

Hidden Figure

Van Cleef & Arpels brings elusive jewelry designer Daniel Brush into the spotlight with an exhibition at its Paris L'Ecole School of Jewelry Arts.

BY TANYA DUKES

Though it's already among the grandest of jewelry houses, Van Cleef & Arpels has larger plans for its legacy.

With its L'Ecole School of Jewelry Arts, the quintessentially Parisian brand offers instruction on gems, the history of the art of jewelry, as well as fundamental jewelry design. Established five years ago, L'Ecole is a "platform for education on jewelry and decorative arts," says Van Cleef & Arpels' CEO Nicolas Bos. Enconced in an 18th century mansion on Place Vendôme, the brand's educational offshoot hosts conferences and workshops on subjects from grand feu enameling to identifying gemstones. And thanks to a recent expansion, there's room for exhibitions from "designers that aren't part of the Van Cleef & Arpels universe, but bring something exciting to the world of fine jewelry."

Jeweler Daniel Brush is the latest artist to be celebrated by Van Cleef & Arpels, and is the subject of a fall exhibition at L'Ecole, from

October 12 through 30. Owing to its virtuosity and scarcity, his work has been a source of fascination for hard core connoisseurs for decades. His pieces rarely appear in public (not even his website includes photos of his jewelry and paintings) and he maintains strict control over who can buy his work.

Though he's often branded a recluse—Brush seldom leaves the studio he's shared with his wife, a fellow artist, for 40 years—the breadth of his output suggests that he hasn't withdrawn from the world; he's invented a new one and devotes exhaustive attention to it. And his work is as unpredictable as it is painstaking. "There's no consistency," he says. "I never thought about it. I get up and worry about what there is to say."

Brush's dizzyingly eclectic catalog includes seemingly ancient stainless steel objets topped with thousands of pinpoint-fine gold granules, bluish colored Bakelite jewels studded with pink diamonds and canvases

painted with gestures inspired by Japanese Noh theater. The one thing that unites them all is that Brush creates every piece with his own hands. "Every single thing is done the way a jeweler did it 100 years ago: with a saw, engraving burins and files."

The focal point of Brush's exhibition is a series of necklaces from his book "Necks," which features 117 collars made solely to be photographed for the volume. They'll be accompanied by a selection of cuff bracelets executed in steel, diamonds and other precious stones. And, Brush will be on-site to introduce his work to visitors, an experience he views as an "incredible opportunity" to see the public respond to his jewelry.

Still, while most anyone would appreciate an extended Paris sojourn, Brush already looks forward to returning to the rigors of his studio. "If you have a dream to be a little whisper in the history of art, you have to work at it," he explains. "Really work at it."

