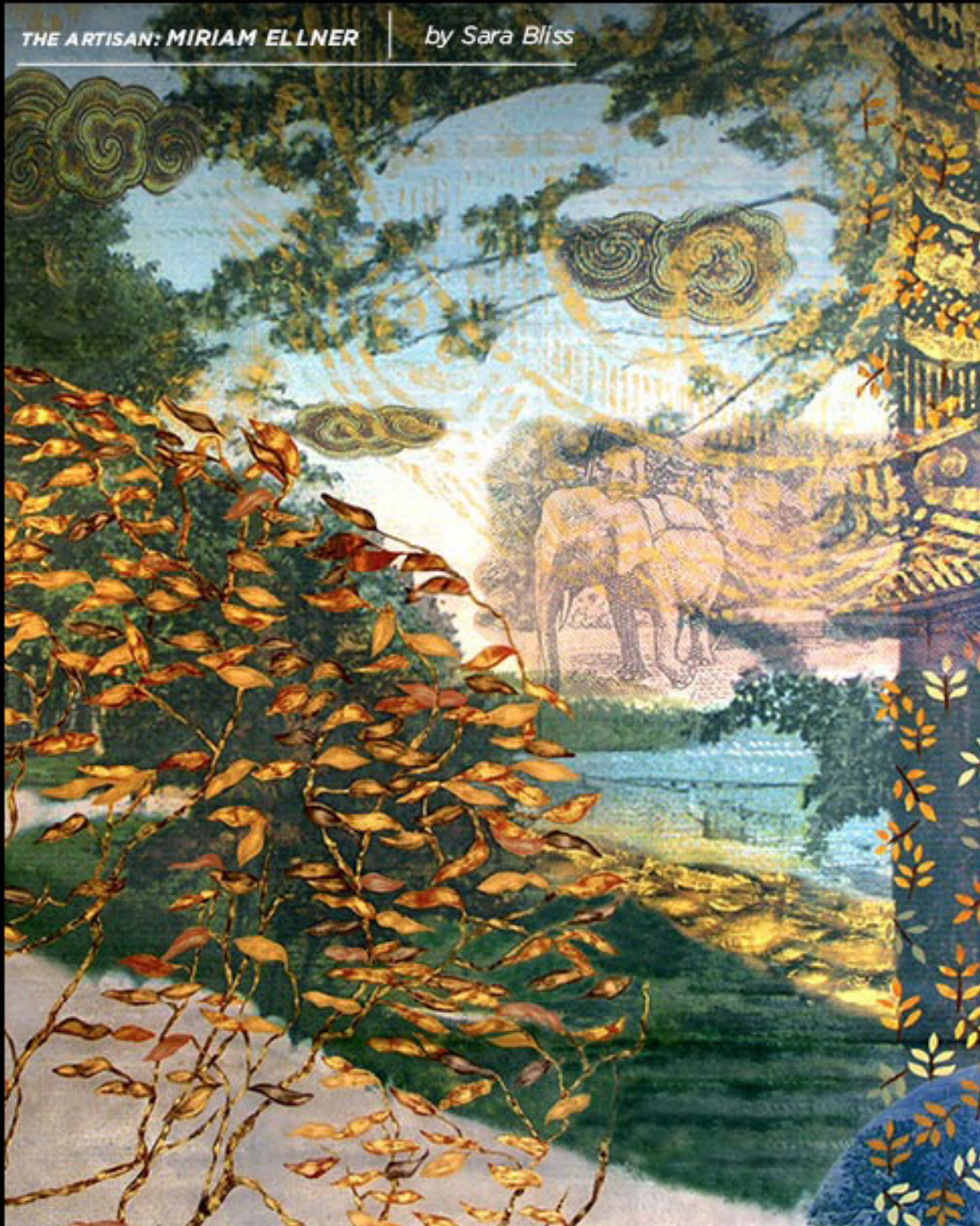




THE ARTISAN: MIRIAM ELLNER | by Sara Bliss



IN THE HEART OF MANHATTAN'S
CHELSEA DISTRICT, SURROUNDED BY THE
BUSTLING CONTEMPORARY GALLERY SCENE,
MIRIAM ELLNER'S ATELIER PRODUCES AN
**ANCIENT ART—
VERRE ÉGLOMISÉ.**

Dating back to the Roman era, verre églomisé is the technique of gilding precious metals onto the reverse side of glass, a craft that enjoyed bursts of popularity in pre-Renaissance Italy, late-18th-century Russia and the Art Deco period. Today, Ellner is undoubtedly one of the stars in her field.

A one-time modern dancer born in New York City, Ellner was introduced to the method in the 1990s in Brussels, where she was studying decorative painting and gilding. It has been her passion and livelihood ever since. For Ellner, discovering verre églomisé was akin to falling in love. "Once I started, I was in heaven," she admits. Finding her work heavenly, too, are such top designers as Michael Smith, Tony Ingrao, Bunny Williams, David Easton and Jeffrey Bilhuber, who have all commissioned Ellner to create eye-catching furniture, mirrors or wall panels for their interiors projects.

A master of verre églomisé — in which precious metals are gilded onto glass — Miriam Ellner creates pieces, like the one here, admired by the country's most notable designers. Studio photos by Stephanie Vanamee, all other images courtesy of Miriam Ellner



Ellner relies on an arsenal of materials to create her art, including moon gold, red gold, palladium, white gold, 22-karat gold, mica powder and crushed abalone. And verre églomisé requires extensive labor and time, likely one of the reasons it is such a niche art. It demands not only artistic skill, but also patience: Pieces take anywhere from six weeks to six months to complete. Ellner begins the process by applying a gilding liquor to the reverse side of a piece of glass, using it to adhere leaves of precious metal she carefully affixes with a brush. She next etches in designs, often enhancing them with paint.

The results are breathtaking, each piece and pattern heightened by the combination of glass, glittering materials, color and light. "Verre églomisé is all about the light: It changes in the light, like a moving painting that is never static," Ellner says.

At work in her Chelsea atelier, Ellner creates her designs by hand, applying leaves of precious metals to the back of glass, then etching in patterns.

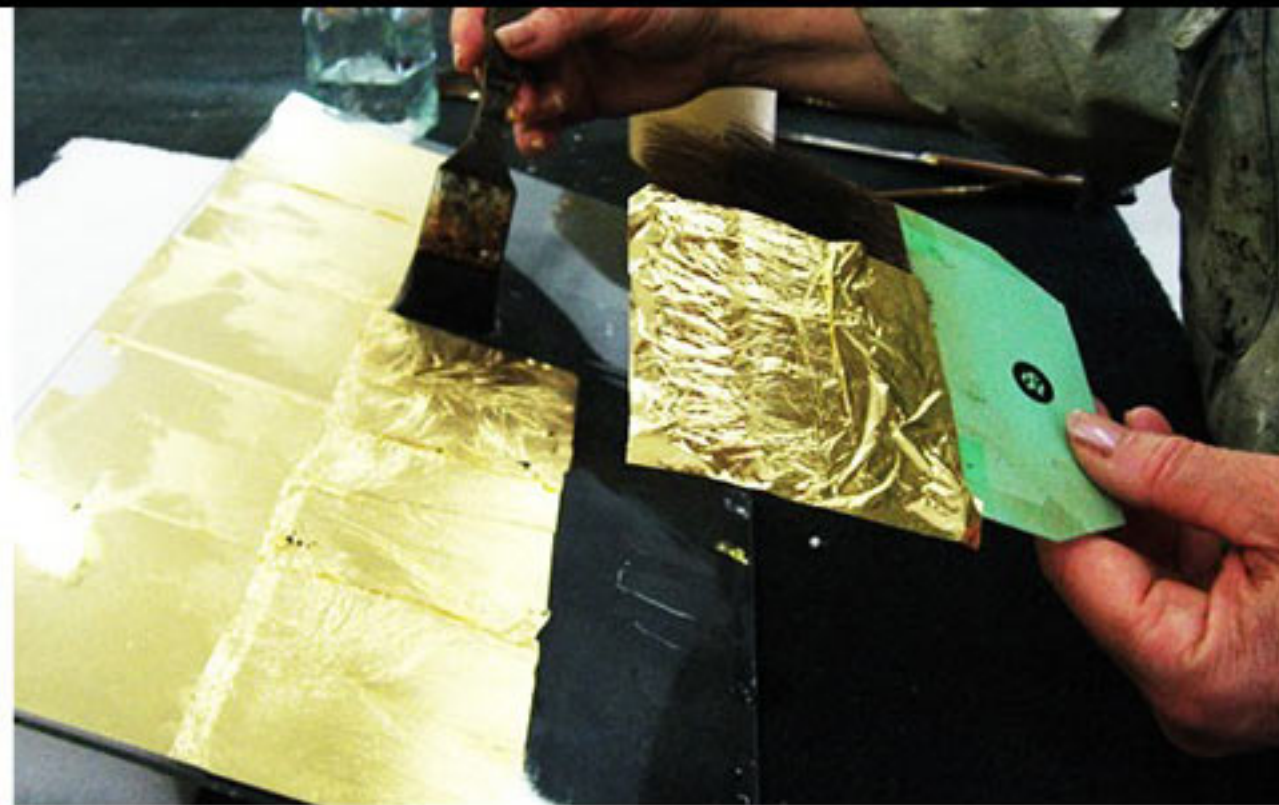




Ellner's range of applications — she skillfully creates entire rooms of decorative glass, along with doors, ceilings, window panels, glass paintings, mirrors, tabletops, desks and kitchen backsplashes — is matched by her ability to translate verre églomisé to any style, whether historic or contemporary. From a glass painting done in a Russian neoclassical style to a mod coffee table with a graphic and modern circular motif, it seems there is no look Ellner cannot master. "I really love to be able to go from style to style, from something simple to something intricate," she says. "It is one of my strengths."

Here, Ellner gives 1stdibs a tour of five recent projects that show the diversity of her compelling craft.

The London interior designer David Collins commissioned five long panels — water gilded in 22-karat gold-leaf and shaded by hand to create a classic wave pattern — for the new Alexander McQueen boutique in Miami.



Tools of the trade, from top left: Ellner's variety of precious raw materials; applying metallic leaf to a glass panel; brushes with greatness, scaled for a variety of jobs; Ellner at work, etching an intricate pattern onto a smaller-size piece.

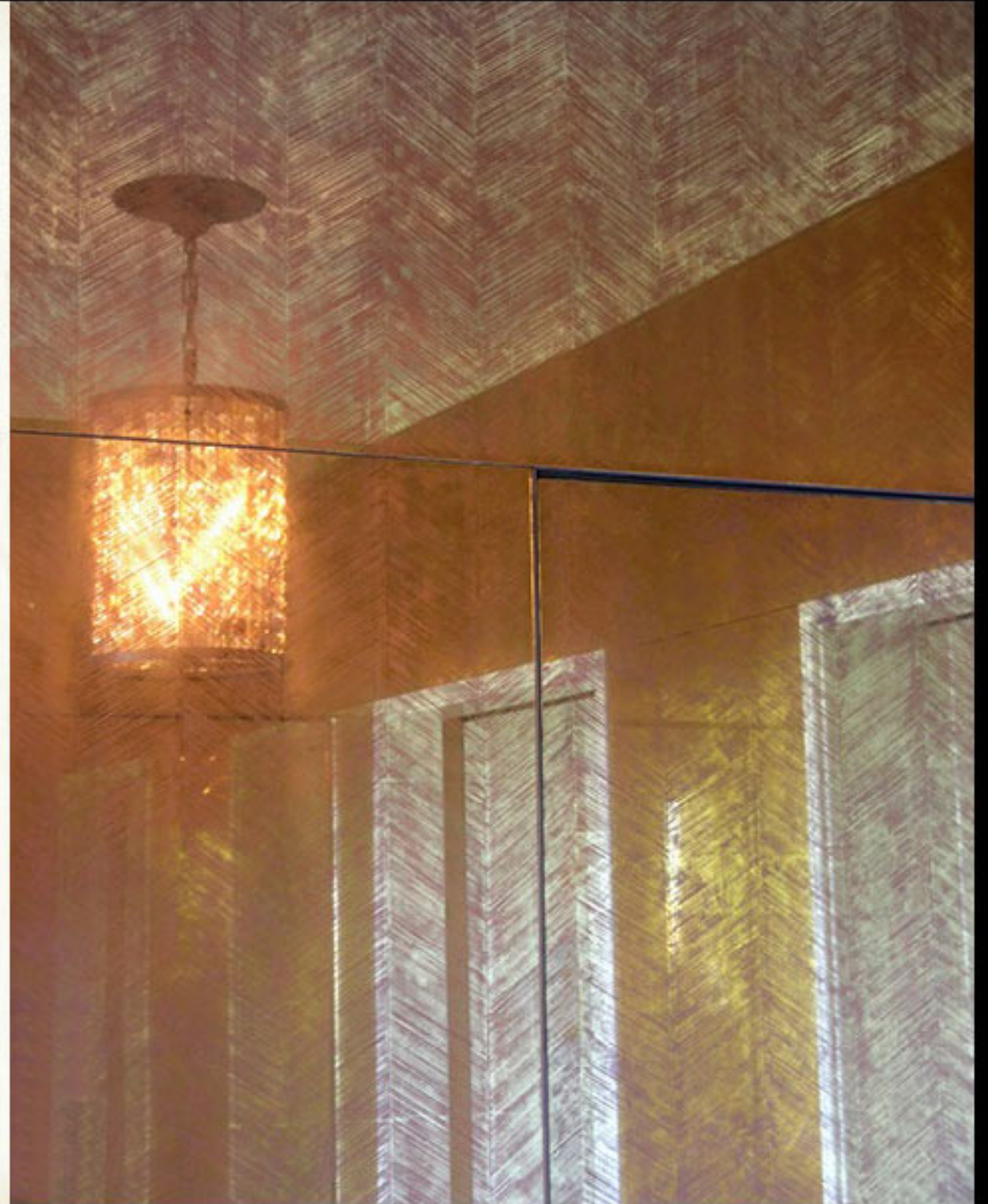


HERRINGBONE ENTRY

for Jeffrey Bilhuber, New York



A subtle, yet graphic herringbone pattern — made all the more dazzling by the reflective qualities of the glass — creates a stunning entrance to a Fifth Avenue apartment designed by Jeffrey Bilhuber. The warm bronze glow of the floor-to-ceiling panels owes to Ellner's layering of gold leaf with mica powders. "You get all these modulations of color," says Ellner of mixing different powders together with gold. "It's a textural thing that happens, one color comes through another to create another."





CHINOISERIE BATHROOM

at the Plaza Hotel, New York



When designing the powder room in an apartment in the Plaza Hotel, Ellner took inspiration from the Asian art, artifacts and traditional screens in the owners' collection. The abundance of floral and plant motifs, especially those from the couple's native China, motivated Ellner to create a floor-to-ceiling chinoiserie design. She coated the glass panels entirely in gold leaf and then added color with reverse painting, a combination of techniques that gives a luminous shimmer to each flower.



SKY CEILING

for Celerie Kemble, New York



"When I thought about creating a sky, it lit my imagination," Ellner says about the arresting ceiling she did for designer Celerie Kemble's wood-paneled library at the 2011 Kip's Bay Decorator Show House. "I love that it isn't just a sky," continues Ellner, who incorporated willows, gold waves and cherry blossoms into the 15-by-17-foot space. "I added all these other elements. They give it a certain mystery." Ellner layered various types of gold to create a moody and otherworldly atmosphere. "All those different hues of gold gave the sky the life and depth it needed."





MOORISH PANELS

for Sean Johnson, New York



To bring an exotic element to a Park Avenue living room, Ellner created two Moorish-inspired glass panels to hang on either side of a fireplace. She created an impression of depth by layering two pieces of glass, each with its own distinctive motif. "The lower pattern I created is more circular while the top is more geometric," says Ellner. "I wanted to juxtapose the two." Palladium leaf and mica powders create the pale blue and silvery hues that link the two motifs together.



CIN CIN BY THE SEA

for Stephanie Barnes, Barbados



For a Caribbean restaurant with an ocean view, Ellner knew the local light and complex reflections would work beautifully with this graphic wall panel. As it is the restaurant's main wall, the owners wanted Ellner's panel to make a statement. "We went with something bolder and geometric, and it impacted the room so dramatically," she says.

