

ART

Of inkblots and ledger books



Artist Louise Despont's works are a pastiche of the old and new, the mystical and the ordinary says Rinky Kumar

Louise Despont's works are quite unlike any other artist's creations. What sets her apart is the medium that she uses. Rather than art paper or fabric, vintage ledger papers from old accounting books are her canvas. The French-American artist, who is showcasing her works for the second time at Galerie Isa with her solo show *Greenhouse*, obscures original

notations with successive layers of marks through pen, pencil and ink.

New forms

Despont discovered ledger books as an undergraduate at Brown University, Rhode Island and started using them initially for class notes and later for drawings. The format of the books strongly influenced how she drew. "I started making inkblots, which were the catalyst for working with symmetrical forms and pairs, and discovered that the lined pages of the books were a kind of scaffolding for working with geometric forms. The first two years I probably filled 15 books with inkblots, collages, and geometric compositions using architectural stencils and tools before finally beginning to cut the pages from the books and making larger compositions," she says.

She adds that drawing on the pages of ledger books give her a lot of freedom as compared to a large canvas in composition and scale because she can add or shift pages around while working. The medium is also quite portable (before the drawings are framed) which allows the freedom to work and travel abroad.

Inspirational geographies

Despont's works are not only deeply influenced by India but also pay an ode to the scenic beauty and tranquility of Bali, where she stays. She said, "The Balinese make extensive daily offerings and ceremonies which have the effect of creating an energy that is unlike any other place I've experienced," she said. Despont talked to us about growing up in New York City, "The contrast of city life and the lush tropical nature of Bali made a big impression on me."

The artist is fascinated with India and has been visiting the subcontinent ever since she first came here in the year 2009 as part of a Fulbright scholarship. While in her previous show at Galerie Isa, she showcased drawings inspired by the stepwells of Rajasthan, this time, Despont has focused on the ancient Bundi fort in Rajasthan. She said, "During my travels in India I had the chance to visit many temples, and discover traditional arts that I felt connected to something that I was seeking in my own work. Whether it is architecture, art or nature, some things have the ability to transport you in time and space."

She started drawing the large painting titled 'Fort' last October when she had only seen images of the fort's wall paintings in a book called *An Unknown Treasure in Rajasthan: The Bundi Wall Painting*. The images inspired her to visit the fort and she completed the work within a span of six months. "It's an imagined facade but the proportions and divisions of space were directly inspired by the intensity and geometry of the narrative wall paintings," she said.

The spiritual and physical

The basic forms of Despont's diagrams also derive from sacred mandalas, traditional metaphysical mappings, and the related realm of sacred geometry. Individually and as a body of work, her drawings denote a balance between the sacred and profane, good and evil, chaos and order, creation and destruction. Despont considers the sacred nature of Balinese rituals to be synonymous with her own drawing practice, connecting and reinforcing the physical and spiritual planes while transforming energy and space through intention and focus. "Drawings have the power to be doorways unto other realms because they are visual traces of non-visible energy. I'm curious to know how a drawing can be an entrance, a framing, and sometimes a map unto other realms," she shared.

Greenhouse is ongoing at Galerie Isa, Fort until September 1