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Beyond mere illustration

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The layer cake of Ian McHarg. Catherine Mosbach and a mouldy glass of sangria. Roland Gustavsson and the forest-time transects. The eidetic collages of Anton James and the spare motations of Lawrence Halprin. The chocolate bar of Georges Descombes. The site-responsive mowing regimes of Martí Franch or Liska Chan's weaving of tall prairie grass. The axonometrics of Jean Canneel-Claes. Each new way of drawing or modelling or engaging with the medium of landscape stimulates new ways of configuring space, of thinking about the experience of place and natural processes. McHarg unpacked and analysed landscape in layers to understand complex natural systems. For Canneel-Claes, the axonometric enabled a synoptic view of a garden that showed how its elements worked together. Mosbach's observation of mould prompted consideration of how to work with dynamic processes in the gardens of the Louvre Lens. Halprin attempted to bridge the distance between representation and human experience through notations that described movement through a space. Drawings, models, installations each hold a question, an inquiry explored through a process of making and refined in response to a physical artifact; drawing becomes thinking rather than illustrating.

Notable theorists such James Corner, Catherine Dee and Elizabeth Meyer have each linked shifts in methods of drawing or making to innovation in landscape design practice. James Corner argues that drawing holds the possibility of 'forming a field of revelation, prompting one to figure previously unforeseen landscapes of a richer and more meaningful dimension'.[1] Catherine Dee, the founding editor of both *JoLA* and the visual methods section 'Thinking Eye', observes that poetic-critical drawings, made through sustained observation, are rich in thinking, and redolent with evocation. Attentive to the transience of landscape, such drawings enable the evolution of landscape understandings and are simultaneously propositional.[2] Meyer makes a similar connection between innovation in methods of site analysis and new disciplinary questions, noting that an increased interest in phenomenology, feminist critique and site-specific art (among other things) resulted in more interpretive readings of landscape that conveyed its physical properties, operations and sensual impressions.[3] Corner, Dee and Meyer suggest that drawings and other modes of creative practice prefigure design, tell us what ideas need to be explored next and how it may be possible to realize them through experimentation with a particular format, the selection of media or a particular methodology. A rigorous art-based process that informs design can allow for the elaboration of new relationships between people and a place, instigating a dynamic process through the active shaping of space, materials and atmospheres over time.

Visual methodologies and creative practice offer alternatives for both the conduct and the communication of landscape architecture research. Images, installations and built works constitute an alternative discourse that conveys different information than what might be expressed in written research. The use of images and support for research rooted in creative practice is integral to *JoLA*. Our guidelines for 'Thinking Eye' and 'Under the Sky' specifically require that visual materials are not 'merely illustrative'. Indeed, Dee points out that a crucial role for 'Thinking Eye' has been to publish studies of how visual media change the perception of actual landscapes and how art-based explorations of imagined places could gain credence in the creation of future landscapes. And, in 'Under the Sky', landscape researchers and designers are encouraged to examine, decipher and appreciate the complex structures and processes that constitute a given landscape or site through reading, writing and *drawing*, and *eventually through design and site transformation*.[4] 'Reviews' also provide a platform offering the opportunity to interpret visual works in light of broader theoretical milieus, through a lively and productive contextualization in the review of exhibitions. Throughout the journal, we recognize that art and design-based methods present an alternative way of thinking through landscape that offers interpretive knowledge of how materials, forms, process and temporality embody spatial ideas through the making of draw-

Liska Chan, 'Braided Field', *Journal of Landscape Architecture*, 11:3 (2016) 68–71

ings and artefacts. The creative arts as a mode of research offer a means to elaborate on the relationship between landscape architecture practice and theory and provide a critical reading of the social, philosophical and cultural dimensions of landscape through an integrative, aesthetic response.

A foray into the unexpected

What characterizes a creative arts inquiry? As Dee notes, the knowledge gained through careful, immersive drawing is *situated*. The artist or landscape architect is engaged directly in making in a particular context. It is *emergent*; thinking is realized through making, and tempered through the production of a particular artefact. The process is uncertain, dynamic and interpretive; it is only through an intensive, subjective engagement in seeing, thinking, reflecting and making that a particular approach is developed and then adjusted, through the work itself. Knowledge gained through creative practice is *praxical* and embodied and cannot be generated in other ways.[5] Some creative work in *JoLA* is accompanied by an explicit, written interpretation as in more traditional academic papers in the 'Articles' section or through project critique in 'Under the Sky'. At the same time, art-based research can also consist entirely of the creative practice, with no explicit critical exegesis deemed necessary; emphasis is placed on creative exploration and innovation in the given artistic practice. 'Thinking Eye' offers a milieu for scholarly review of visual works and of how their production embodies new knowledge or has implications for the theory and practice of landscape architecture.

Landscape architecture draws on an array of disciplines and requires a range of methods to test ideas: some visual, some spatial, some philosophical, some experiential and some scientific. An iterative process of drawing and making, rooted in critical reflection, is a substantive mode of research and theory building, resulting in concrete experiments that define a stage of knowledge and a tangible method of instigating further discussion and analysis. Such an approach is neither rooted in self-expression nor an intuition. Rather, the tacit knowledge gained through sustained acts of making, through site-responsive visual experiments or experiential installations offers a new mode of discourse and demands a willingness to engage with the unexpected and the unknown. Knowledge in landscape architecture, as in fine arts, resides in physical works, in constructed spaces. Ideas about the relationships between people and nature or the effect of a particular material or the effectiveness of an ecological proposal must eventually be manifest in actual forms, spaces and materials. Process or dynamic phenomena of atmosphere, movement, light or weather or particular social or political relationships are also made visible through creative practices. A cultural and ethical framework in landscape architecture is communicated through the project itself.[6] Built works reflect spatial and aesthetic innovation and the making of new relationships between human experience and place. For this reason, engaging art-based methodologies that actively test the configuration of space, form, materiality, temporality, atmosphere in relation to human experience and natural processes are important. And so, too, is the ability to contextualize such works. Landscape architecture mediates a visceral contact with nature in order to suggest a different way of interacting with a place. It is considered part of a broader cultural production because it offers concrete alternatives to existing forms, conceptions of site and space, and inspires particular human responses.

A search for rigour

How does creative practice demonstrate the originality, precision and rigour demanded of academic research? Artist Robert Irwin sees art as a legitimate form for advancing knowledge and developing ideas, in equal validity with other disciplines. In his interviews with art critic Lawrence Weschler, Irwin insists that art has both the right and the obligation to stake its claims as high as any science.[7]

For Irwin—an artist often cited as inspiration by landscape architects—questions about space, light and minimal intervention informed a series of installations undertaken in the 1970s, begin-

Roland Gustavsson, 'The touch of the world: Dynamic vegetation studies and embodied knowledge', *Journal of Landscape Architecture*, 4:1 (2009) 42–55

ning with *Fractured Light—Partial Scrim Ceiling—Eye Level Wire*, which was exhibited at the MoMA. In these installations, Irwin uses new aesthetic and spatial strategies that reframe the relation between the human body and its ephemeral phenomena (light). He reconstitutes a museum gallery as a dynamic, phenomenologically based experience, mediating a new way of interacting with an artwork in the same way that landscape architects might mediate the experience of place. He demonstrates how a localized, subjective and immediate understanding of a place and a person in it can be the basis for a transformative, formal intervention. Irwin configures a complex spatial relationship between the transitory and the permanent. He changes how people see.

Throughout this series of installations, Irwin defines the questions, arguments, and values that matter most to him through his art work. Initial questions are rooted in subjective, individual observation and personal experience of a room, landscape and its particular qualities of light. His installations embody a kind of sensorial assimilation: an interpretive, complex knowledge that requires an understanding of materials, procedures and techniques, and the ability to use them in an imaginative way that engages all the senses.

Irwin's work demonstrates how choices about media, process, form and space relate to a particular aesthetic inquiry and a particular place. It can be understood as a series of distinct themes and ideas that are sustained over time, but informed by what is discovered in each one—by a thinking eye, and a thinking hand. His work demonstrates rigour, originality and precision, not because he follows the same method and process as other artists, but because he is able to critically examine and modulate his own production. He is attuned to the limitations of one medium. He changes materials and processes of fabrication when he realizes that a particular way of working is no longer useful for exploring his interests in the human body and space. Through the installations, it is possible to articulate and discuss what each of Irwin's works does and does not do; subjective methods based on individual experience can in this way result in a critical reinvention of prevalent modes of art or design practice and the development of new theory. Through the distillation of the ephemeral phenomena of light, Irwin makes his art practice a spatial experience, dissolving the boundary between spectator and art object through a dialogic process of making.

The making of art, of propositions enacted through drawings, installations and other media, enriches landscape architectural practice by acknowledging that landscape architecture is not simply about the natural. Landscape architecture must resolve rational problems and fulfil functional, technical, environmental and social demands. Landscape architects work in a network of actors from the public authorities who commission a project, those who collaborate in its design, construction and maintenance, and the members of the public who will use it. At the same time, a good work of landscape architecture, like a good work of art, must also evoke complex human experiential response and represent cultural values and positions not easily prescribed.

Activating a spatial imagination

James Corner argues that: 'Any recovery of landscape in contemporary culture is ultimately dependent on the development of new images and techniques of conceptualization.'[8] The elucidation of new relationships between natural phenomena and people through exploration and engagement and invention with art-based methodologies reframes broader social and ethical concerns about a particular place or environment. This reconfiguration of the relationship between natural phenomena, aesthetic practice and ethics is echoed in Elizabeth Meyer's analysis of works by Robert Irwin and Robert Smithson. These artists offer landscape architects "alternatives to large-scale ecological analysis and mapping" through their immersive methods.[9] Unpacking and analysing the art-based methodologies that underpin the work of artists and landscape architects can offer a framework for intervening in a particular site outside of the conceptual framework of ecology taken strictly as a scientific dis-

Anton James, 'Re: Drawing', *Journal of Landscape Architecture*, 12:1 (2017) 44–59

cipline or as environmentalism. The rigorous practice of landscape architecture demands, as does the practice of fine art, a disciplined inquiry based on a dynamic engagement by designer and spectator. The act of making a landscape is not universal, mechanical or general in its operations. Rather, the making and experiencing of a designed landscape and the interplay between nature and human experience adds depth and texture to the building of new relationships to a place. Landscape research inquiry rooted in the creative arts is one way of acknowledging that the landscape itself is an eloquent, sensorial medium, one that allows for an interrogation, analysis and reconfiguration of broader cultural values.

As Kamni Gill and Bianca Maria Rinaldi are now stepping down from their positions as editors of, respectively, the 'Thinking Eye' and the 'Reviews' sections, and two new members—Usue Ruiz-Arana and Ursula Wieser Benedetti—join the editorial team, we reflect that it has been this determination of *JoLA* to go beyond mere illustration to provide a thoughtful dialogue on the practice of landscape architecture and allied disciplines that has been the most satisfying. *JoLA* has developed as we explored alternative ways of enabling the critical examination of our discipline through richly considered interpretations in writing, images and creative design practice, and it will continue to evolve as we encourage, through the publication of diverse modes and methods of research, new ways of cultivating a spatial imagination—of thinking beyond landscape.

Bianca Maria Rinaldi, 'Reviews' section editor from 2010 to 2021, and Kamni Gill, 'Thinking Eye' editor from 2011 to 2021, would like to gratefully acknowledge the *JoLA* founding editors for welcoming them into the editorial team and the exciting opportunities that working with *JoLA* offered. They also would like to thank all the members of the editorial and production teams, who contribute to shaping the journal, for their openness, curiosity and the always lively and productive exchange. It was a pleasure and a privilege to work with you all.

1 James Corner, 'Representation and Landscape: Drawing and Making in the Landscape Medium', *Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry* 8/3 (1992), 245.

2 Catherine Dee, 'Poetic-critical Drawing in Landscape Architecture' *Topos* 49 (2004), 41–49.

3 Elizabeth K. Meyer, 'Site Citations: The Grounds of Modern Landscape Architecture', in: Andrea Kahn and Carol Burns (eds.), *Site Matters: Design Concepts, Histories, and Strategies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005) 93–129.

4 Bernadette Blanchon, 'Criticism: The Potential of the Scholarly Reading of Constructed Landscapes: Or, the Difficult Art of Interpretation', *Journal of Landscape Architecture* 11/2 (2016), 66–71.

5 Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (eds.), *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry* (London: I.B. Tauri, 2007), 1–14.

6 Elisabeth Braae, *Beauty Redeemed: Recycling Post-Industrial Landscapes* (Aarhus: Ikaros Academic Press, 2015), 131.

7 Lawrence Weschler, *Seeing Is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees: Over Thirty Years of Conversations with Robert Irwin* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2009), 233.

8 James Corner, 'Eidetic Operations and New Landscapes', in: James Corner (ed.), *Recovering Landscape Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), 153-154.

9 Elizabeth K. Meyer, 'The Post-Earth Day Conundrum: Translating Environmental Aesthetics into Landscape Design', in: Michael Conan (ed.), *Environmentalism in Landscape Architecture* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2000), 197.