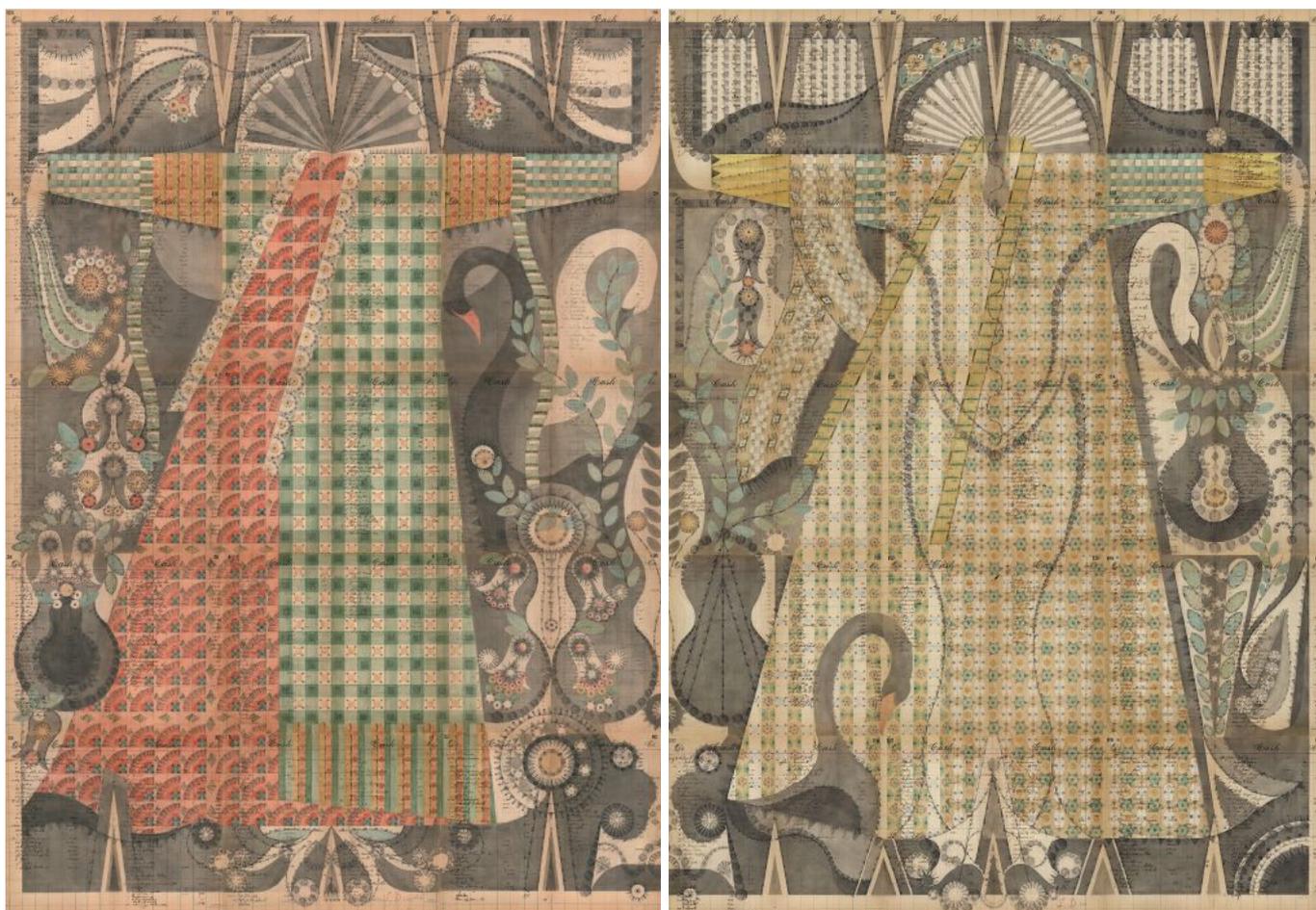


American artist Louise Despont's arduous meditation on paper translates into musings on destiny and the union of people.

■ BY ROSHAN KUMAR MOGALI

In the Garden of Fate

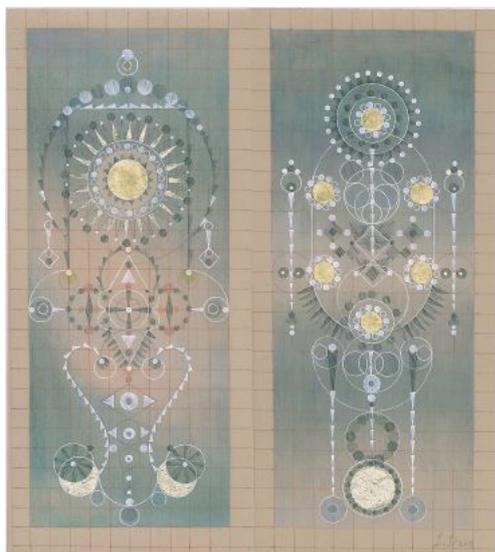


All images courtesy the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York

Louise Despont's solo exhibition 'Long Distance Gardening' on view at Galerie Isa in Mumbai is a meditation on foreordination, which brings about the fated coming together of people and inescapable encounters with objects.

A large diptych (a two-panelled artwork) titled *Long Distance Gardening* (Left Palm and Right Palm) — drawn across 30 sheets of ledger book paper from the U.S. dating back to 1908 — is at the heart of the show. The two figures have been created as a symbolic couple in such a

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manner that when the two drawings are placed together, the palms of the figures’ outstretched arms meet, completing a symmetry with their union.

“Each work can stand on its own but certain elements will remain incomplete if they are separated,” explained Despont. “I imagined them as lovers whose fate is undetermined, dependent on whether they are sold as a pair or separately,” she added. “While I was working on the show, I was thinking about the symbols and rituals that are associated with the union of two people. My own wedding is taking place in Rajasthan just a week before the opening at Galerie Isa, so it was a subject that was very much on my mind.”

A series of four drawings titled *Constellation Symptom*, drawn on Indian ledger paper that Despont found in Jodhpur, is a “reference to the astrological significance and alignment of the couple”. A divine decree — an order of events to be — is represented in a diagrammatic form, charging the drawing with new and extended symbolic meaning that hints at divination. White ink, graphite and pure gold leaf on a base of shaded layers of indigo pencil further lend an ethereal quality to these artworks.

The antique ledger pages bring their own history to the process of art production. Despont



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absorbs the old writings on these pages into her art not by erasing or altering them but addressing and acknowledging their presence, yet drawing over them — sometimes even responding to the page’s grid — to create a cryptic assembly of patterns and numbers and formations with their own logic. In a sense, Despont’s art focuses on recontextualising the use of the ledger paper, under threat from digital mediums of data storage and accounting.



Facing page: Long Distance Gardening, Left Palm, 2012 (left) and Long Distance Gardening, Right Palm, 2012 (right) have been crafted using coloured pencil, graphite and gold leaf on antique ledger book pages.

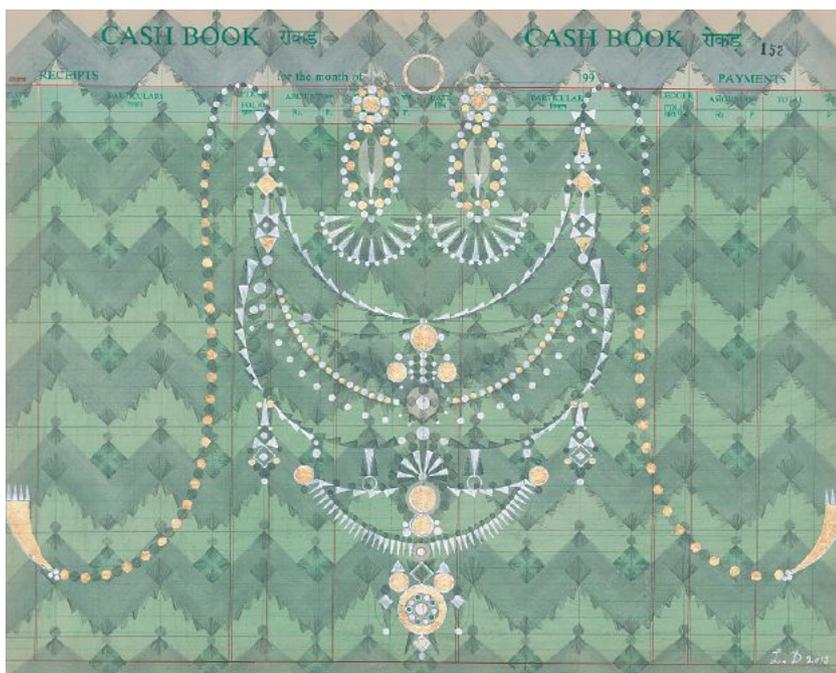
Top left: Constellation Symptom No.16, 2013 — coloured pencil, graphite, ink and gold leaf on antique ledger book pages.

Top right: Louise Despont at her studio in New York.

Right: Detail of Ganga Jali, 2013 — coloured pencil, graphite, ink and gold leaf on antique ledger book pages — showing old ledger entries made in pencil.

The balance that is intrinsic to accountancy is also set against the formal balance of the drawings with their symmetry and harmony. The worldly calculations on the ledger pages could also be seen as a grounding contrast with the celestial references of the drawings. In doing so, they fulfil Despont's purpose of making and viewing art: "to let that which is not understood to come through".

The 10 drawings that make up the exhibition feature architectural structures, mythological figures and constellational formations. These have found their way onto the surfaces of Despont's works along with motifs from her abundant collection of staple images. *Parure* is a drawing of a jewellery set made with gold leaf and white ink as seen against a background of an embroidered emerald-coloured piece of textile. It has been drawn on a page from an account book that Despont found in Nepal, but which she believes is originally from India. *Inner Chamber* is a translucent drawing of an architectural space — a place of meditation — with traces of the interior as well as the exterior along with the representation of movement within the space. This artwork, in which Despont has used 'moon gold' (silver-coloured gold), singularly showcases the artist's attention to detail, dexterity and her view of art production as meditation.



PLAN A VISIT

- Louise Despont's 'Long Distance Gardening' exhibition at Galerie Isa is scheduled to go on until May 28. Log on to www.galerieisa.com to know more.
- Galerie Isa is located at 132, Great Western Building, 1st Floor, SBS Road, Opposite Lion Gate, Fort, Mumbai 400023.

Top: *Parure*, 2013 — coloured pencil, graphite, ink and gold leaf on antique ledger book pages.

Right: *Inner Chamber*, 2012 — coloured pencil, graphite and gold leaf on antique ledger book pages.

