



Team Leaders: Oscar Grauer, Carla Urbina and María A. Villalobos

## Ephemeral Botanical Urban Landscape:

A performative method towards resilience and adaptable public spaces.



Fundación Jardín Botánico de Maracaibo Botanical City



# EPHEMERAL BOTANICAL URBAN LANDSCAPE: A PERFORMATIVE METHOD TOWARDS RESILIENCE AND ADAPTABLE PUBLIC SPACES

## Summary

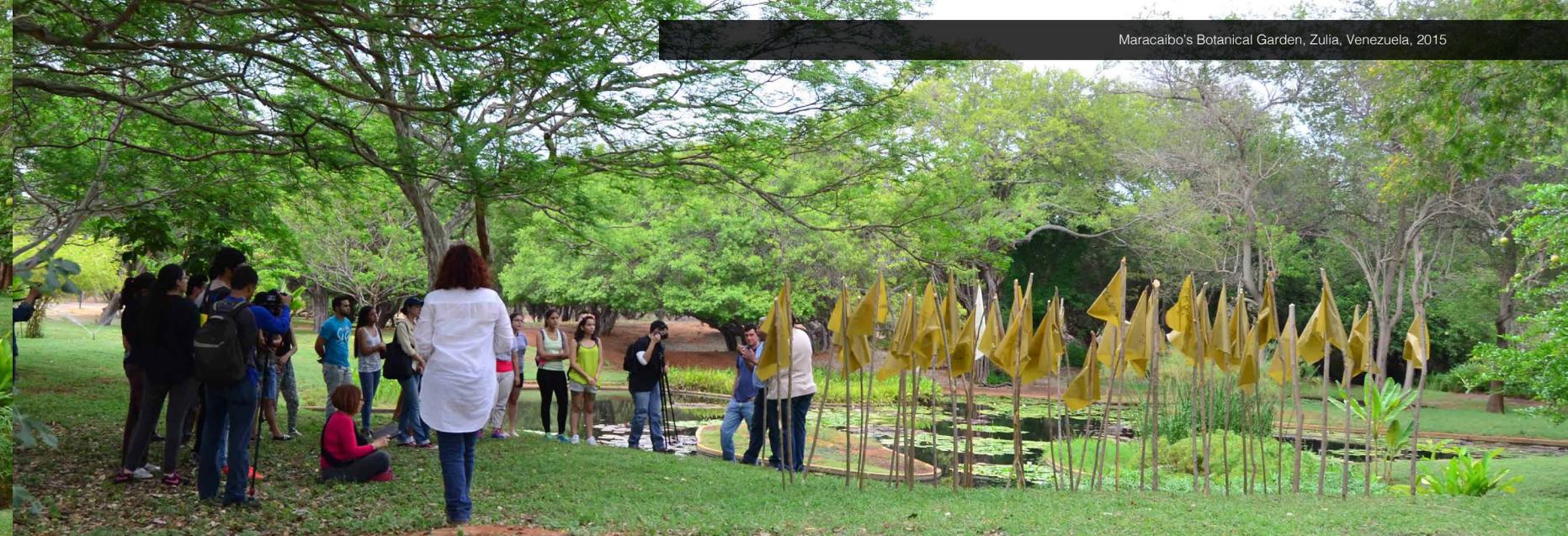
This side event to UNESCO's International Scientific Conference held in Paris included two Workshops, simultaneously performed on July 08, 2015. The two on-site learning experiences consisted of performances where participants had the opportunity to transform the public space into an ephemeral botanical garden, based on Roberto Burle Marx and Leandro Aristeguieta's unique invention in Maracaibo, of a garden-school that builds itself while teaching its constructors how to do it. The first workshop took place in Paris, at the Place Jussieu, as a perfect middle point between the University Campus Pierre et Marie Curie and the Jardins des Plantes. The second one took place at Maracaibo's Botanical Garden, in Venezuela, where the First School of Horticulture of Latin-American was founded (1983). Taking the botanical garden landscape typology as a point of departure, we believe that such ephemeral engagements could encourage long-lasting pedagogical transformations.

## Introduction

Stark disparities mark the widening gap between the developed and developing. The two on-site learning experiences in Paris and Maracaibo, consisted of performances where participants had the opportunity to transform the public space into an Ephemeral Botanical Garden, specifically focusing the Phylogenetic Garden-Open air Classroom. One of the questions posted to the participants, was that perhaps isolated actions and single scale strategies of natural and cultural preservation are not enough to achieve long term sustainability, particularly when dealing with landscapes of profound cultural significance. Instead of considering such landscapes as artifacts fixed in time and space, the quest shifts towards processes that can sustain a transformative botanical and aesthetic equilibrium in the long term. Secondly, it was discussed how this process of rehabilitation/transformation of historically significant landscapes, not only addresses the legacies of Burle Marx and Aristeguieta, but also the botanical garden as a model of artistic and botanical performance itself. In this sense, the case study has the potential to serve in similar situations in other contexts, and perhaps contribute to the conversation on 'The Landscapes of Our Common Future' and alternative approaches to what makes us vulnerable and what makes us resilient, both within and as a product of, the public space.

## Ephemeral Botanical Urban Landscape at Maracaibo's Botanical Garden

As a research team responsible for the reopening of the garden in 2013, after more than 20 years of abandonment, the goal was not to talk about the recovery of an impossible past, but rather about the process of expansion, preservation and adaptation of a unique landscape system to the larger territorial scale. The performance included five simple steps: Discover: Learn about the Phylogenetic Garden within the Botanical Garden, the Orders and Families in the botanical world and how they can be identified by their size, leaves, flowers, etc. Plant: Observe, identify and redraw a botanical illustration. The participants received fabrics in three colors, each on which was meant to represent the three general orders of plants, as included in the Phylogenetic Garden: Pteridophytes, Dicotyledoneae and Monocotyledoneae. Grow: Attach the new self created botanical illustrations to pieces of recycled wood from the Dry Tropical Forest and plant the wood holding the illustrations at the edge of the Garden's Lake. The participants were then able to see their drawings as part of the garden, while creating a kind of outdoor classroom to continue the conversation on the importance of conservation of the ecosystem diversity and the ecological balance. Be: Expansion and replantation of the self created botanical illustrations by walking in a procession towards the original location of the Phylogenetic Garden, and 'discover' in the field where each botanical illustration needed to be located. François Galletti started the game, took one of the 'flags' (see pictures in the following page), found the spaces in the garden that corresponded to the illustration and 'planted it'. The participants then noted how the performance became a kind of living declaration of action, preservation and transformation. Reproduce: The participants were invited to enter the Orchidarium, where they discovered that the walls were covered of new botanical illustrations to be taken home by them to share their experiences and plant new lives beyond the garden's walls. In experiential terms, in the field one could perceive how children and adults were looking for names of the plants on the land and screaming the names of the botanical families and the species, while the new botanical individuals/illustrations began to invade the 'empty' landscape. After each participant planted their own illustration, they continued to help their friends and also made new friendships in the process. Gradually, the once empty and horizontal landscape was transformed and became a recognizable place of transversal relationships. The wind was hitting the fabric where the participants created the new botanical illustrations. This added a new sound to the symphony of the garden; the white, gold and silver of the fabrics in the landscape, remained the participants of what they have collectively learned and experienced.







Rue Jussieu, Paris, France, 2015

#### Ephemeral Botanical Urban Landscape at Place Jussieu

The Paris Workshop took place at the Place Jussieu from 12:00PM to 2:00PM. This public space was identified as a perfect middle point between the University Campus Pierre et Marie Curie and the Jardins des Plantes. This location was meant to serve as a strong metaphor for a relevant encounter between educational and botanical landscapes of learning, preservation and dissemination. The Paris performance shared the same methodological structure with the performance in Maracaibo, it was structured in five simple steps: Discover: Learn about the Phylogenetic Garden as designed by Burle Marx and Aristeguieta and its relationship to the long term evolution of the Botanical Garden as a landscape typology originated in Europe. The participants also learned about the Orders and Families in the botanical world and how their stems can identify species, leaves, flowers, etc. Plant: Distribution of botanical illustrations among the participants to observe, recognize and transform the drawings into their own representation of the species and their potential role in the urban landscape. Participants will be constantly joining the event at different moments during the time on site. The participants also received fabrics in three colors, each on which was meant to represent the three general orders as included in the Phylogenetic Garden: Pteridophytes, Dicotyledoneae and Monocotyledoneae. Grow: Presentation and dissemination in the public space of the newly created drawings/representations. Collective creation of a sort of Phylogenetic Urban Garden in the square; a kind of ephemeral landscape that could have the potential to better connect the Jardin des Plantes and the Pierre et Marie Curie Educational Campus. Be: As a result of the conversations on site, the participants decided that there was an opportunity to improve urban connectivity between the adjacent educational institutions: the garden and the campus. At that point, the participants collected the different botanical illustrations placed around the square and attached them to a continuous piece of blue fabric (see images in the next page). Such blue fabric was to represent the Seine River, as the key kind of landscape armature that would metaphorically support the new inter-relations among educational landscapes and the expansion of the botanical diversity. Reproduce: As part of the dissemination portion of the performance, the participants decided to continue in a procession along the Rue Jussieu and into the Jardin des Plantes. The participants decided to end collective activity in front of the Grandes Serres to later continue their own promenades towards the river, their homes, restaurants and other destinations, while bringing with them their creations. In experiential terms, the participants brought to life an active botanical, physical and programmatic connection among the river, the Jardin des Plantes and the University. The blue fabric was moving with the wind; people passing by were reading the labels, discovering the species, imagining how the river could enter the garden, the campus and the square.

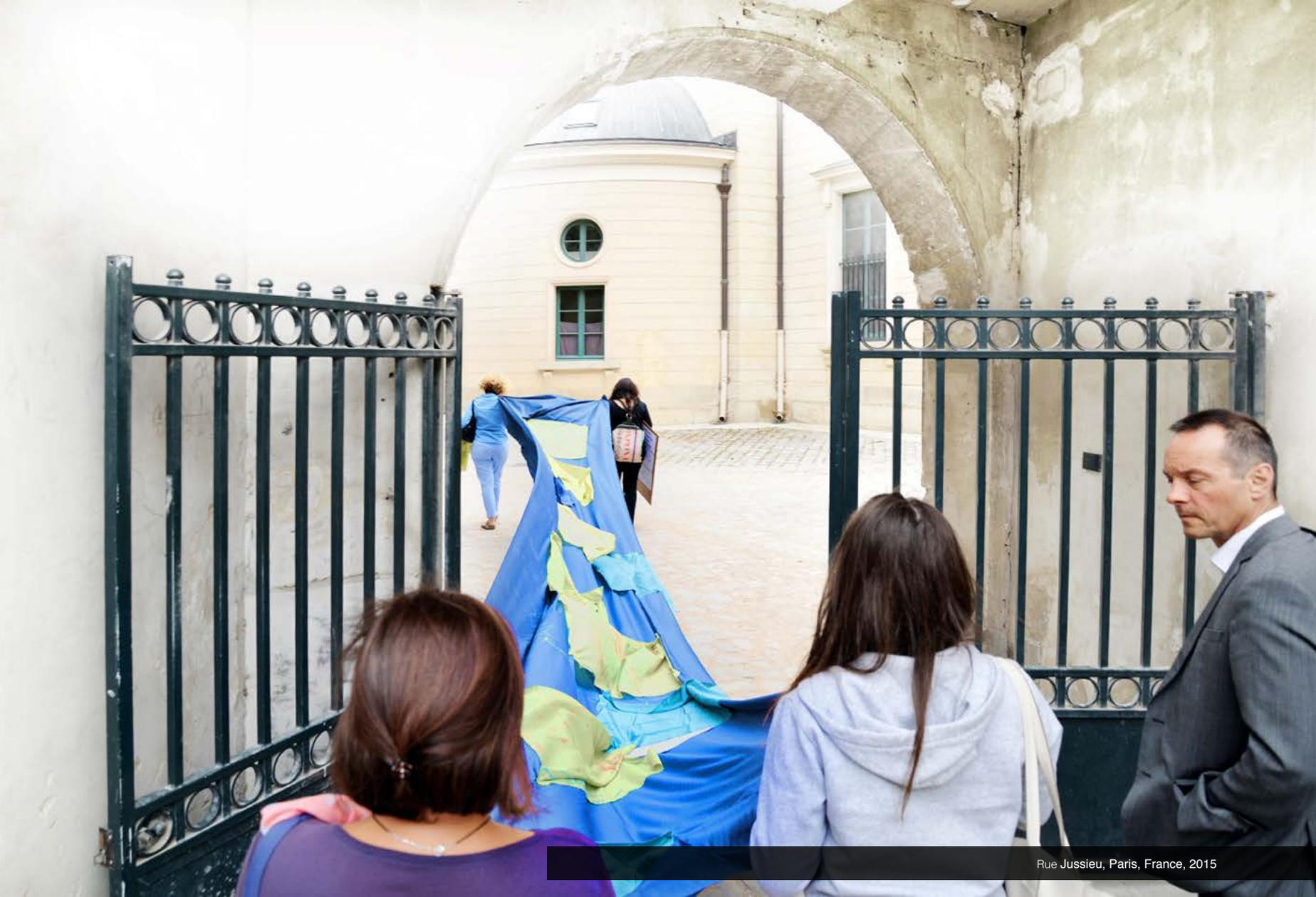
#### Highlights

In specific terms, the two performances followed the same structure of five activities and the same theme, while preserving open the format and content of the actions and the outcomes in each location. In that sense, while the questions and the particular process were shared, the results were distinctly tied to the specificities of the landscapes. In Maracaibo, the conversation resulted on the reconnection of isolated areas within the botanical garden itself, to later bring such exercise of reconnection to the larger territory. In Paris the participants choose to address disconnection within the larger urban scale by the metaphorical extension of a preexistent dominant natural element, like the river. In both instances, the performative research was there to provide the structure and the freedom to make legible and understandable both approaches: a) one that is synthetic, that compresses and summarizes and, b) one that is analytical, that expands and articulates. Therefore, as researchers, the one key highlight we can offer is perhaps a methodological one. One that finds elements to encourage the research on methods of learning and engagement that moves beyond the oppositions between the scientific and the artistic. This methodological field is certainly not new. Lately, it is being used in most social studies. However, the 'performative essence' of this study is not a subversive ambition against academic conventions; rather it is a true interest for understanding processes that intrinsically seek balance between what is of artistic power and that of scientific value, as it happens in Burle Marx and Aristeguieta's Garden. In such cases, practice is research, action equals theoretical findings, findings are products, and the acceptance of products leads to validation. Such paradigms transcend the systems of cause-effect deduction. Moving from "looking at" to "engaging with" approaches, the performative interventions entitled 'Ephemeral Botanical Urban Landscape' became routine-breaking methodological tools, behaving as ephemeral landscapes of social encounter. This type of performance aims to capture what keeps us apart from public space and what and whom do we fear as a group of individuals, while navigating the public space. Finally, the ephemeral performances offer the designers and scientist instant information that may influence the design process and policy making mechanisms, thus the way the sites may look and perform over time. Moving forward into the future exercises of this performative nature, have taken on the potential to analyze the applicability of the performances in relation to three different aspects: a) as a mechanism to evaluate design proposals, b) as a tool to influence the design process, and c) as a method to enhance the implementation of the proposals.

#### Next Steps

The next scheduled performances will take place in Maracaibo, Venezuela in January 2016, and in Mexico City, September 2016.





Rue Jussieu, Paris, France, 2015



Maracaibo's Botanical Garden, Zulia, Venezuela, 2015

## Team

### Overview

Organizers: Botanical City Inc, New York, USA, and The Maracaibo Botanical Garden Foundation, Zulia, Venezuela.  
Date: July 8th, 2015. Paris from 12:00 PM to 2:00 PM; Maracaibo from 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM.  
Location: Place Jussieu, Paris, France and Maracaibo's Botanical Garden, Zulia, Venezuela. .  
Estimated number of participants: 150 (100 in Maracaibo and 50 in Paris).  
Nature of participants: Public in general, artist, scientists, policymakers.  
Keywords: Ephemeral Landscapes, Botanical Garden, Botanical City, Public Space Adaptation.  
Language: English and French in Paris; Spanish in Maracaibo.

### Keynote Speakers

D. Gouverneur, Professor in Practice, University of Pennsylvania, Landscape architecture, Philadelphia, United States of America.  
F. Galletti, President, Fundación Jardín Botánico de Maracaibo, Maracaibo, Venezuela.  
O. Grauer, Visiting Professor, University of Pennsylvania, Landscape Architecture, Philadelphia, United States of America.  
M. Machado, Professor, Universidad del Zulia, School of Architecture and Museum of Contemporary Art, Maracaibo, Venezuela  
G. Sthormes, Professor, Fundación Jardín Botánico de Maracaibo, Maracaibo, Venezuela.  
C. Urbina, Professor, Universidad del Zulia, School of Architecture, Maracaibo, Venezuela.  
M. Villalobos, Founder Artist Creator, Botanical City Inc, New York, United States of America.

### Collaborators

L. Ararat, Photographer, Fundación Jardín Botánico de Maracaibo, Maracaibo, Venezuela.  
A. Belfort, Architect, TAB Lab Architects, Paris, France.  
N. Bofill, Artist, Barcelona, Spain.  
L. Gómez, Director, School of Fine Arts, Universidad del Zulia, School of Architecture, Maracaibo, Venezuela.  
M. Gutierrez, Architect, Fundación Jardín Botánico de Maracaibo, Maracaibo, Venezuela.  
L. Morillo, Photographer, Fundación Jardín Botánico de Maracaibo, Maracaibo, Venezuela.  
E. Potié-Vivas, Paris, France.  
W. Rivero, Photographer, Fundación Jardín Botánico de Maracaibo, Maracaibo, Venezuela.  
L. Soffer, Architect, Grumbach Associés, Paris, France.  
A. Mujica, Photographer, Paris, France.