



PRESS RELEASE "Precious Grotesqueries: The Jewels of William Harper"

Les Enluminures Paris, 21-22, Galerie de Montpensier, Jardin du Palais-Royal, 75001 Paris
Dates: Wednesday March 4 to Friday April 10, 2026

Following the successful exhibition in our New York space, Les Enluminures Paris is honored to host an exhibition of fifteen of William Harper's artworks – "precious grotesqueries" he calls them. Yes, "artworks." They are far more than jewelry. He himself says: "I have always believed that jewelry can be about something, have content, be more substantive than mere ornament. In other words, exist as Art."

So, what is the art of William Harper about? Having worked as a practicing artist since the mid- 1960s, William Harper (b. 1944) has an extensive corpus that defies simple definition. His objects combine the precious with the utilitarian, the natural with the industrial world, the medieval era with modern times. They display a deep personal immersion in art history, yet they are by no means dryly academic or remotely historicizing. They are vivid fantasies, adventures into hidden realms, autobiographical reveries, homages to artistic heroes. Like the grotesques in the margins of medieval manuscripts, they are often strange and mysterious, yet comic and pleasing. Vibrant colors are ubiquitous, for William Harper is a supremely talented enameller. Numerous group and solo exhibitions, as well as countless awards and prizes, attest to the esteem with which William Harper's work is now held. Signature pieces can be found in major museums across the globe, including the Met, LACMA, the MFA in Boston, Cleveland Museum of Art, The Cooper Hewitt Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Schmuckmuseum in Pforzheim, and many others.

Two themes emerge in the works selected for the exhibition. One group of objects is distinctly medieval in inspiration: saints and their reliquaries. The cover image, a brooch of *The Temptation of Saint Anthony as the Artist* (1986) shows the desert saint with one eye, holding a book in the form of a mirror, wearing a halo composed of a bone, his hand and feet made up of teeth. Like Anthony, William Harper works with but one eye due to operations following detached retinas. The beautifully complex cloisonne enamel is a tribute to his immense talent. Some saints lie in their own caskets. The brooch of Archangel Michael

Please contact us for high resolution images and descriptions of the featured work of art.

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(1996, another self-portrait) nestles in a box with wood, leather, nails, bottle caps, buttons, and other found objects. He's visible through the openwork lid. The other group of objects consists of tributes to artists he admires: Cy Twombly, Jasper Johns and Edgar Munch, and Joseph Cornell. William Harper has been called the "master of the box," and the reliquaries and casks pay obvious homage to Cornell. Ever the colorist, William Harper takes Twombly's 1989 *Petals of Fire* to create his own exercise of petals in smoldering red enamel on a large brooch.

About Les Enluminures:

Founded by Dr. Sandra Hindman more than thirty years ago and with locations in Paris and Chicago, Les Enluminures has forged long-standing relationships with major museums and prestigious private collections throughout the world. Among its clients are the Met, the Getty, the National Gallery of Art, the Louvre, the Cluny, the British Museum, the British Library, and many others. It exhibits at TEFAF Maastricht, Frieze Masters, and the Winter Show. The gallery is well-known for the level of its scholarship but also for the diversity, high quality, and provenance of the works it offers for sale.

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William Harper
"The Temptation of Saint Anthony as the Artist" | 1986

"My metaphorical Self-Portraits first materialized in 1986 with The Temptation of Saint Anthony as the Artist. Fully figurative, their faces always possessed but a single eye, usually in the center of the forehead. In 1990, both of my retinas simultaneously detached. After seven surgeries and laser treatments, I have no vision whatsoever in my left eye, and somewhat limited peripheral vision in my right eye." [W.H.]



Photo credit: Steven DeVilbiss

Brooch
**Gold cloisonné enamel on fine gold and fine silver, sterling silver,
14 and 24 kt. gold, aluminum, mirror, opal, tourmaline, bone, pearls, tooth;**
178 x 63 mm

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William Harper
"Cy's Petals of Fire" | 1995

Based on Cy Twombly's painting *Petals of Fire* on 1989, this is one of a series of jewels that pay tribute to that artist. The combination of gemstone, smoldering red enamel, and high carat gold in a swirling design is dazzling.



Photo credit: Steven DeVilbiss

Brooch
Gold cloisonné enamel on fine gold and fine silver 18, 22 and 24 kt.
Gold, sterling silver, red coral tourmaline;
152 × 155 mm

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William Harper
"Beads for Morgan Le Fay" | 2004-2018

"Over the course of my 50-year career, I have created many different strands of beads, usually cloisonné enamel, high karat gold, but also other organic materials. Each strand would start as a sing lead, to me each was similar to a short musical phrase." Traditionally, beads are often amulets and talismans, and William Harper also has this in mind for his stands of beads. He says about amulets and talismans: "... at what point does the hope for supernatural protection stop and the desire for individual adornment begin." [W.H.]



Photo credit: Steven DeVilbiss

**Gold, cloisonné enamel on fine gold and fine silver,
18, 22 and 24 kt. Gold; pearl;
229 x 171 mm**

Please contact us for high resolution images and descriptions of the featured work of art.

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