

**CATHARINE
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GALLERY**

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New York, NY
By appointment only

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Techno-Botanical Art In the Garden

SHIRLEY ALEXANDRA WATTS

Curator, Natural Discourse

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In October 2016, *Digital Nature* invited a group of acclaimed contemporary artists to the Los Angeles County Arboretum and Botanic Garden to present time based works that explore ideas about nature, climate, culture and biology. With themes as diverse as invasive exotics, petrochemical production, smog, cell mitosis and an ancient Chinese poem, these digital and video works explore the intersection of horticulture and technology.

The LA Arboretum is a beloved public garden with an important botanical collection, a flock of peacocks and stunning views of the San Gabriel Mountains. Founded smack in the middle of twentieth century Los Angeles, its architecture is highly reflective of the optimism and delusions of that time in Southern CA.

This stunning landscape, full of contradictions and promise, presented itself as a perfect fit for a *Natural Discourse* project.

Natural Discourse: Artists, Architects, Scientists & Poets in the Garden began as a collaborative project between The University of California Botanical Garden at Berkeley (UCBG) and a multi-disciplinary group of artists, writers, architects and researchers who spent time in UCBG's extraordinary collection of plants, engaged with the horticulturalists and developed new site specific work. The resulting works were on view within the garden's collection from July 2012 to January 2013. From 2011 to 2016, *Natural Discourse* has produced six symposia exploring connections between contemporary art, science and the humanities at institutions including

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the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles, the LA Arboretum, UCBG and the Huntington.

Work on the Arboretum project began with the idea of producing a similar exhibit to the one at UCBG. After carefully considering the culture, history and collection of the Arboretum, the ties between science and art in the San Gabriel Valley and the Arboretum's long history as a site for films, it seemed natural to produce an exhibit of video projections and interactive digital work.

In liberating these works from the hallowed white walls, we have given both the public and the artists something extraordinary. We invited everyone into the garden after dark, a time when it is normally the haunt of urban wildlife and truant humans. Each projection or installation was sited carefully to tease out connections between the botanical collection and the art. Just as in a classical Chinese garden, not meant to be seen all at once, the art was presented as a series of perfectly composed views framed by the larger context of the garden, the San Gabriel Mountains and even the traffic on Baldwin Ave.

Experiencing these digital works at the

Arboretum provided not only many settings for selfies, but also a reason to look up from our screens, wander through the garden at dusk and pause to watch a time based work of art, the projection of which expanded beyond the space of the garden and connected the garden to its urban context.

The artist Chris Doyle chose to show *In the Labyrinth* on a large monitor in the Weaver's Garden. Having done a lot of outdoor projections, which he describes as romantic and magical, Chris says this:

"The monitor in the garden is a different experience. It is much more of a collision, jarring and surprising. It is more akin to surrealism. When I showed the piece at the Arboretum, it was an experiment testing the hypothesis that the result would be more dramatic. And yet I was somewhat shocked and so pleased with the juxtaposition of the gilded landscape in the natural context. Showing the piece in a gallery setting just doesn't pack the same punch.

One thing is certain; I will never be satisfied by showing it indoors again. I really can't imagine a more perfect setting than the Arboretum."

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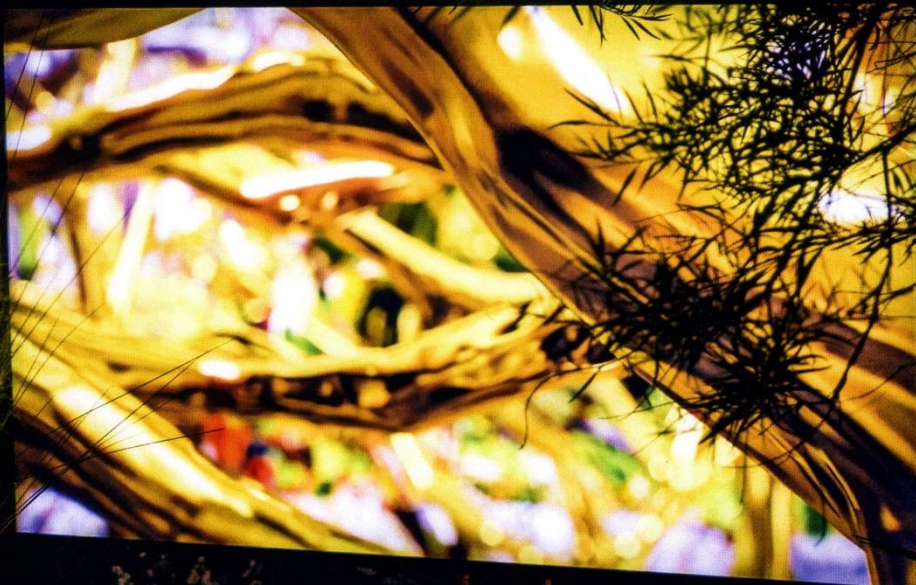
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*The monitor in the garden showing *In the Labyrinth**



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In the Labyrinth

CHRIS DOYLE 2016 Single-Channel Digital Animation Edition of 5 with
2 Artist Proofs Duration: 2 Minutes, 10 Seconds

Within the world of this piece, the viewer is taken through a dense thicket of roots and branches. Leaves flutter; light streams through the sculptural, natural, architectural forms. The entire environment appears to be cast in gold, making a strange, synthetic and hybridized version of the natural world. As it moves, you experience that tension between natural and artificial, a kind of contradiction that hints at an apocalyptic terror that haunts both my own work and contemporary landscapes in general.

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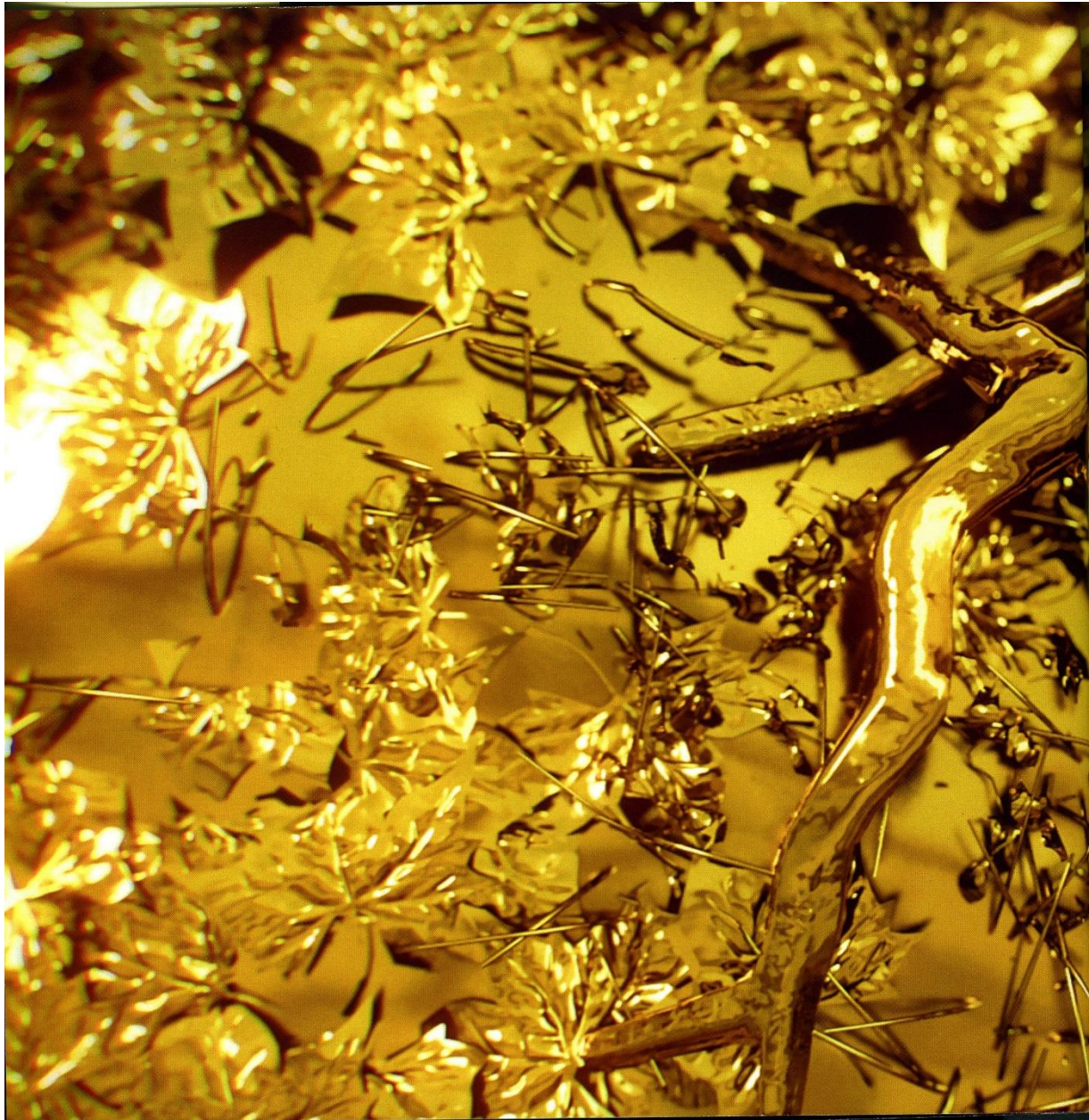
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