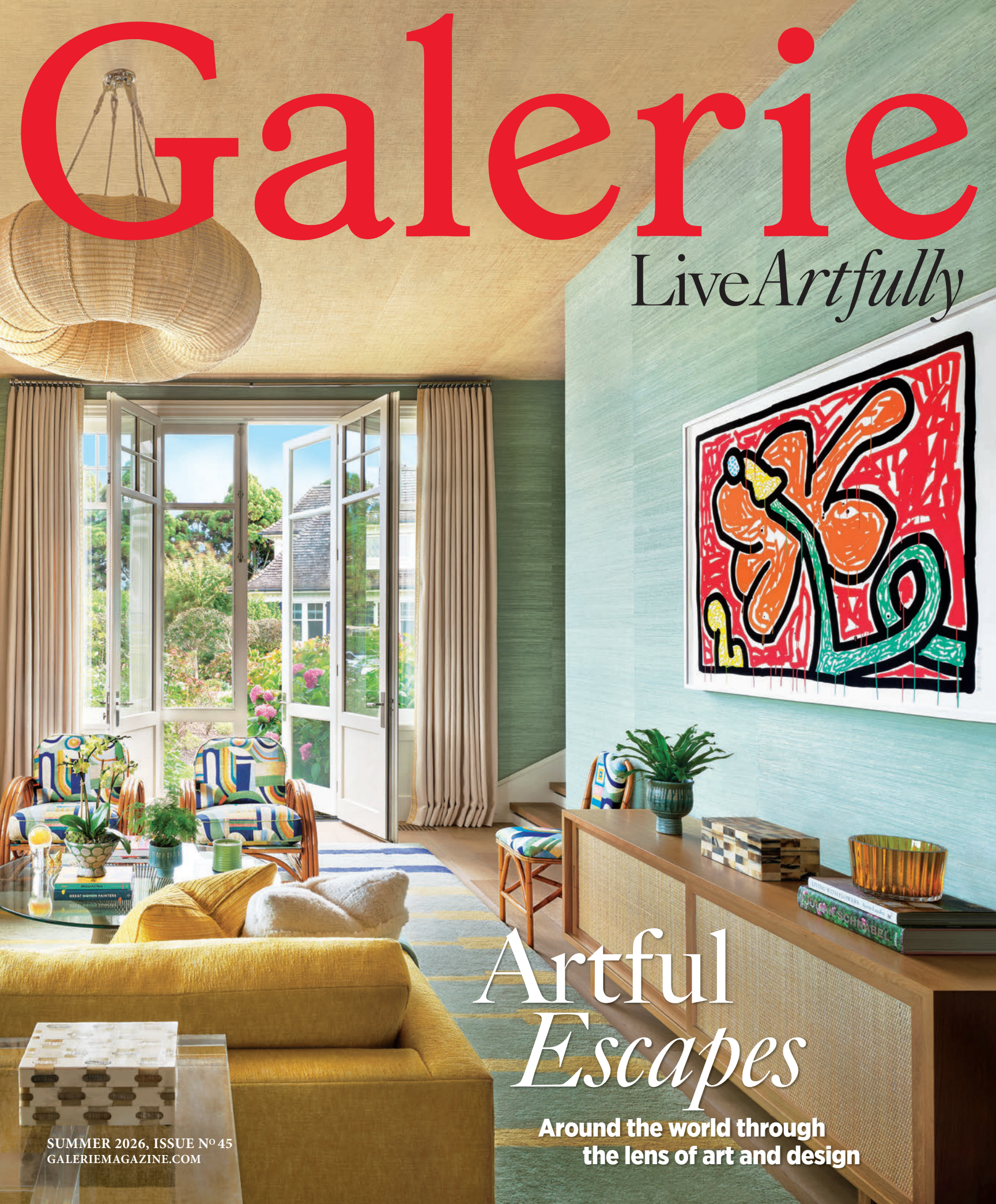


Galerie

Live Artfully



Artful Escapes

Around the world through the lens of art and design

SUMMER 2026, ISSUE N° 45
GALERIEMAGAZINE.COM



Demond Melancon (right) in *Jah Defender* (2020), one of his Mardi Gras suits. BOTTOM: *Nanny of the Maroons* (2022).

Demond Melancon

Many great artists are said to have found their calling at an early age. Demond Melancon is proving to be one of them. As a member of a Mardi Gras Indian tribe in New Orleans, he learned how to bead the elaborate costumes worn as an element of the Black Masking tradition at only 13.

Part of a 150-year-old legacy, making the brightly colored suits is in equal measure culture and craft, sweat and skill—the beadwork taking thousands of hours of painstaking effort. During Mardi Gras, tribes challenge each other with song and dance but even more so with their stunning creations. “It’s called ‘Kill ‘em dead with needle and thread,’” he explains of the competitive aspect of costuming.

Melancon has pushed this craft into an art form, adding a painterly touch to the process he learned for sewing glass beads. “I use a lot of techniques I was taught, but now the thread is not the same, the needle is not the same,” he says. “The way I tighten the canvas or draw a piece is completely different.”

He has also broadened his sources of inspiration. “I look at the work of Caravaggio and Botticelli, and I try to put the same type of shading into my beadwork,” says Melancon, citing Kerry James Marshall and Barkley L. Hendricks as other influences.



Seven years ago, he made the leap from costume maker to contemporary artist when he began showing with Arthur Roger Gallery in New Orleans. Then, in February, international gallery Mariane Ibrahim announced his representation. Melancon’s body of work now extends beyond the Black Masking culture—his recent output encompasses the greater African diaspora with a series depicting Ashanti masks, portraits of New Orleans characters, and historical Black figures.

Honored by his tribe, the Young Seminole Hunters, as its Big Chief, Melancon has now been recognized on the art world’s largest stage: the Venice Biennale. This year’s exhibition, titled “In Minor

Keys,” features, among other works, his wildly intricate, tangerine suit *Amistad Takeover*, which renders the 1839 mutiny by African captives. “The narrative is everything,” he explains. “When I’m beading something, I’m trying to make that story come alive.”

Despite the global acclaim, Melancon prefers to stay humble, telling himself, “You can always be back pouring concrete and cooking lobsters”—a reminder of the odd jobs he once took on to support his art. One look at his otherworldly creations, however, and it’s hard to imagine that ever happening. marianeibrahim.com

—JACQUELINE TERREBONNE

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: RYAN HODGSON; COURTESY OF THE ARTIST; CEDRIC ANGELES; COURTESY OF THE ARTIST