



Gardens are an edgy subject, all hedging, fences and borders. Framing is the key. Containment. Even the word 'garden' is rooted in the idea of property: a paradise walled up against the invasion of an uncontrolled 'other'. No surprise, then, that Britain and Japan – the two countries most identified with the artifice of gardening – should be islands. More surprising, given how the Royal Horticultural Society's Year of the Garden has inspired a flowering of art all over the country, is that Tate Britain's 'Art of the Garden' is the first major exhibition to examine Britain's national obsession.

The show illustrates artists' changing view of gardens, from celebratory to critical, from Eden as *des res* to Eden as a suburb in hell. On one side are the colourists (Sargent, Heron, Jekyll) and the comforting (Constable, Tissot, Allingham): those who seemed happy with the greenhouse effect of Britain's controlling frame on nature. On the other are artists (usually of a younger generation) who are worried about the way in which science has transformed 'nature' into 'culture' through horticulture; or sceptics, like Damien Hirst, who address the impossibility of man-the-classifier's desire for harmony with the natural world. The 'created' wildflower meadow is no less artificial than Gary Hume's metallic blooms.

Instead of taking inspiration from Gertrude Jekyll, these younger artists are more likely to expose how Jekyll's ordered hues require weeds and wrongly coloured migrants to be eliminated or hybridised. A 'cultured' plant has had its wilder genes altered, as Susan Hiller suggests in her audio piece for Tate, *What Every Gardener Knows*. On the same track, Marc Quinn presents bouquets frozen in bell jars: gardens as cabinets of curiosity, where we reject the unruly and unclassified in favour of the collected, paid for and catalogued.

Yet artists' anxiety about the political and scientific consequences of gardening is producing work as visually rich as it is meaningful. *Blessed*, Anya Gallaccio's mutant apple tree at the Serpentine Gallery's 2000

show 'The Greenhouse Effect', was both breathtaking and 'over-bearing' with biblical implications, its trunk weighed down by garlands of slowly rotting fruit. What price knowledge, Gallaccio asks us; what price a perfect apple, when ideas of perfection have been genetically modified to include global consistency, profit margins and pure excess?

Gallaccio's piece at Tate Britain, *Red on Green*, reprises a work from 1992. It consists of the severed heads of 10,000 cultured English roses, blood-red against a bed of thorns, which will fade over the course of the show. Her work is often a critique of the packaged, as with *Keep off the Grass* (1997), for which she sowed vegetable seeds in the scars left by other sculptures on the Serpentine's lawn. Continuing that theme for *Glaschu* (1999), she seeded a paisley silhouette into a skin of concrete on the neo-classical interior of Glasgow's Lanarkshire House. The living pattern that emerged was a reminder both of paisley's floral origins and of the weeds that populate cracked floors in abandoned buildings.

Such 'unwanted, overlooked, opportunistic immigrants' also inspire Jacques Nimki, who sees in the weeds' opportunistic survival an echo of human repopulation. *Florilegium* at Tate is the result of the Mauritian-born artist's three years of walking, cycling and sketching around London. A residency this spring at the renovated Camden Arts Centre led to ethereal drawings of plants collected during the Centre's months as a building site. Using the forgotten corners that weeds populate, he etched delicate plant silhouettes – ghostly, almost invisible – in pencil on the newly painted walls, adding roots and tendrils to this modern graffiti as the exhibition continued.

Above: Anya Gallaccio, *Blessed*, 1999, installation in Amden, Switzerland **Top right:**

Jacques Nimki, *Florilegium*, 2002, acrylic and collage on laminated board, 220 x 160cm

Below right: Abigail Reynolds, detail of *Monument to Darwin's Garden*, 2004, Passiflora, glass, Plexiglas, lights, pins, hydroponic gel, wire and text, dimensions variable

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To make visible the invisible and forgotten side of the garden was the intention of artists Sue Ridge and Julia Dwyer with 'Digitate'. The site-specific works in this show traced a cultural route around the suburb of Enfield, mapping its miles of greenhouses which once provided fresh food to London and its garden centres which now feed the inner city's gardening appetite.

Exploring Enfield's 17th-century Forty Hall, Ridge and Dwyer were fascinated by the way nature has been safely tamed for centuries in the form of floral fabric and leafy plaster friezes. They decided to introduce 'natural' decoration into the least decorated of places. A ceiling rose made by collaging transparencies of Forty Hall's great cedar tree onto a lightbox was hung in the brutalist architecture of Enfield Civic Centre. A cleaner's stark cupboard in the heart of Forty Hall was transformed by wallpaper, its pattern derived from photographs of rubber gloves collaged with images of the ancient magnolia which presses against the Hall's windows.

The principle of reinterpreting the present through the traces left on a place by its past lies behind Danielle Arnaud's exhibitions at London's Museum of Garden History in the deconsecrated church of St Mary-at-Lambeth. Since 1995, when Arnaud opened a gallery in her Georgian house, she hasn't had time to garden herself, but she has planted the seeds of metamorphosis with shows like her upcoming 'Nowhere Else But Here', in which 16 young artists investigate landscapes of the imagination.

Equally passionate about generating new art and regenerating her Lambeth neighbourhood, Arnaud proposed in 2001 that the MOGH show contemporary art inspired by the museum's history. Her proposition was accepted (although it's hard to imagine anyone refusing this tiny, vivacious powerhouse of a Frenchwoman) and the subsequent exhibitions, with the help of Philip Norman, a full-time volunteer since 1981, have transformed the museum into a centre that attracts a wide audience for young artists like Shane Waltener and Sophie Lascelles (recently at Tate Britain).

'Exhumed' (2003) took as its starting point the histories of those 26,000 famous, infamous and anonymous corpses buried in the museum grounds. 'Tempered Ground', this year's show, is based on dialogues between artists and head gardeners, a collaboration which has already resulted in an altering of preconceptions on both sides. 'I think the botanists expected portraits of themselves,' Danielle reports, 'and the artists didn't realise how highly educated and artistic a head gardener could be.'

Abigail Reynolds, who studied English Literature at Oxford, has been researching her piece for 'Tempered Ground' at Down House in Kent, the humble domestic garden where Charles Darwin spent 40 years testing his theories of evolution. Working with head gardener Toby Beasley to investigate Darwin's methodology, Reynolds has produced a stunning glass piece in which tendrils of glass and plant intertwine with magnifying lenses, bottle brushes and inoculating loops. It's part chandelier, part hydroponic system for growing Darwinian species searched out by Beasley. The transparent spiral ▶



4 suggests, as Reynolds intended, 'observation, selection, mutation – as well as the immense exuberance of living plants'.

Danielle Arnaud looks for artists inspired by process, artists closer to gardeners, in fact, but not necessarily those already inspired by gardens. 'Most of them are quite young and can't yet afford the luxury of gardening.' Two who can are Mr and Mrs Ivan Morison. With work in Tate Britain's show, at MOGH and their first solo exhibition at Arnaud's gallery this September, the Morisons are using their garden as a stage for engaging with culture as well as nature. Gardens regularly inspire their editions of gently celebratory mailed cards. Ivan Morison, amateur gardener, blooms naked in their garden in a film for 'Everything's Gone Green', a group exhibition at Bradford's National Museum of Photography, Film & Television, while the couple's broadcasts on Resonance 104.4FM through July and August will link their concurrent projects.

In 2003, as part of their 'Global Survey', the Morisons recorded Marina Pimenoff in her Helsinki garden. Spring was late, there was no sign of life above ground. Yet Pimenoff could detail how she acquired each plant, describe its present location underground, thus making time audible – and visible, as the Morisons transcribed her descriptions onto 200 cards: 'Chinese roses from Sweden'; 'Tree peonies from Estonia'; 'Pimpinella roses, they flower like hell'.

Mat Collishaw's flowers definitely grew out of some kind of hell. His infectious blooms of 1996 to 1997 would never feature in a Jekyll or Allingham cottage garden, but grow in places where cruising and other transgressive encounters occur. Connecting the diseased, phallic lilies of *Infectious Rudeboys* with the pubescent *Ideal Boys* who clutch virginal flowers to their genitals, Collishaw's photographs forge the links between aesthetics, medicine and horticulture made by Ged Quinn's disquieting landscapes. During his residency at Tate St Ives Quinn painted Elizabethan parterres laid out to resemble the syphilis, herpes and HIV viruses – one answer for *Who Killed Cock Robin?*, Collishaw's exhibit at Tate, which hints at what ideal-boy clones may pick up among the bedding plants.

The private, nocturnal underworld of our public parks was something Derek Jarman was familiar with. During the years he was dying, he created a garden of scavenged plants and beach detritus on wind-blasted shingle under the shadow of Dungeness's nuclear reactor. Jarman loved its bleakness, particularly when his plants' struggle to survive their inhospitable surroundings merged with his own struggle against Aids.

Our desire to stop time, fix the ephemeral, is explored in the grassy works of Heather Ackroyd and Dan Harvey. Helped by Howard Thomas and Helen Ougham, two visionary scientists in Aberystwyth, they subvert that ultimate symbol of nature framed and tamed: the lawn. Their medium is chlorophyll, a fragile molecule whose photosensitive powers Ackroyd and Harvey manipulate to achieve dazzling 'photographs' in shades of grass equivalent to the greys of black and white film.

Jarman saw lawns as 'the enemy of a good gardener'. Against nature. A form of suburban terrorism. But Ackroyd and Harvey transform the lawn in pieces like *Sunbathers* ('regrown' this spring for their show at Metronom in Barcelona), where two figures on a pebble beach emerge and are submerged within the blades of grass. People become landscape. Brilliant sculptors of mutating form, Ackroyd and Harvey are trespassers at heart, notably when they abandon photography and encourage their grass to run riot. In autumn 2003

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they spread mud and grass seed over the walls of a bombed mission church in London's Southwark, and while the church doors opened outwards onto pockmarked inner-city scrub, verdant young grass slipped its vertical frame to pour like water across the floor inside.

A gang of teenagers, hoodies pulled up, entered the space scoffing, but within seconds had craned their necks back and fallen silent. Their only comment: 'Fuckin' amazin'!' Not an unusual reaction to the sheer gobsmacking gorgeousness of Ackroyd's and Harvey's work (lamentably unrepresented at Tate), which reawakens a sense of awe even in the most cynical of urban ironists.

The couple have declined to take part in 'The Other Flower Show' – garden shed installations by artists and designers including Tracey Emin and Tord Boontje, to be held in the V&A's courtyard. Instead, Ackroyd and Harvey will be in Latvia. 'We have permission to grow a mausoleum in a cemetery where many of the tombs of Riga's merchants were vandalised by factions of the Soviet Army in the early 1960s. A landscape of trees with abandoned temples. Very evocative and political.'

Did mankind lose Paradise, sell it, or merely throw it away with other disposables of our plastic world? An advertisement David Cotterrell placed in the property sections of three Hampshire newspapers put our island Eden up for grabs, reducing it to the size of a flotation device supporting a white picket fence around a 'For Sale' sign. Cotterrell's piece for 'Exhumed' held out more hope. He took as his starting point the plaque in St Mary-at-Lambeth that memorialises Lieutenant Henry Buckley, a victim of Waterloo. Cotterrell then filmed himself – for nine hours, the duration of the battle – lying in the summer grass that now grows over the field of conflict. Forty thousand men were killed or wounded at Waterloo. Fertilising the soil, their bodies were never recovered; it isn't known where Buckley fell. 'When David projected the film on Buckley's tomb, this vision of bringing a lost man back home, if not back to life, touched many people,' says Danielle Arnaud. 'They called it the tomb of the future.' Art can transform even a battleground into a garden – a virtual garden at least.

'The Other Flower Show', to 11 July, V&A Garden, London SW7 (+44 (0)20 7942 2000, www.vam.ac.uk); 'Everything's Gone Green', to 26 Sept, National Museum of Photography, Film & Television, Bradford (0870 701 0200, www.nmpft.org.uk); 'Art of the Garden', 3 June-30 Aug, Tate Britain, London SW1 (+44 (0)20 7887 8008, www.tate.org.uk); Heather Ackroyd & Dan Harvey, 4 June-25 July, Sculpture Quadrennial, Riga (www.sculpturequadrennial.lv); 'Tempered Ground', 1 July-31 Aug, Museum of Garden History, London SE1 (+44 (0)20 7401 8865, www.museumgardenhistory.org); 'Nowhere Else But Here', 25 June-1 Aug, Danielle Arnaud Contemporary Art, London SE1 (+44 (0)20 7735 8292, www.daniellearnaud.com)

Right: Heather Ackroyd and Dan Harvey, *Dilston Grove (grown state)*, 2003, installation using grass, clay and water, in the interior of Clare College Mission Church, Rotherhithe