

By Design

Art and Artifice

For the most innovative floral designers working today, form is just as important as flora.

BY LINDSAY TALBOT PORTRAITS BY JOE LEAVENWORTH

SPIKED BISMARCK palm fronds, dramatic clusters of flamingo-pink anthuriums, flowering quince branches — MetaFlora's bold arrangements are unexpected and irreverent, marrying ikebana-inflected minimalism with a dash of kitsch. Founder Marisa Competello, a former fashion stylist, constructs her sculptural compositions — which she often coats in layers of spray paint — from her Chinatown studio in Manhattan. "My work is an overdose of the '80s," she says.

Competello is one of the highly individual, personality-driven floral designers who are pushing the craft in new directions. Rather than fetishizing a particular flower or color, their focus is on composition — the more distinctive, the better — a clear departure from the tidy, symmetrical centerpieces that defined the early 2000s floral aesthetic. Their styles may differ wildly — spare and undone, Pop Arty and daring, or wild and painterly — but along with form, the thing that unites these young designers is the depth of inspiration they find in the palette, mood and proportions of work by painters and graphic artists.

Competello's arrangements, for example, recall the loud, neon-pastel prints of Patrick Nagel — an era-of-excess maximalist who created racy illustrations for Playboy, new-wave Duran Duran album covers and winking Budweiser ads. Like Nagel's cartoonish, color-blocked illustrations, the 40-year-old's work has a defiantly unnatural quality: Monstera leaves are snipped into blunt geometric shapes with scissors and palms are spotted with purple polka dots; entire bouquets are painted cornflower blue or chalk white. "I am into things that don't look like flowers — hardy, tropical, sexy plants," she says.

Sophia Moreno-Bunge's designs exist in an entirely different world than Competello's:



FROM LEFT: EVEL ADRIAN, "UNTITLED," 2010, OIL ON CANVAS, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND STEIRER GALLERY HAMBURG/REBUT, SOPHIA MORENO-BUNGE

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