

CULTURE

# STATE OF THE ART

## VAN CLEEF & ARPELS PAIRS WITH ARTIST ARTHUR HOFFNER ON AN EYE-POPPING INSTALLATION

BY JACKIE COOPERMAN

**W**HAT happens when a young, blowtorch-wielding artist meets the CEO of one of Europe's great luxury jewelry houses? A kind of whimsical, insouciant alchemy, as revealed last month in Van Cleef & Arpels' Milan boutique.

Timed to the city's Salone del Mobile design fair, Van Cleef's collaboration with French artist Arthur Hoffner (right) resulted in a gravity-defying installation that highlights the brand's *Perlée* collection. The line combines 18-k yellow, white and rose gold with diamonds as well as brightly hued stones like malachite, carnelian and turquoise. Those striking pairings spurred Hoffner's approach to the artwork.

"I really like to create a dialogue between materials, and I love to experiment with what a specific stone, metal or color is able to convey," says Hoffner, 29, a former teenage iron-working prodigy who, in the past decade, has expanded his craft to include other metals, like brass and aluminum, as well as stones like marble.

Hoffner's aesthetics immediately captivated Van Cleef president and CEO Nicolas Bos, who spotted the designer's work a year ago at the Villa Noailles Design Parade, a contemporary design show (of which Van Cleef is a partner) in Hyères, France.

"It was really natural and organic for us to link Arthur Hoffner's universe with *Perlée*'s. They both share playfulness, a touch of humor and a round aesthetic. The idea was to make them echo and respond to each other," Bos tells Alexa.

And with what Bos terms a "carte-blanche" mandate, Hoffner immersed himself in the *Perlée* collection, which is defined by its repetition of luminous 18-karat golden beads, often flanked by vibrant stones and diamonds.

This year, Van Cleef & Arpels added a long, transformable, yellow-gold necklace — with three interchangeable rings of hand-polished turquoise, onyx and coral beads — to the range. The company is also introducing four watches, along with pendants, rings and earrings with gold and hard-stone cabochons. The entire line is designed to be mixed and matched, creating breezy jeweled compositions of varying color and size.

Building a stage for these jewels forced Hoffner to develop a "secret" engineering process, which he perfected over six months. The result (below right) was on display in Van Cleef's Milan store through April, with plans in the works for the installation to travel to other cities.

"The main challenge was to create the feeling of movement, of something dynamic, with static objects," he says. "I wanted my pieces to express the idea behind a pearl: It can roll, it can disappear inside a tube, it can slide along a slope. It was also quite challenging to create an interesting dialogue between very precious, eye-catching jewels and my own work, which uses some very everyday elements, like sponges."

Working within the confines of the boutique windows, Hoffner took inspiration from the Milan-based Memphis Group (Ettore Sottsass' 1980s design collaborative) and its candy-colored aesthetic and pop sensibilities. He built a system of aqua, pink and yellow spheres, cones and boxes — all balanced on each other — to act as showcases for the *Perlée* jewels.

"One of the ideas behind the project is indeed playing," the artist explains. "Playing with the combination of various shapes and elements, playing with happy and intense colors, playing with different scales of 'pearls,' playing with the feeling of precarious equilibrium. The whole installation is also a kind of treasure hunt to find allusions and hints to find the golden pearl."

For his own treasure hunt, Hoffner looked to the Milan boutique's extensive holdings of classic Van Cleef & Arpels pieces, including, to his delight, the 1980s Zip "Lampion" necklace, festooned with diamonds, emeralds, rubies and pearls set in 18-karat yellow gold.

"I am very happy about the feeling you have when you get into the shop," he says. "You first see the tiny and shiny pearls of the jewels in the windows, and as you walk into the space, you discover colorful and bigger pearls from my work that spread into many places. That's what I tried to create: to feel like the spirit behind the *Perlée* collection materialized in front of you."



**LEFT:** Van Cleef & Arpels' "Perlée Couleurs" pendant with coral set in 18-k yellow gold, \$20,100

**BELOW:** Van Cleef & Arpels' "Perlée Couleurs" ring with malachite set in 18-k yellow gold, \$2,230, and earrings with turquoise set in 18-k white gold, \$3,700

**BELOW LEFT:** Arthur Hoffner's bold installation at Van Cleef & Arpels' Milan boutique takes inspiration from the brand's *Perlée* baubles.

PHOTOS BY TIMO MERZIG, COURTESY OF VAN CLEEF & ARPELS



GEM-FLUENCERS

### KYLE ANDERSON

(@kyleeditor)

A former top style editor at Elle and Marie Claire, the Sweden-born New Yorker is now a fashion and creative director who models on the side

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN KENZIE



Instagram followers: 184,000

**Signature jewel style:** Small, personal pieces with sentimental significance; my husband and I wear matching black bracelets from Messika's Move collection.

**Celeb jewelry icons:** When Rihanna started wearing major statement pieces, she made traditional high jewelry look young and fresh. And over the past few years, male stars like Z Chanz have taken their daily diamond obsessions to social media, showing off

their latest pieces.

**Styling secret:** If you don't own anything rose gold, consider it. The color looks good on every skin tone, unlike yellow or platinum, which some people don't feel match their complexion.

**Must-haves for men:** I especially like when a guy wears a small bracelet that he never takes off, like a cord bracelet with a small diamond. But there's no limit! If it makes you feel good — isn't that what it's all about?

—Andrew Sessa

Z Chanz



Messika Paris' "Move Titanium" black bangle, \$1,860

PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES, COURTESY OF MESSIKA PARIS