

Green Integer Blog

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"Illuminations of Flowers" (on Tom Wudl show at L.A. Louver)

ILLUMINATED FLOWERS

Tom Wudl **Reflections of the Flowerbank World** / L.A. Louver Galley, the opening I attended was on Saturday, September 7, 2013

For a number of years now Los Angeles artist Tom Wudl has been slowly producing a body of stunningly beautiful illuminated miniatures with acrylic, oil and gold paint, gouache, pencil and gold leaf on rice paper, linen, and other surfaces that arise out of an intense engagement with often arcane and esoteric spiritual concerns.





The most recent series of works is a flowerbank world based on processes described in the vast Huayan Chinese Buddhist texts, *The Avatamsaka Sūtra*, generally translated into English as *Flower Garland Sutra* or *Flower Adornment Sutra*. The work describes a cosmos of infinite realms within realms, each mutually containing the other, a device immediately revealed in Wudl's seemingly gem-studded petals of flowers, floating, often in a space surrounded by other, equally unfolding petals.

The process, which can take, at times, over four years to complete, is itself, quite obviously, revelatory of an almost maniacal obsession devoted to repetitious detail, the actions of which presumably result in a kind of loss of interpretive consciousness leading to supreme enlightenment.

Obviously, I cannot speak to Wudl's personal transformations in creating these works, but I can admit to the audience-perceived result of their utter beauty, sometimes, as in *Unattached, Unbound, Liberated Kindness*, the colors almost overwhelming us in their complexity; and, at other times, as in *Sublime Eye of Tranquility, Blossom of Inexhaustible Kindness*, and *Light of Silent Sound*, in the remarkable clarity and simplicity of that beauty.



Upon first entering the upper floor of the L.A. Louver gallery, I was struck almost by what I perceived as the relationship of these works with Persian and Turkish miniatures, both in their size and in the iconic use of image; as in those works, what matters about these is not the “originality” of the image, but the “techniques,” the “mastery” of creating or even *recreating* those images. Of course, while the Persian and Turkish miniatures are utterly narrative, these works are anything but. What they convey comes from their form, color, and light, not from the well-known and often-portrayed human figures and events. In fact—and I do recognize this as a very odd stretch of the imagination—Wudl’s works may bear more in common with James Terrell’s spaces of light than with the story-telling miniatures; and it is no accident that a majority of them call up light and abstract emotional states such as “tranquility,” “kindness,” wisdom,” and “liberation.” But it is also clearly no accident that Wudl spent years of study on late Medieval and early Renaissance paintings and illuminations.

Unlike so much of contemporary art, wherein even a short view of the image and sculpture reveals its content, Wudl’s works demand attention, that the viewer stare into their spaces for long periods of time, the eyes wandering over their minute and subtle manifestations. Particularly viewing a work such as *Unattached, Unbound, Liberated Kindness*, created in 2013, one can seemingly never quite get enough of the image, even after long periods of observing it from different angles. It is as if every aspect of these petals were encased in jewels that glimmer back in varying degrees of color and glitter, as if the small work was truly “unbound,” or, as he describes another work “inexhaustible!” I have determined to return to the gallery on a weekday afternoon to study these works for longer periods of time.