

# Conferences

A section for the review of conferences and exhibits is a regular feature of *Landscape Journal*. The opinions and ideas expressed in the reviews are those of the reviewers and do not necessarily represent the views of the *Journal's* editors or the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture. Suggestions for conferences, exhibits, and other events to be reviewed are always welcome, as are comments regarding the reviews published. All correspondence should be sent to the conference review editor:

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## Globalization in Landscape Architecture

St. Petersburg State Forest Technical Academy,  
St. Petersburg, Russia  
June 3–6, 2007

Reviewed by Lilli Licka and Daniel Roehr

This conference was conceived of by Maria Ignatieva, previously a professor at the Forest Technical Academy now teaching at Lincoln University, New Zealand, and her former colleague, Irina Melnichuk. They were assisted by Jacky Bowring and Shelley Egoz from Lincoln University, and supported by the government of St. Petersburg and by Russia's first professional landscape architecture journal, *Landscape Architecture Design*.

The conference's primary purpose was a discussion of the globalization of landscape architecture. The secondary desire was to see the discussion of the profession boosted in modern-day Russia, and so it was with deliberate symbolism that the conference was staged at the Forest Technical Academy where the first landscape architecture program in the former USSR was founded in 1933. It was attended by 130 delegates from 20 different countries including, understandably, a strong representation from Oceania. Double-blind peer-reviewed papers addressed issues of global exchange, globalization of the profession, sustainability, educational standards, teaching methods, and professional practice. Delegates were introduced to St. Petersburg in a guided four-day pre-conference tour and to Moscow in a three-day post-conference tour. These gave impressive evidence of the power,

influence, and wealth of the tsars, and included visits to parks from the Baroque and Soviet periods, to more contemporary times. In the preamble to his 1848 novel of the same name, Fyodor Dostoevsky described the White Nights as "the lyric of the North," which helps to explain the allure of a city that appeals to the aesthetic and historical sensitivities of design practitioners and scholars.

Ignatieva stated in an article for the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA) in August 2007 that "today, landscape architecture is one of the most popular professions in Russia" (9). She also suggested that teachers and practitioners from the Western parts of the world "need to develop in both their students and themselves the ability to read the words and thoughts of the rest of the world in their pure form, to make the connections themselves, and use this as a means of thinking meaningfully about those parts of the world," and that "globalization should not aim for homogenization, other alternative voices need to be heard as well" (9). She drew attention to St. Petersburg as a city that combines a distinct Western history with a modern Eastern culture. While demand for landscape architecture is booming in Russia, questions of global importance, such as urban ecology and sustainability, seem to be neglected in major building developments like the new waterfront in St. Petersburg and the projected high-rise tower for Gazprom, Inc. Ignatieva argued that the professional discourse in Russia also overlooks issues such as education and teaching methods.

Against this background, Jacky Bowring gave a compelling paper about global correlation and questions, such as Western domination of the visual realm becoming globalized. Australian landscape architect Grant Donald, currently working in booming Dubai, addressed the relationship between East and West as a question of exporting identity. Yuelai Liu from the Department of Landscape Studies at Tongji University, Shanghai, highlighted a "missing cultural consistency" in landscape architecture in China. On the one hand, the Cultural Revolution created a huge cultural gap; on the other, Western imports are accepted *carte blanche* without reference to authenticity or context. Liu documented this with the example of the curriculum at Tongji University where of the 26 main subjects, only 2 courses—"Chinese and Foreign Garden History" and "Landscape and Culture"—engage cultural history. He advocated for an innovative tie to traditional Chinese landscapes and workmanship, including stronger awareness of practical and theoretical approaches to these traditions.

Liu also sees student exchanges as a way to develop regional consciousness.

A series of lectures was dedicated to the comparison of landscape architecture around the world. This led to the general acknowledgement of the value of creating international standards for the profession, both in the classroom and in practice—as reflected in the accreditation system for curricula within the European Federation of Landscape Architects (EFLA). Equally, James Taylor from the University of Guelph, Canada, presented the Charter for Education in Landscape Architecture, launched by the IFLA in 2004, and underlined the need for minimum international standards for a globalized profession. The Charter includes the vision and basic ideas about the discipline, educational objectives, and the body of knowledge for landscape architectural education. Terry Clements from Virginia Tech addressed professional goals as the foundation for the adoption of education standards. Clements referred to Albert Fein's *Study of the Profession of Landscape Architecture* (1972) and the Landscape Architecture Body of Knowledge (LABOK) study from 2004, and pointed out that whereas Fein's study guided changes in curricula and professional expectations over decades, the LABOK study only contains an analysis of the status quo in North America and provides little direction for education.

Given that at Tongji, the program is called "Landscape Studies," and that in Russia the students gain either the title "engineer" for park and garden design or graduate in "landscape construction," it is difficult to establish a unified terminology. This was explained by Andrew Saniga from the University of Melbourne, who presented his research on the importation of the profession to Australia, and the attached meaning and abstract concepts introduced from Europe and the United States after World War II, as a precursor to globalization.

The final sessions were structured according to the three areas of discussion during the conference—Education, Landscape Ecology, and Landscape Design. The conclusions drawn included:

- English will be the dominant language of globalization and fluency in it will allow improved discussion and access to information;
- designs in different parts of the world should retain a local identity to maintain diversity and use solutions that have been locally proven and successful over time;

- water management is a global issue and waterfront areas should be preserved in a more sustainable form;
- ecology is an important component of landscape architecture today and more research on sustainability, biodiversity, management, and maintenance is needed;
- education benefits from a more intercultural environment and the advantages of studying abroad need to be encouraged and made available to students from economically poor countries; and
- overseas study is of great benefit to students who will work in a globalized world

In summary, the conference was successful in bringing professionals and academics from all over the world for the first time to Russia to discuss the globalization theme, the identity of our profession, and education, specifically the subjects of registration of landscape architects and the accreditation of academic programs. Similar subjects are addressed at many conferences today and they should be, particularly in countries where the profession has not yet reached full acceptance by governmental institutions. This event laid the groundwork for future conferences and for international cooperation on the academic and professional levels with Russia. Finally, all agreed that even with globalization taking place, when planning and design are carried out, local and cultural aspects need to be a major part in the education and professional practice of each country.

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## Think with the Senses—Feel with the Mind. Art in the Present Tense

The 52nd Venice Art Biennale  
Venice, Italy  
June 6–November 21, 2007

Reviewed by Philip Pregill

The 52nd Venice Art Biennale, titled *Think with the Senses—Feel with the Mind*, attempted to portray the breadth of current art practice by hosting 76 national exhibits, including 34 in the Giardini and the Arsenale, and an additional 42 located throughout the historic center of Venice. By official estimates, it was the best attended art Biennale in the past 25 years. This year's exhibition methodically presented international art as an amalgam of disparate references striving to convey form and content.

Robert Storr, the first American director of a Venice Art Biennale in the history of the event, chose to strike a conciliatory balance between innovation and order, with the traditional overriding curatorial risk-taking. Throughout the Giardini and the Arsenale there was evidence of Storr's direction. In the long hallway of the Arsenale's Corderie—for years the site of artistic innovation—order imbued the overall exhibition with the controlled rigor of the current international gallery and museum establishment. Nonetheless, the 52nd Biennale contained moments of expression that supported the sensory and cognitive theme of the exhibition. The other notable quality of the event was the range of work, which included digital, video, painting, photography, and mixed media. Painting appeared a bit more in the national exhibitions in the Giardini, especially the Italian Pavilion, where the selected works leaned in the direction of established American painters, including Elizabeth Murray, Felix Gonzalez-Torrez, Susan Rothenburg, and Ellsworth Kelly. However, the most compelling work appeared in the Russian Pavilion and eschewed traditional painting in favor of mixed media. The standout in this pavilion was AES+F Group's video, *The Last Riot*, a stirring ballet staged in the context of an alpine setting.

Despite the successes in a few national pavilions, the show in the Arsenale was the main event and contrasted distinctly with the 2006 Architecture Biennale, where an overabundance of data—much of it in digital format—overwhelmed the viewer. Storr's 2007 rendition featured a well-organized arrangement of fine art that safely echoed the current corporate

presence in contemporary art. The works in the Arsenale also contained a mix of traditional art media and digital or video expressions that attempted to support Storr's theme of mind and sense interplay, while conveying the dichotomy of conceptual and representational art that currently defines contemporary art practice. In response to this direction, the role of the landscape that appeared in the Arsenale was often as a physical frame for specific social issues that required a geographic locus, whether urban, suburban, or rural. The best of these appeared in the works of artists who held to the social or ecological message contained within their works, for example, Franz West's *The Fragile on its Cloak* (2007), an amalgam of three-dimensional forms that evoked an enigmatic landscape bereft of traditional shape and structure.

Two national pavilions located at the end of the Arsenale summed up the challenge of the Biennale in its attempt to convey Storr's exhibition theme and to reconcile both conceptual and expressive approaches to contemporary art. The first, the African Pavilion, resonated with works that both spoke to social circumstance in the African continent and conveyed the quality of landscapes in that region. Consequently, the viewer was reminded of the character of global landscapes, whether idealized, developed, or degraded. The second venue, the People's Republic of China Pavilion, offered a break from the controlled mood of the works along the Corderie. Four women artists worked with the theme, "Everyday Miracles," including Cao Fei's *China Tracy* (2007), a digital presentation of alternative existence. In a garden adjacent to the pavilion, Shen Yuan's *First Voyage* (2007), featured outsized infant items strewn across the turf, including a pacifier and bottle nipple, that turned an undifferentiated landscape into a surreal setting.

The Biennale underscored current global art practice that engages media and references that reach beyond what constituted notable production even a decade ago. Such breadth has been both the signature and distraction of contemporary art, especially for individuals who seek in art an affirmation of traditional representation. Landscape imagery, for example, which a century or so ago preoccupied painters from Frederick Church to Paul Cézanne, now competes with virtually every event in the sensory field for inclusion in contemporary image making. Urban landscape settings, in particular, provide artists with the references for both conceptual and representational content. Whereas the national pavilions in the Giardini featured landscape elements as pictorial references, the function of landscape in many works in the Arsenale was a

setting for specific ecological or social issues. In sum, the representational and conceptual strategies of the artists featured throughout the Biennale underscored the status of current art practice.

If the intent of *Think with the Senses—Feel With the Mind* was to explore the interface between sensory experience and rational response, then this carefully programmed exhibition managed to achieve some notable moments. However, by avoiding risk in favor of museum-like organization, the exhibition lessened the opportunity for viewers to explore sensory and cognitive issues that often best appear when works are allowed to complement, contrast, and overlap one another. For example, in 1958, Mark Rothko was the featured artist in the American Pavilion at the 29th Venice Biennale. At a retrospective of his work at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome (October 6, 2007 through January 8, 2008), both representational and abstract works were on view and the overlap of the two approaches successfully engaged sensory and rational experience. By organizing the works in a way that allowed the viewer to explore the sensory content of the artist's paintings, this show succeeded where the 52nd Venice Biennale fell short.

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### **Eighth International Garden Festival at Les Jardins De Métis/Reford Gardens**

Grand-Métis, Quebec, Canada  
June 23–September 30, 2007

Reviewed by Brenda J. Brown

Gardens have long served as intermediaries, buffers, showcases and theatres for orchestrated, impromptu, and incidental sounds from inside and outside their gates. One thinks of George Sitwell's "plashing fountains," the mechanical chirping birds and sweetly-playing, miniature musicians of Renaissance garden automata, and the avian choruses in vernacular gardens designed for specific song-birds, as just a few examples.

Considerations of sound nevertheless complicate contemplations of gardens—and garden design. While the etymological root of garden (the Indo-Aryan *gher*) means *to grasp* or *enclose*, landscape sounds resist containment and control. Yet whether or not we are aware of them, whether transient or constant, whether produced by birds or by an over-sized

air conditioner, whether invading from woodland or highway, sounds are part of most garden experiences.

The 2007 International Garden Festival was intended to explore relationships between the garden and sound. Lesley Johnstone, artistic director, invited 15 teams to submit proposals. Five were selected. Four were constructed for the 2007 festival, joining four others constructed for 2006 and somewhat redesigned in 2007 (the 2007 gardens will similarly remain through the 2008 season). The fifth garden was postponed until 2008.

The site of the festival gardens is adjacent to but separate from the luxuriant gardens Elsie Reford started over 80 years ago, the restoration of which began in 1995 under the direction of her great-grandson Alexander Reford. The borders of the festival plots are largely determined by their previous incarnation as cottage lots. Ranging from 10 × 20 to 20 × 20 meters, half are irregular and located in a wooded area; a few overlooking the St. Lawrence River. The others are 10 × 20 meters on a grid layout. Traffic on Route 132 can be heard throughout, particularly in the latter area.

*soundFIELD*, by Douglas Moffat and Steve Bates, is adjacent to the festival entrance and occupies a small lowland site dominated by poplar trees. Spindly four-foot-tall steel poles form points in a grid of blue electrical wire. This skinny-legged furniture accommodates the equipment—50 speakers, 25 amplifiers, and 5 mini wind sensors—that conveys the designers' sonic response to the site. The designers discuss the design in terms of function. Given the vicissitudes of site and climate, they wanted the system to work as a network: one amplifier can go down without bringing down the entire system. The look is somewhere between contemporary high tech and 1970s futuristic. The designers were captivated by the sounds of the poplars' leaves, distinctly sonorous in the wind, and visitors here will come to know, or remember, those leaves' gentle maracas-like shake. However, the primary sound, broadcast from the speakers, is a 144,000-minute (the length of the festival) composition of electronic sounds that Moffat and Bates made, treated, mixed, and composed to create a second mass of sound to work "in concert" with the trees. The idea of a work combining electronic composition and changing site conditions is intriguing, yet this garden is perhaps most of all, a contemporary version of Renaissance garden automata. Though the experience may be more encompassing, today, just as five hundred years ago, the technology is at least as intriguing as the composition.

Figure 1. *Pomme de parterre* by Angela Iarocci, Claire Ironside, and David K. Ross. Eighth International Garden Festival, Les Jardins De Métis/Reford Gardens, Grand-Métis, Quebec, Canada. (Photograph by author, 2007)



*La boîte noire*, by Corbeil & Bertrand and Jean Maxime Dufresne, employs the recorded sounds of lawn sprinklers and children talking in French and English. Sounds, spatial structures and green plants together evoke a fantastical suburbia—a suburbia on the moon, or perhaps, with its mirrors, a suburban funhouse. A seamless connection between interior and exterior and the exclusively children's voices suggest a truly gentle environment. The children, who speak about what a garden means to them, were recorded by the designers during interviews at two primary schools in Montreal and two in the Métis region. Meaningful fragments periodically emerge, but they are less significant than the distinctly childlike and seemingly at-ease voices, and the fact that it is only their voices—and the sprinklers—that we hear. The world created is simultaneously familiar and strange.

*Cat's Cradle*, by Juliette Patterson, Michel G. Langlois, and Gerard Leekey, contains three resonating sound cabinets constructed of recycled piano boards. It is an Aeolian harp in which trees act as both musicians and instruments. A lattice of piano strings extends between the sound cabinets and branches of the trees bordering three edges of the site. As they move with the wind, the branches are intended to push and pull the strings so that the boards resound. Unfortunately, during my visits little audible sound was created, and although the idea and physical set-up is evocative, the sound cabinets remained isolated if interesting objects in a cursorily defined space.

The gardens most interesting in terms of sound, *Pomme de parterre* and *Terrain fertile*, were also the ones in which sound, though integral, was not essential. *Pomme de parterre*, by Angela Iarocci, Claire Ironside, and David K. Ross, is exemplary for its intriguing use and creation of sound, and as a created world. Most of the plot is planted with 13 varieties of heirloom potato, along with nasturtiums and other traditional potato-companion plants. By September, these were a profuse mass of rich greens with smatterings of yellow, orange, blue, and white. In their center, wooden paths that mellowly resonate when walked upon, are stenciled with the names of the

potato varieties. These paths frame and access a half-buried, wooden, hut-like structure, built from boxes used to ship and store potatoes (Figure 1). Though its form refers to vernacular root-cellars typical of the region, this structure also suggests a mad scientist's (however primitive) underground laboratory, for inside, on shelves set into its walls, is a 1,000-potato electric battery. The electricity is converted into droning sounds and bursts of light that irregularly animate the dark space. This garden is funny, sensorially rich, inviting, educative, and enchanting. It tickles the imagination.

*Terrain fertile* by CÉDULE 40 (Julian Boily, Sonia Boudreau, Étienne Boulanger, and Noémie Payant-Hébert) was originally created for the 2006 festival. Changes were made to increase its sonority for 2007, but the effect was minor. The garden is dominated by a 7.5-meter-high swing set situated in the middle of a bright green field of ceramic-lined rows of barley. The actual swing rests approximately four feet below the ground surface, and is reached by descending a wood plank ramp, the smell of the earth and barley increasing with the trench's depth. In its lumbering long arc, the swing cranks the hopper overhead so it sends forth showers of barley seeds. By September, these seeds had taken root in every crack and cranny, including the swing seat.

A festival dealing with gardens and sounds is appealing, intriguing, and timely. Such events afford opportunity for and goad focused exploration, and can entertain and stimulate other designers and visitors. Regrettably, four or five gardens provide neither a critical mass sufficient for diversity of expression and comparison, nor the depth of exploration the subject deserves. (One glaring omission is that none of these gardens dealt with human, or mechanically produced ambient sounds.) The festival is nonetheless a pleasing gesture, providing ground for more comprehensive examinations.

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