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Ponencia: *Gustafson Porter + Bowman: Proyectos Singulares*

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Art and Nature – Gustafson Porter – Selected Projects

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Abstract

Can a landscape be a work of art – art is the creation of mankind, and if a landscape is invested with meaning can it become art? A landscape that uses nature and is shaped by an architect falls on a spectrum between pure utility, and that which demands contemplation to provide a laboratory for the intellect and senses.

Through an analysis of projects including ‘Towards Paradise’ (exhibited at the 2008 Venice Biennale); the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fountain in London; and Bay East, at Gardens by the Bay in Singapore - we will examine where Gustafson Porter +

Introduction / Background

Trained as an architect, I was fortunate enough to study at the Architectural Association where we were educated to think laterally beyond architecture. Learn from past and contemporary culture; experiment with narratives and concepts that could give meaning and shape to space beyond the functional and create an inner life, or soul to our creations. This was to translate very well to working in landscape.

On concluding my studies in 1983 my external examiner Bernard Tschumi hired me to work on the Parc de la Villette, Paris. Whilst working on La Villette I met my business partner Kathryn Gustafson. We were introduced to Kandinsky’s ‘point, line and plain’ and the interaction between buildings as protagonist and the landscape as container for events and narratives.

This was an entirely new way of developing a park landscape for the needs of contemporary city dwellers. Where city based events and interaction collided with abstracted space formed from natural elements. It was probably the first and last park of its kind before the age of urban ecology.

Westergasfabriek Culture Park - Amsterdam

15 years later the lessons learnt from La Villette enabled Kathryn and I to take on the challenges of developing Amsterdam’s park for the 21st Century at the Westergasfabriek. Here an existing industrial infrastructure was transformed into a culture park, using a similar building / landscape concept as used at the Parc de la Villette, but this time with urban ecology as the frame for the relationship between nature and the urban condition.

The Westergasfabriek Culture Park is complex and diverse in its contribution to the life of Amsterdam. It was a highly polluted site as a result of the industrial processes needed to create gas from coal during the 19th – 20th centuries

The design solution was to create a series of flexible landscape spaces between existing buildings linking by a central axis.

The key spaces are the events field and mound - a space for 10,000 people

The village – an arts community of workshops, exhibitions / cinemas / theatres and restaurants.

The gasholder - the sites biggest attraction for events.

The Broadway a forest path that divides the park diagonally along its length.

The stream garden reed beds for the cleaning of water and connection to the surrounding polder eco-system.

The events mound is placed between the lake and protects the park from the adjacent Amsterdam / Rotterdam railway.

It's the place for a morning jog, ice skating in winter, a place to picnic and sun bathe in summer. It is at the heart of the park landscape furthest from the surrounding city. The entire space can transform into a major venue for music festivals and fairs.

The village is a place to stroll at the weekend and catch up on what is happening outside ones routine life / a place for morning yoga session, a childrens festival or an art event.

The gasholder is the sites biggest attraction and money earner, attracting crowds and helping subsidise less profitable activities

The stream garden connects with the city farm, allotments and nature. It is the water cleansing, health giving heart of the park, a place to socialise, play and provide a home for wildlife - a place to be alone and at one with nature.

How We Work - Encountering Land

At first site the Westergasfabriek Park provides what all parks should provide in its range of spaces, habitats, events and facilities. However its development required the movement of vast mounds of soil, to protect the site from past pollution. It is in the bare bones of the landform where we invested our greatest energy during the early design stages.

Our use of clay models allows us to examine how we encounter the land, how land movement and landform can create graceful, fluid and minimal spaces that engage the eye and feet in the discovery of a place.

The narrative evolution of space, is a non constant that spans, stretches, stops and rolls to engage the body in a series of atmosphere's and emotions.

Further layers of light, plants and water help guide the human body through the landscape via the senses, what it see's and what it can touch. These distilled sensations deepen the relationship between people, materials and nature to create a totally enveloping sensual experience.

Clay Models

Westgasfabriek Culture Park, Amsterdam – the cut and fill of polluted soil and the addition of clean soils, balanced with the spatial needs of a park, helped guide our subtle land movements.

The events lake and mound transformed from model into reflected light and sculpted landform.

The use of clay models can be appropriate for many scales and different types of landscape.

Great Glass House – Interior Landscape – Botanic Garden of Wales, Camarthan – a ravine cut into the ground provides the route to a secret room and multiple terrains for Mediterranean plants

Norman Foster and Partners dome becomes the sky, the ravine creates its own landscape horizon.

HM Treasury – West Courtyard – London – subtle dished and curved surfaces create a causeway and pool that relax the formality of the space.

The trees and pool give the impression of being placed on real ground rather than being placed above a basement

Swiss Cottage Open Space – Community Garden - London - the need to provide for a sports pitch and a clearly observed space to meet and play led to two sculpted amphitheater's connected by grass and stone.

Old Market Square - Public Square – Nottingham – a formal civic square was transformed by the introduction of diagonal routes, seating terraces in the sun, a water feature and a large flat surface for events,

The square can become a town beach and the water feature becomes the event on non event days.

Diana Princess of Wales – Memorial – Hyde Park, London

The creation of the memorial in 2004 took our model-making skills to new levels of technical complexity. The use of 3-d digital computer programs used in the car

industry enabled us to carve 520 blocks of stone into a constantly morphing ring of water.

The ring of stone is laid subtly on a slope adjacent to the Serpentine where it can be seen and reached from all directions within the listed monument of Hyde Park. Having reached the memorial bridges invite you to cross the water and enter the space within. The working title of the piece was reaching out / letting in.

Not only was each stone different , but whilst cutting them we required that the surface was textured to create water effects that spoke of a changing life, from youthful to mature, from energetic to calm.

The memorial is now one of London's most visited free attractions, a testament to the person it memorializes and its inclusive sculptural qualities.

How We Work - Places of Translation

Places of translation are landscapes that emphasise, or interpret the cultural and environmental contexts that surround them in contemporary form.

A sites history, scientific data, regional issues, environmental factors, surrounding culture, encounters with artists or material research, simultaneously inform the construction and layers of meaning.

Towards Paradise – Temporary Installation - Venice Biennale 2008

Towards Paradise was a response to the challenge and theme of the Architecture Biennale – how to cultivate our garden and tend to our affairs, or make ammends for what has gone wrong in the world.

The site provided for our response was the Garden of the Virgins within the Arsenale – an archaeological site where we had to remain above the remains of an ancient church and where we found the remains of an agricultural plot.

We took visitors on a journey of discovery by using old storage spaces and carving out two garden rooms within the wilderness of the site.

The first was a store where we lined the walls with the names of all those plants that are now extinct.

Beyond the store visitors entered an allotment filled with a profusion of vegetables and herbs – an earthly paradise connecting us to the land, nourishing our bodies and souls.

The final garden on our journey was an opening in the wilderness. A sculpted grass landform in which a large wind sculpture invited visitors to look towards the sky in curiosity and contemplation!

Computer Models

In recent years we have been working at a larger scale, in new cities, cultures and climate zones that have tested our ability to digest and interpret what we find and see and give new meaning to our work.

Marina East, Gardens by the Bay, Singapore – a project yet to be realised

Working in the tropical far east we have learnt how climate completely changes the way local people interact with landscape and that to encourage the use of parks during the day, we must work hard to provide shade, find a cooling breeze and places to rest.

Singapore immediately strikes one as a totally 3-d city. People can move to from rapid transit systems, into shopping malls, offices and homes without ever setting foot on streets and landscapes. However wherever one walks vegetation is everywhere and provides a screen to tough urban environments.

The climate is of the body. Plants have incredible graphic leaf forms and colour. Our park is on the next stage of the cities expansion awaiting the creation of an underground road and rail route with fantastic views of the central business district across the bay.

The site is over 2km long – quite a distance for people to walk in the tropical heat. We divided its length between five water feature inlets and event spaces. Each water inlet provides a circulation system that helps oxygenate the bays reservoir water and will reduce algal blooms. Each inlet has new buildings and car parks under huge leaf landforms with an array of garden habitats that beckon you around the parks curved form.

The inlets are as follows:-

An aquatic centre for dragon boat racing, canoing and sailing

A fountain event surrounded by a food court with the city as backdrop.

A romantic stream garden with pavilions for weddings and parties

A large waterfall behind which is a café for parents with views to a large paddling pool for children.

A channel that provides water for the bay reservoir and an entrance to a sea edge ecology zone.

Given the scale of the park we were able to learn from our Diana experience and create digital rhino models of the land form and the buildings placed below there surface. We wish to create a 3-d planted experience that is uniquely Singaporean.

Parque Central, Valencia, Spain – to conclude a project under construction.

The park is placed above the new high speed train line between Madrid and Valencia. A sequence of six bowl shaped spaces contain theme gardens that are each linked by water channels to the surrounding residential neighbourhoods and create a meeting place for local residents where there had previously been an urban void - the former rail yards.

Just as the clay models defined a projects conceptual base, at Valencia a rhino model defines the bowl landforms that represent the, cultural and social gathering that is linked to the production, cooking and eating of food from the Huelva agricultural region that surrounds the city. Phase one will open next year!