



ARTUR RAMON ESPAI D'ART

Captive Beauty

Strolling through the gardens of Artur Ramon Art

Curated by Ignacio Somovilla

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“...The garden is the place where the reunification of nature and culture is consummated, the loss of that original unity is the loss of the garden or paradise... Leaving the garden is entering time, beginning to walk on the plane of history. And throughout history we have been planting gardens at all times, echo and promise of the garden where death did not exist and that we would like to reconstitute...”

Elogio del calígrafo. José Ángel Valente.

Artists of all disciplines have always looked at the garden and reflected in their works what was occurring in it. In accordance with the film and garden program of the Filmoteca de Catalunya, *Captive Beauty* exhibits a series of pieces treasured by Artur Ramon Art. It will show the garden from different points of view: as an artistic creation, as a metaphor, satire, scenario, as a moral or conflict state; the garden as the ultimate bastion or as a refuge for private pleasures. The garden can embrace everything, as a reflection of the outside world. The history of humanity is the history of constant attempts to recover paradise, a wonderful and unique orchard. All these paths we travel through converge in the same place: the garden as a cultural creation and as a reflection of our changing spirit.



Lost Paradise

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (...). Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. (...) Then Yahweh God planted a garden in Eden, to the east, and there he put the man. Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...”

Genesis

The biblical origin and where all the sources of Western culture drink from is the Genesis, the story of the creation of the garden as a happy space, a place where there is no pain, suffering or need; there is no architecture, just a world where Adam and Eve run around naked and where their only home is the Garden of Eden. Numerous artists throughout time have imagined that initial chapter and have represented the carefree couple, always naked – often covered with fig leaves or other plants – and in exuberant gardens full of all kinds of species and animals. Brueghel, Rubens, Titian, William Blake... numerous artists have given us their particular vision of this original garden and

Roman culture, *Vessel fragment with head of Silenus*, 2nd century AD. White marble from the Luni-Carrara quarries, 49 x 65 cm.



its protagonists. On many occasions, they are represented at the fateful moment in which, tempted by the serpent, Eva takes the apple, or in which both are expelled from paradise.

Thus, we begin our tour of the gardens of Artur Ramon Art. Expelled from Paradise, men and women begin to wander through the world looking for food, clothing, home... and they begin to create gardens that can mitigate in some way the fleeting possession of the best of all: the Eden.

The garden in the classical world

Pales, the Roman goddess of shepherds and fields, awaits and welcomes us from her shelter of the entrance showcase. The delicate and academic marble sculpture, a work of mid-19th-century Italian artist Giuseppe Lazzerini (1831-1895), perhaps inhabited a garden of a summer villa somewhere on the Mediterranean coast.

She is one of the actresses in a cast of gods and heroes who began to run around the classical world gardens, took a well-deserved rest during the Middle Ages and reappeared with unstoppable momentum in the Renaissance. Bacchus, Silenus, Dionysus, fauns, nymphs... they would drink, dance, seduce and enjoy all the joys of life, giving themselves over to any ecstasy, in the forest-garden. This list will be completed by great gods, such as Hercules or the brothers Apollo and Diana, who always appear attached to the garden.

The classical world gardens are evoked in *Captive Beauty* with an engraving by Stefano della Bella (1610-1664), which reproduces a classic work much copied in Antiquity: the Medici Vase. Della Bella depicted the young Medici heir, who was to become Grand Duke Cosimo III, sitting in a garden, drawing the vase. Together with the “Vaso Borghese”, they were the two most admired large vases of Antiquity, copied for numerous gardens such as Versailles, the Kew Gardens in London and the Sanssouci in Postdam, Germany.

Many heirs to aristocratic British families went on a “study trip” called the “Grand Tour.” For months, or even years, these wealthy young men accompanied by tutors and many chests crossed the European continent through France or Germany, dodged Switzerland and the Alps and reached their desti-



Giuseppe Lazzerini, *Pales, goddess of shepherds*, c. 1850. Carrara Marble, 110 x 90 x 68 cm.

nation: Italy, where the visible remains of Classical Antiquity still survived. Rome, the Eternal City, Veneto and Palladio’s villas, Florence, the cradle of the Renaissance, and other cities of interest. A place of unusual beauty near the eternal city was Tivoli and Hadrian’s Villa, converted into ruins and an almost inexhaustible source of sculptures and archaeological remains. One of the great looters of Hadrian’s Villa was another illustrious resident of Tivoli, Cardinal Hipólito d’Este II, who built his mythical Villa d’Este, a magical place due to its water features, terraced gardens and endless views. The complex of fountains was well supplied with

water from the waterfalls that Piranesi (1720-1778) dramatically reflected in his works. The Villa Gregoriana Park continues to impress with its aquatic drama, its gorges, paths and caves amid lush vegetation.

The entire collection of paintings and sculptures that young Englishmen took back to Great Britain, especially in the 17th and 18th centuries, amalgamated with a series of other ideas and influences, and thus, landscaping was born.

The Labyrinth

*No habrá nunca una puerta. Estás adentro
Y el alcázar abarca el universo
Y no tiene ni anverso ni reverso
Ni externo muro ni secreto centro.
No esperes que el rigor de tu camino
Que tercamente se bifurca en otro,
Que tercamente se bifurca en otro,
Tendrá fin. Es de hierro tu destino
Como tu juez. No aguardes la embestida
Del toro que es un hombre y cuya extraña
Forma plural da horror a la maraña
De interminable piedra entretejida.
No existe. Nada esperes. Ni siquiera
En el negro crepúsculo la fiera.*

This poem by Borges introduces us to one of his great passions: the labyrinth. In his story “The garden of the forking paths” he already confronts, through a thriller plot, this metaphorical element of the garden that will be a constant in his work.

The classical world is again the original source of the labyrinth, since we find the story of Theseus, Ariadne, the Minotaur and his labyrinthine prison. It has its beginnings in Athens, which every year was obliged to send seven maidens and seven bachelors to Crete to be devoured by the Minotaur, the result of the zoophilic relationship between the wife of King Minos, Pasífae, with a bull, so the monster was half-human, half-animal. Tired of this periodic bloodletting, Theseus, the king’s son, offered to be part of this tribute. Arriving on the island of Crete, Ariadne, the daughter of Minos, fell madly in love with the handsome Athenian prince and gave him a ball of thread that would allow him to enter and exit the labyrinth. Theseus entered, killed the Minotaur, and retraced his steps, guided by the mythical thread of Ariadne, freeing Athens and its young people from the terrible tax. The story continues through other twists and turns, but we stop here, in the complex world of the labyrinth that has given magnificent real, fictional and metaphorical examples from ancient times to the present day.

We find labyrinths represented on Greek coins, in Roman mosaics and on the pavements of the French cathedrals of Reims and Chartres; however, it was in the Renaissance that the labyrinth was recovered with unusual force and became a regular element in gardens, a place for games, love affairs, clandestine meetings and symbolic walks. In Barcelona, we find an extraordinary example that also gives its name to the whole place: the Horta Labyrinth Garden. The list of artists who have tackled it would be inexhaustible, and in *Captive Beauty*, we could not help but present the extraordinary labyrinth that Josep Maria Subirachs (1927 - 2014) created in 1961. He could not escape its hypnotic world; in fact, he hid one on the Passion façade of the Sagrada Família, challenging us to find it and, with its discovery, ask ourselves some of the many questions about our lives and existential paths.



Josep Maria Subirachs, *Plànol del Laberint*, 1961.
Wood, terracotta and iron. Unique piece. 35 x 50 x 5 cm.



Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin, *Les funambules*, c. 1840.
Musical automaton with animated scene and clock, 70 x 46 x 29 cm.

East in West

In 1757 the English architect, William Chambers published his book “Designs of Chinese Buildings, Furniture, Clothes, Machines and Utensils” and in 1772 the “Essay on Oriental Gardening”. Accompanied by copious illustrations, they contributed greatly to the fashion for chinoiserie in Europe, which also had its repercussions in parks and gardens, first in Great Britain, and later in the rest of the continent. These were filled with bridges, pagodas, temples, pavilions, tea houses and all kinds of *follies*. In fact, this landscape style is still known as an “Anglo-Chinese” garden. The Kew Gardens pagoda in London, the lavish “Chinese Pavilion” in Sansoucci or the Swedish royal palace Drottningholm, are just a few examples.

This trend did not stay in the garden, but also entered buildings. Thus, we find wallpaper, rooms covered in silk and porcelain — another great Chi-

nese invention that arrived in Europe at the beginning of the 18th century —, furniture that reflects this new fashion in different ways. Despite the fact that in our country these new patterns were reduced to the circle of the Royal Court and never reached the profusion of extraordinary examples in different European gardens and palaces, we find the lavish example of the “porcelain cabinet” commissioned by Carlos III that is located in the Palace of Aranjuez, in whose famous gardens we also find a “Chinese” pavilion. In *Captive Beauty*, we present three interesting pieces that are the result of this trend. A decorative panel of Italian origin, a French chest of drawers with European lacquer decoration that imitates themes of Eastern taste, and a French terracotta with a title as suggestive as *Chinese garden* (19th century).

The painted garden

Impressionists and expressionists found in the outdoors an inexhaustible source of inspiration and models. The multiple Impressionist works representing gardens are well known, at the top of which appears Monet's, who created his well-known garden in Giverny with a clear influence from the Japanese world. In Spain, Aranjuez was a much-loved motif for many 19th century painters. As proof of this, we present two works by Eliseu Meifrén (1859–1949) and Santiago Rusiñol (1861–1931), who deeply loved gardens and reflected them in numerous of their works. Not only did they represent them, but their brushes also shaped humbler patios, popular pergolas or small gardens in pots. The heterogeneous group is completed with a work of expressionist nature by Nicolau Raurich (1871–1945). In this section, the garden

takes on different meanings: a place of explosive joy and light, a festive and colourful space, with all the subjectivity that the artist applies to it. It is a space of vibrant description in which virtuosity comes into play when narrating the reflections in the water of the *View of Aranjuez* (c. 1920) or the shadows and lights produced by the avenues of trees that lead to the majestic fountain. Or, on the contrary, the melancholy look that brings the inexorable passage of time embodied in the closed, enigmatic and solitary garden of Luis Marsans (1930–2015).

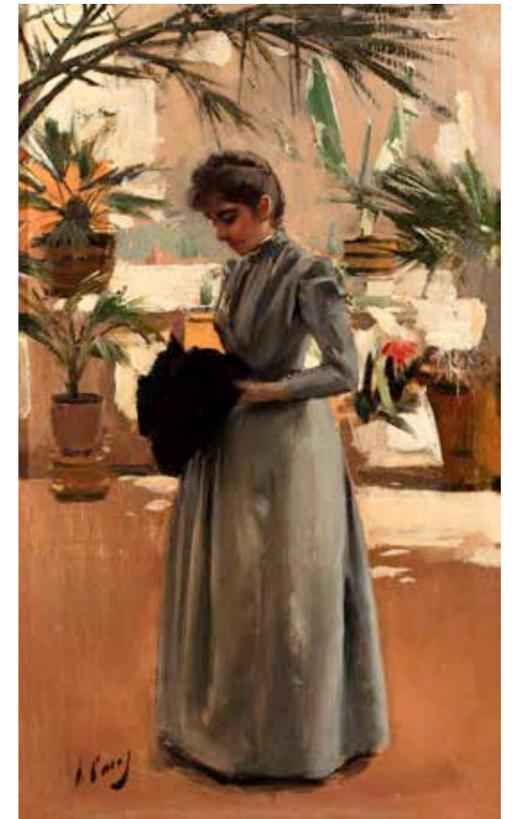
With a more lyrical and intimate look, Marsans presents us with his particular vision of *The paradise* (s.d) and *The Abandoned House* (s.d), evoking that Romanticism to be found in ruins and decadence.

Women in the Garden

At different times, the garden was also a “domestic” space traditionally frequented by women, especially from the wealthy classes, such as Guillermina de Bayreuth, Luisa of Sweden, the mythical Josefina de Beauharnais or the Spanish Duchess of Osuna, to name just a few.

The examples of the works of José Villegas Cordero (1844–1921) and Francisco Miralles (1848–1901) show us the friendly looks of women in the garden during moments of leisure and rest. We can observe the same idea in the works of Ramon Casas (1866–1932), *Elisa Casas* (c. 1899) and Ramon Martí Alsina (1826–1894), *Woman with a parasol in the garden* (1879).

On the other hand, Olga Sacharoff (1881–1967) frames a domestic *Interior* (c. 1943) in a gardenly environment, as if the viewer were leaning out of a flowery window and contemplating the delicate maternal scene, the presence of the colour green helping to sweeten the topic even more.



Ramon Casas, *Elisa Casas*, c. 1889. Oil on wood. 24 x 14,5 cm.



Santiago Rusiñol, *The Tajo river*, 1898. Oil on canvas, 66 x 85,5 cm.



Josep Maria Tamburini, *Melancholy*, c. 1905. Oil on canvas, 69 x 85 cm.



Francisco Miralles, *Lady at the park* ("Le bouquet"), c. 1894. Oil on canvas, 61,5 x 50,5 cm.

The democratisation of the garden

Central Park in New York marks the canon of what we understand today as a public park. Designed in the mid-nineteenth century and officially inaugurated in 1873, the work of landscape architects Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, with a marked landscape character, incorporates several pieces of water that will be an almost essential element in any park to be built later. Many of Europe's great parks derive from earlier green spaces, especially parks linked to the monarchy. Such is the case of the Retiro in Madrid, the French Bois de Vincennes or London's Hyde Park. Barcelona used the old grounds of the "Ciudadella", the Bourbon Citadel, to hold the Universal Exposition of 1888 and later became the "great" green space of the city.

In *Captive Beauty*, we present a curious group of works by different authors whose theme is the Parisian Luxembourg Garden, the great park in the centre of elegant and bourgeois Paris. A famous place, the setting for numerous films, it is linked to the memory of many generations of Parisians who have grown up, played and loved in the shelter of its shadows, fountains, attractions, promenades and benches. We are once again facing the conversion of a place linked to the monarchy, in this case to the regent Marie de' Medici, into a public park. Together with the Tuileries Gardens, they are the great protagonists of green spaces in the French capital and the subject of many works by countless artists.

An example of public garden space in Barcelona is the antecedent of what is now Paseo Sant Joan. Created at the end of the 18th century, it was a long tree-lined avenue with fountains and sculptures, as seen immortalized in the engraving *Paseo de la Esplanada* (c. 1801).

Cabinet of wonders

The tour of *Captive Beauty* is completed with a small botanic-inspired cabinet of wonders. Divided into the various objects contained in the large cabinet that ends the exhibition and the furniture, vases, planters, architectural elements, and planters that are distributed in other parts of the gallery. All of them complete that intimate and varied garden in which Artur Ramon Art has become for a few weeks.

As Michel Foucault states: "the garden is the smallest plot in the world and it is, on the other hand, the whole of the world. The garden is, from the beginning of its history, a kind of happy and universalizing heterotopia, the garden continues to be that polyhedral *topos* from which to speak of the universal and the particular."

We like this varied vision of the garden that art has provided us with throughout history, since it does nothing more than telling us about all the old, and, above all, new cartographies of the emotions that the viewer of the trained gaze can find behind a placid and beautiful flowerbed.

Ignacio Somovilla

Ignacio Somovilla (Asturias, 1966), graduated in Law from the University of Uviéu and in History of Art from the University of Barcelona and has completed his studies with a master's degree in cultural management at the University of the West of England. Author of several books and articles on gardens, and radio collaborator for twelve years, he currently has a fortnightly section in Radio 1's "El Ojo Critico" dedicated to the dissemination of garden art. He has curated different exhibitions and has been the coordinator for nine years of the "Paraíso Perdido" film and garden series that takes place at the Filmoteca de Catalunya. He is currently preparing the creation of an editorial specialized in gardens "Encyclopedia Botánica" and completes his informative work with the project of trips to gardens, Bomarzo, garden tours.



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Front page: *Venetian school. Pair of vessels (detail), c. 1850. Glazed Venetian ceramics, 86 cm high.*

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