

## BIENNALE OF SYDNEY - 2004

### [Art in America, Dec, 2004](#) by [Lilly Wei](#)

Royal Botanic Gardens

Entering the show this way, you saw, situated along a path leading toward the bay, *Words for Gardens* (2004) by Luisa Cunha (Lisbon), an installation composed of a bench and headphones that whispered a text linking drawing to seeing the world, defined here as a zone that exists simultaneously inside the listener's head and outside in physical reality. Nathan Coley (Glasgow) created an architectural structure, *The Edge of the Radiant City* (2004), that was a form of trespass, an intrusion into nature. The work consisted of a simple, gray modernist building facade, papered on the back side with the "ugliest wallpaper" the artist could find and "furnished" with fake potted plants. It was a more literal exterior and interior than Cunha's, its ungainliness offered in deliberate contrast to the cultivated beauty of the park, resulting in a skewed dialogue between a nature that wasn't quite nature and the towering Sydney skyscrapers beyond. Members of Coley's crew were spotted wearing T-shirts printed with this succinct credo: "conception, construction, installation, destruction."

From here, you could turn left or right. If you turned left, you came out onto the forecourt of the Sydney Opera. Durham, under a piercingly blue sky and surrounded by large crowds two days after the official opening of the Biennale, presided over the crushing of an economy-sized fire-engineered car which remained in situ for the duration of the show. A 2-ton boulder with a painted face that resembled Mr. Potato Head was lowered onto the car's roof, while Durham conducted the operator of the crane in a spectacle that was also beguilingly "anti-spectacle," in the words of one viewer. The slow-mo buckling of the car--everyone applauded when the windows shattered--was a parable of nature crushing technology, albeit abetted by technology; it might also be read as one way to solve the perennially vexing question of sculpture and pedestal.

If you turned right, you came upon the crowd-pleasing *Secuencia Ridicula* (2002), by MP & MP Rosado (twin brothers from Seville). Here, two telegenic, lifelike, life-size figures of young men sat tantalizingly among the branches of a magnificent ancient fig tree, like a latter-day Tom and Huck (or maybe a Duane Hanson), just out of reach. Farther down the path, and easily overlooked, was another Durham piece, a half-hidden, red PVC pipe that resembled an amiable pet periscope, peering up inquiringly from a dry conduit, another version of the machine in the garden. In the nearby

Palm House, a modestly sized greenhouse, was a poetic, ephemeral and idiosyncratic installation of inconsequential found objects, their abundance subdued and quieted into orderly groupings laid on the floor and attached to the walls by Korean-born, Paris-based Koo Jeong-a. And last, on the way toward the Art Gallery of New South Wales, along the curve of the water, was Bulgarian artist Pravdoliub Ivanov's Water Monuments (1999/2004). Using the sloping grass lawn as a color field, Ivanov, who has an offbeat sense of humor, sank dozens of candy-colored plastic buckets into the ground, making either a geometric painting or a domesticated earthwork. At the Royal Botanic Gardens, reason as technology, emotion as nature, and the human presence were some of the issues juggled, reconsidered and reconciled.