

YOUR FACE, LIKE A LONE NOCTURNAL GARDEN IN WORLDS WHERE SUNS SPIN ROUND!



Reception: Saturday 26 March 2011 @ 7pm Modern Fuel presents a recent body of work by Toronto-based artist Susy Oliveira, who fuses her interest in sculpture and photography with the varied forms and fauna of a garden. The exhibition is titled after a passage from Jean Genet's *Our Lady of the Flowers*, eliciting the poetry, passion and entropy found in Oliveira's multifaceted fictional landscapes. Her simulated garden exaggerates the unnatural quality of most gardens and green spaces, drawing our attention to the increasingly manufactured environments that we occupy and their effect on the commodification of our desires, both real and imagined.

This body of work has recently been exhibited at the PLATFORM Centre for Photography + Digital Arts in Winnipeg (2010), The New Gallery in Calgary (2010), The Khyber in Halifax (2010), and the University of Waterloo Art Gallery (2011).

Your face, like a lone nocturnal garden in Worlds where Suns spin round!

Photos

Susy Oliveira lives and works in Toronto. She received her MFA from the University of Waterloo and is a graduate of the Ontario College of Art & Design. She has exhibited her work nationally and internationally with recent exhibitions at the Khyber, Halifax; PLATFORM centre for photographic + digital arts, Winnipeg; Graphic Design Festival Breda, The Netherlands; The New Gallery, Calgary; and Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto. She is the recipient of numerous grants and awards, including grants from the Ontario Arts Council and Canada Council for the Arts.

Exhibition Essay

The Thief's Gardening Tool Susy Oliveira's *Your face, like a lone nocturnal garden in Worlds where Suns spin 'round!* unites poetry, photography and sculpture in an exhibition of objects belonging to a world which lies between multi-dimensional reality and fragmented analog. The artist's seemingly computer-generated models consist of photographic facets which form a skin upon a three dimensional structure. The resulting sculptures project into real space, while visually translating cyberspace's distorted imagery. The viewer's expectations are interrupted via interaction with works that originate out of this rigorously splintered, yet highly detailed realm. Oliveira's investigation of virtual and digital planes is brought to fruition in her artistic articulation of flora and fauna. In her artist's statement, Oliveira asserts that her work at once examines the pervasive preoccupation with replacing nature with fabricated replicas but also delves into ideas of technological reproduction and its implications. She writes, "*By definition, the garden — complete with its natural components — is a construction made for our own pleasure and consumption.*" Her garden's connection to pleasure is taken even further by her reference to the work of Jean Genet.

The title for the exhibition is sourced from a passage in Jean Genet's novel *Our Lady of the Flowers* in which he is referring to a fictional lover. The novel, Genet's first, written while he was in prison, is largely autobiographical and features characters drawn from the criminals and homosexuals he knew in the Parisian underworld. The stories told in the novel are often highly erotic, which the narrator, writing from prison, says helps with passing the time and other solitary activities. In Genet's quote, the narrator — Genet himself — is fantasizing about a man with whom he has never had any real contact. In her artist statement, Oliveira makes a parallel relationship between her activity and Genet's. She writes, "*He fictionalizes a relationship that seems to draw up emotions that are as intense if not more intense than if the relationship was actual. For this project, I hope to translate the feelings of wonder and awe that Genet relates in this one sentence into my fictional garden.*" Though she downplays the sexual content of Genet's work, there is a queer sensuality embodied by Oliveira's virtual world. By musing upon the words of Genet, Oliveira follows a long tradition of artists referencing *Our Lady of the Flowers*. The appropriation of this novel, since its published date of 1943, can be often seen in music and theatre — most prominently in work by the Beats. Oliveira has used Genet's words as a spark to inspire a body of work that is wholly of its own moment.

The exhibition at Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre consists of several sculptures, the newest being a wall-mounted grouping of sculpted plant life imagery forming a mask-like visage (perhaps that of the fictional lover). Oliveira aims at enhancing the virtual qualities of these simulated gardens through the control of light and shade. Related 2-D photographs, paintings and collages supplement Oliveira's exploration of the computer simulated natural world. Come and get lost.

Essay by Kristina Thornton.

Kristina Thornton is currently in the first year of the MA program in Art History at Queen's University, under the supervision of Dr. Janice Helland. Kristina's research interests include gender, sexuality and craft-based media in contemporary art, as well as feminist art theory.