

Kathy's Garden: Concrete Piggies and Plastic-Stone Bunnies

So far I have been able to live without a set of concrete gnomes, an antiquated brass-look egret made of aluminum, or a little garden sign bearing a gentle poem about the joys of gardening (though I do secretly treasure that splendid Victorian poem containing the immortal phrase "A garden is a lovesome thing, God wot!") My restraint in the area of garden ornament has less to do with my innate good taste than with a limited budget.

Given the choice between an attractive plastic-made-to-look-like-marble piglet and a hundred daffodils I'll take the daffodils every time. And yet, there are some garden embellishments that are very lovely or whimsical or charming—and others, in the grand scale, that I might sell my soul for. Would anyone care to offer me a series of fountains & pools patterned after Versailles? Try me. I might sacrifice all my principles.

On the small scale, gazing balls are enjoying something of a revival. Imagine a polished glass globe in silver or blue or gold—sort of like an oversized Christmas ornament. Sometimes the gazing globe is placed on a pedestal; sometimes it is plunked on the ground like a big marble. These were very popular at the turn of the century. Even now they have a bizarre charm, reflecting the whole garden in a curved & contained surface; a permanent soap bubble. I think they look best in a very formal garden, but if you crave their glittery reflection by all means put one in your tomato patch or your meadow. It is your garden. Do what you like—otherwise what fun is it?



The one ornament I do have in my garden is a sundial. Rusted now after some twenty years in various gardens, it still faithfully marks the shift of hours bearing its motto: "Lumen me regit" –light

rules me. I think gardens need sundials, just as they need a bench or chair or nice comfortable rock where you can sit & take stock of the state of the world while comforted by roses (or dahlias, or lilies, or snowdrops, according to your passion & the season).

I suppose my bathtub qualifies as an ornament, though barely (it qualifies more for the junk yard than the gardens of Marie Antoinette). The fish, the lilies, & irises it holds are ornamental enough. A small contained water garden gives me pleasure. If you are a jaded gardener in search of new horizons you might consider a fish & lily tub well before you decide to invest in those life-like egrets. Of course, if money is no object, you can have it all—put in a pond & fill it with sporting dolphins, voluptuous mermaids, Triton blowing his wreathed horn, those egrets and perhaps a reproduction of Venus on the half shell.

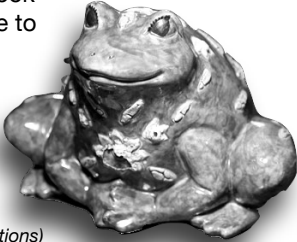
You could charge admission.

As to the concrete piggies and cats, the cunning little plastic-stone bunnies, the sets of gnomes with garden tools—invest in daffodils or lilies instead, unless those little statues call to your inner heart. Once I bought a large Japanese ceramic toad for my garden. I didn't even have a garden at the time, so my toad (with toadlet perched cunningly upon her brown ceramic back) stood guard over my avocado plant and dying African violet. My friends never quite understood why that toad was a heartfelt life necessity. They would stub their toes on it and swear. But if your piglet or gnome is a heart's need, peace be with you. I won't say a critical word.

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Meanwhile, an aside to the reader who wonders if I really look like the drawing that appears with these columns from time to time. Of course not. The drawing looks like my long term live-in canine, Leonard Woolf. How then, do folks recognize me readily on the streets? My hair doesn't even curl, alas. It is a great mystery.

Kathy Epling
 (These columns are posthumously printed from columns published in a variety of publications)



THE GYROSCOPE

I don't need to believe
 I'll find my place anyway
 in this history of loss
 translating the glass sharp
 light of trees, the white birch edges
 It doesn't matter,
 Life & death, the crazy spin
 of gnats or stars, moving together
 or apart. Sun's face
 & kisses, an isotropic dance
 love that gyroscope

Centered, wobbling, a leap
 from the edge
 It takes my breath away

Kathy Epling



TO GIVE EVERYTHING AWAY

Perpetual beginner, it was love
 you wanted to tie to all the words
 patterns of fir trees & sunlight
 running stitches & knots
 donkeys browsing the hearts
 of thistles. You sewed certainty
 across the lifelines of your children
 the prayer rugs of desire
 At this distance we can cover
 everything with our outstretched hands
 the moon, the home, a childhood
 of whispered secrets. Goodbye.
 Gladness will enter again here
 in the spaces of stars
 to give everything away
 light scattered on moving water

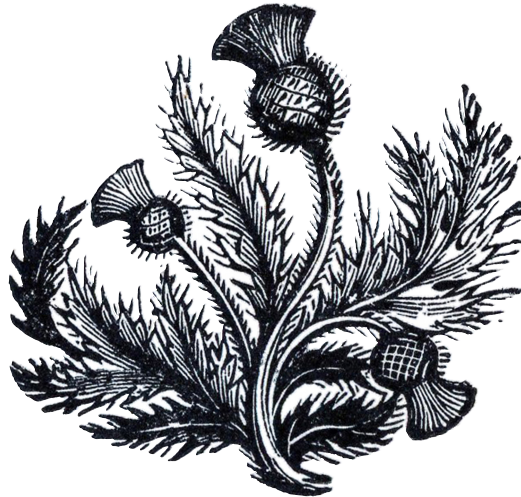


Kathy Epling

AT THE DEATH OF A FRIEND

We take sorrow for a walk
 Sorrow is very young
 Sorrow with your blue eyes
 where shall we go
 She is so little
 carrying this weigh
 Magpie sorrow, see the oak
 leaves fallen, one on another
 all we once loved
 open holding together

Kathy Epling



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Sonoma: bsimon733@sbcglobal.net
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