



ALONG THE GARDEN PATH

Fantasy Gardens by Contemporary Artists in the Industrial Brandywine River Landscape



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Fantasy Gardens by Contemporary Artists in the Industrial Brandywine River Landscape

Linda Weintraub, guest curator

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Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts
103 East 16th Street • Wilmington, Delaware 19801 • (302) 656-6466

for the Contemporary Arts is pleased to present "Along the Garden Path" by Contemporary Artists in the Industrial Brandywine. The exhibit was organized by guest curator Linda Weintraub and includes works by Kathleen Anderson, Carol Field, Louanne Getty, Portia Munson, Carlene Ramus, and Sue Johnson. Some components of "Along the Garden Path" have been installed in a traditional gallery setting, while others are situated intriguingly along the River path behind the Wilmington City Waterworks. In a variety of ways, the exhibit probes the interaction between man's technological achievements and the natural world they occupy.

"Along the Garden Path" is complemented by three related exhibits. In the DCCA exhibit, Sue Johnson's "Alternate Encyclopedia" presents a whimsical world created from the confluence of zoology and the artist's imagination. Linda Weintraub's exhibit in the Draper Showcase, explore the natural cycle of growth and regeneration. Finally, DCCA artist-in-residence Linda Lorrie's exhibit, "Growth from the Boys and Girls Club of New Castle and SODAT's permanent tile installation on the terrace of the Delaware Center for the Arts, the installation extends the metaphor of Gross' concurrent exhibit in the gallery at the DCH, "Native, Invasive, and Alien," which explores the complex interaction between native and non-native species.

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Linda Weintraub, guest curator

Gardening is reported to be the most popular hobby in the United States. Thousands of citizens delight in a form of toil that assures sore backs, sun-burned necks, mosquito bites, skirmishes with grubs, and dirty fingernails. For them, these tribulations are investments well-rewarded. Perhaps the passion to garden stems from the solace of participating in the cycle of life, or from the delight in harvesting blossoms and vegetables. Or, conceivably, the products sought from this labor are antidotes to those that prevail in the workplace. In this century, gardens have ceased to be extensions of such basic activities as eating, staying warm in the winter, and acquiring the raw materials to build and to clothe ourselves. Gardens now resemble sanctuaries from such nature-alienating phenomena as the media, industry, and technology.

Inviting artists to conceive of gardens situated in an industrial setting may seem like the convergence of contradictory realms. Gardens carry the connotation of an enhancement of nature. Industrial sites imply nature's blight and distress. But these disparate settings are both stages where humans and nature not only interact, but where the human mark is made prominent upon the earth. When artists enter the gardening arena, this crucial relationship is dramatized. The indoor-outdoor format for this exhibition heightens this theatrical metaphor.

Within the gallery, Kathleen Anderson and Portia Munson have each contrived playful ways in which industrial materials, romantic whimsy, botanical cycles, and feminine guile intersect. They are accompanied by Sue Johnson, who contributes mock botanical and zoomorphic specimens, while Linda Huey's clay sculptures combine the fragility of her medium, clay, with the fragility of her subject, pods, to welcome the life-cycle into her art.

Outdoors, visitors are invited to wander along a pathway of art. The sequence of artworks unfolds like a lively conversation between the artists who produced them. These artistic "remarks" are contributed by Carol Field's astute observations, Louanne Getty's whispered enticements, Skip Schuckmann's challenging questions about the source and the fulfillment of human desire, and Carlene Ramus's commendations on the invisible or unnoticed forces of nature.

Although these artists alter the site in four distinctive ways, they all shape more than the material components of their work. They also "sculpt" visitors' sensory, kinetic, and mental perceptions by magnifying awareness of the moisture, temperature, breeze, aromas, sights, and sounds that impinge on our bodies. Furthermore, they help us locate our bodies at a precise juncture between earth, sky, and water. These delights do not derive from a bucolic setting where they might be expected, but from an industrial site where they become a special gift, a confirmation of the transforming power of art, and a reminder that all habitats contain the potential for garden delights.

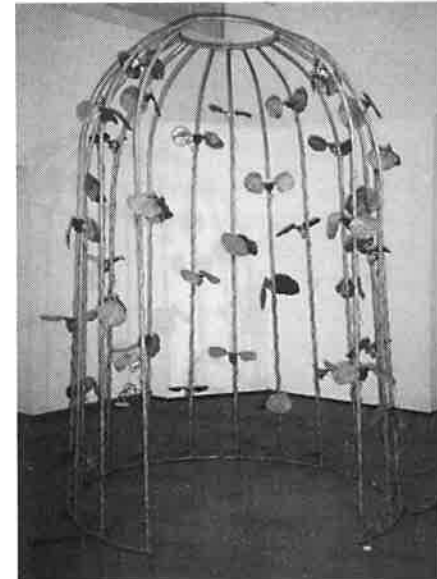
KATHLEEN ANDERSON

"My work represents the interaction between the mechanical and the organic. A functional imitation of nature. . .explores the meaningful relationships beyond our visible boundaries."

Like a Moliere farce, Kathleen Anderson delights in dismantling the social refinements associated with formal eighteenth-century garden pavilions. She has constructed a hoop skirt that is so large, the dainty maiden is here transformed into an arbor large enough to be entered. Pairs of heart-shaped leaves, carefully arranged on its frame, verify the romantic association of a secret garden rendezvous.

But the image of amorous exchange in an idyllic setting is quickly eroded. The leaves are dry, brown, and dramatically dead. They would not be capable of movement if the artist had not provided each pair with a tiny motor whose gears whirl and grind and create an unsettling reminder of how many delights of nature have succumbed to machines. The tangle of wires replaces the tendrils. Orange extension cords replace the vines. The machine has not only entered this garden, it has usurped it.

Gene-splicers and genetic engineers might envy Anderson's next feat. Her arbor plants morph into insects. The opening and closing of the pairs of mechanized leaves have been carefully paced to resemble butterflies fluttering in the summer sun. Thus, her cross-overs are a witty cycle that progresses from botanical to insect to machines and back again to its organic equivalents.



"Butterfly Kiss",
1998, brass, leaves, electric motor, wires