



Tom Wudl: *Array of Myriad Fragrances*, 2013, pencil, gouache, ink, gold leaf, aluminum leaf and mixed mediums on vellum, image: 17¼ by 18¼ inches; at LA Louver.

LOS ANGELES TOM WUDL LA Louver

By its nature, meditation involves an element of repetition—sitting each day, observing each breath—that rewards the practitioner with a diversity of inner experience. Since 2008, Tom Wudl has been making paintings inspired by the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, or *Flower Ornament Sutra*, a foundational text of Hua-yen Buddhism that uses rich metaphors to describe the interdependency of all things and the 10 stages to full enlightenment. Wudl’s works in this show, as well as those in two previous shows at LA Louver, suggest that concentrated repetition does in fact lead to expansiveness.

The 10 paintings, from 2013, in “Reflections from the Flowerbank World” are Wudl’s most visually complex and buoyant yet. Each painting can be viewed as a meditation for both the creator and the viewer. The intricacy of the surfaces, composed of countless minuscule marks (the artist wears a jeweler’s glass to make them), seem possible only via a state of intense focus. Meanwhile, the myriad facets of each picture absorb viewers in a deep contemplation of the visual field.

The largest painting, at 25 by 36½ inches, *Unattached, Unbound, Liberated Kindness* consists of pencil, gouache, gold leaf and gum arabic on rice paper, and is a marvel of detail. It took four years to complete. A large, roselike form in the center is surrounded by several smaller, many-petaled flowers that appear to float on a black ground, which itself is bordered by a geometric gold band. The seemingly solid black and gold areas are actually made up of tiny clover shapes (a symbol Wudl has utilized in numerous works). Each petal of each flower suggests a world of its own, with its own color scheme and specific marks. In just the central rose, one petal contains numerous tiny petals and stems in grass green and shimmering gold, while others are made up of faceted crystals in shades of blue. Here, the various complex patterns coexist harmoniously, as if the markings had formed organically. The resulting work conveys a process or evolution more than the execution of a prearranged plan.

In addition, Wudl’s recent exhibition addressed the concept of interconnectedness—expressed in the *Flower Ornament Sutra* as the net of the god Indra—more directly than in his previous shows. Three paintings in particular—*Array of Myriad Fragrances*, *Fragrant Flame Light Blazing*, and *Subtle Light Banner*—offer a vision of this net; the grounds in these works are composed of numerous short lines or bars connected by little circles, creating web-like expanses. Painted on vellum, the 17¼-by-18¼-inch *Array of Myriad Fragrances* presents spheres and lotuslike flowers that appear to orbit one another within the webbed field. The slight ripples in the surface and the soft cream and gold hues add to a sense of movement and light. The laboriousness of Wudl’s process produces an elegant and ethereal result.

—Annie Buckley