



Celestial ART MATTER

Ahead of her first solo retrospective, artist Nancy Lorenz shares how her Japanese-inspired craft caught the imagination of designers

When the weather affords it, Nancy Lorenz bikes from her home in Manhattan to her new studio in Queens. She acquired the atelier a year and a half ago. The brick industrial warehouse, complete with backyard, offers her the space required to make her bronze castings and screen panels. Currently, she's working on a series of paintings to be displayed at the San Diego Museum of Art – the first solo retrospective of her 30-year career.

Lorenz has always had one foot in the design world and another in abstract painting. Born in New Jersey, she lived in Japan for many years. There, she would visit potter, weaving, and calligraphy studios. "I loved the idea that in Japan, craft was elevated to high art," she says. "These craftsmen were revered as national living treasures." On weekends, she would get on a train and explore different areas of Tokyo, and try to learn how to make some of the crafts herself. After studying print-making at the University of Michigan, she went to graduate school in Rome. She returned to New York and worked for an antiques restorer before opening her own business restoring Asian lacquer antiques.

In her free time, Lorenz developed her own paintings. "Designers I would work with – Lebanese Chahan Minassian or William Sofield – suggested to start using my paintings in their projects," she says. Business took off. Then in 1998, she received the John Simon Guggenheim Grant, which permitted her to focus solely on her paintings. High fashion houses soon called. Since 2004, she has worked for Peter Marino, designing screens for Chanel, including pieces for its boutique in Mall of the Emirates in Dubai. "A brand like Chanel has huge respect for high craftsmanship," she says. "Each piece is unique. When you enter the store, you go into a space that respects the tradition of high art. At the same time, my work has a modern twist to it. The

Dubai screens are a contemporary version of the coromandel tradition found in Gabrielle Chanel's Paris apartment.

Lorenz has also collaborated with Tomas Maier. The creative designer of Bottega Veneta first contacted her some 15 years ago. A collector of her work, he invited her to make lacquer treasure boxes and molten-gold lunar landscapes for the fashion house. Her signature "liquid gold" style is actually water gilding. It consists of building up layers of clay and then polishing the surface. Afterwards, a thin, gossamer sheet of gold with water is applied. It can be burnished to appear molten and solid; a weeklong process that she learned during her years restoring antiques.

It's Monday, the one day that Lorenz takes to be alone in the atelier. The rest of the week, her team is by her side. Come lunch, the smells of takeout from the mom-and-pop Greek, Puerto Rican, or Japanese restaurants nearby permeate the air along with the paint. Besides the paintings being prepared for her upcoming exhibition, she is currently making samples for Peter Marino for Chanel, some works for a yacht commission, and reverse glass paintings for a home in Hawaii. Since all her projects end up out in the world, her dream project is to do a paneled living room for herself – if she finds the six to eight months of "free time" to complete it. Making a rock garden is also on her list.

When the day is over – she clocks out around 6pm – Lorenz will head back home to her family and check in with her teenage kids. Her son is studying Russian and Arabic while her daughter loves to draw. As for her social life, she says, "I love my friends. They are fellow artists and hardworking women." She exchanges her jeans and T-shirt for a monochrome tailored outfit sent from her friend, LA-based designer Elaine Kim. It's been a long day of gilding. She smiles, "I like to dress up." *Nancy Lorenz: Moon Gold is on at the San Diego Museum of Art from April 27*

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