



The Alchemical Garden of Desire

McClelland Sculpture Park + Gallery

How can we speak of the being of plants, of Dickinson's "transport" or "suspense" of flowers? Laurence's "alchemical desire" is not so much human desire, although plants (and this exhibition) seek to engage it, rather it is a play on what she calls "the chemical reaction between plants"-- their bio-chemical reactions—as well as "the fact that plants are in a state of desire." From an evolutionary perspective, what plants "want" is more plants, a continuation of their genetic makeup rather than their competitors'. In *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's Eye View of the World*, Michael Pollan suggested that the domestication of the apple, the tulip, tobacco and the potato, driven by the human desire for sweetness, beauty, intoxication and control was not a one-way process determined by man. The lengthy transformation effected by domestication served the plants' purposes as well, giving them an evolutionary advantage. Pollan calls this process a co-evolution, one that effectively transformed human appetites as much as it did the species concerned. In this way he would have us re-imagine agriculture "as something the grasses did to people," rather than vice versa. (2) Pollan goes further. "I don't think we can begin to understand beauty's gravitational pull," he writes, "without first understanding the flower, since it was the flower that first ushered the idea of beauty into the world the moment, long ago, when floral attraction emerged as an evolutionary strategy." (3)



Citradora (2012)
duraclear on acrylic, mirror
590 x 270cm

Beauty begins then with the flower soliciting a pollinator and because this beauty serves evolution's purpose, we are effectively powerless against it. Perhaps this accounts for the momentary explosion of joy we feel in watching time-lapse photography of a blossom unfolding. That opening of the petal, the tilting phototropism, the gentle waving of pistils—yes we delight in seeing these movements that are usually invisible to us, but the real pleasure lies in seeing something we recognize in a primordial way. Our delight and that of the flower's spring from the same source.

- Excerpt from 'In the Flower' by Ingrid Periz.

REFERENCES

1. Emily Dickinson to Louise and Frances Norcross, ca. April 1873, in Emily Dickinson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge: Bellknop Press of Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 505; cited Molly Peacock, *The Paper Garden: An Artist Begins Her Life Work at 72* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2012) p. 81.
2. Michael Pollan, *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's Eye-View of the World*, (New York: Random House, 2001), p. xxi.
3. Pollan, p. xviii.



ABOVE & FOLLOWING

Conversation with Plants (The Tarkine, Tasmania) (2012)
duraclear on acrylic, mirror, oil glaze
1200 x 6595mm

The Alchemical Garden of Desire (2012)
fragments of plants, laboratory and hand blown glass, photographs,
acrylic, silicon tubes, resin, pigments, mirror, tulle, frost cloth
Site specific installation, dimensions variable.



