

A BOTANICAL AESTHETIC, COLLAGES BY JANE HAMMOND ON ANTOINETTE POISSON'S PAPERS

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A collection of new botanical collages by the American artist Jane Hammond, entitled 'Natural Selection', was shown for the first time in May this year at the Lyndsey Ingram gallery in London, to coincide with the famous Chelsea Flower Show. At first glance the collages seem to fit perfectly within the age old tradition of botanical illustration and herbaria. But a closer look reveals that they are actually imaginary compositions. In them Hammond seeks to create "a cocktail of fact and fiction, of things found out in the world, things I invent, and hybrids of the two. I'm looking for a bold unity that is built upon dissociation and tension, as well as harmony."

The artist uses a combination of engraving techniques along with painting, photography, recycled objects and digital elements to

create "collages d'art" that are one-of-a-kind pieces in large format, exploring the infinite complexity of the natural and artificial world. "Making a collage starts with foraging, being on the hunt, and searching," she explains. "Then the process of selecting and assembling takes over. The elements start to talk to each other and tell me where they want to go. I live for the journey, the surprise – the unique ensemble that each piece becomes. I don't like the uniformity of surface in traditional printmaking. I want something fresher, more varied and multilingual."

It is obvious that we are looking at a passionate botanist. Hammond inherited her love of gardens from her grandmother, who was an ambitious amateur gardener: "When I was six, she made me memorize the Latin names of a hundred flowers. "It is equally obvious that an expert botanist will have a taste for methodical research and cataloguing of species: "I have an encyclopedic mind that scavenges for information and imagery, wherever I can find it."

What is most singular and original in Hammond's work is her ability to construct a relationship between a scientific, "rational" subject such as botany, and something that is much more abstract and subliminal. Starting with various simple objects, she creates compositions that reach heights of pure poetry. This process is very similar to the one used by the great Lombard master of the 16th century, Giuseppe Arcimboldo, who famously, alchemically transformed the classic "still life" into marvelous esoteric portraiture. Indeed, Jane Hammond's practice seems to fit just as well into the genealogy of the artists of the Renaissance courts.

Collage on collage! Cabana has chosen the intricately patterned *papiers dominotes* (domino papers) of Antoinette Poisson as the backdrop for Hammond's work. In her Paris atelier, Poisson creates these prints, along with fabrics, in faithful observance of the techniques used by the *Maitres Dominotiers* of the 18th century. The quality of the materials utilized, like the aesthetic of the prints, perfectly reflect the spirit of the Enlightened age. Her collections are for the most part inspired by historical models – the motifs are timeless, the colours vivid – but the atelier also offers a modern collection of Poisson's devising, featuring unique, original patterns.

Just as Jane Hammond has made her own interpretation of the traditional herbarium, the atelier *A Paris chez Antoinette Poisson* reconciles an ancestral tradition with the most refined and elegant modern aesthetics.

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