

Garden of Curious Delights

Marna Brauner
Hai-Chi Jihn
Denis Sargent
Jan-Ru Wan

Christopher Davis-Benavides
Cima Katz
Maria Tomasula



VILLA TERRACE DECORATIVE ARTS MUSEUM

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Garden of Curious Delights

This exhibition blends notions of the garden as a place of pleasure and delight (taken to the extreme in Hieronymus Bosch's masterpiece referenced in the title) with 16th century collections of "wonders" known as "cabinets of curiosities". These collections, often created by royals as a result of sending ships around the world to collect plant specimens for their elaborate gardens, represented human fascination with objects collected during the Age of Discovery, some natural and some artificial, that now fill university teaching collections in Europe. Including the artwork of seven contemporary artists, the exhibition metaphorically expands the boundaries of the garden, for which the Villa Terrace Museum is renowned, connecting the interior and exterior of the Villa as a continuous *Garden of Curious Delights*.

The garden as a place of pleasure and delight is well established, historically, in numerous cultures. From this idyllic point of view, many art forms, including the decorative arts, employ elements of nature as motifs to embody abundance and fertility. The Villa's collection includes many examples of such uses of nature motifs, for example the Züber gallery, with its panoramic garden wallpaper, expressing the exotic richness and beauty of nature, bringing the outside, inside. Incorporating the idealized natural world within a habitable human space, it creates an all encompassing landscape "view."

The Villa's courtyard and formal garden are architecturally organized to integrate natural elements into daily life. This impulse to inhabit nature, by designing it into and around the domestic space, creates a unique special place,

isolating the Villa from its urban surroundings. Through collecting and arranging plants, which have already been placed within horticultural taxonomies created to categorize and organize them, a collection is created, much like the decorative artworks within the Villa. The most celebrated examples of these, Cyril Colnik's metalwork, primarily represent motifs of plants and other such natural forms. Again, they appear in the Villa's other decorative arts, such as the carved wood furnishings, textiles, ceramic tiles, and sculptural and painted architectural details.

These decorative elements become specimens within the domestic interior, much like the collected and displayed objects in cabinets of curiosities, which, indeed, were the earliest form of museums. They represent the human impulse to collect and celebrate the exotic, wondrous and unique elements of the natural environment as rarefied examples within human domestic spaces.

The works of art included in this exhibition address elements of nature, objects of curiosity and collecting, in a variety of ways. They take many physical forms including assemblage, ceramics, fibers, photography, installation, metalsmithing and painting, each finding its place within the decorative scheme of the Villa's domestic space. Whether embellishing and accentuating the established décor, or challenging and subverting it, these works make the Villa Terrace Museum an ever more splendid and varied *Garden of Curious Delights*.

—Marna Brauner & Denis Sargent
Curators



Marna Brauner

Bio

Marna Brauner is one of the guest curators of *Garden of Curious Delights*. She received her BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and her MFA from California College of Arts and Crafts. She exhibits her work nationally and internationally in both solo and group shows, most recently at the Hong Kong Design Institute and the Kaohsiung (Taiwan) Museum of Fine Arts. She has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Wisconsin Arts Board and the Milwaukee Artists Foundation. Her work has been featured in the books, *The Surface Designer's Art* and *Celebrating the Stitch: Contemporary Embroidery of North America*, as well as *Fiberarts Magazine*, and *The Surface Design Journal*. She is currently a Professor of Art and Design at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (since 1989), with a specialty in surface design (textile printing and dyeing). Prior to that, she taught at the University of Kansas and as a one-year visiting artist at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago.



Giardino Curioso; Marna Brauner; Dye, Vintage Textiles; 144" x 120"; 2012

Artist Statement

I am obsessed with and “collect” images of collections: old natural history and decorative arts museums, odd personal “roadside” museums, even the stalls in flea markets. My discovery of the objects in these places parallels my finding of equally fascinating objects in antique flea markets and on eBay. I became an obsessive collector, enjoying the “hunt” as part of the process, as well as the knowledge that I have found a uniquely made object that there is little likelihood of finding again. I believe that the objects I find inform me of what they want done with them. Thus, masses of crocheted lace are dyed and stitched into a curious garden, and museum still life photographs become a miniature museum.

For over thirty years I have been creating work that is thematically based on the absurdity of life in the face of inevitable death. Collections and memories, shopping as art form, natural and artificial, and obsessive decoration are very much a part of that exploration.



Museo della Natura Morta; Marna Brauner; Digital Photographs; Variable Dimensions; 2012

Christopher Davis-Benavides

Bio

Christopher Davis-Benavides pursues cross-cultural issues in his research and teaching. His sculpture in both clay and wood explores the hero/saint myths in Spain and the New World as well as the layered meanings of cultural interposition as revealed in the architecture of his native Peru.

Davis-Benavides has exhibited his work in a variety of national and international venues. He has been the recipient of numerous grants and awards including a Wisconsin Arts Board New Works Community Research Grant, a Milwaukee County Individual Artist Fellowship, and a J. William Fulbright Senior Scholars Lectureship in Mexico. He has been awarded residencies in the FuLe International Ceramic Art Museum (FLICAM) Fuping, Shaanxi, China, and the Arts/Industry Residency at the Kohler Corporation in Wisconsin. Public collections of his work include the *Instituto Cultural Peruano-Norteamericano*, ICPNA, Lima Peru; *Museo de Arte de Lima*, Lima, Peru; R.A.M. (Racine Art Museum) Racine, Wisconsin; the Arkansas Arts Center, Little Rock, Arkansas; Lawrence University, Appleton Wisconsin; the Kohler Corporation and the John Michael Kohler Art Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin; FuLe International Ceramic Art Museum, China; The University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, Wisconsin; International Ceramics Studio, Kecskemét, Hungary; and the *Museo de La Ceramics de L' Alcora*, Castellon, Spain.

Artist Statement

Having spent my life with a foothold in two cultures, Peru and the United States, it is natural that the source of my artwork is an impulse to examine these two divergent worlds as a tension of cultural and aesthetic forces in a struggle for identity. The visual result of this confrontation, western formal concepts in conflict with non-western forms of visual expression, is evidenced in my artwork throughout my career. The work is a reflection of my thought processes and experiences rather than a documentation or critique. It is rooted in history, current events and specific places without being direct representation. Broadly speaking my work incorporates three repeating and recombining components: the architectonic, the human figure/statuary, and the vessel. For this exhibition I have selected pieces that are hybrids of these components. These are fruits of unpredictable studio experimentation that I find peculiar, but in some enigmatic way capture my attention.

Ella Tang;
Christopher Davis-
Benavides; Ceramic
72" x 12.5" x 12.5";
2012



Gusano II;
Christopher
Davis-
Benavides;
Ceramic;
11.75" x 16"
x 7"; 2012



Hai-Chi Jihn

Bio

Hai-Chi Jihn, currently an Adjunct at Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee, WI, splits her time between being a studio artist, educator and homemaker. She has exhibited extensively in the United States and Taiwan, including the National Metal Museum, Madison Art Center, Georgia Art Museum and Taiwan Kaohsiung Museum of Arts. Her work is in the permanent collection of the Racine Art Museum, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Alverno College and many private collections. Hai-Chi Jihn is a recipient of the Milwaukee Individual Artist Fellowship, Sacagawea Artist Award and participated in the Artist/Industry Program at the Kohler Arts Center and Kohler Company in 2002.

Artist Statement

My most recent installation work continues my interest in everyday miracles and women's roles, along with a simple fascination with the mundane. This fascination precipitated my recent research into the history of mirrors and symbols in nature.

My intention with these pieces is to use symbolic objects to create a dialogue with viewers. These objects might include a life-size enameled cast iron apron, a mirror framed in a silver doily, or a simple still life remade in silver. Through these objects, I want viewers to examine and re-examine how women are viewed in the culture: the same culture of which I am now a part.



Veiled Virtue; Hai-Chi Jihn; Brass, Cast Iron, Mixed Media; 8" x 8" x 1-3" each; 2005

Trees of Memory; Hai-Chi Jihn; Copper, Enamel, Found Objects, Silver; 72" x 6" x 6"; 2003-2005

Cima Katz

Bio

Cima Katz was born and raised in the metropolitan New York area. She received her B.F.A. from Carnegie Mellon University and her M.F.A. from Indiana University. She is a member of the faculty at the University of Kansas teaching in the area of Expanded Media. Though trained as a printmaker, Katz's research has historically been motivated by content; she has fostered a variety of specific technical strategies as required. Her work is regularly exhibited in a variety of national and international venues including, recently, the Albrecht-Kemper Museum of Art, St. Joseph, Mo, the Louisville Visual Arts Association, Charlotte Price Gallery, Louisville, KY, the Sungkok Art Museum, Seoul, South Korea and the XIII Latin American Print Bienal in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Katz's work is represented in numerous private and public collections including the National Museum of American Art in Washington, DC; the Chicago Art Institute; Bibliotheque Nationale de France (Paris); Ewing Gallery, Utah Museum of Fine Arts; Huntsville Museum of Art; University of Tennessee; Over Museum; Vermillion, S.D.; Kennedy Museum in Athens, Ohio; the Aberdeen Art Gallery in Aberdeen, Scotland, and the J.B. Speed Museum in Louisville, Kentucky.



Vanitas; Cima Katz; Digital Collage; Found Objects; Mantle; 108" x 72"; 2010



Vanitas; Detail

Artist Statement

This work: is about grief and forgiveness. Ultimately it explores the notion of finding grace.

This work: is about memory. It is about the junk we accumulate over a lifetime, be it literal or metaphysical. It is about the irrelevance of it all once we depart this world unless new meaning happens to be constructed.

This work: embraces the new and the old... antique objects, time-worn sayings, contemporary snapshots, old family photographs, images 'liberated' from the web.

This work: is about an artist's obsession with information; visual cues, literary thought, humor, poetry, history, politics, everyday wool gathering; and above all it represents free association about the relationships between them all. The work celebrates artistic license- the opportunity to tell tall tales, take risks, try on ideas. For the viewer, it is a chance to gain entry, and insight and to have the opportunity to respond and add their own ideas to someone else's thought processes.

Denis Sargent

Bio

Denis Sargent is one of the guest curators of *Garden of Curious Delights*. He has shown his work nationally and internationally in such venues as the James Watrous Gallery in Madison; the Center for Contemporary Art in Baton Rouge; the Kansas City Art Institute; the Center for Creative Studies in Detroit; the University of Wyoming Art Museum in Laramie; the Berkeley Art Center; the Fuller Museum in Brockton, Massachusetts; the Chautauqua Center for the Visual Arts; the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts; the Portsmouth Museums in Portsmouth, Virginia; Gallery 128 in New York City; the New Forms Festival of the International Festival of Media Arts in Vancouver; the University of Monterrey in Mexico and the National Institute of the Arts in Taipei. He earned his B.A. degree in painting, drawing and printmaking from the University of California at Santa Cruz in 1980 and his M.F.A. degree in painting from the University of Iowa in 1986. He is a Professor in painting and drawing at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, where he has taught since 1988.



To My Sole Desire—To Touch; Denis Sargent;
Pigmented Wax on Cotton; 60" x 42"; 2012

Paradise Garden; Denis Sargent;
Pigmented Wax on Cotton;
66" x 45"; 2012



Artist Statement

I began these works by looking at the relationship between the Villa and its garden, considering the connection between human habitation and the formalized elements of nature that it contains and that surround it. The courtyard design, itself, comes from the ancient Persian model of *paridazea*, or paradise. The design of the walled garden represents the ideal of perfection on earth, full of abundance and beauty, and removed from elements that might threaten it. Set within a garden context, I've incorporated elements of contemporary curiosity and fascination that are designed to delight our senses, which I have appropriated from mass media sources. These objects are the contemporary counterparts of the optical devices and other scientific instruments that were included, along with natural phenomena, within the original cabinets of curiosities. Having expanded human perception and understanding of the natural world, and our influence upon it, such instruments have evolved into contemporary technology. Playing ever-increasing roles in our lives, they have become the consumer products that are our most current, if not our most curious, objects of desire and delight.

Maria Tomasula

Bio

Maria Tomasula received her B.F.A. from the University of Illinois at Chicago and her M.F.A. from Northwestern University. Her paintings recall the work of 18th and early 19th century Spanish Baroque painters and Mexican votive paintings, and depict familiar objects in highly stylized, symbolic compositions. With strikingly colored and meticulously rendered objects from both the natural world and the built environment arranged into theatrical compositions, Tomasula's painting style has been described by some critics as "metaphorical realism." Her work has been written about in publications such as *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *ARTnews*, *Chicago Tribune*, and many others. Her paintings have been exhibited in many venues, including Forum Gallery, New York; Forum Gallery, Los Angeles; Zolla/Lieberman Gallery, Chicago; The National Museum of Mexican Art, Chicago; Taller Boricua, New York; The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Connecticut; Illinois State Museum, Springfield; Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art & Design, Kansas City; Katonah Museum of Art, Katonah, New York—and numerous others. She is the Michael P. Grace Professor of Art in the Department of Art, Art History and Design at the University of Notre Dame.



Orators; Maria Tomasula; Oil on Panel; 7" x 5"; 2011



Lot; Maria Tomasula; Oil on Board; 10" x 8"; 1997

Artist Statement

The traditional notion that each of us is a self-generated, autonomous individual is collapsing under the collective impact of contemporary ideas, many from disciplines within science. Increasingly we see ourselves as shaped by, and emerging from, a constantly shifting and multi-layered network of biological, historical, cultural and familial forces. I try to give visual form to this sense of self by making paintings that both employ and refute the way a trace of paint—a mark—is felt to communicate something about the maker and his/her state of mind. I use marks that are so tiny and blended that they can't be detected. As I paint, I erase any visible trace of my hand, thereby symbolically eliminating 'myself' as the painting develops. The process is methodical and impassive, but the *image* that emerges from this rigorously calculated approach is totally centered on the notion of subjectivity. I pick every element in these pictures for their expressive values; the image is meant to engage a viewer's powers of reflection and to engage with them emotionally, using an aesthetic founded on the embodied self. In essence, I'm trying to symbolically enact—in visual form—the sensation of being, a feeling that for me centers on a persistent sense of particularity, but a particularity that hasn't grown out of a condition of freedom, but rather, a sensation of individuality that's qualified and complicated, even countered, by the knowledge that it's been formed within conditions of constraint.

Jan-Ru Wan

Bio

For 20 years, Jan-Ru Wan has been reusing found objects, especially those that have been discarded from industrial factories, in her sculpture/installation work thereby reinventing their purpose. She uses sculptural form, space, and site-specific formats to communicate about the human experience, the body, and the blending of Eastern and Western cultures.

In the 15 years since receiving her MFA at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, she has participated in twenty solo and forty group exhibitions, both national and international, including Casablanca, Morocco, Taipei and Kaohsiung, Taiwan, and Zhengzhou, China. She has been awarded artist residencies in Maine, Thailand, and Morocco. Her work has appeared in *Sculpture Magazine*, the *Surface Design Journal* and the *International Journal of Arts in Society*. In 2006, she received the Graduate of the Last Decade (GOLD) award from the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee. Recent awards for Wan include the 2009 North Carolina Visual Art Fellowship and the 2011 Chapel Hill Community project grant.

Jan-Ru Wan has taught as an Assistant Professor at North Carolina State University, College of Design and East Carolina University.

Artist Statement

Curiosity is the origin of creativity and imagination. Great art and design stems from exploring the curious. In my work, ordinary or even discarded materials often become the main sources for inspiration. For example, when I see a green bean, I start to imagine its potential to grow into a bean sprout full of life and energy.

In this exhibition, the unique museum space with a garden next to it triggered my imagination and prompted me to ask myself if this space can be imagined as a flowerpot and we human beings as seeds and plants. We are all contained in this space, some reserved, and some full of energy.

With this idea, I use mixed materials and repetition, to represent bodies and natural forms, inducing curiosity and intrigue within the viewing audience.



Potentiality;
Jan-Ru Wan;
Garment, Green
Bean, Laboratory
Tubing;
35" x 28" x 12";
2012



Restraint and Beauty;
Jan-Ru Wan; LED Light,
Mixed Media, Nylon Mesh, Silk
Organza; 156" x 180" x 108",
2012



VILLA TERRACE DECORATIVE ARTS MUSEUM

2220 N. Terrace Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53202

Museum Hours: Wednesday through Sunday 1 to 5 p.m.

Museum Admission: \$5 Adults • \$3 Seniors, Veterans & Students

FREE Members, Active Military & Children

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