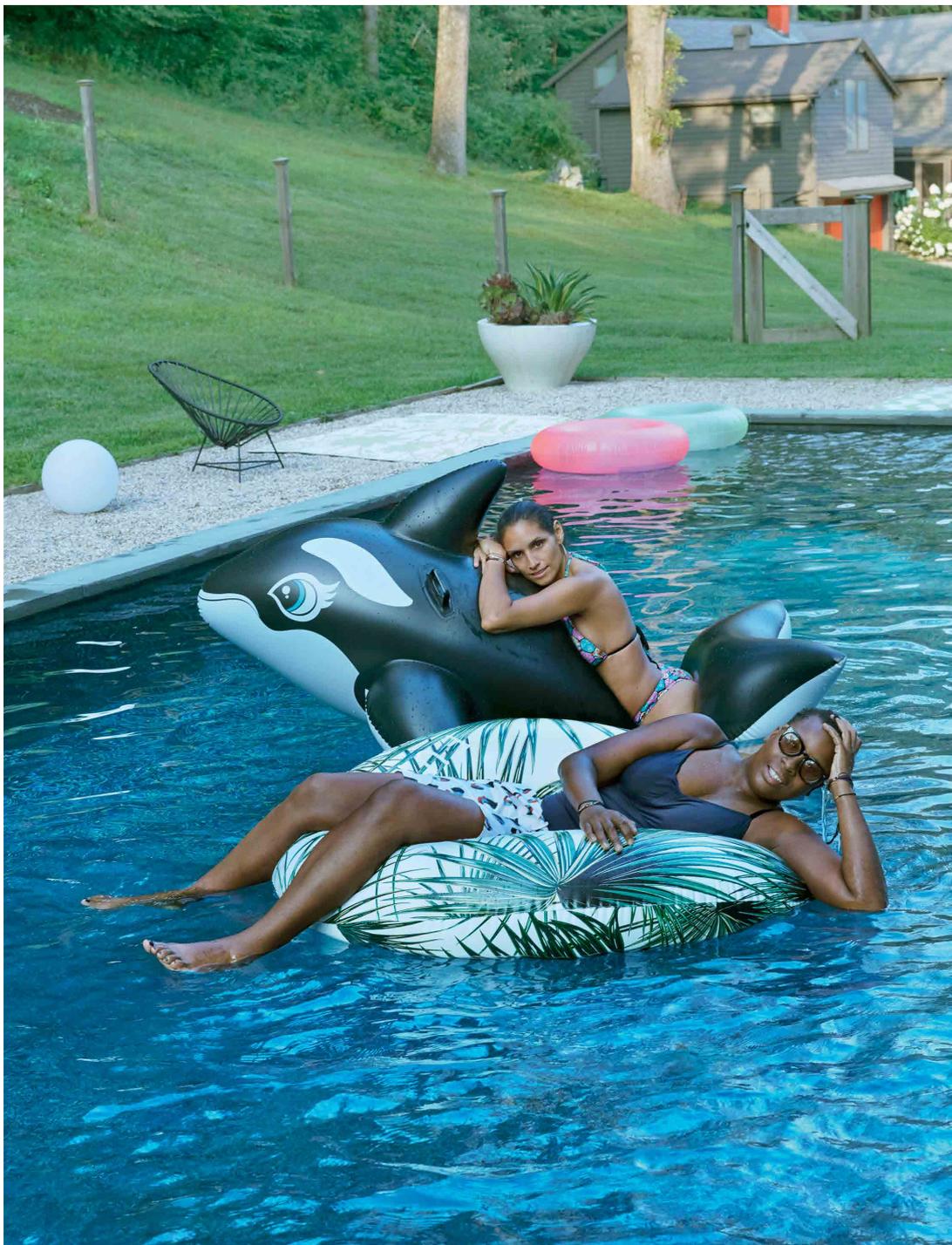


UPSTATE DIARY



HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS

Mickalene Thomas / Sean Kelly / Judy Pfaff / Mary McCartney / Donald Judd's *Casa Perez*
 Terhi Tolvanen / Brice Marden / Letha Wilson / Georgie Hopton / Kirsten Owen



Interview [Glenn Adamson](#) Photography [Carlton Davis](#)

Reinvented Nature

The work of Terhi Tolvanen is a reminder of jewelry's great virtue: it compresses whole worlds into small spaces. Her particular microcosms are organic in character, taken from the forests and fields of France, where she now lives, and her native Finland. Looking at them, you can almost hear the birdsong.

Glenn Adamson *How do you like living in the French countryside?*

Terhi Tolvanen I had been working at home, and the house was so isolated that the only person I would see during the week was the postwoman. She is a very nice, and we would always talk, but she's meant to be working! (Laughing) So now I have the studio here in Montmorillon, a small town about 15 minutes by car.

GA *I guess the location is important for your work?*

TT Yes. Quiet, not a lot of distraction. It's about 20 years now I am working on the same theme. I'm from Finland, where there is lots of nature and we are not so many people; having a country house is a common situation. Even in Helsinki, the central park is a big forest. You're living much more with nature in everyday life. Then I moved to Amsterdam, to go to school. It was strange to realize that a lot of their nature is manmade.

GA *Centuries ago, in fact.*

TT The forests were planted for kings so they could hunt. If you travel by train, you can see the trees are in perfect rows. And the canals — very nice for me, because Finland is a water country. So that was where I began working on the dialogue between human and nature.

GA *How does jewelry fit into that theme?*

TT It has been part of jewelry since the beginning. Flowers, bouquets, and ornamentation — it is in the tradition. For me, though, it started because of materials. The main one is wood, branches which I let be the inspiration for the pieces. What I like best is what I call *garden wood*, which has been pruned a lot. I need wood where there is a lot happening — it needs to be curvy, but small in scale so it can go round the neck.

GA *You also use precious stones in unusual ways.*

TT I make flowers with pearls, which I cut with facets — pearls are very perfect, and I wanted to change the appearance. Also, when you have colored or dark pearls, they have been in a color bath; I never know what will happen when I cut into them. I use other stones in their mineral form, chosen for their expressive properties. I am looking not only for color and texture, but movement. I'm very fond of green and blue. Green for me stands for moss; blue is more of a water thing.

GA *In effect, you're working in partnership with nature.*

TT Yes, it's a dance. I feel I should go along with materials, not work against them. What I'm trying to do is isolate the best in the material, to use it in a logical way.

GA *Logical is an interesting word to use — it seems more intuitive to me.*

TT Well, it has to do with technique. I don't try to do something that the material doesn't want to do. But there is a lot of intuition, too, especially in how I combine things. It's a question of composition, tension.

GA *Do people actually wear your jewelry? Or do collectors buy it to admire, then put it in a drawer?*

TT Yes, people do wear it, and that is important to me. I make everything on a mannequin, even brooches. I like my pieces

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to have suction on the body. To fall in the shape of the neck.

GA *You've recently had an exhibition at Ornamentum Gallery, a leading venue for conceptual jewelry.*

TT My theme for this show was flowers. I have been buying silk for 15 years, using it as an inspirational material. But the big danger is that before you know it you're making hat flowers, which of course is not the goal at all. I would take the silk out once a year, to see if I could manage to make something, but I never really got there. This time, I really concentrated on the material; it means using bright colors, a new challenge for me. I mostly use dark wood, sometimes burning it, to get melancholic tones. For this show I wanted to get away from that.

GA *What kind of imagery are you using?*

TT It became about personal flower stories. One is *An Afternoon With Claude*, which refers to Monet's *Water Lilies*. I saw those paintings for the first time when I was 18 years old. I don't know if I understood it then, but in retrospect, I realized the power that art can have. Then there's a piece called *Midsummer Night*. In Finland, half the year is so very dark, so people go to their summer cottages with friends and family, to make good food, go to sauna, party all night. And there is the Midsummer celebration where single girls go out and pick seven different flowers. You put them under your pillow, and dream about your future lover. So I made this necklace with seven flowers.

GA *How was your work received here in the U.S.?*

TT The pieces are big, so it's seen as sculptural. I don't know if there is a better understanding of contemporary jewelry here — there's a deep understanding in Europe — but in America ladies dare to wear it. In other countries it's much more modest.

GA *And how does it feel to be back?*

TT An exhibition is always a big project. It took me 5 months to make the pieces, 1000 hours, though you can never count how much work it really is. Then the long trip, with so many impressions, and suddenly the airplane brings you back home, and everything seems so small. It took me a whole week to unwind. Then I cleaned up the studio, to get back to normal. So, yes. I have been cleaning. ■

Terhi Tolvanen is represented by ornamentumgallery.com

Glenn Adamson, is a curator focused on the intersection of design, craft and art. glennadamson.com

Previous spread: A statement from nature; *Midsummer Night* neckless in silk, hornbeam wood, silver and paint by Terhi Tolvanen. **Opposite:** The *Anatomy of a Rose* brooch in silk, amber, wood, cement and silver. The *Ghost* brooch in silk, wood, paint and silver. All jewelry by Terhi Tolvanen.





Above: The *Flores Nubis* neckless in pearwood, cherry wood, pearls and silk.
Opposite: The *Abre à Papillion* brooch in silk, heather wood, cement and silver. Available at Ornementum Gallery.

