



David Leaser, Los Angeles fine art photographer, creates iconic Hollywood closeups of flowers reminiscent of 17th century Dutch Golden Age botanical art.

# The Intimate Glamour of Flowers

Modern photographic mandalas show flowers from a bees-eye view

BY JOHN MENDELSON

Art has always asked us to pay attention to the world in all its darkness and in all its outrageous beauty. David Leaser's *Nightflowers*, a series of striking photographs, confronts us with nature at its most flamboyant. He shows us one individual bloom at a time, enormously enlarged. These giclée images, often frontal and centered on 44" square canvases, present themselves as both objective and poetic. They are highly detailed visual records and an artist's vision of how he apprehends reality.

Leaser's work can be seen in the tradition of botanical illustration, the eye of art in service of science. At the same, we notice the perfection of each flower, its vivid color and its glowing luminosity. The photographs' shallow depth of field creates a heightened sense of immediacy and dimensionality, as the flowers emerge from the surrounding blackness. Leaser has enhanced the images to maximize their detail and visual impact. The result is a kind of intimate glamour, with each bloom celebrated as an icon, distinctly ready for its close-up.

Leaser's flowers are both domestic and exotic varieties, ranging from the simple daisy, to the seductive hibiscus, to the fabulously patterned flowering maple. His titles for the images of these flowers, respectively *Serenity*, *Hawaiian Sunset* and *Tiger's Eye*, indicate his poetic intent. Leaser is asking us to transform our vision of reality both in scale and in quality. We assume an insect's-eye view, and allow the ordinary to become an object of wonder. This transformation extends to seeing in a flower the whole world beyond it. A showy dahlia suggests a cosmic supernova and pineapple leaves seen from above become a psychedelic starburst.

In Leaser's flowers we can see the affinity he feels for the flower painters of the 17th century Dutch Golden Age, with their closely observed bouquets brilliant against the darkness of space. In his images, this photographer creates fantastic, contemporary signs from nature's own high style. They become vibrant, nearly abstract mandalas, prompting us to recognize in them the oneness of creation and the vitality of its inexhaustible invention. \*

---

*John Mendelsohn* is based in New York and reviews contemporary art for *ArtNet*, *Sculpture Magazine*, *dArt International*, *Cover Magazine* and *The Jewish Week*, as well as essays for exhibition catalogues. He has contributed to the forthcoming book, *A Book of Images: Reflections on Symbols*, to be published by Taschen in conjunction with the Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism at the C.G. Jung Institute, New York. He teaches in the Studio Art Program at Fairfield University.