

SELECTIONS

summer feel



BY KARAH BYRNS



Caroline Dechamby



IN LIVING COLOUR

CAROLINE DECHAMBY BRINGS BEAUTY TO BEIRUT

With paintings full of colour and passion, former Dutch model Caroline Dechamby shares her optimism and lust for life with the rest of the world. Her paintings often feature bold, bright images of flowers, butterflies, and pop art subjects. More controversially, her paintings over the last seven years have also almost always featured herself, back turned to the viewer as she paints, an enigmatic, well-proportioned blond with a bob that is as bouncy as her jubilant and upbeat personality. "It happened as an experiment, and people really liked it," she recalled. "It has become my concept, and through this people can easily identify and authenticate my work. This sense of humour cannot be copied." For Dechamby, the self-portrait is not egocentric, but merely emphasises the idea of an anonymous woman appreciating the beauty of life, and being a catalyst through which others can share in the experience.

Dechamby's story began where most happily ever after stories end, "married to a handsome, James Bond sort of character". When the six year old daughter of the enviable, jet-setting couple was wrongly vaccinated at her Swiss elementary school and fell into a coma, disaster struck. Dechamby, who wished to personally help her daughter recuperate, held a very different opinion from her husband, who wanted to place the child in a centre for the disabled, where the tragedy would become far removed from their buzzing daily lives. The couple split, and Dechamby found herself not only with a son and daughter to support alone, but a heap of medical bills to pay. It was then that she began painting, discovering not only herself, but a solution to her life's problems and a new source of strength to carry on. "To live from your art is something that is truly incredible," she said, contrast-



"To live from your art is something that is truly incredible," she said, contrasting it to her former life as a model.

ing it to her former life as a model. "I was never happy in that world, it was very empty and fake."

Now in her mid-forties, Dechamby has made a career out of her art for the last 27 years, but she has not grown tired of trying new things. She recently got her pilot's license in Florida, and she is constantly searching for professional challenges. Her latest project is a new line of bespoke women's watches that feature her silhouette on the watch face, packaged in a petite yet luxurious handbag. "I thought, what is the point of a fancy watch box that you can do nothing with? Now a handbag, that is something that a woman can use and it matches the watch," she explained, revealing the logic behind her stroke of brilliance. Regarding her art, she has begun incorporating jewellery into her work that can be plucked out of the painting and worn out for the evening.

Today, Dechamby can most often be found in Switzerland, where she operates her own mountainside gallery that is three floors high and hosts radical exhibitions each year, attracting an international following. Featured at the Ayyam Gallery in Beirut throughout the month of April, Dechamby found great inspiration in her first visit to the Lebanese capital, where she was impressed by the beauty and spirit of Arab women. Although Dechamby admitted to having to fight in "a man's world" for much of her success, she has been enjoying the challenge and thought that women in the Middle East can relate to her work. "There's a woman's world too," she said. "And it's so exciting." ■