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Christopher Thompson-Royds Brings The English Countryside To Massachusetts in 18k Gold

By Kate Matthams



Natura Morta Daisy necklace, hand-painted 18k gold and diamonds, by Christopher Thompson-Royds
SIENNA PATTI GALLERY, CHRISTOPHER THOMPSON-ROYDS

As a solo exhibition of his work opens in the US, British artist Christopher Thompson-Royds talks about his start as a jeweler, creativity during the pandemic, and how, through jewelry deeply

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/katematthams/2021/02/25/christopher-thompson-royds-brings-the-english-countryside-to-massachusetts-in-18k-gold/>

inspired by nature and the English countryside, he navigates the borderlands between art and adornment.

The power of nature to wake Covid's "stilled lives"

Christopher Thompson-Royds is looking ahead. As his exquisitely crafted 18k blooms arrive Stateside for Floret, a digital-physical exhibition at the well-known contemporary jewelry gallery [Sienna Patti Gallery](#), in Lenox, Massachusetts, his thoughts have turned to the upcoming change of seasons. "We are here at that beginning again," he says. "Hopefully this exhibition reminds people of the seasons ahead - new beginnings bringing promises of hope". A sentiment made even more pertinent after a year of living "stilled lives", as he so beautifully describes the enforced slowdown of the past 12 months.

This time a year ago, he was in the process of moving back to London after a spell living in Amsterdam, until lockdown hit the UK and he didn't quite make it. He ended up staying with his mother, deep in the English countryside and was able to continue working surrounded by the space and nature that so many who were locked down in the cities, craved. "For the first half of the pandemic I was lucky to be in the countryside where the progression of seasons turned from wintry bleakness, to the exuberance of spring. It was grounding to see trees burst into leaf, fields turn from muddy brown to vivid green; then summer and meadows yellow with buttercups, verges white with daisies." This flourishing of nature nourished his own creativity.



Natura Morta Poppy Earrings (post), hand-painted 18k gold with diamonds, by Christopher ... [+] SIENNA PATTI GALLERY, CHRISTOPHER THOMPSON-ROYDS

Once the initial shock of generalized shutdown and cancelled exhibitions wore off, "I realized how fortunate I was. I wanted to do something to help others, so I came up with a jewelry project to raise money for victims of domestic violence." While the UK government was telling people to stay home, he was struck by the fact that for many, this meant putting themselves at serious risk and as the lockdown rolled on, reports of violence and abuse went up 70%.

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He looked to the language of flowers for inspiration and created the Forget-me-Not earrings, delicate hoops with hand-painted flower charms designed as tokens that could be a treat for the buyer, or sent to someone in their thoughts. "They are a reminder not to overlook the forgotten," he says, and with \$140 from each \$200 sale going to Refuge, a UK-based charity that works to support domestic violence, to date he has managed to raise \$17,000.

Art inspired by the "overlooked survivors"

Indirectly, the coronavirus pandemic is also present in the work he is showing at Sienna Patti Gallery. The pieces on show are from the Nature Morta and Against Nature series. "In their own way, both address slowed time and the unnoticed becoming noticed," the artist muses. "Both series use wild flowers found in the margins between the wild and the cultivated, both celebrate often overlooked survivors." In the delicate force of the daisies that reach for the sky on fine stems of gold - detachable earrings and a pendant - there is also resilience and a quiet strength which feel very appropriate.



Against Nature: Violet Sculpture with Earrings, 2020 18k gold with patinated brass base, by ... [+] SIENNA PATTI GALLERY, CHRISTOPHER THOMPSON-ROYDS

The show's title, Floret, references the individual pieces of a flower that come together to form a whole and the gallerist herself sees Thompson-Royds' work as "a bouquet, in which each

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individual floret contributes to the beauty of the larger body. A recent addition to Patti's roster of artists, she has followed his career since he left London's Royal College of Art: "Christopher's work is exquisitely made, very wearable and nods to jewelry history without feeling dated. It's modern and a little edgy."

Thompson-Royds had an early introduction to jewelry, via a lesson in basic silversmithing at school when he was 12. "The first thing I made, was a Greek Love knot ring, and I found I had an affinity with metal, which soon became a passion. What small boy doesn't love bashing things and melting metal to red hot?". He draws deeply on his countryside upbringing in his art; his favorite piece in the show is a gold and diamond daisy chain necklace: "I remember sitting in fields making daisy chains when I was little. Years later, I am still doing this, albeit in 18k gold."

Ironically, there was not much jewelry at home, after both his mother and grandmother had their jewelry stolen. The shock of the theft had turned his grandmother's hair white, but "how she talked about the loss was above the financial and status signifiers, it was about the memories of who had given which piece and why. The one piece she did manage to re-find, by trawling up and down Portobello Market in London, was a small Fabergé egg that had been given to her by Princess Yusupov and its identifying features were tiny teeth marks - my mother's".



Against Nature: Daisy Chain, 18k gold presented in a marbled box, by Christopher Thompson-Royds
SIENNA PATTI GALLERY BY CHRISTOPHER THOMPSON-ROYDS

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The language of jewelry

His sculptural pieces pierce the membrane between art and adornment. The graceful arc of a gold violet can be plucked from its stem to become an earring, while a pair of hand-painted poppies is presented like a watercolor sketch in an artist's portfolio. While studying at the Royal College of Art, he was encouraged to explore the very nature of jewelry and why it is worn: "A wedding band signifies to others that we are married, the Hand of Fatima protects against malign spirits. How do you recognize that the Queen is a queen? Through the crown of state, the Cullinan III and IV diamonds she wears. We all use jewelry to express that we are loved and love, what we believe in, where we come from. This language of signifiers can be used to tell stories, both personal and historical. In this respect, I don't see a difference from art."

From John Constable to Seamus Heaney, art has long been inspired by the undulations of the English landscape. "There is so much inspiration in the natural world and artists and designers have used flora and fauna to pique our curiosity forever," says Patti. "Jewelry can take what is beautiful and freeze it in time or place, we can then carry that joy and beauty on our bodies, radiating a universal connection to the natural world." During such uncertain times, there is something particularly joyful about bringing nature into our lives through art, even if that means enjoying a posy of Forget-me-Nots hand-painted onto wafer-thin gold, online, at the end of a long Zoom day.

Christopher Thompson-Royds' work is available to see at Sienna Patti Gallery, online and in person (appointment only), until March 31.