

AMERICAN CONNECTION

American artist **Wendi Schneider** describes her fascinating new floral series as a 'dance between the darkness and the light' – a philosophical response to the increasingly polarised state of the world. Susan Burnstine reports.

Wendi Schneider's stunning prints are a delight to behold. Her use of pigment on kozo paper over gold or silver leaf offers a luminous and refined contemporary interpretation of both the photogravure and classic orotone, revitalising these processes for a modern audience. Best known for her seminal colour work, *States of Grace*, Schneider recently returned to her monochrome roots with her new series, *The Weight of Light*.

Schneider earned a major in painting at Newcomb-Tulane College, New Orleans, following studies in studio arts, art history and decorative arts at

Stephens College, Columbia. She went on to work as a designer and illustrator at the *Times-Picayune* in New Orleans.

'It was at that time that I purchased my first camera and began printing,' she says. 'I then merged my love for oil painting with the alchemy of the darkroom by hand-painting photographs. I began exhibiting, selling and creating covers for the newspaper's arts magazine.'

The highlight of her time at the paper was recreating the 1901 *Picayunes Creole Cookbook* for the paper's 150th anniversary, for which she handled the design, art direction and photography.

In 1988 she moved to New York City and

opened a photography business. During that period, she focused on personal work and gained representation at her first gallery, A Gallery for Fine Photography in New Orleans.

Her career expanded to include fine art commissions, editorial photography, book covers and select advertising work. In 1994 she moved to Denver, Colorado, became pregnant a year later and put her hand-painting on hold due to concerns about chemical toxicity. She continued working in editorial and corporate photography, web/print design and art direction, gradually adopting digital technology.

In 2010 she returned to her fine art practice, and in 2012 began her signature body of

work, *States of Grace*, known for its ethereal aesthetic on gilded vellum and kozo prints.

'The commitment to the unique print is central to my work,' she says. 'Each print is an exploration of the ephemeral: a unique impression, rooted in emotion, that captures the timeless essence of a fleeting moment. Just as the early hand-painted work allowed for reinterpretation, the gilding process infuses the artist's hand, creating luminous surfaces suffused with the implied spirituality of precious metals. The surfaces echo the flickering light of the original capture and continuously transform.'

Her latest series, *The Weight of Light*, is both a personal statement on aging and a philosophical response to the current state of the world. 'The series was borne from sadness for the world's diminishing values – its ethical erosion, loss of compassion and broadening division,' she says. 'I felt that the world had lost much of its colour, drawing my focus back to the foundational language of monochrome. I view the current political climate and lack of respect as stark, polarised black and white. My work in monochrome is an effort to resist that polarity, searching for the hope and nuance residing in the range of tones within the darkness – illuminating a path towards acceptance and respect.'

While these works depict flora in Denver and Aspen, Schneider says it's a metaphorical effort to find light and hope within a larger, fractured social and environmental landscape.

Her decision to depict this work in black & white reflects an evolution that integrates past experiences and processes with current ones. 'My intention is to reveal the light residing within the shadows – to find that quiet lustre that defines forms and hints at resilience, and to explore a depth of tones that mirror the corresponding depth of feeling.'

'I find myself drawn to the liminal spaces at dusk – a threshold where opposing truths can coexist, and complexity gives rise to connection. *The Weight of Light* is an exploration of the enduring power of luminescence – its profound capacity to offer respite through these essential values, both tonal and emotional, in a world yearning for illumination.'

Since 2023 Schneider has also been developing a project on Venice and Florence. The trip provided a crucial creative and emotional contrast, immediately following her experience in Israel during the 7 October tragedies. 'That work is both monochrome and subdued colour and is primarily influenced by photogravures of Venice in my collection, specifically by Steichen, Stieglitz, Coburn and Kernochan.'

This month, a collection of her work will be on view for her solo exhibition at A Gallery for Fine Photography in New Orleans.

wendischneider.com



The melancholic maple



The arched doorway



Allium I



Allium III