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VISUAL ARTS & ARCHITECTURE: Spirit of Baudelaire, Matisse flows

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REVIEW

"Luxe, Calme et Volupte"

Through Aug. 25. 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays. Prices: \$975-\$35,000. Marcia Wood Gallery, 263 Walker St., Atlanta. 404-827-0030, www.marciawoodgallery.com.

Verdict: Intelligent and pleasurable.

Order and beauty form the organizing principle in an engaging new exhibition at Marcia Wood Gallery curated by artist and writer Joanne Mattera. She borrows her concept from 19th-century French poet Charles Baudelaire and his poem "L'Invitation au Voyage" ("Invitation to the Voyage").

In his ode to the ideals of physical and spiritual harmony, Baudelaire depicts a world where "all is order and beauty — luxury, calm and sensual pleasure." So affecting is the poet's lyricism, Henri Matisse used the phrase *luxe, calme et volupte* to title his painting of 1904-05 that epitomizes the luxuriant artworks of the brief Fauvist period.

Mattera's 15 participating artists adhere, each in different ways, to the tenets of beauty presented by Baudelaire, while incorporating aesthetic aspects of Matisse's celebrated painting.

German-born Rainer Gross offers "Espinal Twins," a gorgeous diptych in celestial blues speckled with red, white and touches of orange. His pocked, crumbling surfaces play tricks on the eye — flowing and atmospheric, hues change as you move toward them — an effect accomplished through the artist's unusual and meticulous method of creating two panels simultaneously.

Tim McFarlane's "All That Could Be" is a delicious abstraction in shades of red, raspberry and ruby. Its lush layering and visible dripping enhance the painting's luminous quality. Loose, interlocking forms stagger across the canvas like bright chains of paper clips. The resulting image is an urban, architectural and fluid landscape.

David Ambrose begins each intricate work on paper with hundreds of tiny pinpricks. His mandalas are washed with watercolor and ornate patterning, recalling Baudelaire's references to "Oriental splendor." Exotic and mesmerizing, "Southeastern Elevation" tempers its elaborate detail with rich, dark tones and areas for the eye to rest.

From a distance, Robert Sagerman's three-dimensional oils are rhythmic and textural. Meditation of a different sort, a closer look shows gobs of paint curled into sculptural twists and drips. The artist methodically counts each highly repetitive stroke, then titles the piece with his final tally. Achieving a kind of bridled exuberance, "8,210" is both sumptuous and restrained — a managed blitz of strong and varied color.

Additional pleasures are on view. Rose Olson's iridescent panels transform in shifting light; Frances Barth's spatially intriguing vistas are filled with calm; and Donna Sharrett's delicate assemblages of rings, beads and straight pins make for dreamy geometric compositions.

Using Baudelaire and Matisse as a springboard for contemporary expression, Mattera's dual premise for themes of duality is both clever and effective. Fastidious process (order) is essential to aesthetic outcome (beauty). Mattera's selections are smart and pleasing in a show that combines control and creativity, visual and tactile harmony, and individual refrains of *luxe, calme et volupte*.