOUISE DESPONT; A GAME OF NEARNESS AND DISTANCE, 2007, INK AND GRAPHITE ON ANTIQUE LEDGER BOOK PAGES, 15 1/2 X 22 1/4 INCHES; AT NICELLE BEAUCHENE