

Sarah Bedford's recent paintings and collages explore the visionary, metaphoric potential of floral still life. Alternately schematic and mystical, organic and hard-edged, her abstracted depictions of flowers, roots, chalices, arrows, and crystals, among other forms, pulse with a life force both otherworldly and generative.

In some of the paintings, these elements interlock to form geometric patterns that flatten and activate space, aided by the graphic use of black and white. In others, black velvety grounds predominate, livened by acid-hued blues, jewel-tones, and splashes of neon-orange, their forms floating in a celestial void.

While modernist references to the work of Marsden Hartley, Arthur Dove, and Fernand Léger abound, a more intuitive and esoteric hand can also be seen – one inspired by the likes of Hilda Klimt and Martin Ramirez. As Bedford has stated, "My chunky, clunky floral forms appear angular, sharp, smudged, crumpled – anything but soft and ideal. So too, my black paper collages, featuring oily lipstick, spray paint, and shredded bits of disco fabric, suggest the work of someone possessed, or driven."

The 19th-century landscape tradition of *sous-bois*, popularized by the Barbican school, is of equal influence. These landscapes captured the lush undergrowth of forest floors, with their mossy tree roots and molding leaves, and as Van Gogh's forays suggest, evoked portals to a magical world. The ghostly outlines of dead plants, auratic haloes of color, reflective textiles, and loamy glitter in Bedford's works illuminate the same dark and mysterious realm.

Like the chalice that appears in many of the paintings, symbolizing not only consecration, but in the artist's words a desire to "hold, rather than contain", the material world embodied by these still lifes is elevated and transcended through Bedford's sensual alchemy of decay.

by Jane Ursula Harris