

High concepts at Hampton Court

Naomi Slade tells the stories behind two medal-winning gardens

The biggest flower show in the world, RHS Hampton Court is a relaxed affair. With lots of room to wander and plenty of nurseries and sundries amongst the gardens the atmosphere is rather like a country fair – albeit a rather grand one. This year two Berkshire-based garden designers were flexing their horticultural muscle, with very different gardens.

Judy Cornford from Kintbury created a sculptural show garden, *The Eye of the Internet Maze*. This silver medal-winning exhibit poignantly addressed the difficulties faced by older people in the internet age. “When I started my garden design course, I had great problems accessing information online. They said ‘find it on Google’ but I didn’t know what that meant!” she explained.

In the centre of the garden, a font of everlasting knowledge spills with water and is surrounded by deep red Lobelia ‘Queen Victoria’ to represent the richness of the information available. But the garden is backed by curved paths of a maze which obscures the information one is seeking.

The garden is full of visual puns and references. The central font is surrounded by *Sarcococca confusa*. The hedges are precipitously cut to indicate a steep learning curve, monkey puzzle trees are surrounded by tangled ‘wire netting plant’ – *Corokia* cotoneaster edged with and clipped evergreen hedges: quite literally thinking outside the box (or perhaps the Buxus).

Over in the Conceptual Garden section, gold medal winning *Picturesque* by Berkshire-based designer Melissa Jolly was my favourite exhibit.

Elegant in its simplicity, she addressed the problem of constructing views in a restricted space and, in a spare white ‘art gallery’, images from a range of well-known artists were reiterated in three dimensional planting, framed by openings in the walls.

Extraordinarily effective, the sense of a controlled exhibition space was overwhelming. Each picture could be considered on several different levels; as a unique composition, in terms of its similarity to the work of art that inspired it and on its gardening merit.

The strength of Melissa’s garden is that nothing is overdone. The Hockney-inspired landscape is made up of simple birch trees and ferns. Mondrian-style colour blocks are created through use of gladioli and Melissa’s ‘Natural Spheres’ composition of Echinops, Buxus balls, agapanthus and alliums effortlessly mimics Wassily Kandinsky’s original circles. The choice of plants is apposite. Damien Hirst’s shark in a glass fish tank is paralleled by *Tillandsia ‘Jackie Loinaz’* a quietly menacing and spiky plant if ever there was one.

Although the gardens are in different categories, both make excellent use of non-gardening concepts to tell a story or expand a theme on an almost intellectual level. Thinking gardening at its best. Find out more at www.melissajolly.co.uk.



Above: *Eye of Internet Maze*
by Judy Cornford

Left: *Picturesque* by Melissa Jolly