

# FRAME

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92>  
0 29074 04462 8  
US \$19.95  
PRINTED IN NETHERLANDS



Issue 92

The Great Indoors

May / June 2013

Designed and printed by  
Koppert, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

# Zoom In

ALL EYES ON SÃO PAULO'S DESIGN SOUL, PAULA HAYES' MINI BOTANIC GARDENS, AND NEW BRANDED RETAIL IN PARIS, ZÜRICH AND BARCELONA

# Nature's Networker

Paula Hayes

Art

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**She lives an urban life in New York City, but Paula Hayes' work revolves around the natural world.**

Words Jane Szita  
Photos courtesy of Paula Hayes

Paula Hayes

Art

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The city garden where Hayes tries out many of her new designs. Her cat Knuckles explores among assorted planters and a cast acrylic birdbath. In the background is a birdhouse for bluebirds, made of UV-stable plastic.



Living Necklace V2  
in lavender.

**'My material is that  
quality in humans  
that needs to  
connect with life'**



The artist tends a  
terrarium in her studio.  
Photo Jesse David Harris

**H**aving grown up on a farm, almost the first thing Paula Hayes did on arriving in the city was to start a gardening business, partly to survive the urban jungle and partly to pay her way through grad school, where she studied sculpture. Inevitably, the two occupations, gardening and sculpture, gradually converged. Twenty years on, Hayes' terrariums – miniature biospheres contained in swelling bulbs of hand-blown glass – launched an army of imitators, some perhaps better intentioned than others. A line of sensuous garden objects – birdbaths, pots and nesting boxes – soon followed, as did a series of installations that interweave her separate works with a landscape of poetic narrative. Now, Hayes is working on inanimate objects (though we suspect they will have some organic dimension) like mirrors and lamps, to be released later this year; a science-fiction book about an alien visiting a natural paradise; and a park in a former industrial area of Germany. 'I guess I'm gradually creating a whole world,' she says.

**Tell us about the park you're designing.** Paula Hayes: It opens in June. It's part of the Emscherkunst programme, which is a summer art project located on the former industrial terrain of Essen, outside Düsseldorf. My part is going to become a permanent element, and it involves renaturalizing an area of extreme pollution around a former filtration pool. I'm adding a bridge and an island, so it will be a place where people can walk and picnic and see the kinds of plants that can purify heavy metal.

**Your book is based on a kind of natural preserve, too.** The book is called *Lucid Green*, and it features a fictional character who has been present in my thinking and work for 20 years. She – the character – is an alien. I don't think she represents me. I have used her in drawings, sketches; I relate to her, look up to her. I wish she would come here, and I hope I'm calling her here. She's a mystery figure, a deity almost.

The book project ties in with my new sculpture, which is for an exhibition to be held at Salon 94 in 2014. The new work will be functional, lamps and mirrors, but envisaged as elements you might find in a nature sanctuary. I guess I'm gradually designing a whole world. And I'm at Art Basel this year, both with my publisher and with some of my new sculptural pieces. David Adjaye has done the architecture for the stand.

**What was the defining moment in your career?** There was steady growth in my work from 1987, but after my 2004 exhibition, *Forest*, for Salon 94 – the first time I showed the terrariums – it really took off. I feel like I revived a design classic. The Victorians had used terrariums to transport tropical plants. But mine were different. They were open, not sealed off, so you could garden them and they were biomorphic, hand-blown and sensuous. Why were they so popular? I think they struck a chord with our contemporary ecological situation. They were a kind of icon, giving people the idea of some part of the natural world that they could take care of.

**And now?** Since my exhibitions at MoMA and Lever House, I've been working with great intensity, refining what it is I want next. I feel it's the poetic aspect I want to pursue – the ...



Living Necklace, a variation on the  
traditional hanging plant basket. Hayes'  
work is becoming increasingly domestic;  
she will shortly unveil sculptural objects  
such as mirrors and lamps.

*Nocturne of the Limax Maximus* (2011), a two-part installation in cast acrylic and handblown glass for the lobby of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The installation's title refers to the hermaphroditic leopard slug.

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Paula Hayes

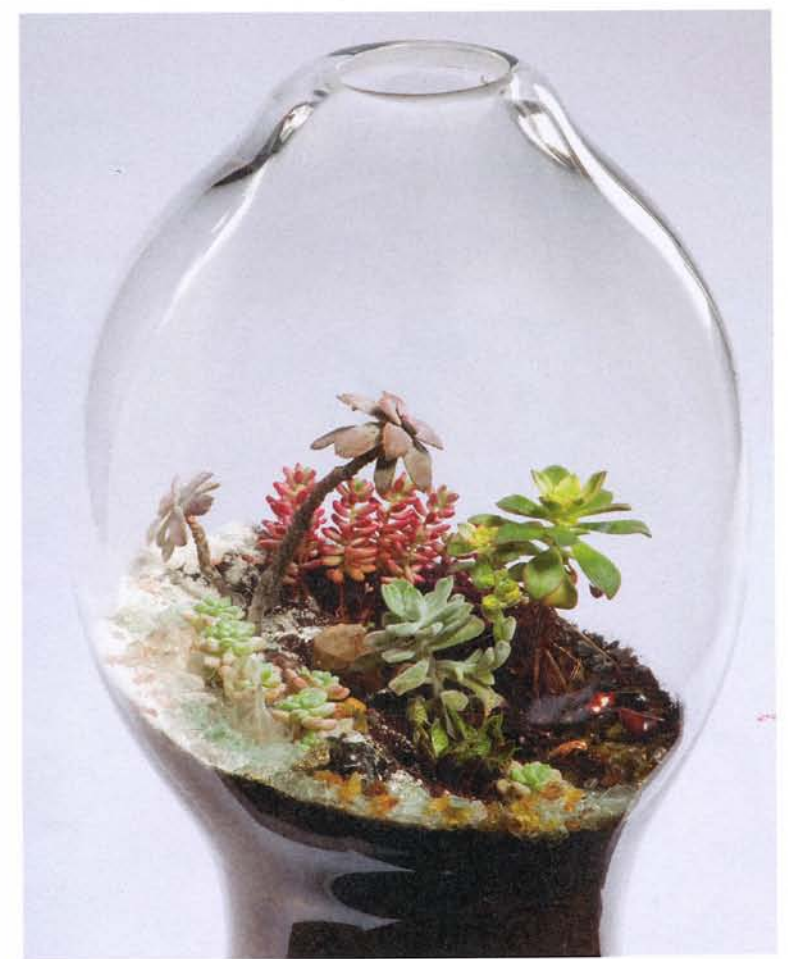
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Inside Giant Terrarium GT02, crystals are set among succulent plants.



## 'My work gives the hope that we can still care for nature'



Giant Terrarium GT02 (2009), a 5-foot-tall, curvaceously vertical glass vessel, hand-blown in collaboration with the James Mongrain studio near Seattle.

... open-ended quality, the thing that touches people. My work spreads over so many different disciplines: horticulture, art, landscape, design, DIY – there's even an element of performance in caring for the plants, and a sense of spirituality because of the presence of life and death. And then I want to leave all this as open as possible to a variety of interpretations, allowing as many layers and contexts to exist as possible.

**Where does the obsession with nature come from?** I was raised on a farm, so growing things is part of my psyche. When I came to NYC 26 years ago, I realized during my first week in the city: I can't live here without gardens. So I started gardening, also to pay my way through grad school. Being entrepreneurial, I'd soon started my own business. I had an equal interest in art and nature, so I merged them. To me, it was no different whether I called myself a sculptor or a landscape designer. Both these things produce the same chemical reaction in me.

**What do you think you can achieve with your work?** I'm trying to enhance the harmony of things. We're hurting our world with our wars and by depleting our resources, so why not do things differently? Look at my flowerpots, for instance. I see them as more in the flow of life and give them a shape similar to the root ball of a plant, which provides the space needed for growth. It's about not imposing a classical form.

My planters are shaped the way they are because of my work with plants. My objects are not cerebral but usable. Birdbaths, birdhouses, planters – they're a cast of characters that belong to the story of how I want the world to be. If a being like the character in my book would come to our world, this is how I'd want the world to look to her.

**Do you despair about our modern relationship with the natural world?** Absolutely. The other day I was talking to a scientist friend who explained how certain substances 'sequester' toxins. And I thought that in my living works I am an artist sequestering despair. People look to me for hope. My work gives the hope that we can still care for the natural world around us.

I make organic works for galleries and museums, and because these pieces need certain systems to keep them alive, there's a lot of work in caretaking. I have to run around a lot, train people and stay in dialogue with them to help keep things on track. I want to build a tribe of caregivers. The people who get involved with the exhibitions often keep weekly or daily diaries, or even give the terrariums names. That's an artwork in itself; that's really a big part of it.

**That seems to be the essence of your work, the way that people connect to it.** We sorely miss this sort of connection. I love technology and its promise to connect us. But meanwhile our connection with nature is slipping away. Artistically, I'm working with another kind of connectivity. Open-minded and open-ended, it's giving people a vehicle for caring. People love to care for plants. Without them, we wouldn't exist. I show my work in public places, and I see its very strong power of attraction. That's what I sculpt. My material is actually the quality in human beings that needs to connect to life. \_

paulahayes.com

With Layar, watch the making of *Nocturne of the Limax maximus* at MoMA, New York City

Excerpts From the Story of Planet Thear (2009), a rooftop installation at the Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York. The installation is an imaginary landing site for an alien character, invented by Hayes in 2002 and now featuring in her forthcoming book.

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