

Natureza Domesticada (Tamed Nature)

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In cities, nature exists in parks, gardens, large concrete planters, trees growing from openings on the sidewalk, lawns and gardens recreated inside public buildings. In one's own home, nature appears in miniature plots of potted plants, window displays and flower jars. Why do we build these samples of nature? Do they function as decorative elements in the city? Are they little oases in the city setting?

One of the first references to planned gardens is the mythical "Hanging Gardens of Babylon", one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The king of Babylon, hoping to please his homesick wife, decided to build a "recreated homeland" which was an artificial mountain with rooftop gardens and hills covered with many different types of trees: a man-made paradise.

Today we still associate gardens with paradise and the idea of retrieving a lost ideal place. In city parks, gardens and houseplants, natural elements are manipulated to an extent that the final product is an "artificial nature". They are artificial "objects" composed of natural "objects" with the purpose of representing nature, functioning as a display and creating a space for public or private appreciation.

In the contemporary garden the "visual" aspect is emphasized. City gardens are designed as landscapes that follow modes of landscape painting. These gardens are planned to generate points of view, offer vistas and imitate natural scenery to be contemplated from a distance. In many of these places the public is not allowed to touch or step on anything, any kind of physical interaction is repressed, in fear that such interaction might damage the garden. When there are no restrictions, often we choose to confine our experience of nature: How many times do we drive a car through the mountains, enjoying the wonderful views without even stepping out of the car? Is our need for nature only visual?

There was a time we had to protect ourselves from the threats of a wild environment. Today, our constructed landscapes are to be cared for and sheltered from the aggressions of civilization. Society has created numerous rules to protect nature. To complete the circle, nature found in the cities helps us relieve the stresses and anxieties of modern life. The presence of nature, however artificial, reminds us of our first home. Its function in the urban environment alleviates the sense of displacement by providing a simulation of a paradise lost.

This project explores the way we relate to nature in urban environments. Nature in the city becomes a commodity. The "nature" we actually experience is far removed from the experience of a "lost untamed nature". The "artificial nature/furniture" objects in this installation are fantasies that investigate the relationship between our consumeristic impulses, the primary need for physical comfort, and our need to be close to nature.

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