

McCLAIN GALLERY

Gold: Devotion and Desire

November 8 – December 27

Opening Reception: November 8, 3–5 PM

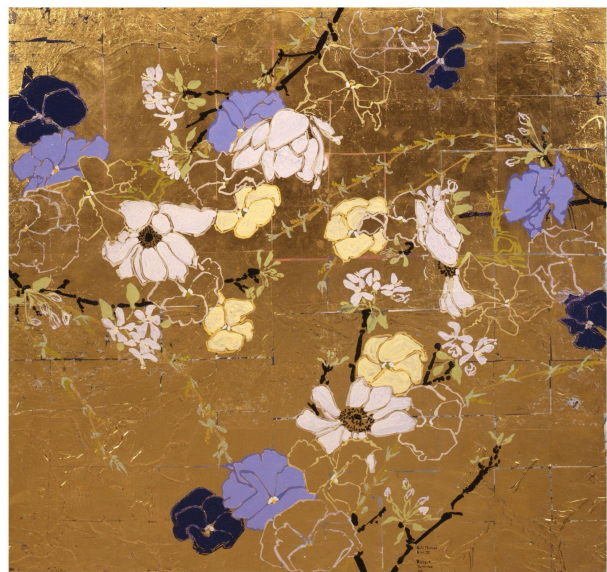
Gold: Devotion and Desire brings together masterworks from two distant but resonant worlds: the sacred gold ground paintings of the Italian Trecento and the explorations of gold by contemporary artists **Christian Eckart**, **Robert Kushner**, **Katsumi Hayakawa**, and **Salle Werner Vaughn**.



Paolo Veneziano, *Madonna and Child Enthroned*, 14th century

Juxtaposed with these 14th-century treasures are works by four contemporary artists whose practices reinterpret the spiritual and formal radiance of gold. Houston based, **Christian Eckart** has long drawn inspiration from the artists of the Italian Renaissance. His gold monochrome works, with their luminous, reflective surfaces, are conceived as portals for the ineffable, functioning not simply as ornament, but as a means of accessing transcendence and reverence. This reverence extends into the formal history of the medium,

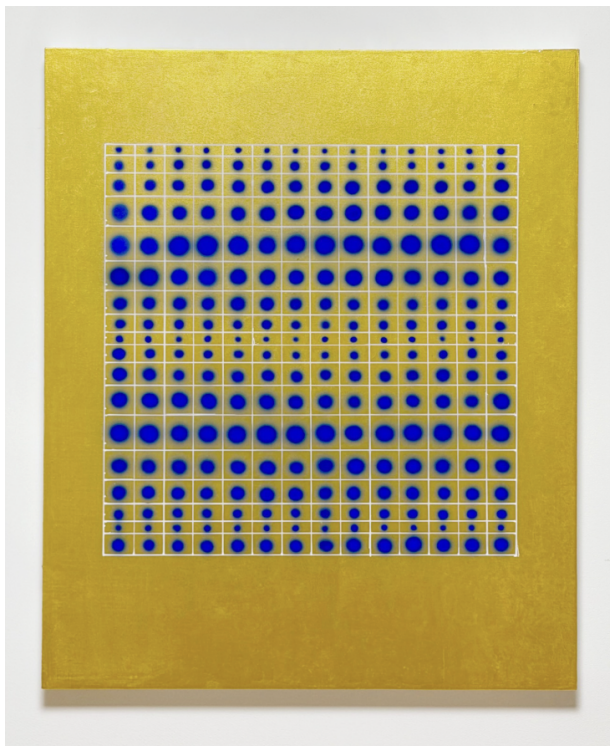
Gold has long functioned as a language of transcendence, desire, and spectacle. In the hands of early Renaissance painters such as **Paolo Veneziano** (circa 1300–1365,) the **Master of the San Niccolo Altarpiece** (circa 1340–1390,) **Tommaso del Mazza** (circa 1350–1395,) **Cecco di Pietro** (circa 1330–1400,) and **Bicci di Lorenzo** (b. 1373– d.1452), gold leaf was a vehicle of devotion, divine presence in altar pieces, panel paintings, and sacred icons. A rare panel painting by Venice's leading figure of the 14th century, Paolo Veneziano, *Madonna and Child Enthroned*, exemplifies the opulent gold grounds of Italian painting during the transition from a Byzantine and Gothic tradition to the humanism of the early Renaissance.



Robert Kushner, *Gold Mirror 8 x 4 II*, 2002

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paying close attention to the formal gestures of painting: brush strokes, gold leaf “holidays” and uneven grounds are foregrounded as the direct producers of the sublime.



Katsumi Hayakawa, *Silent Field*

Katsumi Hayakawa, based in Tokyo, and **Robert Kushner**, based in New York, share a deep affinity for the aesthetics of traditional Japanese screen painting, in which gold has long served as a central element. Hayakawa’s systematically laid out paintings harness light to create spatial and ephemeral experiences; the final result is balanced between a gridded organization and a sweeping and natural composition. Kushner’s lush, ornamental paintings fuse gilded surfaces with floral motifs, blending Eastern and Western decorative traditions. His major work in the show uses a six panel Japanese screen as a ground for a Matisse-inspired vision of floral patterns and design.

Salle Werner Vaughn is a long-time Houston-based multimedia artist. Her work, which straddles surrealism, symbolism, and abstraction, is akin to alchemy. Vaughn’s paintings and sculptures utilize charged symbols and shapes that recall a specific history through found objects. Salle explores the

significance of decoration and its aspirations toward the sublime, belying the impact of visual culture on spirituality. Her practice delves within the devotional intimacy of sacred objects while remaining rooted in a personal, contemporary vision. Known for her installations and tableaus, Vaughn uses gold to suggest liminal spaces between the material and the ethereal.

By bringing these works of art into dialogue, ***Gold: Devotion and Desire*** invites viewers to consider how a single material has continually mediated between the spiritual and the sensual.