

Bennington College Usdan Gallery

February 25–May 9, 2020

[Opening Reception](#) | February 25, 6:00-8:00 pm

Usdan Gallery is proud to present the complete *House & Garden* drawing series by ecological artist Patricia Johanson '62, a seminal project produced fifty years ago but never before exhibited in its entirety. Inspired by a 1969 commission from *House & Garden* magazine, the 146 garden prototypes illustrate the scope of Johanson's prescience in considering environmental issues of urgency today, such as erosion, flooding, landfills, and water conservation, as well as larger questions of the relationship between humans and nature. Drafted on 8 1/5-by-11-inch sketchbook paper, the modestly scaled pencil drawings gain potent beauty and historical significance when viewed as a cohesive series. The *House & Garden* exhibit situates the artist among her conceptualist peers of the 1960s and 1970s, forecasts her current work on urban infrastructure projects, and contributes to the growing, overdue recognition being accorded Johanson's generation of women land-art pioneers.

Johanson was an emerging star in minimalist painting when an architect with *House & Garden* invited her to design a domestic garden for its pages. Ignited by research into the history of gardening, the artist restlessly sketched and wrote about ideas stretching far beyond the backyard, proposing initiatives such as giant gardens shaped like insects, highways with parks for grazing sheep, and a wildlife network spanning North America like a web. The magazine declined to publish any of it, yet the project reoriented Johanson's career toward studies in engineering and architecture and a renowned practice designing functional artworks that create habitats for people and wildlife. Originally a burst of radical imaginings completed over nine months, the *House & Garden Commission* has, fascinatingly, served as Johanson's wellspring for decades. The artist has consulted the drawings and texts for built projects including Fair Park Lagoon, Dallas (1981-86); Endangered Garden, San Francisco (1987-97); Petaluma Wetlands Park and Ellis Creek Recycling Facility, California (2001-09); The Draw at Sugar House, Salt Lake City (2002-18); and two current projects: Mary's Garden, a remediation of mine-scarred land in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and a conversion of parking lots to wetlands at McMaster University in Ontario, Canada.

The *House & Garden* drawings form the centerpiece of the Usdan Gallery installation, which follows the chronological sequence of the artist's related essays on "Line Gardens," "Vanishing Point Gardens," "Artificial Gardens," "Illusory Gardens," "Water Gardens," "Highway Gardens," and "Garden-Cities." As Johanson developed many of her ideas at Bennington, working closely with faculty Paul Feeley and Tony Smith and mentored by artists such as fellow alumna Helen Frankenthaler '49, the exhibit includes early works and ephemera that set the stage for the artist's pivotal activity with *House & Garden*.

Johanson lives in Buskirk, New York. Her work has been exhibited internationally and is in public collections including the Dallas Museum of Art; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C. Her awards include fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Patricia Johanson: House & Garden is curated by Usdan Gallery director Anne Thompson.

Associated Events

Artist's Talk by Patricia Johanson
Tuesday, March 24, 7:00 pm, Tishman Auditorium

Lecture by Xin Conan-Wu, "Patricia Johanson: Path into the Garden of Art"
Thursday, April 23, 7:00 pm, Tishman Auditorium

Conan-Wu's research bridges art history and contemporary inquiries, with a focus on the visual arts and landscape cultures of East Asia and their exchange with Western traditions from a comparative perspective. She is associate professor of art history at William & Mary and the author of *Patricia Johanson's House and Garden Commission: Reconstruction of Modernity*.

Stay tuned for more Usdan programming this spring; details forthcoming. Visit [Usdan Gallery's website](#) for information.

About Usdan Gallery

With exhibitions of contemporary artists and ideas, Usdan Gallery engages and advances the College's history of innovation in the arts while addressing the wider community. The 3,200-square-foot space is located on the main level of the Helen Frankenthaler Visual Arts Center.

Driving directions

The College is close to other notable art and culture destinations, including [The Bennington Museum](#) (10 minutes); [The Clark](#) (30 minutes); [The Williams College Museum of Art](#) (30 minutes); and [MASS MoCA](#) (40 minutes).