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**CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
DESIGNING WITH THE FINE ARTS**

by

Matthew Kerby Durkovich

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree**

of

DEPARTMENT HONORS

in

Landscape Architecture & Environmental Planning

Approved:

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**UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, UT**

Spring 2006

Utah State University

Honors Program Thesis:

***Contemporary Landscape Architecture
Designing With the Fine Arts***



Department of Landscape Architecture & Environmental Planning

Completed April 28, 2006 by:
Matthew Kerby Durkovich

Contemporary Landscape Architecture
Designing With the Fine Arts

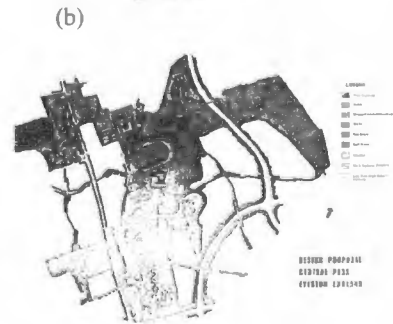
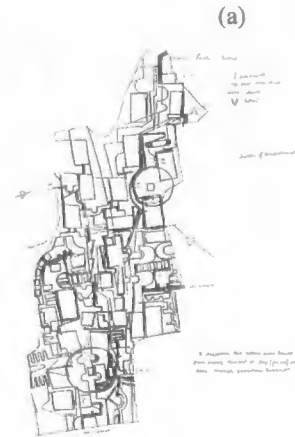
It is the year 2006. We live in a time where advances in technology and processes surround us at every turn of our lives, and in almost every profession that exists. The medical world, for example, now benefits from such advanced practices that could have only been imagined a half century ago. The computer industry has grasped only a fraction of what is possible in this day and age, and yet their products still seem so futuristic that we wonder what will come the next day. The automotive industry, construction trade, science fields, and many other disciplines are experiencing breakthroughs in their respective transformations and growth. Where then does the profession of landscape architecture lie? Are we ahead of the times in regards to technology? Are we advancing as similar fields with respect to our design process? Or are we perhaps content with relying on older, more proven methods?

Those are the questions we as landscape architects must ask ourselves if we expect our profession to grow in stride with the rest of the design community. In this report I propose that the overall site design in landscape architecture, as a result of the integration with any of the fine arts, would be enhanced beyond anything that could be done without these artistic, philosophic, and aesthetic aids. I lean so strongly to this position because ours is a profession of the mind. Other jobs and skills around the world evolve based on technological advances (as discussed earlier), geographic constraints, educational opportunities and barriers, and other factors which decide what can and can't be done in a profession. Doctors for example may dream of performing surgeries without certain tools or machines, but the advances made in that profession do not allow for that to be a reality...yet. Computer gurus might dream of putting a super-loaded computer into a small watch, but the current technology won't allow for that kind of dream...yet. Architects may want to construct a floating building, but the literal constraints known to them will again deny the dreams of that particular day. Now compare professions of that level with someone in a design oriented field (such as artists, sculptures, painters, landscape architects,

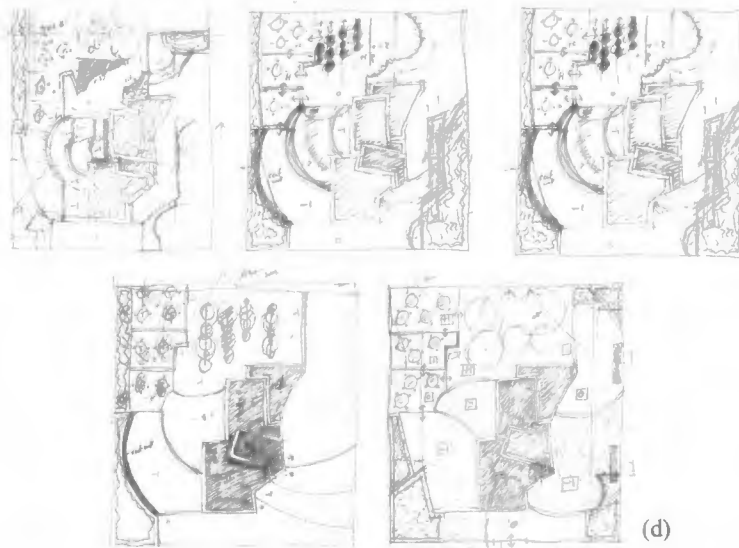
etc) and a completely different situation exists. What you dream *is* what you do. A painter thinking of an abstract scene will simply produce what their mind's eye is seeing. A sculpture wishing to carve a figure out of marble will simply chisel what their mind's eye is seeing. And what of landscape architects? Do we design what our mind's eye is seeing, or do we design based on simple spatial relationships and diagrams, budgets, limited plant knowledge, and other dampening factors? Therein rests the genesis of designing through the fine arts.

David Tomlinson, a distinguished practicing Landscape Architect in Ontario, Canada wrote an article in Landscape Architecture Magazine, May 1982, titled "Design in the 20th Century: Start with Art". Within the article he details a number of professional projects which were designed by looking at paintings and other art pieces. In the article he explains,

"On the whole, most landscape architects have failed miserably to make an original contribution to the aesthetics of the 20th century. This is possibly due to the fact that the teaching of pure design is no longer fashionable in landscape courses at universities and colleges. It is far easier to teach the jargon and functionalism of modern landscape and recreational planning than to teach the aesthetics and principles of pure design. This in my opinion ignores the trends of history. While the functional aspects of design and planning are very important, these on their own - no matter how well executed - are insufficient unless they are combined with the philosophy and aesthetic values of the age. *There is a wealth of ideas just waiting for translation into landscape design.*" (Emphasis added).



It is that very process of translation which can take the profession of landscape architecture to an entirely new level; one worthy of the respect of the design community, and one worthy of producing better results. So, what is this notion of designing with the fine arts in mind? It is using paintings (and other art pieces), music, sketches, sculptures, mobiles, 3-D objects, philosophy, nature, photographs, certain books, borrowed aesthetics, etc., to produce a framework from which the overall plan can be designed. The first exposure I had to this was in a computer software class where we were taught 3D Studio Viz. The professor gave an assignment to create (or design) a courtyard, with given dimensions, based on a painting. After choosing the painting from a selected list of famous artists (Braque), we placed several layers of trace



paper over the painting in order to draw over the hard lines (or other features), always with the function of the courtyard in mind. At first this project and the overall design process seemed strange and unfamiliar, but upon further exploration I started to literally see and understand the benefits of using such resources in generating distinctive concepts. It was amazing to me how many different and *unique* results I came up with, just by using paintings as a design inspiration. Had I simply produced a sketch of the site, come up with a (no doubt interesting) design, and done a simple planting plan, the end result would have been far less engaging and interesting in

my opinion. Any other method would have produced a result which worked from a spatial diagram point of view, but the amount of flare and special blending



(e) of talents that we as landscape architects bring to the table would have been dramatically reduced. Now imagine if you multiplied that effort worldwide to all the landscape architects, integrated any

of the previously listed “fine arts” into their design process, and just think of the possibilities! Where would our profession stand if we gave that much thought and *extra* effort into the beginning and most important stages of a concept?

After this first project was completed I wanted to explore more options into this process of designing with the fine arts. In the last year and a half I have had the opportunity to design a migratory bird refuge using a piece of music (Pavarotti), an interpretation or

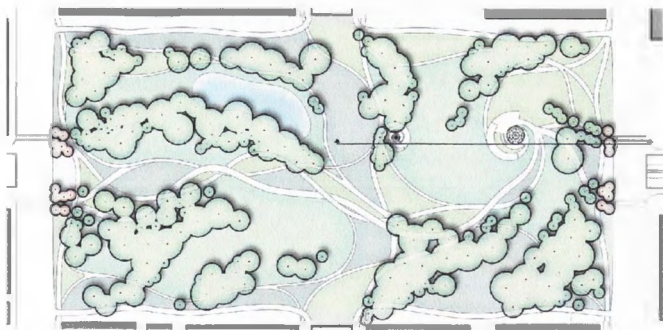


(g) representation of a city from the book “Invisible Cities” by Italo Calvino, and design an

urban park in Adelaide, Australia, in which the “parti” forms used to develop the concept were inspired by classical and Aboriginal music. These projects, in comparison to the other projects



(h)



(i)



(j)

I completed in studio, had more of an enriching end result both in terms of aesthetics and function, from the integration of the arts. This can be attributed

to the design process in which I produced concepts from the arts emphasizing spatial relationships and experiences unrelated to the specific spatial functions. In other words the framework and form of the design

was more pure as I was momentarily unconcerned with function. Later in the overall development I had to make sure that the functional requirements of

the site were met by my concept – but they did not control my original design *possibly* dulling any potential of a unique end result.

Now, obviously a balance must exist between simply generating a rote design, and spending several hours on the internet just browsing through English painters in the 18th century. Not every project that requires our professional skills will require a vast amount of energy dedicated to this specific process of design. Simply put, when these moments come which exercise our minds and thoughts as designers, think of these outside resources as just that, resources. Perhaps listen to appropriately related music when you're waist deep in trace paper, or take a few moments to look at any painting, and see what sketch comes next on the paper. Take the time to analyze the sculpture or 3D object that gave you inspiration. Re-read that last passage by Olmstead as he verbally painted the scenery or landscape so beautifully in your mind; see where it takes you if you give it some direction. It is not only what you know as a designer, but how you can incorporate these contemporary ideas into a working landscape. You are not simply using an art piece, sculpture, or music and copying the framework – it is inspiration for

the ideas and principles of design. These are mere suggestions to an overall larger principle that could change the way contemporary design is seen, felt and experienced by many in the field of landscape architecture.

Where did this idea get its start? Using the fine arts to produce landscape design was not something that came about in the last twenty years. The actual person that came up with the concept is not known, nor is the original date. There have been many examples throughout history of cultures mimicking certain aspects of other culture's societies, including the landscape. This general practice, in it's most pristine and basic form may have been a pattern as early as records begin. For these purposes, the pattern begins in the 1600's with two widely known painters, Claude Lorrain, and Nicolas Poussin. These men and other Romantic painters captured



(k)

the raw essence of the landscape which existed in nature.

“Romantics gave greater attention both to describing natural phenomena accurately and to capturing sensuous nuance”¹ The



(l)



(m)

English landscape garden took form largely in part, from these painters giving inspiration to wealthy landowners, who desired a replication of the wild scenery represented on canvas before them. Other famous artists such as Jan Van Kessel, Salvator Rosa and Samuel Palmer followed the examples given by Poussin and Lorrain by capturing

the native landscape, intentionally and *unintentionally* giving the well to do to a “master plan” for their estates. This practice of attempting to capture the true essence of nature filtered down through the 1800's as the pioneer “landscape architects” were molded in education, both formal and informal. One of these prominent landscape architects, Frederick Law Olmstead, was very fond of travel, and upon many visits to England and other countries he took vivid journals and

descriptions of the places he visited. On one such occasion Olmstead was visiting a grand public park in Birkenhead, England. This description gives a brief detail into the careful observation and attention to detail Olmstead had:

“Walking a short distance up an avenue, we passed through another light iron gate into a thick, luxuriant, and diversified garden. Five minutes of admiration, and a few more spent in studying the manner in which art had been employed to obtain from nature so much beauty, and I was ready to admit that in democratic America there was nothing to be thought of as comparable with this People’s Garden. Indeed, gardening had here reached a perfection that I had never before dreamed of...we passed by winding paths, over acres and acres, with a constant varying surface, where on all sides were growing... shrubs and flowers, with more than natural grace, all set in borders of greenest, closest turf, and all kept with most consummate neatness.”²

These journal entries (and all resulting memories) would later be used as inspirations by Olmstead in his many designs, non lesser than Central Park in New York City. These references and memories acted as a secondary template for several elements of design for Olmstead and other designers of the time.

(n)



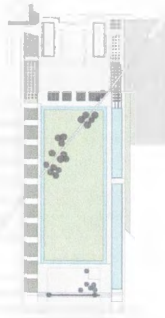
The historic trend of landscape design using these fine art themes was imitated earlier in the 20th century by many landscape architects across the world, including the famous contemporary landscape architect, Brazilian Roberto Burle Marx (1909-94). Besides being an accomplished landscape architect, Marx was an incredible painter, sculptor, singer, and jewelry designer.³ He was well known for creating landscapes which reflected his artwork, often generating

quite unusual results, but nonetheless successful on their own. Many other designers and landscape architects used the same methods as Marx used in replacing typical, conceptual design with inspired, conceptual design. These contemporary pieces opened the door to many professionals who today practice these simple applications. Peter Walker, Martha Schwartz, Garrett Eckbo, Salvatore Calatrava, Darrel Morrison, Michael Laris, and many others have grasped this concept of using the arts, *as just one resource*, in their designs.

It can be argued that the profession and practice of landscape architecture, in and of itself, is a form of designing with the fine arts. A myriad of talented professionals and accompanying projects all around the world are a testimony to the already present skills found within these landscape architects. A comparison of two, large scale public parks may provide more

(o)

clarification into this theory of designing with the arts. The first, Parc Andre Citroen, located in Paris, France provides the surrounding



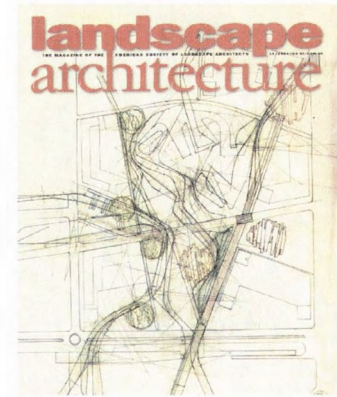
community with a large 36 acre place of refuge.⁴ The park integrates diverse

landscapes into one interconnected natural tapestry, by utilizing separately designed gardens throughout a very diverse framework. Alain Provost and Gilles Clement designed Parc Citroen as a place of transition from urban to rural, with four themes: artifice, architecture, movement and nature.⁵ None of the themes in this park were designed by using any of the fine arts; instead the gardens represent a literal object or idea. For example, the serial gardens represent each of the five senses; the changing garden evolves with the changing of the seasons, etc.⁵ This manner of well thought out design has produced something very successful at the large, urban level.

The second park, Parc Diagonal Mar located in Barcelona, Spain is a large urban redevelopment project centered around Barcelona's famous Avenue District where it meets the sea.⁶ This



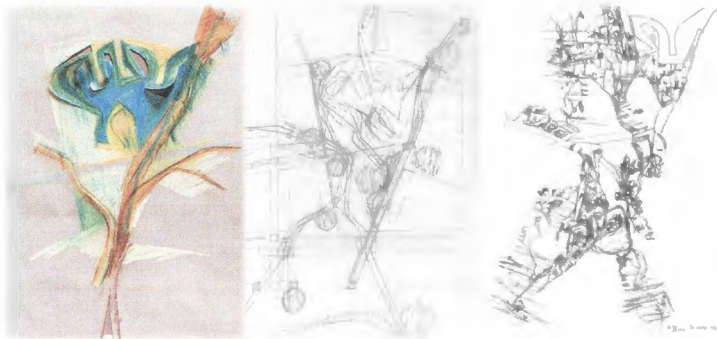
(p) park was featured in the November 2004 edition of Landscape Architecture Magazine, where on the cover you will see one of the early sketches from Enric Miralles's concept painting. Miralles and his design partner from EMBT, Benedetta Tagliabue were contracted for the design of the actual park inside the larger redevelopment site. Tagliabue was quoted saying this about his colleague:



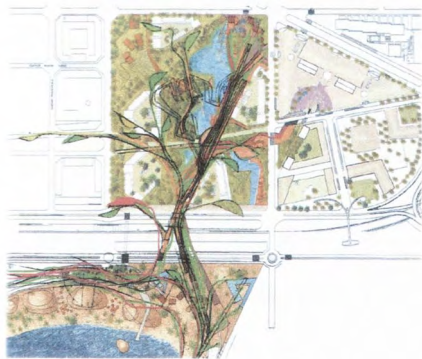
(q)

“In Miralles’s early design drawings, the park’s paths resembled a tree whose branches moved in all directions...these sketches showed paths of energy and indicated a desire

for a natural world in the city; in later iterations, they became literal paths, water, hills, and places for children to play. (The artist) likened the concept to the sea moving from the shore into the city, with which the sea is reconnecting. Given the sites relatively flat topography at the



(r)

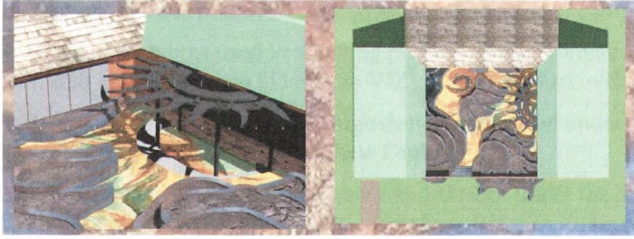


(s)

outset, (the artist) also borrowed from Chinese gardens and their effective use of stones and water to create topographic interest.”⁷

The park is comprised of six general areas: fountains, a sport and amphitheatre area, a bar, “magic mountain” for young children, a play area for infants and toddlers, and a dog area.⁶ It is seen by the community as a

success, and similar to the Parc Citroen, has succeeded in being an interactive urban space; the difference being that Parc Citroen was not designed with any fine arts, and Parc Diagonal Mar was created with the help of a painting. Which park is better? Neither one is better than the other in terms of being designed with or without the arts; Parc Diagonal Mar is just one example of innumerable possibilities waiting to happen when landscape architects and other designers use the fine arts, *with their innate skills* for their designs. The same professor



(1)

who gave us the assignment to design a courtyard from a piece of art explained to me that he was impressed with the inspirations that came to us when we used these paintings. He relayed an example of a courtyard which had been designed with a sunflower painting. This

courtyard had design elements mimicking the arc of the sunflower in it; something very unique which would not have happened had the student not used the painting.

The profession of landscape architecture as a whole is making great progress in “design”. We have incredible new technology which affords the opportunity of seeing things we have never before imagined. We can generate 3D computer images that are photo-realistic, use GIS for extremely relevant and quick analysis problems, make use of computer programs which parallel us to other graphic professions, and so much more. We are truly engaged in an effort to be ahead of *our* times in our designing capabilities that deal with external components. Think then where we are in terms of our mental capability to design. Are we truly designing what our mind’s eye is seeing? We already know that landscape architects possess something professionally that no other field holds. Whether or not we as designers use the fine arts as a resource in our designs is irrelevant from a standpoint of talent. We have been taught to be sensitive, creative, and exciting in all of our design work, and we thrive at that; but where are we in realizing our potential at using *all* of our available resources? Designing with the fine arts can only open the door to more potential in our concept development. Simply try these methods once and see if your creativity is increased in the process. The future potential and benefits for the profession in designing in such a way just might make a difference worth noticing.

(Footnotes)

¹Adapted from *A Guide to the Study of Literature: A Companion Text for Core Studies 6, Landmarks of Literature*, ©English Department, Brooklyn College.

² “Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England” by Frederick Law Olmstead, page 52.

³ <http://www.burlemarx.com.br/ingles.htm>

⁴ <http://www.orangecountygreatpark.org/otherparks.html#andre>

⁵ http://www.boston.com/beyond_bigdig/cases/citroen.htm

⁶ www.archidose.org/Jan05/013105.html

⁷ Landscape Architecture Magazine. November, 2004; page30.

(Image References)

a Thomas Everton; Landscape Architecture Magazine; May, 1982; page 52.

b Thomas Everton; Landscape Architecture Magazine; May, 1982; page 53.

c http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu:7138/albums/album09/Braque_Georges_8211_Fruit_Dish_and_Glass_8211_1912_8211_charcoal_and_pasted_paper_24_1_2_x_17_1_2_in.sized.jpg

- d** 5 layers of trace placed over Braque painting; used to complete concept for courtyard; Matthew Durkovich.
- e** Original drawings used in showing process of transformation from art piece to finished courtyard; additional photos of courtyard (finished images done in 3D Studio VIZ); Matthew Durkovich.
- f** Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge design completed under the direction of Darrel Morrison. Conceptual forms were completed using Pavarotti with pastel; Matthew Durkovich.
- g** Project completed in Urban Theory and Design under the direction of Caroline Lavoie. Board was a representation of a city from the book "Invisible Cities" by Italo Calvino. We were to represent graphically what we read through metaphors; Matthew Durkovich.
- h** 3 parti forms used to develop the overall concept for Victoria Square in Adelaide, Australia. Project completed under Caroline Lavoie. Parti concepts used by listening to classical and Aboriginal music for inspiration; Matthew Durkovich, Justin Kmetzsch, Ryan Talbot.
- i** Completed design for Victoria Square; Matthew Durkovich, Justin Kmetzsch, Ryan Talbot.
- j** Section of design used to give a more completed picture of the design; Matthew Durkovich, Justin Kmetzsch, Ryan Talbot.
- k** Claude Lorrain; <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>
- l** Jan Van Kessel; <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>
- m** Nicolas Poussin; <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>
- n** Plan view of a famous landscape plan by Roberto Burle Marx; http://www.landliving.com/image/burlemarx_2.jpg.
- o** Images of Parc Citroen in Paris, France; from left to right: http://areavasta.provincia.salerno.it/av_2003n6e7/images/fig_2_pag_15.jpg; <http://www.letopdesparcs.com/parcs/citroen.jpg>; <http://www.brianpirie.ca/trip2005/trip2005-Images/144.jpg>
- p** Image of Parc Diagonal Mar in Barcelona, Spain; <http://www.archidose.org/Jan05/013105b.html>
- q** Cover of Landscape Architecture Magazine, November, 2004. Image is original concept sketch done by Enric Miralles.
- r** Landscape Architecture Magazine, November, 2004; page 26; process of design by using original painting.
- s** Landscape Architecture Magazine, November, 2004; page 26; overlay of painting on actual site.
- t** Courtyard designed by Rachele Jones, 2004. Sunflower image from painting inspiration shown in the design of the shade structure.

Appendix A: Supplemental Pictures



These paintings are from the collection of Claude Lorrain. They represent his painting style in mimicking the landscape. All paintings were obtained from the National Web Gallery of Art online at <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.



These additional paintings are from Nicolas Poussin. Again the attempt to recreate the natural landscape is present.



Similar style of capturing the landscape by Salvator Rosa.



Samuel Palmer's attempt to bring the landscape alive on canvas.



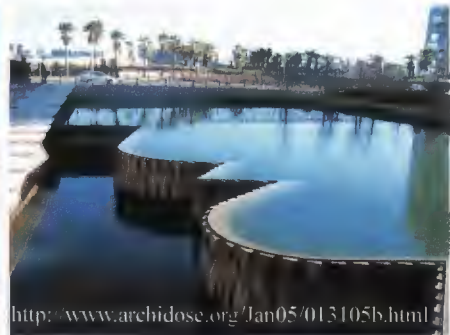
Additional photos of Citroen Park in Paris.



<http://www.archidose.org/Jan05/013105b.html>



<http://www.archidose.org/Jan05/013105b.html>



<http://www.archidose.org/Jan05/013105b.html>



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Landscape Architecture Magazine, November, 2004



<http://www.archidose.org/Jan05/013105b.html>

Additional photos of Parc Diagonal Mar in Barcelona, Spain.



Landscape Architecture Magazine, November, 2004



Landscape Architecture Magazine, November, 2004



Landscape Architecture Magazine, November, 2004



Landscape Architecture Magazine, November, 2004



Landscape Architecture Magazine, November, 2004

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