

SOURABH GUPTA

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Sourabh Gupta is a designer, architect and artist based out of a studio in Harlem, perhaps best known for the paper flowers he makes there. His path into this unusual practice was as organic and wild as the flowers he replicates, but it all started with a garden. As a boy in Kashmir, Gupta created a verdant rooftop garden, replete with thirty-three bonsai trees and hundreds of plants (which his mother now tends while he's in New York). Because there was nowhere to buy pots for the plants nearby, he made them himself. "Everything that I wanted to create, to decorate, I had to make myself," he says. "That's where the concept of making something started in my life." He accepted plants and flowers from friends' gardens and grafted them onto plants in his own, which, he says, "gave me time to grow and surround myself with nature" and "to study and understand it." Inspired, he made paper flowers to decorate the church at his Catholic school.

Gupta moved away from home to study architecture in India before moving to New York to study at Parsons School of Design. There, he met designer Stephen Earle, who one day took him to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to see an exhibition called *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination*. He said the textiles reminded him of the paper flowers he made as a child. After the exhibition, Earle gifted Gupta some paper, and Gupta started making flowers again—and it filled his life. "There's so much diversity in flowers, so much expression, that you hunger for more—to find the next color, shape, smell. There's something new

and fresh about every single flower." He gave his constructions away to his friends, who loved them because they could "survive" in the lightless rooms of their New York apartments. "Nature was there with them," Gupta says.

His interest in recreating botanically-accurate flowers (as opposed to purely decorative ones) intensified after a particularly inspirational trip to the gardens of the Hamptons. "It was too much for me to understand—in terms of color, anatomy, structure. And, of course, my architecture side always comes in. When I see something, I see it in parts. When I see that many components in flowers—that many layers—it's even more enticing for me to know how it is put together." After the garden tour, he spent his whole Christmas holiday constructing a single thistle plant.

Now, his architectural and botanical interests have dovetailed. He has dozens of books on botany and spends a lot of time thinking about structure as beauty. "There's so much in the gesture, how pieces are attached, the scale. There is something magnificent about a whole plant. It almost looks like poetry." (Right now, he says, he's most interested in the Wild Oak Leaf Hydrangea.) And, like any good designer or artist, he's interrogated his own fascination, leading him to more existential questions that verge on Shakespearean. *What makes a flower a flower*, he now wonders—if it had any other smell, shape, or color, would it still be a flower? The path forward for Gupta, it seems, will be as whimsical and inspiring as his garden high above the Kashmiri streets: "I experiment," he said of the constructed flowers. "I push them to a fantasy."





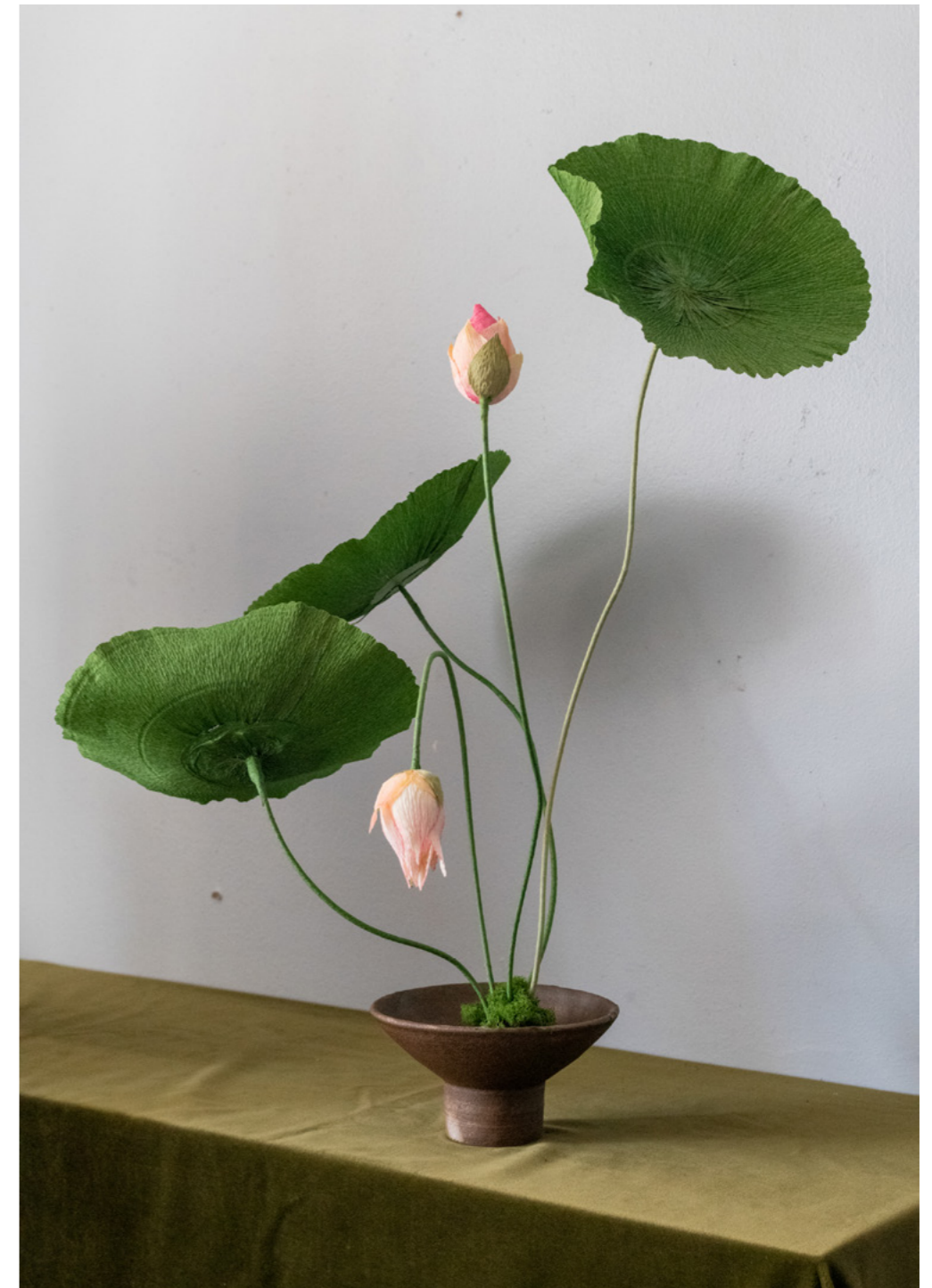
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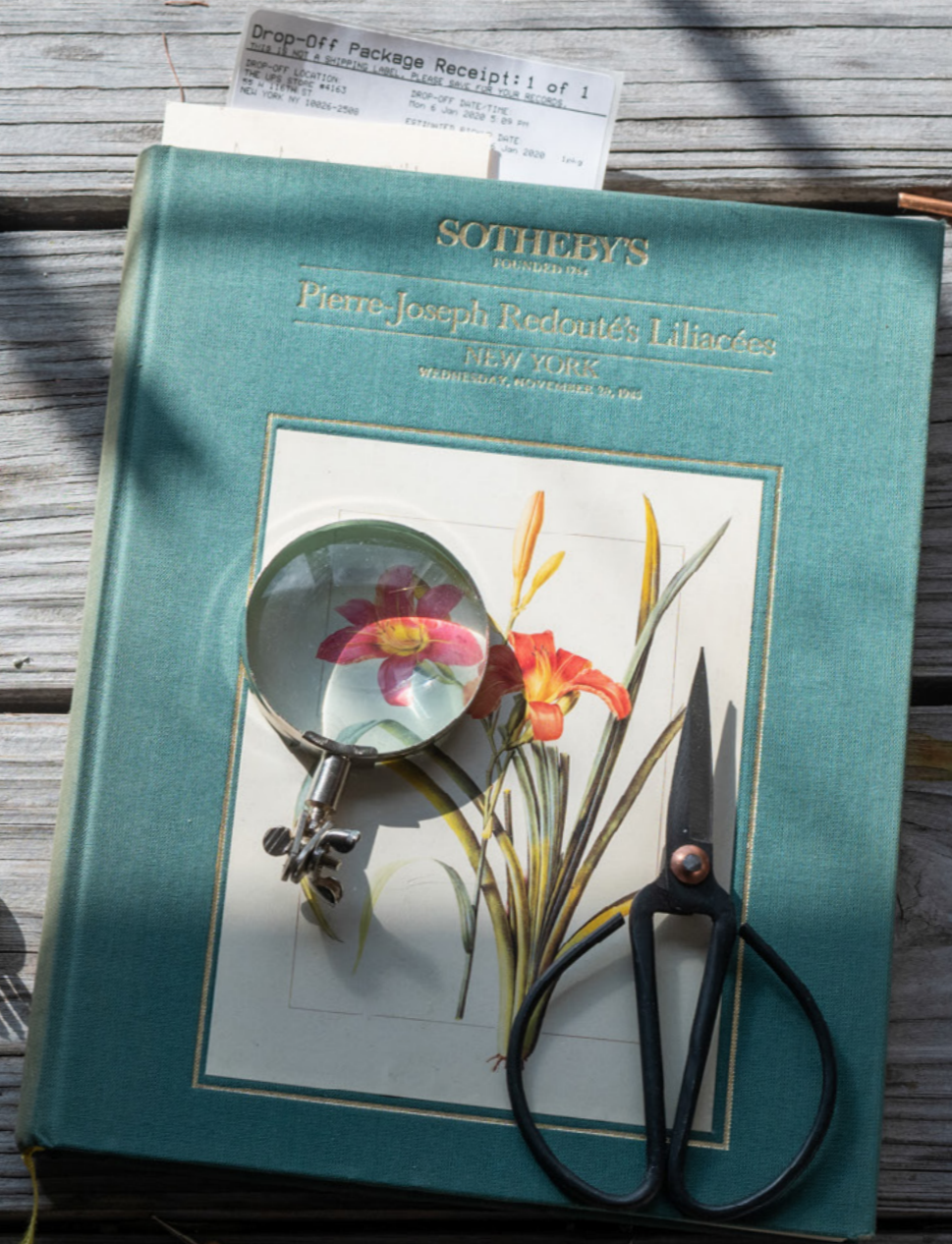
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