

FASHION PARIS SPECIAL REPORT



Victoire de Castellane is displaying a collection of 15 floral creations, all with fake Latin names, like "Crystalucinea Metha Agressi." The exhibit is at the Gagosian Gallery in Paris through March 22.



VICTOIRE DE CASTELLANE / GAGOSIAN GALLERY

A bouquet of fantastical flowers

The lacquered silver pot looks like an ice sculpture — the flowers on top dusted with diamonds like a sprinkling of snow.

But the real magic of these frozen images of nature is that they come apart, turning an art object into a nest for striking jewels.

It is fitting that the Gagosian Gallery in Paris is host to this exhibition of fantastical flowers with fake Latin names like "Quo Canis Magic Disco," or "Opium Velourosa Purpra," for a ruby, diamond and rhyolite bouquet laid in a powdered silver box.

For these objets d'art are only partly jewels designed by Victoire de Castellane. "I wanted to make precious objects and it started from the idea that when jewelry is not worn, it is hidden away. I wanted it to have another life and to be part of something that can put on display," said Ms. de Castellane, who started her jewel designing at Chanel and is now the fine jewelry creative



force for Christian Dior.

Inside their glass domes, like Victorian curiosities — but far more colorful and three-dimensional than anything from the 19th century — it is hard to understand the "performance art" of these flowers and their places of rest. A ring, with a jeweled green finger piece, can be

lifted out from its companions. The significance is that, unlike a classic jewel box, the "frame" left behind is not inert but still pulsating with creative imagination.

There is a hint of René Lalique's work in some of these wayward blooms, too colorful, too strange in shape and too decadent to be entirely "natural." But that has always been the way, even with the Dior jewels — that shapes and forms are based on nature but hyper-real in color and size.

"It doesn't interest me to make merely beautiful or pleasing things. I don't think that proposition is possible any longer," says the designer. "My jewels are propositions."

To celebrate this exhibition of 15 pieces, which took more than two years to make, a party was held at the Romanian embassy in Paris where the jewelry designer and her friends danced the night away.

The exhibit will continue through March 22. **SUZY MENKES**