Chaumet: Observing Beauty opens Thursday in the Beaux-Arts de Paris

By Godfrey Deeny - June 15, 2022

Botany, biology and the bucolic are at the heart of remarkable new exhibition 'Chaumet: Observing Beauty,' which opens in the Beaux-Arts de Paris this Thursday in Paris.

Remarkable not just for its rare and brilliant jewels, owned by empresses, queens, princesses and mere billionairesses but also for the striking array of artworks, photography, objects d'art, rare illustrations, tapestries and fossils that illustrate the power of nature to continually inspire and surprise. From Monet and Delacroix from Georgia O'Keeffe to Eva Jospin to antiquities, it's an unexpected blend by a brand that's also been revered for its classy yet atypical aesthetic.

Nature has always been at the heart of Chaumet, one of the world’s greatest jewelry marques, whose founder Marie-Étienne Nitot was known as a “naturalist jeweler.”

The exhibition comes one year after another brilliant display by Chaumet entitled ‘Joséphine & Napoleon,’ a meditation on the French leader’s great love and eventual empress Josephine and her rare collection, staged in its Place Vendôme headquarters.

“We cannot promise an exhibition every year. It took us four years to pull together over 400 objects from multiple museums and collectors for this exhibition so this is a one-shot,” smiled Jean-Marc Mansvelt, CEO of Chaumet.

In fact, the display is barely is the tip of the iceberg of Chaumet’s own archive, which includes 66,000 drawings, 300,000 photographic prints and 350 creations – ranging from jewelry to timepieces.
'Chaumet: Observing Beauty' reaches way back. Back 25 million years in paleobotany to a laurel fossil that seems almost lifelike. And back to antiquity, with a dramatically delicate gold myrtle wreath dating from the fourth century BC reign of Phillip II of Macedonia. Discovered in a necropolis in Derveni, Greece, it looks uncannily brand new, and with its blooming gold buds and blooms, truly modern.

Sportingly, the display includes works by other master jewelers and artisans, from Boucheron to René Lalique.

One can take mobile phone shots of the entire exhibition, though two small signs instruct visitors not to photograph contributions from Doha, properties of the Qatari royal family. Notably their horn, platinum and diamond tiara by Lalique that looks as natural as the fern that inspired it.

All spread across seven main themes: Forest, Foreshore, Reedbed, Stairs, Tillage, Hortus and Millefleurs. Reedbed represented by a hyper original tiara that splits into two mini eagle-winged brooches, made in 1910 by Chaumet for Gloria Vanderbilt.

Foreshore is interpreted by Joseph Chaumet’s intriguing maquette for a tiara based on seaweed; Millefleurs by a truly eye-catching, giant Franco-Flemish tapestry of animals and birds adoring nature borrowed from the Pistoia Musei-Antico Palazzo dei Vescovi; or by a stunning wild rose and jasmine diamond tiara by Jean-Baptiste Fossin, so delicate it shimmers and vibrates as one approaches its glass case.

It being Paris there is also a literary slant, with a letter on the importance of contemplating nature by Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

In a word, it is a four-star, gold-medal performance by curator Marc Jeanson. Open until September 4, Chaumet: Observing Beauty should not be missed.