

ART PAPERS

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Pervading both dreams and art, according to Mircea Eliade, is a “nostalgia for paradise.” This yearning, moreover, is frequently projected in the topos of the garden: the Judeo-Christian Eden; the Chinese Isles inhabited by the Immortals; Roman wall paintings, such as the impressionistic scene of fruit-laden trees encircling a room in Livia’s villa at Primaporta; medieval cloister walks; Muslim gardens organized around a central fountain; Monet’s compound at Giverny, conflating Norman and Japanese traditions.

A contemporary addendum to this august lineage, Jennifer Vanderpool’s *Hysterical Paradise* (2008), an installation in a former Los Angeles electrical plant, but now Bandini Art, creates a fantastical, parti-hued indoor landscape. A visual and auditory extravaganza, Vanderpool’s garden features patches of “grass,” a fountain, “vines” trailing from the ceiling, mini towers, a trellis, a picket fence—all these “vignettes” punctuated by seven DVD animations that pivot back and forth between imaginary configurations and images of actual waterfalls, mountains, birds, and butterflies. Exploiting the uneven shape of the space and its slanting floor—both subliminally disorienting—the artist underscores even further the work’s exuberant surreality.

Its position in the legacy of idyllic sites notwithstanding, Vanderpool’s 21st-century gardenscape insinuates a darker side as well. Ingeniously constructed in part from the detritus of contemporary consumerism—duct tape, fishing line, discarded panty hose, bubblewrap, Starbucks cup holders, plastic bags, among other odds and ends—the apparently joyous installation adumbrates the peril of reckless consumption. At the same time, however, the artist couples societal cast-offs with more personal mementos—ribbons, trinkets purchased abroad, objects scavenged from earlier exhibitions, even her grandmother’s old costume jewelry. This “potpourri” of discards and “treasures” functions then as a kind of “conceptual compost heap” (the artist’s term) from which germinates, if you will, a provocative fantasy.

Spray painted with splotches of Kandinskyesque colors and stenciled with blossoms, plastic tarp covering the walls blocks out the “real” world and defines Vanderpool’s imaginary space. Cut-outs of dark green astrograss (updated, more “real” than Astroturf) lead to a pseudo-fountain assembled from bright orange Home Depot buckets stacked one atop the other as in a

champagne fountain. Bubbling up from the outermost container, water spills onto the multi-colored plastic sheeting below, lending a tranquilizing sonance to the immediate environment.

Another focus, a curving white picket fence with uneven rails, nods to the overly familiar cliché of restful domesticity but explodes the platitude with a riot of make-believe embellishments, including a DVD screen. A coating of marble chips provides texture to the boards, and paper flowers tower cheerfully above the fence, while others less discreet trail out onto the floor in variegated clusters.

Marvels of ingenuity, Vanderpool’s flowers invite closer inspections. One particularly ludic creation begins with a very irregularly trimmed circle of yellow plastic. A length of turquoise ribbon, itself printed with flora designs, then surrounds a vivid pink center adorned with indigo and fuchsia beads. Another blossom derives from a Starbucks’ coffee cup, melted, painted, then remelted, and finally placed on a lace doily and garnished with chartreuse “moss” used for Easter baskets. This ensemble rests on orange plastic mesh over smaller, gauged yellow mesh. Other flowers from patterned paper fan out in accordion pleats from centers inscribed with designs fashioned with a spirograph from the 70s.

For those who know Vanderpool’s work, *Hysterical Paradise* represents more than a playful allusion to the topos of the garden as well as a tangential critique of contemporary mores. Two years in the making, this effort is a sort of summation, indeed, culmination of previous work, beginning in 2002 with the re-creation of a Georgia swamp in a converted Atlanta ballroom. More complex and richer both in depth and in scope, her synthetic paradise reveals an admirable maturity of vision.

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