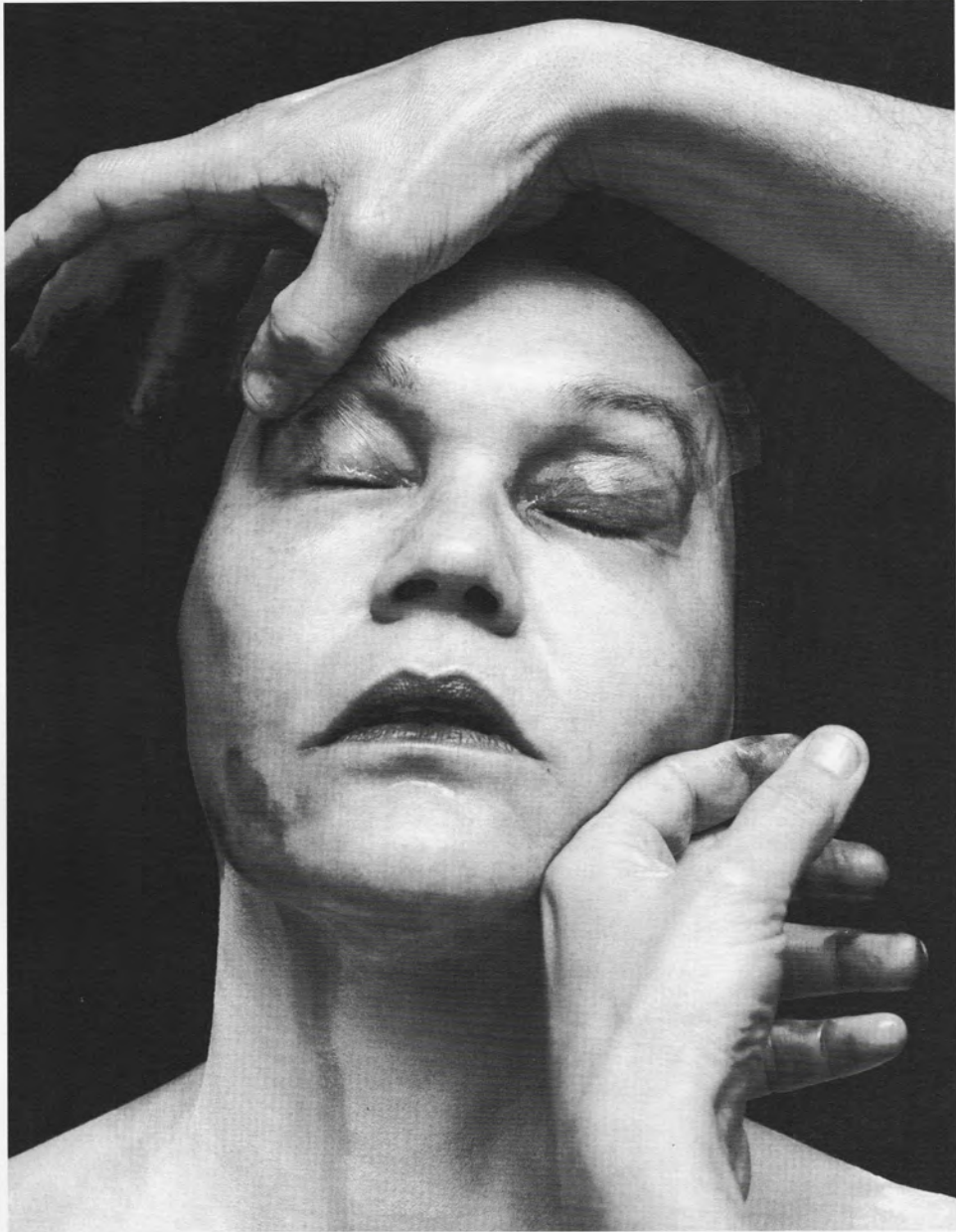


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Callidus Guild

Art Studio
Yolande Milan Batteau,
Founder and Principal Artist

“Callidus means [artistic] excellence through experience” in Latin, says the artist Yolande Milan Batteau, founder of Callidus Guild, an art for architecture studio that she originally began in the bedroom of her New York City apartment before moving it to its current space in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn. “I wanted to make a team of incredibly talented people who are masters at their skills and work together to make new, visionary things.”

The artisans at Callidus Guild—which has been commissioned by Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Tiffany & Co. and other high-profile clients—create applied art on walls, panels and wallpaper using plaster, marble dust plaster, many types of precious metal leaves, mother of pearl, semi-precious stones, resins, inks, dyes and paints. Batteau, a painter who uses these materials in her own work, is always looking for experienced artisans.

“I’ve worked with some of the artisans for a very long time,” she says, mentioning the German gilder who’s been working with her for 20 years, an artisan plasterer for 15 years and a third-generation plasterer from Spain. “There’s really a tradition of artisanship.” Once an artisan joins Callidus Guild, Batteau says it generally takes him or her about a year to learn the techniques she uses. When working on an art for architecture project, she explains, “it’s really a collaboration with me and the interior designer or the architect, with me putting the jewelry on the outfit of their project.”

In developing the concept behind a piece or collection, Batteau looks for a cohesive sense of beauty and inspiration. She says, “you find something really beautiful, and then you explore more and more about it to find the golden thread that flows through the whole thing.” Batteau’s process focuses on manipulating materials to find the beauty within. “I will usually spend some time manipulating traditional materials—gold leaf, glass, marble powder or plaster—in traditional ways. Then I’ll start to manipulate it in a new process, with different tools or unconventional movement.” As she sees it, she “plays with the material until the material speaks to me and tells me what it wants to do.”

Batteau is kind with a bright smile. Throughout this photo shoot at Callidus Guild, she is wonderfully playful with her poses and quirky facial expressions, partially hiding behind her hands and tousling her hair for the camera. She adds movement and insists on keeping things “weird.” She seems at ease in front of a camera, but as an intellectual child growing up in Los Angeles, she says, she never really felt comfortable. Her struggles with

her identity held her back from exploring her passions and expressing herself artistically. She and the people she spent time with always felt a bit different. “Being an intellectual and American is tough for kids... We were just not mainstream,” she offers. “Our identities were not fixed.” She eventually found a home for her individuality in Paris and started painting at the Sorbonne (and later at the San Francisco Art Institute and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston). “I was a little bit younger than everyone,” she says, “so I lied about my age to not seem like a prodigy.”

Batteau has traveled extensively, often staying for months or even years in countries around the world, from Kenya to Belgium to Japan. “I was obsessed with art and architecture and the way people lived,” she says. “Every place that I traveled informed my sense of what a life could look like, in terms of the house, the decorative arts, the food.”

Her work was also influenced enormously by the material culture that she observed while living among these various groups of people. “I’m really influenced by the way different cultures use materials differently,” Batteau says. “They can appear so different depending upon how you manipulate them.”

Batteau draws inspiration from nature, particularly from its movements. “There are patterns in nature that you see over and over again: veining, mountains exploding, imploding, a star created, a volcano erupting and making an island, or something collapsing in on itself,” she explains. “When you can tap into those rhythms or patterns or structures, that’s the magic of natural geometry.”

This is what Callidus Guild’s Sacred Geometries collection is all about, with patterns that are universally recognizable. Such a natural pattern holds “great beauty,” Batteau says, because it “resonates for everybody. They recognize it as being of this universe, of this place, specific to our experiences as humans.”

Conversely, Batteau finds what is perhaps the opposite of natural movement, the Japanese idea of *mu*, to be particularly inspiring. This is, as she describes it, “the concept of potential nothingness, like the space inside of a bowl, or the space inside of a building. It’s emptiness, it’s nothingness, but its purpose is to be filled.” Batteau sees *mu* in most things, she says, and she believes that “the connection between nothing and something, that middle place, is where beauty happens.”

Photography JASON ACTON
Words LAINA RICHARDS

Makeup MECUMI ONISHI, Hair CHAD TABER.





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