

STRANGERS IN THE GARDEN by Stephen Spurrier

Series One – Gymnophobia
Series Two - Psychedelia
Series Three – Schizophrenia
Series Four – Paranoia
Series Five – Animaphelia

Most of us enjoy gardens. We often have an idealised concept of the garden- from the picturesque to the bizarre. However there are many nuances of what transpires in the garden – clandestine meetings, burglary, gossip, suicide, erotica, murder, espionage, chance encounters, joy and love – all these things make the garden an intriguing place, whether it be a simple backyard in suburbia, a national park, a botanical garden a religious environment or simply somewhere in the Australian bush.

The garden has been used by artists as a setting for imagery for centuries since religions began telling stories and creating mythology.

So who are the strangers in the garden ?

While on one hand gardens are symbols of birth and renewal, these artist's books investigate what the possibilities are as to who might be in the garden – in this case perhaps some weird, ambiguous and distorted characters. These types of images have been used for some time – such as the upside-down reversible images, depicted here on the inside covers, from Italy (1700 c) which influenced the evolution of the Coles funny picture books, first published in Australia during 1879.

These artist's books examine the darker aspects of the garden and what might go on during both day and night – quasi-religious ceremonies, witches rituals, voodoo rites or strange demonic activities. For example in the novel *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* by John Berendt (1994) the writer investigates the concept of midnight as the period between good magic and evil magic. (This novel was made into a film in 1997)

There have been many films which have used the garden as an important part of their theme.

A few examples:

The secret Garden 1993 (based on the 1911 novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett)

I walked with a zombie 1943

Mysteries of the Garden of Eden 2007

Rashomon 1950

Bharat Mata (Mother India) 1957

The Birds 1963

Night of the Living Dead 1968

The Hills have Eyes 1976

L'Alberto Degli Zoccoli (The Tree of Wooden Clogs) 1978

Visual Artists use the setting of the garden over centuries in many ways

For example

Andrea Mantegna; *The Agony in the Garden* 1455

Joan Miro; *Woman and Bird in the Moonlight* 1949

Henri Rousseau; *The Snake Charmer* 1907

Katharina Fritsch; *Figure in the Garden* 2011

Hugo Simberg; *The Garden of Death* 1896

Sandro Botticelli; *Primavera – the garden of Venus* 1478

Hieronymous Bosch; *The Garden of Earthly Delights* 1505

Mysteries and puzzles lie within.

Mary Collins, Research Commissioner, Ugg Boot Press.