

Style

Artist Melissa McGill, Who Once Brought a Regatta to Venice, Makes Waves with a New Show at Vacheron Constantin

McGill's contemplative new work was commissioned for Vacheron Constantin's "The Art of Beauty" exhibition.

William Van Meter, April 27, 2022



These Waters is on view at Vacheron Constantin through September. (Courtesy of the Artist Melissa McGill and TOTAH)

Nestled in a vestibule in Midtown Manhattan is an oasis of glistening waters: five glass panels of varied heights are printed with images of rippling water and overlaid atop one another.

Light pours through the panes and projects a glowing blue tint on the walls behind them that they lean on, subtly pulling the space into the artwork.

“I wanted the work to engulf you and act as a portal, transforming the space its installed in,” the artist, Melissa McGill, told Artnet News. The piece, titled *These Waters*, is a commission for the show “Anatomy of Beauty,” which is open through September at the Vacheron Constantin flagship. “The viewer is both reflected in the work and swept into it. The size and placement of each glass panel evokes the rise and fall of the tides.”

Although it may look primordial and mystical, the waters depicted here are images of the Hudson River, near the upstate New York town where McGill resides.

Her scope ranges from hyperlocal to interstellar. “*These Waves* has a cosmic dimension,” she explained, “connecting to the way waves ripple with starlight in the sun connecting heaven and earth.”



A detail of *These Waters*. Courtesy of Melissa McGill and TOTAH.

At last week's preview, servers orbited with trays of porcelain spoons with charred octopus atop artichoke puree and king crab, garnished with nasturtium leaves. The exhibition melds art with a selection of the company's watches, including magnificent archival vintage timepieces displayed in cases atop images of coral. The sparkle depicted in the artwork is a reverberating motif in the jewels and precious metals of the surrounding fine watches. There were also subtle design parallels, such as a standout 1822 gold pocket watch with multi-colored amethysts in a delicate wave pattern.



An 1822 yellow gold pocket watch expertly set with amethysts stones in a delicate wave pattern. Courtesy of Vacheron Constantin.

The show seemed to compare and contrast nature’s perfection and intricacy with man’s attempt to achieve that beauty through art and craftsmanship.

“Anatomy of Beauty” is the latest art extension of the venerable brand, which was founded in 1755. Other artists that have previously been featured for Constantin Vacheron are sculptor Chris Burden, photographer Cory Richards, and the playful pop artist Jojo Anavim.

On the wall next to the entrance is an imposing large-scale sculpture depicting coral, oversized watch parts, and magnifying glasses. The work, *Our Changing Seas III*, is on loan from marine conservationist and artist Courtney Mattison.



Melissa McGill by Ellis Michael Quinn.

McGill’s work similarly has a decidedly eco-conscious slant. “*These Waters* aims to inspire conversation about our changing climate, rising seas, and the preciousness of water—our life

force,” she said. “Through the language of water, viewers are reminded of being one with the natural world, not separate from it.”

These Waters is McGill’s largest work on glass, but it is not her most grandiose expression. Often inspired by nature, the interdisciplinary artist’s 2019 *Red Regatta* piece, filled Venice’s canals with 52 traditional *vela al terzo* boats with crimson, hand-painted sails (she then documented the sails’ reflections upon the waters in a photographic extension).



Red Regatta Reflessi: The artist reflects upon her armada. Courtesy of the artist Melissa McGill and TOTAH.

Constellation was a sculpture project where LED lights were positioned atop poles to mimic stars in the sky. “My work takes the form of site-specific, immersive experiences that explore nuanced conversations between water, land, sustainable traditions in the spirit of reciprocity and interconnectedness,” McGill said. “Walking along the liminal space of the Hudson River in the Hudson Valley where I live is a daily ritual. Over the past two years, I have been making a new body of work based on my year-round personal observations of the Hudson as an enduring life-force.”