

for the installation? I am curious to see how the scale of your body and the difference in physicality are registered in the cut edges in both cases.

SRH: Yam, cutting the vinyl for the model is very different. It is the concept process, so it is much freer. The model was my place to figure out how to communicate my idea-how to *depict* climate change. What would it look like? How would I make it?

Working small is less physical than working large--I can sit in a chair and don't have endless steps up and down a ladder--there is no reaching or working with large swaths of unwieldy and sticky material. It is physically easier and I can work faster.

Line quality and edges have always been important to me, and this is much easier to achieve on a smaller scale. When I move to a large scale, I create ratios of the model to actual space to estimate the general size of the elements of my final artwork. I cut the vinyl to size and, tape it to the wall so that I can draw while looking at reference drawings or the model itself. As I scale up, I don't want to lose the litheness, the movement, or the dried-up, frozen quality. But to do this is on a

large scale is more complicated. There is a dance to creating--you use your entire body to stretch and reach to draw at your height or larger. That movement in the work creates palpable energy—its spirit.

But there is also so much flexibility—this does not have to be exactly like the model. The model—the study—can be a trap, so I let go a little. I try to make it right for the work. I don't want to miss the beautiful accidents that can happen. When your pencil or X-ACTO knife slips, you feel different one day; you install the parts in reverse, there is an electrical outlet in the way, or you correct something that you never liked in the first place. When I struggle with the size of the pieces and getting the shapes right, I use a projector and draw the forms on the wall. I know I can digitize the model, use a mechanical plotter/cutter, or work with a graphic studio, but I don't. I am never as happy with the results.

YL: Thank you Susan, for this conversation. It is like a path into the garden. There is much in the work that is like you. The garden perhaps, is in the heart.

SRH: Thank you Yam. I had fun.

Born in British Hong Kong, **YAM LAU** is an artist and writer based in Toronto; he is currently an Associate Professor at York University. Lau's creative work explores new expressions and qualities of space, time and the image. His recent works involve video and computer-generated animation to create spaces in varied dimensionalities and perspectives. A recipient of awards from the Canada, Ontario and Toronto arts councils. Lau has exhibited widely across Canada, mainland China and Europe.

SUSAN ROWE HARRISON utilizes painting, drawing, ceramics, and large-scale site-based work to explore her fascination for natural environments and our relationship to them. Rowe Harrison studied painting and drawing at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois (1990-1991). She earned an MA, Art, Education, and Community Practice from New York University, New York, NY (2003) and a BA, History of Art from the University of California-Berkeley, Berkeley, California (1987). Rowe Harrison has been shown and collected internationally, including LinkedIn NYC (Empire State Building), Hyatt Hotels, Pfizer NYC, Arts Etobicoke/Amnesty International, Autoshare/Art on the Move, Floorworks/Relative Space, Bookhou, The Gladstone Hotel, Wave Hill, the University of Chicago Committee on Japanese Studies, The Newberry Library, and FIFA World Cup/Seoul 2002. Rowe Harrison currently lives and works in New York.

We'd like to thank the Puffin Foundation for their support of this project.

A PATH IN THE GARDEN

**A CONVERSATION BETWEEN YAM LAU
AND SUSAN ROWE HARRISON**

model, garden, mirror

Yam Lau: Let us recall the lovely afternoon when we viewed the delicate model you made for the present exhibition at the YYZ Artists' Outlet. You had casually placed the model (of a garden?) in a garden, amidst the plants at the Spring Wind Buddhist Farm in upstate New York. Our conversation unfolded around this scenario. Incidentally, I find gardens enchanting because they are models of sorts. The garden is where the micro and macro entangle, and the question of scale is made inherently dynamic. This aspect of the garden presents an endless fascination, and it is especially inspiring for artistic creation. I think of the art of Bonsai. Placing these concerns alongside the themes of ecology and transformation in your work, I would like to juxtapose your model with a powerful Buddhist metaphor, the Jewel net of Indra. In Indra's net, the question of dimensionality and universal interdependence are cogently integrated. I think of this metaphor, with all its splendour, as a conceptual garden of some sort, a garden of deep ecology, insubstantiality, and infinite transformation. I wonder if you would reflect on this juxtaposition a bit.

Far away in the heavenly abode of the great god Indra, there is a wonderful net that has been hung by some cunning artificer in such a manner that it stretches out infinitely in all directions. In accordance with the extravagant tastes of deities, the artificer has hung a single glittering jewel in each "eye" of the net, and since the net itself is infinite in all dimensions, the jewels are infinite in number. There hang the jewels, glittering like stars of the first magnitude, a wonderful sight to behold. If we now arbitrarily select one of

these jewels for inspection and look closely at it, we will discover that in its polished surface there are reflected all the other jewels in the net, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that there is an infinite reflecting process occurring.

Susan Rowe Harrison: Yam, I like this metaphor very much. While we don't see the mirror in the model in the garden, the mirror (on the model's floor) completes the analogy; the garden is reflected into infinity or some expression of infinity. And I love the model placed in the garden where the concept of the garden becomes the garden, and the garden becomes the concept of the garden growing into one another. This is the idea of universal

interdependence—we don't have the model of the garden and the garden; the garden model is the garden. We don't have the garden and nature--the garden is nature. And, in nature--we do not have "us" and the environment. We are the environment. To not take care of nature is to not take care of us. The garden is a glittering jewel in the net of infinity.

The idea for the mirror came from Monet's garden--that image you always see when you search for his garden online--the plants and the bridge all reflected in the pond below. I wanted a "reflecting pool" so that the "nature" in my installation would be reflected in the space, as would we—implicating us in a garden that portrays an ecosystem as it grows and falls apart--to see ourselves in it.

YL: "the garden model is the garden...". this is beautiful. I can relate to your love of (Monet's) pond and its reflective qualities. The pond is a quiet agent. It receives and binds the distinct elements within the environment on its illusive surface. The pond releases the weight from things, allowing their virtual imprints to trace temporarily on its surface. I imagine the efficacy of the mirrored floor-as-pond in the YYZ installation. The fictional garden on the wall will be projected into yet another fictional, perhaps virtual dimension in the mirror/pond. I imagine these two registers, the fictional and the virtual, are probably reversible. Enfolded in a supplementary dynamic, one cannot claim more reality than the other.

Here in The Buddhist farm, the night is populated by fireflies. I enjoy their company while sitting under the stars. They bring the stars near, I imagine the stars are the fireflies, the fireflies are stars. They became reversible realities. I would like to share a story by the Taoist philosopher Zhuangzi.

Once upon a time, I, Zhuangzi, dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes, a butterfly. I was conscious only of my happiness as a butterfly, unaware that I was Zhuangzi. Soon I awakened, and there I was, veritably myself again. Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man. Between a man and a butterfly, there is necessarily a distinction. The transition is called the transformation of material things."

From the graphical to the environmental

YL: In our discussion, we agreed that climate change and related calamities need not conclude in total destruction. While species extinction, including the human species,

presents imminent challenges, the narrative in your graphical garden suggests a different frame of reference than the anthropocene, a term you indicated as limiting. It appears that your "garden" is a perpetually self-generating process, one that demonstrates agency and finds expressions in the unforeseen.

SRH: I don't feel that this process will be purely dystopian. In terms of plant life, some plants will spectacularly thrive early--too prematurely for the species that depend on them--some will die off, and some will mutate and change--rupturing this web of interdependency. But how will this process change things--will the earth adapt, and what will this look like? How do you move the viewer to care? The beauty of the work is the hook. Or the *hope*?

from the book form to architectural form

YL: We spoke about the book works by Bruno Munari. I think your model could be a kind of "children" book, with the "pages as planes" folded into an architectural enclosure. The scale of these pages can be comfortably handled by hand. I think you can make a book work out of it. By "children", I refer not so much to a specific developmental stage as to the tribe of tender, curious, and innocent souls at every stage of life. I expect the large installation will preserve these beautiful and magical qualities but differently. I like the inherent scalability of this work.

SRH: I love Bruno Munari's books, though I am not familiar with all of them. I'm a big fan of his book *Square Circle and Triangle*. We both share an interest in visual communication and solid graphic form.

I can see the comparison between my model and a children's book or illustration. Especially since it is small enough to hold in your hands and it looks like a crude mock-up for a book, but I don't see it that way. Primarily because I made it as a scale model of Z gallery at YYZ, I see it in service to the installation. It is a playground for the work I am making and an efficient way to plan an exhibit.

This form allowed me to work on the corners of the installation, which I didn't want to go unconsidered. The corners can connect or break up images, changing the rhythm of the artwork in the space. I often find the nooks and crannies filled with potential. The details are crucial to the whole story.

I think the installation, once completed, will feel close to the model, but I want anyone who sees it to become a part of it--which is where I think the scale comes in. You are in the

artwork's environment rather than holding it in your hands--*you live in it* rather than carry it--It is a metaphor for the state of our environment. I hope that the work retains its magical qualities but also its scary ones.

YL: These are interesting thoughts on edges and corners. Corners are architectural folds. They facilitate transitions and interruptions. I imagine the installation at YYZ as a continuous sequence of images surrounding the space. But it can also be experienced as composed of individual tableaux whose edges align with sections of the architecture. The two orientations act simultaneously on the space and the viewer. The corners, by default, naturally introduce changes and interruptions to the sequence.

SRH: The corners are challenging. Where do you put images so that they retain their importance? I want the walls to appear continuous, but the corners assert themselves. Not acting on them is a missed opportunity. I continue the story across the folds on to the next panel and work with the bends and turns to continue the image or start a new one or, both.

In a sense, there is no beginning or end to the work. I imagined it beginning on the super-lush and colorful panel and ending on the colorless one where everything in the world dries up, but it could start there. This is where the viewer can control the story. This is where it is not a book.

Scale and perspective

YL: The play of scale and perspective between the model and the installation is fascinating. For the installation, the plants become giant and their scale architectural. They project a sense of wonder with their enormous graphical presence. They dwarf the viewer and invite her to assume the position of an insect, a cohabitant with the plants. This conceit is used in Chinese Bonsai presentation. Miniature figurines in classical costumes are placed in the bonsai pot. They serve as proxies of sorts. They invite the connoisseur to project herself (through them) into a dreamlike world of varied dimensionalities. I feel the bonsai is transformed from being a "scale model" to a world of wonder. It is both small and large. Looking at a bonsai, I know we occupy the same space. But I also know we are not in the same world. It requires imagination to get there. These proxy figurines facilitate that projection and transportation.

Can you talk about cutting the vinyl for the model and cutting directly in a large scale