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Sometimes I start a project and along the way I realize that everything has changed. You seem to approach these situations more intelligently. You come to a project with very few preconceptions. Tell me about your project for InSITE 2000—Picturing Paradise (2000)—how did it change? I wanted to create a situation that would bring forth all the complexities of the region—cultural, political, and social. I proposed cutting the border and turning it vertically to create two spaces. Of course, I couldn't get permission. The Border Patrol would not allow me to physically change the border.

What did you end up doing? I started to think about how I could deal with this idea of the border, something that was solid but transparent. How I could deal with the illusion of entry... or of not entering. Because what you realize when you are there is that the border is psychological; the physical boundary of the fence itself doesn't stop anybody. What stops people is the idea that on the other side of the fence there are people who will hunt them down and catch them.

You have been dealing with the idea of borders in your work and in your life. You are a Brazilian living in the United States. Did that influence the way you went about doing this project? It did. I'm interested in subjective borders, the limits that you impose on yourself and how illusory they are. I've also been dealing with ideas of reflection and distortion, how you think things are and how you see them, and what gets distorted between those two perceptions. I thought that perhaps there was a similar fluctuation of perception in the Tijuana/San Diego area. People who live very close to one another and think of themselves and one another in particular ways, but in reality, distort and reflect one another simultaneously.

Okay, what did you end up doing?! I'm trying to build an illusory field, using stainless steel sheets with a mirrored finish that are going to be placed on both sides of the border.

Along the fence? Yes. Because the fence is made of chicken wire, there is a transparency there. Depending upon where you are, you will think the fence is open and that you can walk through. There is a contradiction in the material—the stainless steel will seem transparent, but it is a very solid material. And, of course, what you are actually seeing is the same side that you are on, reflected from another space, that you cannot cross into. But at the same time, it's sort of like a mirage.

How do you think people from each side of the border will perceive the project? I don't know. There is another element to the project. I'm also using text from Italo Calvino's book *Invisible Cities*, which talks about two cities

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that exist side by side and reflect one another. They keep looking at each other, but they don't love each other. I could never write anything as effectively about what I saw of the two cities as Calvino did. On the U.S. side, you will read the text in English; it will be printed in Spanish as well, but the Spanish will be reversed, as if seen in a mirror image—an unreadable text. On the other side you will have the Spanish printed legibly, and the English in reverse. I'm not sure how it's going to be perceived, but I think that's one of the challenges. You have to allow yourself the possibility of failure, which would mean that all the particulars of that situation could not be encompassed. If I allow myself that possibility, I learn things and can take a critical position toward what I do.

You've researched the idea of gardens, of artificial landscapes and their relation to nature—that's a constant in your work. For instance, you're transplanting realities in a project for Canada. Can you explain what you are doing there? I'm working on a piece for a group exhibition about Arcadia titled *Elusive Paradise* (2001) at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, a monumental museum with two courtyards—a garden and a water courtyard. I've been trying to address two different levels of perception within the concept of garden and paradise, the semantic one and the mythological one. What I am proposing is one level of perception that is sensory. In the water court, I'm replacing the water with a perfume-scented liquid of a different color that's going to contaminate the galleries with scent. And in the garden courtyard, I'm using a level of perception that's more conceptual and architectural. I'm creating a colonnade around the courtyard balcony, and on each column will be a ring of text, a book title—it's a subjective bibliography. Each title makes reference to a garden, but they are not necessarily books that deal with gardens. They are political and fictional books. If you read all of the titles, they will create another text that sends you back to the ideas and mythologies surrounding gardens and landscapes.

***Hyperotomachia Poliphili: The Strife of Love in a Dream* by Francesco Colonna, an often neglected allegory from the high period of the Italian Renaissance, is probably the most influential work on gardens from the Renaissance onwards. There was this notion of walking through models of existence. First there is the labyrinth, the dense forest of darkness. Then**

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there is the body of water, and the glass garden. Polyphilus goes through all of these experiences that were translated by designers into elements of gardens from the Renaissance to Le Nôtre, even to the middle of the nineteenth century. And when Poliphilus finally finds what he's searching for, his muse Polia, which means wisdom... She disappears.

And the only thing he is left with is a scent. You've been working with ideas centered on gardens and labyrinths, as well as scents. Your career is a little bit like walking through a garden in that you experience a similar range of situations. When I look back, it seems that there was always an interest in dealing not necessarily with gardens, but with ideal spaces, subjective spaces that referred back to how we construct ideas of paradise. It's been one of the biggest themes in our imagination since the beginning of time.

And it's a great contradiction, especially in modern times. There is always a close correlation between what people try to do physically in constructing a landscape, and philosophically. When people wrote about gardens, there would be a correlation to philosophical quests. Garden paths related to the acquisition of wisdom, or to experiences that might only exist subjectively. There has always been a desire to translate ideas into a physical space that related to nature, or rather, a controlled nature. I once saw this amazing sign on an L.A freeway: "The Landscape Ends Here." (laughter) What does that mean? What is beyond the sign, if not landscape?

It's landscape as a construct. Exactly, everything beyond was not a landscape, it was...

Haphazard. Most spaces that we experience as "natural" have been constructed as sculptures on a larger scale. They deal with mass and volume, perspective and points of view, and how the subject plays itself into the landscape. They want to emphasize the control man has over nature, but then you see how these ideas of paradise shift like paradigms.

How do you position your work in these terms? Do you want your work explored as different situations? Or do you want to emphasize one view or another? I'm fascinated with vanishing points. Not just architectural vanishing points, how you view things, but also the idea of how you vanish on that point—how, at the same moment you place yourself there, you have to disappear. So I take these concepts to a subjective and abstract level that examines or investigates how we perceive things. You deal with perception in your work, the very close shift between what is there and

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- what is not there, and what you perceive as being there. I think my work has to do with that same concept, but on a more subjective level.
- Vanishing Point (1998), another one of your works, is a seventeenth-century type of labyrinth constructed from stainless steel tanks filled with perfume. Although the work has a very present physicality, in my own way of perceiving things, I think it has a lot to do with illusion. The night of the opening reception (at Galeria Fortes Vilaça) there were bees that were seduced by the scent of the perfume and fell into the tanks. It made me think of Zeuxis, who painted grapes so beautifully that they attracted birds. I'm really interested in that faint line between being seduced by something and being completely intoxicated by it. In my work, perfume has become a metaphor for possibilities of intoxication. It's a substance that crosses that border between pleasure and being over intoxicated.**
- In other words you're asking the question, what if lethal gas smelled good?** What is desire if not this faint line between being intoxicated by something or sickened? You can be intoxicated by many things—hate, desire, love Our societies have become so normalized that one of the only transgressive points we have is this very faint line of intoxication.
- When one thing becomes another.** Yes, when you cross the line, even if it's only for a minute or so, you abandon yourself to something. You've lost control.
- There's the paradox of Zeuxis and his contender, Parrhasius. Zeuxis painted fruit that could attract birds. When Zeuxis went to see what Parrhasius was doing, he stood in front of Parrhasius's painting and said, "Okay, unveil it." And Parrhasius said, "It is already unveiled; it is a painting of a veil." I'm thinking of this text where the author was talking about the development of human beings. He said that in the beginning there was only imagination. We understood the world through images. But then imagination became so dense that we had to conceptualize because we couldn't deal with such a huge amount of images. That's how language was created.**
- It's an image of an image.** It's contaminated, intoxicated by the conceptualization of the two processes. We can't isolate ourselves and go back to this primitive place where we only understand through images or mythological icons. It's nonsense to try to separate mind from body.
- Maybe that's the paradox for those of us who are influenced by art from the 1960s, as I think you and I both are. We're dealing with minimalism, it's something that's present in our work. A lot of artists are dealing with**

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the concept of “the thing itself”— how to create objects that represent nothing but themselves. And here we are borrowing from the aesthetic of those objects and impregnating them with different ideas. I’m more interested in photographs of minimalist sculptures than the sculptures themselves. I see a lot of minimalist influence in your work. I went to architecture school; I never went to art school. We were immersed in modernism—that pure, ethical utopia, and things that were not related to life per se. As an architect, there was such a desire to control everything. When you designed a house you also wanted to design people’s furniture, their way of living, their way of acting inside the space, their clothes ...so everything would get along. (laughter) When I started doing art, it was all phenomenology. I mean, in Brazil that was the biggest thing.

I want to talk about the piece with the pots. I see that as dealing with memory and residual impressions, an idea of Arcadia. What was the name of that work? *Untitled (from Vanishing Point)*. I had done the steel maze of tanks that referenced Renaissance and Italian gardens as well as English architectural follies. When the desire to control turns to the point where it is so contaminated by desire that it loses its ability to control, it becomes a folly. A folly has no sense to it beyond the pure desire underlying its construction. That was the point of the metal maze. At the time, I wanted to address those issues in a private way. How could I deal with a model for a landscape or an Arcadia that was closer to me, as I looked back into my own garden knowing that I had to leave it? How could I preserve it in my memory, or re-create it in another circumstance, create an index of that thing that was not there?

So how do you see the translation of one material into another as being an active part of this process? That also had to do with the folly. It was about my own desire and things that I really couldn’t control. I wanted to see those things exist in another form because I couldn’t have them in the original form anymore. I wanted to carry them with me. That’s how I came up with this idea to cast each pot, destroy the original, and keep the replica in another material. I went about it very systematically, although there was no system per se; it was one that I was creating out of my own desire. I classified the pots. I mapped them out and gave each original ma-

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terial a surrogate in the sculptural world.

There are different offshoots in the evolution of your work, like the eyedroppers, which seem to exist by themselves in a certain way—or am I mistaken? No, there is a correlation to language in the way I work. Some of the objects that I create I see as words that can be repeated in different forms or that can be articulated in a phrase. The eyedroppers dealt with issues in the work that had become “words.” They’re not necessarily attached to a phrase or a paragraph, they’re isolated ideas that came from the things I was dealing with. They came out of the series *Vanishing Point*. I was trying to think of how one delivers things into the world, and receives things, and I arrived at the idea of dosage. They are oversized variations of the droppers one finds in medicine bottles, but mutated into formal variations. What fascinate me are the unknowns. I thought the eyedroppers were going to drop the liquid, one drop at a time, but it turned out to be much better than that—they defy your expectations. They can go for half an hour without doing anything, and then you turn your back and they deliver. (laughter)

One work of yours seems to be anomalous to what we’ve been talking about, *Sinners* (1995), which you did for Site Santa Fe. How does that fit into your production? All along, my work process has involved an interest in systems that work outside of reason. I realize the semantic paradox of that, but what I mean is that I’ve always been interested in how madness and faith operate, because they have their own systems of reasoning. They operate outside of what we think is rational. That’s how *Sinners* came about; I was trying to think of sin’s nature, how it is seen or how it exists—because sinning is sort of an intoxication in and of itself. It means there is a border you have to cross.

Or that was crossed. Yes, but not necessarily into something bad. I think of sinning as a creative act. It’s one of the artifices—you can cross a line, you can transgress, you can challenge assumed notions. What interests me is this jump that can be made between what is allowed and what is not allowed, and how creative that can be.

It makes me think of your series, *Cheap Emotions* (1995) in which you had vials filled with different kinds of perfume. I live in Brooklyn where all these shops sell you counterfeit perfumes. And the semantics, the names that people give to these scents...

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What kinds of names? Beautiful. Escape. Poison. Passion. Now you have Schizophrenia. There is a whole pathology of desire invested in naming perfume and this pathology is compounded and made even more perverse by the fact that these are not the original scents. They're the fake ones you buy if you can't afford the real ones; they're the cheap ones. So I wanted to do something that would deal with this desire and this pathology. I created flasks that contain cheap scents locked inside. In order to fulfill the nature of the work you would have to break the flask, which of course nobody does. There's always something latent in there that rectifies the pathology of desire.

I've always wondered how someone names a perfume; did you use given names or make them up? What kind of references do you give? A chemist develops the scents for me. I just call him and tell him more or less what I want. I give him abstract references. I don't want it to be flowery, or too feminine; I want it to have, like, a residual note, to be strong, and not very sophisticated; I want it to have this cheap note to it. It's very abstract and very subjective. He creates samples, I choose one, and then we give it a name.

The scent of perfume is associated with a human presence—a body smells of perfume. But there is a disembodiment of that in your work; you construct a place that smells like perfume. That goes back to the vanishing point—it refers to the same disembodiment, to something that has physicality, but a physicality that you can't grasp.

One imagines a human presence. How do you see people in relation to your installations? They play a very big part; my pieces could not work without people. I'm not interested in some kind of monolithic narrative. That's why I'm fascinated by scents and other ephemeral things; I'm giving people triggers that activate memories and contexts, and they create their own narratives. So each piece has multiple readings depending upon who is seeing it, or the context in which they are seeing it. Depending upon your mood, you're going to see those things completely differently. There is no fixed meaning—I want my pieces to be triggers.