

DREAM GARDENERS

+ BY ERIC NAKAMURA

I LIKE TO THINK OF THE GARDEN AS THE BEGINNING OF LIFE, WHERE THE FIRST SPROUTING IS THE SIGN OF THE FIRST FORM OF LIFE AND ALL LIFE FORMS EXTEND THEMSELVES FROM THERE.

Ryan McGinness is a well-known graphic designer whose work shows up in books, on T-shirts, and on skateboard decks. But he is also a conceptual artist. Ryan's latest show is a collaboration with Julia Chiang, a sculptor who works with found objects as well as her own free-form art. *Dream Garden* opened in July at New York City's Deitch Projects.

GR: Why is your collaboration called *Dream Garden*?

JC: We've attempted to create an environment where "all of our dreams come true." I think the combination of the imagery and form really brings these elements to life, so it's no longer just in one's imagination.

RM: I initially proposed *In for a Quick Garden*, which I saw on Led Zeppelin's manager's T-shirt in the background of a fuzzy black-and-white photo during the band's *Behind the Music* on VH1. But then Jeffrey [Deitch] suggested the more straightforward *Dream Garden*. I thought that his suggestion was a lot like destiny.

GR: Can you explain the show's concept?

RM: We really wanted to create a personal yet accessible environment that reflected some of our basic themes: artificially growing love with organic and artificial materials; reality vs. fabricated and wishful memories; coming to terms with a surreal and absurd subconscious in everyday life; and presenting the fractal-influenced concept of worlds within worlds.

JC: I like to think of the garden as the beginning of life, where the first sprouting is the sign of the first form of life and all life forms extend themselves from there. In our environment, everything is connected and each form is extended into an "other." It becomes a garden that can give life to anything.

GR: What is the relationship between the drawings and the sculpture?

RM: We both wanted to create another world—or rather, our own worlds based on memories, dreams, and the subconscious, but each using our own language. The flat graphics is the language I know, and Julia communicates well with objects.

JC: We both had a strong interest in working together on creating an environment that was based on the past—whether it was from memories or childhood fantasies. In a way, I consider Ryan's paintings as environments for my objects to inhabit.

GR: How do the icons relate to the lush plant life?

RM: The idea of representing something not only from one dimension—third—in another—second—but also romanticizing and idealizing that representation is a theme that runs throughout the installation. Presenting three-dimensional symbols of things in conjunction with the real things themselves—planting fake flowers in the real dirt and grass—further complicates this contrast.

JC: Ryan's icons mimic the familiarity of a symbol, referring to something that is real. The contrast of icons or forms that are clearly artificial—plastic horses, fake flowers, hearts—growing out of or inhabiting a real environment of lush plant life is our effort to bring this *Dream Garden* to life.

GR: Is there meaning behind the relationships between each animal and its surroundings in *Dream Garden*?

JC: Definitely. I am obsessed in ways with animals and symbols that represent an ideal love. My interest lies mainly in where these ideals come from and where the fantasy of a "true love" comes from—if there even is a source. I think it comes back to this combination of nature and artificiality, where without reality there is no need to dream and fantasize.

GR: What are your opinions on the current interest in graphic design? It seems to be considered art these days.

RM: I believe, as of late, there has been a lot of naive confusion about the difference between art and design. It really is quite simple: The design industry is a services-based industry, and the art industry is a commodities-based industry. That's it. End of discussion.

GR: You have a pop culture side going on with skateboards, T-shirts, and so on. Then you have a hardcore art school side. Is this dichotomy something you recognize and care about or something you don't think about?

RM: I believe every great artist has self-consciously recognized the historical and contemporary context of his work. I want to create work which exists on all ends of the culture scale. I believe that a lot of "art" is boring and inaccessible and that a lot of "pop culture" stuff is just plain dumb and insulting. I am trying to bridge that gap.

GR: Julia, are you interested in promoting your art in pop culture arenas? It seems like there's a world of graphic art that's involved in skateboarding, advertising, and so on. Can sculpture go there, too?

JC: Definitely. I make things to share with people, so the more people that see it and experience it, the better. It's funny because I grew up in that world of skating and snowboarding, and you are constantly being immersed in imagery of all kinds. Maybe because I saw everyone doing their thing with design, I kind of went the other way, wanting to make things. I think sculpture is just a fancy word for an object, and in terms of objects, how beautiful is a newly made ramp or halfpipe? Generally these functional objects aren't viewed as art, but that's changing too—look at that bowl that was just shown at *Documenta*. I think of skating and advertisements as elements in everyday life, and I definitely think that there is room for sculpture. I guess it depends on how you define sculpture, but I can see it as a giveaway at a skate demo or as a full-on public project. 🤘

