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DESIGN ARCHITECTURE ART

AZURE

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PLUS WHAT'S IN FOR OUTDOORS



Nipped in the bud

There's a sprig of Quebec whimsy blooming in Italy this summer, courtesy of the Montreal firm NIP Paysage, which was invited to create an entrance garden for the *Ortus Artis* garden festival. The firm's *Flore Laurentienne* installation recreates an array of St. Lawrence flora at the Charterhouse of San Lorenzo, a 14th-century monastery turned centre for contemporary art in the southern Italian town of Padula. Reinterpreting the tradition of monastic gardens, NIP set up 13 two-metre spheres, filled them with earth, covered them in blue burlap and seedlings and added water. The designers chose herb species – thyme, mint, sage, oregano, rosemary – native to Quebec and also grown in the monastery's medicinal garden. Over time, as the embedded seedlings took hold and grew, the globes have metamorphosed from smooth, sterile masses into verdant living forms.

Borrowing its title from a seminal 1935 inventory of plants by storied Quebec botanist Brother Marie-Victorin, *Flore Laurentienne* plays on the particular scientific focus of its namesake. It links the monk's life work of classification with the traditional monastery garden, where carefully tended medicinal plants took on religious and mythical significance. Enter the

contemporary landscape architect, who releases the garden from the cloistered walls, transplants it onto seedlike pods and lets it grow wild. The result? A visual manifestation of the many ways of thinking about plants.

When the installation premiered last summer, its transformative nature stirred controversy. "The Italians are used to seeing hyper-manicured gardens," says Michel Langevin, one of the project designers, "and we created the opposite, a garden that would take on an untamed look" – and deliver a heady olfactory experience as well. In the second season, he hopes the foliage will become impenetrable as growth causes the globes to merge. The piece is a giant reminder that despite our attempts to tame nature with myths, science and art, the earth's fecundity prevails. With a Québécois flair for the bold, insouciant gesture, NIP has merely planted an idea overseas, ultimately allowing *Flore* to take on a life of its own.

Flore Laurentienne is on view through September 29 at the Charterhouse of San Lorenzo, Padula, Italy, www.irmabianchi.it, www.comune.padula.sa.it

ELSA LAM

NIP Paysage installed a series of burlap-encased spheres, then planted them with native St. Lawrence herb species for a fresh take on the historic monastery garden at the Charterhouse of San Lorenzo in Padula, Italy.

