

In Harmony

American artist Louise Despont's works display a fine balance of controlled technique and uninhibited vision

Written by [Pooja Pillai](#) | Published: July 14, 2017 12:10 am



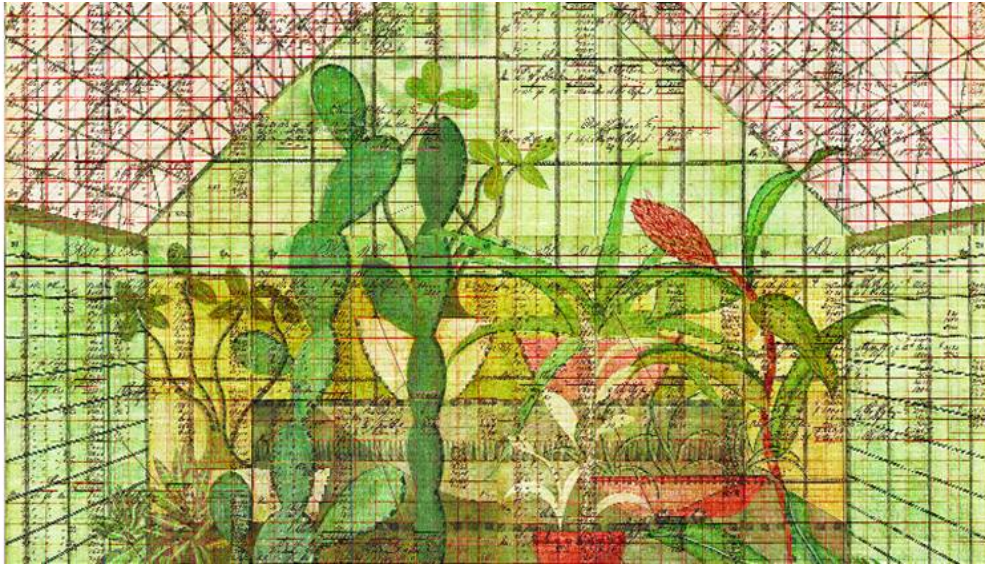
Works from Louise Despont's exhibition, "Green House" — Torchginer and Leaves (top) and Green House; the artist

Even to appreciate the largest of Louise Despont's works, one needs to lean in and register the little details. It is important to note the careful, delicate strokes of coloured pencil and the precise rendition of motifs that come together to form massive, elaborate geometrical patterns. These drawings, 10 of which are on display at "Green House", her second solo exhibition in the country, offer an exquisite example of the balance that the artist has found between a tightly controlled technique and a wildly imaginative vision.

"A large drawing takes me one month if everything goes smoothly," the 32-year-old artist says. Such works are usually spread over multiple sheets of antique ledger pages, Despont's surface of choice, and it's hard to believe that they're not all planned down to the last meticulous detail. "Sometimes I have a rough idea of form or subject but the way that I begin a drawing tends to vary a lot," she says.

Despont begins her work by drawing one-inch grids on all the ledger book sheets and laying them out on the floor of her studio. "Sometimes, just looking at the graphed paper allows me to start

visualizing forms and shape. Certain drawings come quickly, with little to no erasing, while others can take months of reworking, shifting pages, and finding new compositions,” she says.



Over 10 years of her career, one of the major themes to have marked Despont’s work is her spiritual curiosity. She cites Emma Kunz, the Swiss artist and spiritualist, as one of her major influences. Like Kunz, Despont approaches geometrical abstraction as a way of articulating spiritual and philosophical ideas. The idea of the “sacred geometry” clearly intrigues Despont and, in works such as *Opening Act I* and *Fertilization*, one can see the influence of the Mandala art tradition of Hinduism and Buddhism as one of the best recognised articulation of this idea. Both works are part of the current exhibition.

In other works, such as *Garden Fence* and *Torch Ginger with Elephant Ear*, the influence of Indian miniature painting is discernible, although they are rooted in the inspiration that the artist draws from the jungles and gardens of her home in Bali.

It would be reductive to speak of Despont’s art as being characterised by her use of ledger pages. Yet, it cannot be denied that this choice of material imbues her work with a sense of antiquity. This is particularly so because, in most of the old ledgers that the artist acquires, the writings of the original owners are allowed to remain. Despont layers her drawings over them, much like a palimpsest. Works such as *Green House* and *Fort*, in which the scribblings of past owners remain faintly visible, become additionally intriguing for this reason.

Despont began using antique ledger pages as a drawing surface when she was a student of Art Semiotics at Brown University in 2006. She was already making art at the time, although with oil paints on canvas, and the ledger paper quickly changed the way she approached her work. She says, “I initially started by making ink-blots in a book, which then became a catalyst for working with symmetrical forms and pairs.

I discovered that the lined pages of the book were already a kind of scaffolding for working with geometric form. The book pages offer total compositional freedom because I can add or remove pages at any point in the process of a drawing. This gives space for the works to evolve.”