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# The Argonaut

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

# Honoring the Humble Flower

LA Louvre hosts show focused solely on botanicals

By Morgan Owen  
 Argonaut Managing Editor

It might not seem like there could be a large, multiartist gallery show dedicated only to the flower, but curator Elizabeth East at the LA Louvre begs to differ. In fact, there was so much material that East found it challenging to narrow the focus down to a mere 50 artists.

On display through Sept. 1, “The Flower Show” engages with themes of life, death, identity, memory and the environment in symbolic and narrative contexts. The show contains a range of mediums and styles with both contemporary and historical works. The variety is boundless, East explained.

“We include paintings, sculptures, photography, video, film, digital technology, and state-of-the-art printing techniques, so it’s a very rich range of mediums. And then within that, we have everything from ancient papyrus ... through the classic materials of oil and watercolor,” East expounded.

“Then something that is enriching to that is a diversity of cultural origin within those artists who are represented in the show. We have shipped work from as far afield as Nigeria.”

With such a wide range of content, East said she wanted each artwork to speak on its own, arranging the show in search of “an engaging rhythm” rather than by theme. That being said, East feels many of the exhibition’s themes are still heavily identifiable. For example, she recalled a painting of a beautiful flower weighed down by an object. To her, it conveyed the fragility of life against the environment.

The exhibition begins on the first floor with a collection of historical works spanning the globe. The very first work in the main gallery is a botanical study by a French artist known for his floral artworks. Then, the show moves into impressionism and beyond. East said it is interesting to have so much botanical art in one place because she found it stunning to see the throughlines of technique and style.

East said she has seen an uptick in contemporary artists engaging with botanicals, which she credits to the pandemic.

“A number of artists were looking to nature, as I think many of us did, during the pandemic ... Being disrupted from a routine and looking at the world around us and maybe not engaging with humanity in the same way but with nature in a particular way.”

That was the case with Yvette Gellis, one of the artists featured in “The Flower Show.” Yvette is known for her architectural, semiabstract paintings. But



Curator Elizabeth East aimed to create a familiar rhythm to the show, rather than categorize works by theme.

during the pandemic, she saw herself turning more toward nature.

“I found myself in the studio with this world consciousness turned to the body and I started making figures out of leaves and foliage. (I felt) the strong belief and interconnection we have with all life, everything on our planet,” Gellis said. “Having gone through a worldwide pandemic and all the geopolitical tensions we are experiencing, it’s a relief to have a show about a flower, which is so symbolic.”

Christopher Pate, another artist featured in the show, said he became interested in participating in “The Flower Show” because of the wonderful group of artists. He said he would have created work specifically for the show, as some other artists did, but, by happenstance, already had a series of botanical works that hadn’t been displayed in LA yet.

The two works on display by Pate are part of his Dominion: “Huntington Gardens” series. The series is about extinction, explained Pate. Depicted are flowers slowly being obscured by black, geometric stripes. To Pate, his work symbolizes the threat of being erased.

“I was thinking thematically (about) this idea of requiem, or loss. I think it’s not pervasive in the whole show, but you can pick out certain artists that seem to represent that in one way or another in their work.”

Pate recalled a work in the South Gallery of “The Flower Show” by Petah Coyne. The work is sculptural, made of wax, silk flowers, wire and other materials. It hangs from the ceiling by a coil chain. To him, that work also recalled that feeling of “requiem.”

East said she hopes people feel “energized” by the show. It’s possible, she said,

to walk through the show in a mere 15 minutes, but she’s also seen people stay for more than two hours, even returning a second time, to pursue the vast quantity of work.

“I would like to think that the motif (flowers) draws people in rather quickly because it is such a beautiful show. It can be read in a very simple way. But beyond that, people who might understand that there are some larger issues being conveyed — whether its fragility, mortality,

environmental concerns — it allows people to contemplate those issues when they reflect on the work.”

**“The Flower Show”**  
**WHEN:** Through Sept. 1  
**WHERE:** LA Louvre, 45 N. Venice Boulevard, Venice  
**COST:** Free  
**INFO:** lalouvre.com



To Christopher Pate, a featured artist, this work by Petah Coyne conveys a sense of reckoning.