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THAWED MUSIC?

A humanistic study of meaning
in Western gardens.

A dissertation
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the
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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation addresses the question of meanings in gardens from a humanist point of view. It is particularly concerned with examining the commonly held notion that a garden is a work of art.

It is limited in scope to western garden styles, and it is limited in scope also in that it discusses gardens only, and ignores all other areas of landscape design. This latter limit has been imposed not only because of considerations of space, but also because it is considered that, of all the areas of landscape design, gardens are the area richest in meanings and the area in which the creation of a work of art is most likely and possible.

This dissertation does not aim to set down "shoulds" and "oughts" with regard to garden design. It is merely an attempt to examine and clarify, for the benefit of its author and anyone else who may be interested, some fuzzy but commonly held assumptions.

Chapter One opens with a range of descriptions and definitions of gardens. It examines gardens as reflections of man's attitude to nature and to the world in general, and reviews the reasons which have led man to create gardens.

Chapter Two discusses garden materials and overall garden form as elements of symbolic meaning. The traditional Sufi garden and the contemporary Californian garden are examined as gardens rich in such symbolic meanings.

Chapter Three is central to the dissertation. It is concerned with the garden as a special sort of symbol - an art symbol. Suzanne Langer's art theories are presented and an attempt is made to relate these to the area of garden design.

Chapter Four presents Geoffrey Jellicoe, Roberto Burle Marx, Ted Smyth and their work. These three men all consider their work as art and it is here examined from this point of view.

Chapter Five considers some contemporary landscape architectural writing on aesthetics. It offers thoughts on the implications for the teaching and practice of landscape architecture if garden design is indeed an art.
CHAPTER ONE

GARDENS IN CULTURE

Gardens have been part of man's cultural life for thousands of years. They have been, amongst other things, expressions of kingly and queenly power, expressions of a love of flowers and trees, expressions of political, artistic, religious or social ideals and attitudes, while at other times they have been attempts at copying a painted or written-about nature. They have existed in deserts, on hill tops, in jungle settings and on roof tops. They have contained immense trees and tiny flowers, sculpture, water, grass, buildings, stone and even neon and bagels. They have been ephemeral and enduring, and have ranged in size from hundreds of hectares to tiny plots containing a single tree and a seat. They have excited controversy, they have been boring.

For the author, gardens are ideally places in which to be invigorated spiritually, in the broadest sense of that word, and places in which to learn through the mind and the senses about us and our place in the scheme of things. But there has never been before, and certainly is not now, a unanimity of opinion concerning what a garden is about, as the following definitions will show.

- A garden is a beautiful book, writ by the finger of God: every flower and every leaf is a letter (William Robinson, quoted in Best and Boisset, 1987);
- A garden is a work of art (Tunnard, 1948);
- Gardens are just the same as paintings and the plastic arts. The principals (sic) are parallel (Burle Marx, quoted in Gregory, 1981);
- A garden is an expression of man in a state of society (unattributed, quoted in Fairbrother, 1956);
- Gardens are thought itself made tangible and visible ... an attempt of the mind to find itself mirrored in the world of things (Comito, 1979);
- A garden affords the purest of human pleasures ... it is the greatest refreshment to the spirits of man without which buildings and palaces are but gross handiworks (Francis Bacon, quoted in Cowell, 1978);
- A garden is a work of art using the materials of nature (Repton, quoted in Cowell, 1978);
- Gardens are links between man and the world in which they live (Crowe, quoted in Fairbrother, 1956);
- [Gardens are] select places of recess, where the mind may privately exalt and breathe out those seraphic thoughts and strains, by which man is known and distinguished as an intelligent being, and elevated above the common level of irrational creatures (S. Switzer, quoted in Cowell, 1978);
- A garden is something that every New Zealand family wants (Gardening Manual, 1961).

These definitions, together with the garden attributes enumerated above, betray a wide variety of attitudes, amongst which man's attitude to nature is perhaps of the greatest interest. How a garden has been seen as against nature itself has varied throughout time, being affected by the type of surrounding environment and by man's attitude to that surround environment, and by his attitude to nature and to the world in general.
For instance, at the height of the 17th century formal French garden style, a style which probably had a more widespread and enduring effect on European civilization than the armies of the monarch who epitomized it (Adams, 1979), the pre-eminent garden style represented the pinnacle of rational man who was master of a servile nature. Whereas a William Morris house and garden, or in the first decade of this century a Chapman Taylor house and garden in New Zealand [Fig. 1], represented man in flight from the "horrors" of an industrialized society, and treated nature as a wholesome therapeutic friend in whose rustic embrace integrity could again be achieved. Different again was the Moorish attitude to gardens and nature as exemplified at, say, the Generalife in Granada. There nature is celebrated as something which man can conjure up in an arid landscape, and so too water, the magical catalyst which makes it all possible, is there celebrated [Fig. 2].
18th century mind in literature and painting, was seen as setting aesthetic standards to be emulated and surpassed in the work of men [Fig. 3]. And in our century too nature sets its own standards, although those "standards" are now scientifically deduced and expressed, we hope with humility, in today's ecological gardens.

Man's attitude to nature and the world can also be examined according to the degree of enclosure and formality with which he invested his garden spaces. The enclosed garden, with varying degrees of formality, was the typical garden right up to the end of the middle ages. It reflected a world where a mix of uncertainty, mistrust and uninterest typified the attitude to what was beyond the garden walls. Survival was a struggle because of hostile armies or hostile nature and, at least in the middle ages, life tended to be poor and cramped and one's life made sense through a vertical relationship up to God [Fig. 4]. This idea of the garden as a safe oasis persisted after the middle ages too. The grand classical and baroque gardens of renaissance Italy often included a bosky giardino segreto. At Versailles Louis XIV's queen is said to have preferred the intimacy of her little garden around the Petit Trianon to the splendors of the extensive formal gardens. And in our time the exquisite oasis-like sculpture court at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City is a superb example of an enclosed garden which shuts out the clangor of surrounding Manhattan. We see a legacy of this mentality too in the hedges and walls with which we surround our
suburban gardens in New Zealand (c.f. the unfenced nature of many suburban areas in the United States).

In the formal gardens which evolved during the renaissance a new attitude to the world at large is apparent. Formality had of course existed previously (v. early Persian gardens and the monastic cloister gardens of Western Europe), and there is perhaps even a case to be made arguing that all gardens are formalizations and ritualizations of agricultural processes. But in many of these earlier gardens the formality was symbolic of spiritual attitudes and values, whereas the formality which flourished in Europe during and after the renaissance was symbolic of the supremacy of man and his powers of reason. Boundaries perforce still existed, but they were played down as much as possible. "The foreground was moulded, in parterres and geometrical patterns, to a logical order of the mind, while the greater landscape was explored and
regulated by confident vistas." (Fairbrother, 1956) [Fig. 5]. This was a gardening reminiscent of the grand manner of ancient Egypt and Rome.

During the reign of the English landscape school there was a marked change of attitudes to enclosure. Boundaries were hidden whether they were the pale around the park or the ha-ha near the house. Logical, visible formality disappeared and instead what were perceived as the rules of nature were pursued. Man no longer sought to subdue nature. He appeared to work in harmony with her, and well-dressed nature was welcomed in as a friend, inspirer and adviser [Fig. 6]. Untamed nature too was welcomed in if she behaved. And gradually, as the original picturesque basis of the movement faltered, nature herself or, more precisely, the materials of nature, were seen as equating with a garden. With many notable exceptions, some of which will be discussed later, this philosophy remains current. Its power has been enhanced by the industrialization of last century and the gradual movement in our century away from things natural, with the concomitant need for man to escape from the "real", un-natural world.
Another perspective which may help to make sense of the bewildering array of types of gardens and garden philosophies which have existed through time is to consider why men have created gardens in the first place. An old Chinese proverb runs: "If you would be happy for a week take a wife: if you would be happy for a month kill your pig: but if you would be happy all your life, plant a garden". But the answers to the question "Why do men create gardens?" are in fact more complex and interesting than the proverb would suggest.

As mentioned above, gardens can be seen as formalizations and ritualizations of the methods and forms of agriculture. Irrigation channels become rills, wells become fountains, vegetable plots become parterres and grape supports become pergolas. And in this transformation the purposes of agriculture are not always lost. So that gardens have always been and still are potentially productive places. Ancient Egyptian gardens provided the flowers so necessary for various public events. Laurel wreathes and flowers were needed in ancient Rome, and just so flowers and herbs were grown in mediaeval monastic gardens. At the height of the French formal garden a space was always provided for the potager garden, where the flowers and vegetables were grown in albeit less intimidating formal patterns. Kitchen gardens and cutting gardens existed in tucked away corners of English landscape parks while the lower classes threw everything in together in their productive cottage gardens.
These cottage gardens were an important antecedent to the early colonial gardens in Australian and New Zealand where, from earliest times, the traditional English components were complemented by a small range of indigenous flora. With the rise of the middle classes last century the home vegetable and flower garden, one of whose main functions was to be productive of edible and decorative material, came into its own, and it continues to flourish today in, for example, the typical New Zealand suburban garden.

Related to the idea of the garden as a productive entity is the notion of the garden as a place in which to get one's hands dirty, in which to be physically in touch with nature and in which to provide for one's own and one's family's needs. Perhaps there is too in New Zealand and similar cultures a perceived moral imperative to work rather than to play, a need to mow lawns and prune trees rather than to lie under trees on lawns. And this "guilt" can be most pleasantly assuaged in the garden.

A powerful reason that has impelled man to create gardens can be described as religious or spiritual. A common theme running through the great western religions is that we have fallen from the state of grace we enjoyed in paradise and that we must now pass through life on earth and thereby re-earn our place in paradise. And this paradise has often been symbolized as a beautiful garden. The nearest we can reach to this paradisical garden on earth is in a garden of our own making, and so gardens have come to be overlaid with all manner of symbolic religious connotations (v. Chapter Two). Sometimes these connotations have been quite specific, for example in the irrigation channels signifying the four rivers of life in the Persian gardens or in the mandalas of the Sufi tradition gardens of India (v. Chapter Two). At other times, for instance under the influence of the thinking of Roussean and the other pantheistic romantics of the 19th century, nature and therefore gardens have been seen as being a direct manifestation of God and his handiwork. In our century, now that upper-case God is for many dead, nature itself has become lower-case god and a modified notion of the garden as paradise remains intact.

Another religious influence on gardens stems from the animist religions. The ancient Greeks for example planted or preserved, and revered sacred groves of trees in which the gods dwelt. And another, more moral gardening thread can be traced through the works of garden makers as diverse as those of ancient Rome and USA's Martha Schwartz, where edifying words and maxims are spelt out in box and other plant materials.
But paradise does not need to be interpreted as literally as the religious garden makers of the past interpreted it. In a more general sense gardens can recreate a world which because it is remote in time, place or mood from the contemporary reality, can appear paradisical. The new settlers who arrived in New Zealand last century set about recreating imitations of their distant homelands in their public and private gardens, and in so doing were part of a long tradition. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon were constructed at some inconvenience on a plain to remind their royal owner of her mountainous homeland [Fig. 7], just as the Moghul gardeners, who came from hilly Persia, created gardens familiar to them from the past when they went to India. A well-known New Zealand garden, Ohinetahi at Governor's Bay, is a good local example of a garden which sets out to recreate a world remote in space and increasingly so in time from the outside world that surrounds it [Fig. 8]. And, were it not for the facts that gardens cannot be bought readymade, are ephemeral and require upkeep, the author suggests that the antique buyers of this country would between them have created many more less distinguished "Ohinetahis" by now. Similarly the re-creation of the mediaeval garden at Villandry in France is, while historically correct, of no more contemporary interest than any other mere restoration.
(A much more interesting and fruitful approach to "restoration" is that adopted by Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe at Sutton Place. This is described in Chapter Four.)

Gardens created specifically to satisfy intellectual, artistic and aesthetic urges are harder to classify as a group because these aims are usually complexly interwoven with other aims and needs in the garden makers' minds. Allegorical gardens such as Stourhead in England (v. Chapter Two) and, to a certain extent, the garden of the Villa Orsini at Bomarzo [Fig. 9], can perhaps be considered as intellectual gardens, as can many of the designed landscapes of the British landscape architect Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe. While the latter says that it does not matter at all whether the garden participant appreciates the ideas behind a particular garden scene, he at the same time insists that all landscape design that is not based on an idea is meaningless, is pure technique. Jellicoe's hills and artificial lake at Sutton Place, for instance, are satisfying visually in themselves. But Jellicoe (1983) sees them as part of a complex allegory of the passage from our beginnings in the primal ooze to the state of evolution where man is able to create complex works of art.
In considering the creating of gardens to satisfy an artistic urge we are restricted primarily to the work of the artist garden makers. Names like Roberto Burle Marx, Geoffrey Jellicoe and New Zealand artist Ted Smyth come to mind, and the work of these and others will be discussed in a later chapter. However, the aesthetic urge as opposed to the purely artistic urge is an important component in almost all the gardens created throughout history. And the author is rash enough to suggest that he finds much of the notable gardening of the last 160 or so years to be in varying degrees aesthetically rather than artistically successful (v. Chapter Three).

Men have at all times created gardens as outdoor rooms in which to pursue a wide range of human activities. Gardens have been used as outdoor reception areas, as in Persian gardens of the 7th and 8th centuries and in 17th century France, and as places for thinking and teaching, as in the ancient Greek academy and the mediaeval cloister gardens. They have provided spaces for games and sports, hunting, sitting
and today, lying about; spaces for outdoor eating and spaces in which to dream, spaces for making love and spaces for parking cars and drying washing. And it is this utilitarian or humanly functional aspect of gardens, typified by the contemporary client’s brief, which is to the fore in the garden design work being done by today’s landscape architects and garden designers. Although not new, for Repton was consciously considering it over 150 years ago, suitability for practical purposes is today an important criterion. And popular misinterpretations of the nature of functionalism, as proposed by landscape architects such as Christopher Tunnard (1948), have only served to reinforce this bias towards the practical above all else.

No consideration of why men have made gardens would be complete without mentioning gardens created as a show of wealth, power or taste, and, by extension, gardens made by those who need to be seen as having as much wealth, power or taste as the makers of the original gardens. Keeping up with the Jones, whether the Jones be Louis XIV, the Duke of Marlborough or the people at 21A, has given the world some great gardens. But for man’s need to bolster his uncertain ego these gardens would not have come into existence.
CHAPTER TWO

SYMBOLISM IN GARDENS

The philosophical literature on symbols is enormous, complex and often contradictory. A division of symbols into three functionally different types is commonly accepted and will be the basis for the material that follows.

A symbol is a special type of sign, something that means more than its primary appearance. Or something that to a particular viewer (or listener) may have connotations beyond its immediate, more obvious meaning. The simplest type of symbol is of the analogue type. An example of this is the policewoman's uniform badge which, besides making her readily identifiable, are symbols of the power invested in her by virtue of her job. Similarly the monarch's crown. In garden terms, the large scale topiary horse outside a bloodstock saleyards near Auckland is on one hand merely a sign, but, because a horse is part of the owners' logo and because horses are what is traded at the saleyards, it also functions as a symbol of this first type [Fig. 10].
A more complex type of symbol is the allegorical type, where a whole series of events or objects may symbolically represent something beyond their immediate, obvious reality. John Bunyan’s *A Pilgrim’s Progress*, for example, is on one level a story of a journey through various events and scenes. Yet on another level it is a metaphor for the journey of a Christian towards salvation. Examples of garden symbolism of this type which come to mind are the gardens Henry Hoare created at Stourhead and Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe’s Kennedy Memorial at Runnymede.

A third type of symbol can be described as accumulative, as having many differing layers of meaning according to context in time and place and the participants’ backgrounds. An example of such a symbol is the cross form or, in gardening terms, the cruciform shape of say Christian monastic gardens, which form the monks took
over from other gardening traditions where its geometry had different, though still spiritual, connotations.

A fourth type of symbol exists too and Chapter Three will deal with it in some depth. But briefly, it is a symbol that is an abstraction of inner human experience but which does not represent anything beyond itself (Langer, 1953, etc.) It is a perceivable embodiment of what it represents, but what it represents is not perceivable save through the symbol. Such a symbol is a work of art. And it is stressed that in this chapter it is symbols of the first three types only that are being discussed. Symbols in gardens (or works of art) are the subject of this chapter, not the garden as a work of art (symbol) per se.

Man's use of symbols can be divided into conscious and unconscious categories. Allegorical symbolism, for example, is always conscious. Whereas it is possible that most use of the circle as a symbol, for example in mandalas, city plans, jewellery, alchemy, garden design and the cross (a quadripartite division of the circle) has been an unconscious reaction to the symbolic connotations of the circle. Exactly what those connotations were and are is difficult to access, but in most cases it would seem that some idea of wholeness or unity is implicit. And Jung would link this to our shared inheritance, the collective unconscious, wherein, in dreams, the circle symbolizes the whole self [Fig. 11].
As well as the collective unconscious, man's personal unconscious also feeds his symbol making. Randolph Hester's wittily titled *Womb with a View* (1979) documents evidence of many landscape designers who, often unconsciously, reproduce symbolically environments familiar to them from their early life in their adult working life.

In the early animist cultures plant material both within and without gardens was often symbolically linked with gods and spirits. For the Greeks as for the Minoans, the Romans and the Egyptians, trees, flowers and herbs had special meanings beyond their productive and decorative qualities. Trees were "peopled" by numerous gods and goddesses, not to mention countless dryads, naiads and nymphs, and in some cases the trees actually "personified" these spiritual beings. In the myths and legends of Ancient Greece the gods were inextricably linked with vegetation of various sort, that vegetation thereby taking on a symbolic meaning. For instance, according to Cowell (1978), plants of lettuce, fennel, wheat and barley were traditionally set out by the women in pots on the flat house roofs to spring up wither and die in a brief cycle symbolic of the short life of Adonis. Apollo, the laurel bearer and god of all vegetation, had as sacred to him plane trees, tamarisks and apples, whilst Dionysius, the tree
god, had as his symbols ivy and the vine, and he was in addition a deity of all vegetation (Cowell, ibid.). In later non-animist times the idea of trees having a symbolic significance or suitability continued. In the Moghul gardens of India it was thought that five trees (including the Melia and the Albizia) should be planted first for good luck, after which any trees could be planted (Cowell, ibid.). And in our own times examples like the special suitability of yews for cemetery planting and of laurels for wreathes persist.

Also linking the animist traditions with our own times is the notion of a language of flowers. To the Egyptians the blue water lily or lotus was prized above all flowers [Fig. 12]. It was to them a symbol of the life-giving Nile and was the sacred flower of Osiris (Cowell, ibid.). To the New Testament Jews, and in fact to all Christians since, the rose (of Sharon) that blossomed in the desert and the lilies of the field have had sacred overtones. By the 9th century the Benedictine Abbot Walahfrid Strabo was praising them as "two flowers so loved and widely honoured that have throughout the ages stood as symbols of the Church's greatest treasures, for it plucks the rose in token of the blood shed by the Blessed Matyrs and it wears the lily as a shining sign of the faith ..." (Cowell, ibid.).

The Christian input into a language of flowers has survived and has over the centuries been added to by a folkloric element. So that today every bookshop stocks a range of calendars, diaries and books derived from this "language". For us plants like hyacinths, rosemary and yew have connotations which we share with much of the western world. But this "language" is not an esperanto. Some plants, like pohutukawa, kowhai, wild Flanders poppies and leeks, have specific regional connotations, while vases of arum lillies in New Zealand houses draw surprised
Materials other than plants can function as symbolic elements too. The use of water in this way has already been discussed in Chapter One. In contemporary New Zealand society where, especially in the North, a bicultural dimension to our lives is growing, it is possible to think of the deliberate use of crushed paua shell for a paving material as a symbolic gesture. In Martha Schwartz’s notorious tyre and Necco garden at MIT (Martha Schwartz, 1982) Neccos were chosen as a symbolic element because, when the wind is in the right quarter, the campus is permeated with the saccharine smells of the nearby Necco factory. And no discussion of symbolic garden elements can ignore the use of especially sand, gravel, rocks and water in gardens of the Japanese tradition. In this tradition these elements are used to
suggest or indeed represent sea, rivers and land, and, at a more philosophical level they symbolize notions such as self, life and other spiritual concepts [Fig. 14].

Various abstract forms, as opposed to the materials used to create them, are in themselves imbued with symbolism and have been used as such throughout the history of garden making. Typical abstract forms used in this way are the circle and the cross, the square, the straight line and various combinations of proportions such as the golden section. Two of these forms, the circle and the square, the latter being it is sometimes suggested a humanization and intellectualisation of the former, have been and continue to be especially important. The circle as a made symbol appears to pre-date *homosapiens* (Jung, 1964). Its commonly accepted symbolic connotations of wholeness and unity have informed its use in gardens ever since, whether it has appeared in circular fountains or circular rose gardens, circular bedding patterns or circular enclosing boundaries. Often the circle has been divided by a cross into four equal segments (v. mediaeval monastic gardens, Persian gardens, etc.) and equally often it has been used in association with a square - that "finite and absolute symbol of reason" (Jellicoe, 1966). Jellicoe traces the square's use in landscape from the Pyramids, through the Summerian, Persian, Moslim and Chinese civilizations, to later examples like the Villa Lante, the Taj Mahal, the Alhambra, college quadrangles and London's "squares". (And he notes interestingly that of all the major nations in history, only the Ancient Greeks excluded the square as a major form in landscape: "As creators of the idea of the individual they were in violent rebellion against Persian
dictatorship, and the square must have been a symbol of the universal in man and of his ready acceptance of what appeared to be the inevitable, as ordained by a single human will.

But the publication of Einstein's *Theory of Relativity* in 1907 has indirectly caused artists in all fields since to see the square and the circle in different terms. No longer can these forms, or anything else in fact, be seen as finite, absolute and secure. The square and the circle are no longer sovereign in their own rights - they are seen rather in their relationship to other shapes, including other squares and circles, and in relation to the immediate and infinite environment [Fig. 15]. A graphic example of this "new" attitude is seen in Jellicoe's intellectually satisfying, but aesthetically less satisfying re-design of the rose garden at Cliveden.

![Fig. 15](image)

Whole gardens can themselves be symbolic of a particular worldview. This has already been alluded to in Chapter One, and here two garden styles, that of the ascetic Sufi tradition and that of the hedonistic Californian tradition, will be examined more closely.

The Sufi garden tradition is a variant of traditional Persian garden design. Hamid Shirvani (1985) describes two contrasting types of traditional Sufi gardens: contained gardens and gardens as containers [Fig. 16].
In the contained gardens lushness of growth and abundance of water are offered as a contrast to the macrocosm outside the walls. This contrasting of opposites affords meditative opportunities. In the symmetrical geometry which reigns within the walls Truth is to be found. The Way and the Soul are the plants, water and green spaces, while at the centre of each the Body, the Manifest and the Law are to be found [Fig. 17].
In the garden as container the inviolability of the private sphere is stressed. The garden is a place away from the outside world, where women especially are free of the restrictions for social intercourse placed on them in public society.

For a worldview that contrasted more strongly with the Sufi tradition it is hard to go past the contemporary Californian garden tradition. The Californian character is hedonistic, experimental, outdoors-y and carefree, but is not without an appreciation of its historical past (David Streatfield, 1985) [Fig. 18]. The hedonism is reflected in the emphasis on the provision of areas for sun-bathing, swimming, cars and outdoor living generally, while the experimental dimension is seen in a willingness to adopt new design styles and theories, new materials and new plants as rapidly as they appear. The historical past makes its presence felt not only in the choice of materials and building styles (v. Spanish mission), but also in a fondness for the Mediterranean plants which their forebears originally introduced all along the western seaboard.

Gardens can be designed so as to create an allegory or extended allegorical symbol (v. opening of this chapter). The most famous of such Western gardens is undoubtedly Stourhead in Wiltshire. Stourhead was created by its owner, the banker Henry Hoare, as a physical re-incarnation of a Virgilian landscape based on Claude Lorraine's *Coast View of Delos with Aeneas*. It reminds the participant of, and is fact in its turn an allegory of, the story of Aeneas' visit to the underworld as told in Book VI
of Virgil’s *Aeneid*. Edward Mallins (1966) writes of the garden as follows: “Just as Book VI of the *Aeneid* is not only a narrative of a journey but a deep moral and philosophical inquiry into the meaning of life and death, so the path from the Temple of Ceres to the Temple of Apollo may be seen as an allegory of the journey through life, with certain ‘archetypes of the collective unconscious’ on the way”. Movement through the garden is needed for comprehension - it is a space where movement is not only possible but necessary. The participant’s progress through the garden (and life) begins from the Temple of Ceres. S/he then moves around the light-reflecting lake until reaching the entrance to the underworld [Fig. 19]. Emerging from the underworld the visitor sights the Pantheon, the hall of earthly fame, before passing on and finally ascending heavenwards to the Temple of Apollo.

In our time the work of Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe (v. Chapter IV) has often been allegorical in nature. Especially notable in this connection are his Kennedy Memorial at Runnymede (not, strictly speaking, a garden) and his famous work for Stanley Seeger at Sutton Place. In a yet unbuilt (1987) part of that garden Jellicoe sets a grotto under a glass-bottomed fountain which features a statue of Persephone. “But to get into the grotto one has to pass under the fall of water. A second, more mysterious grotto chamber is reached by a dark, wet tunnel, where a giant head of Pluto consumes the water of life. Redemption comes from Nature, and once outside the grotto’s shade the water breaks into harmless rills and little falls down a prettily planted slope to where a punt is moored for an idyllic afternoon on the river” (Jane Brown, 1987) [Fig. 20].
Another, more relevant example of contemporary allegorical garden design is the alas also unbuilt "Places for Peace" submitted for the 1986 Transforming the American Garden exhibition (Feinberg, 1986). It deals with questions related to the nuclear age, and features a series of designed spaces that relate to the grieving process and the emotional shifts that move a person from denial to action.

This chapter has so far dealt with gardens and garden elements as things which embrace a wide range of connotations and symbolic features. And this range of meanings has not been lost on other artists who, in countless examples, have used the garden as an element of symbolic meaning in their own works of art. Liszt and de Falla, in Les Jeux d’eau à Villa d’Este and Nights in the Gardens of Spain respectively, have interestingly both found inspiration in gardens with prominent water
features; while Debussy in *Les Jardins sous la Pluie* and Ravel in *Jeux d'Eau* both bathe their respective imaginary gardens in an aqueous light. Hieronymus Bosch and T.S. Eliot have both made use in their work of the garden as a paradise symbol. But it is by then negating this symbolism that their works gain strength and meaning. Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delight* shows a garden full of all manner of unusual carnal activity [Fig. 21]. And while the work's impact is still strong, the blasphemous nature of its content is lost on us today when "garden" does not have such direct symbolic links to the Garden of Eden. Similarly, T.S. Eliot, in the first of the *Four Quartets*, takes us into what promises to be a paradise garden, not unlike the hyacinth garden in his *The Waste Land*, only to "look down into the drained pool. Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged ...".

By contrast Hockney finds Californian gardens to be places of refreshment, symbolized for him by green lawns and sprinklers, while New Zealand artists Pat Hanly and Rodney Fumpston delight in the colours, patterns and simple joys which the domestic flower garden provides.
In summary then gardens can be seen as places that have very frequently made use of their potential for conveying meaning symbolically, and they have been in themselves a fecund source of imagery for artists in a variety of other disciplines. Sometimes garden designers have directly and consciously exploited this symbolic potential in gardens but often too this potential has been realised unconsciously in their work. Equally, garden participants have sometimes been consciously aware of such symbolic meanings, while at other times that meaning has been conveyed at a deeper, subconscious level.
CHAPTER THREE

THE GARDEN AS ART

In Chapter Two gardens were discussed from the point of view of how various garden materials can function symbolically. Now it is time to discuss gardens themselves as a special sort of symbol, as in fact an art symbol or work of art.

Steven Krog (1981) asserts that landscape architecture, and therefore garden design, has a "self-proclaimed singular capability to marry art with technology, and social and environmental concerns with political and physical reality". But is this claim valid, and is or indeed can landscape design be art? The assumption that it can is almost universally held, but there is hardly any serious investigation of that claim. Books with titles such as The Garden as a Fine Art (Cowell, 1978) and similarly titled lecture courses abound. But in them you will find the notion of the garden as art accepted as a datum. In the aesthetic writings of the last 100 years or so only one aesthetician, Etienne Souriac (1949), seems to have taken garden design seriously. And, while his attention is flattering, his findings are superficial.

The notion of a work of art as something produced by an artist, as opposed to "merely" a good or bad work produced by a painter, poet or choreographer, is generally speaking a fairly new notion. Bach, for example, was not an "artist" but a church and court composer who wrote the works required of him. Only from the enlightenment period onwards, and slowly, have the notions of artist and art evolved. And with this development has come an increased philosophical interest in deciding what constitutes a work of art.

Naturally there have been many conflicting theories advanced:

Art is intuition (Benedetto Croce, quoted in Weitz, 1959).
Art is the communication of feeling (Herbert Read, 1951).
All arts aspire to the condition of music (Schopenhauer, quoted in Read, 1951).
Art is not about something: it is something (Susan Sontag, quoted in Krog, 1981).
Art is a product which provides sensory or other stimuli ... which are felt to be beautiful, pleasant, interesting or emotionally moving (T. Munro, quoted in Krog, 1981).

Art is a symbol making activity (Jellicoe, 1975).

But the theories advanced in the exhilarating, perceptive writings of the American philosopher Susanne Langer (1953, 1967, etc.) offer a system of aesthetics and understanding that stands head and shoulders above the rest. To Langer the work of art is a special sort of symbol, the fourth type of symbol mentioned briefly in Chapter Two. This art symbol offers an aspect of our inner life for contemplation. It symbolizes something that is ineffable discursively, i.e. something which is beyond the reach of our commonest symbol system, language. It symbolizes and formulates feelings, with all their complexities, for our cognition. It doesn't create or stimulate feelings, and nor does the artist present his/her feelings in the work, or symptomize those feelings. Rather, artists present what they know about feeling for our contemplation. And this art symbol is inseparable from what it represents (cf. other symbols). The former is the embodiment of the latter, and the latter does not exist except through the form of the former.

How is this symbol made, how is this aspect of our inner life made available for perception? It is done by the creation of virtual (cf. actual) images, each art having a primary illusion or illusionary field. In the plastic arts the primary illusion is that of space, and it is within that illusion that the "living form" has its being. That living form reflects our subjective reality by sharing with it things like rhythm, organic structure, growth or the illusion of growth, simultaneous motion, rest, and many more besides. And that living form is created by abstraction. There is no point in trying to convey reality pure and simple: art abstracts certain discursively ineffable aspects from experience for our contemplation.

Space permits only a passing exposition of Langer's ideas on painting and sculpture, the two arts with which architecture and landscape architecture make up the main corpus of the major plastic arts. Painting, she says, depends for its being as an art on the creation of a visual three-dimensional image by using planes on a two-dimensional surface. Its primary illusion is not what is painted, the subject, which is only an articulation of it, but it is virtual space [Fig. 22].
Sculpture, on the other hand, is a three-dimensional object to start with, and its primary illusion is of virtual kinetic space. "A piece of sculpture is a centre of three-dimensional space. It is a virtual kinetic volume, which dominates a surrounding space, and this environment derives all proportions and relations from it, as the actual environment does from one's self ... It is an environment but not our own ... It effects the objectification of self and environment for the sense of sight." But, while a sculpture is actual and tangible, "its kinetic volume and the environment it creates are illusory - they exist for our vision alone, a semblance of the self and its world" (Langer, 1953) [Fig. 23].
Passing on to architecture, Langer sees its primary illusion, its basic abstraction, being that of the ethnic domain. (Perhaps a better term today would be cultural domain, and this term will be used for ethnic domain throughout this chapter.) A domain she sees as a sphere of influence of a function or functions, and it may or may not be geographically specific. Sea-faring life, for instance, is not geographically fixed, yet a ship is culturally a place. So too a Gypsy camp is culturally different from an Indian camp though geographically they could be in the same place. So a place, in the sense of cultural domain, is a created place and is therefore, she argues, an illusion - an illusion of self-contained, self-sufficient perceptual space, just as in sculpture and painting. But its organization is different from these latter for it is organized as a functional realm made visible - the centre of a virtual world and itself a geographical
semblance. So, finally, architecture articulates this virtual place by treating of an actual place [Fig. 24].

Culture, which is reflected in architecture, is a continuous functional pattern made up of interlocking and intersecting actions. And as such it is intangible and invisible. It has actual physical artifacts and symptoms. "But all such items are fragments that "mean" the total pattern of life only to those who are acquainted with it and may be reminded of it. They are ingredients in a culture, not its image" (Langer, 1959). It is the architect/artist's task to create those images, virtual images which reflect a cultural domain.

Unfortunately Langer does not pass on to discuss landscape architecture, but her theories are of great and immediate relevance to this field. It is possible to see her theory of virtual cultural domain as being equally applicable, but with changes of emphasis, to the field of landscape design. The emphasis in landscape design on man's relationship with nature as paradigmatic of his relationship to the world in general is probably the most important change of emphasis. But important too are the emphasis in landscape design on the physical relationship between the created virtual place and the existing, surrounding and immediate actual place, and the emphasis on man's relationship with the garden as a paradise symbol.
There is, however, a major but not philosophically insuperable difference between architecture, as described by Langer, and landscape design, and that is in the area of materials. Traditionally landscape design uses a preponderance of natural, living materials which, for the reasons discussed below, are potentially inimical to the notion of gardens as art.

In the first place natural materials, plants, are essentially aleatoric in nature; that is, they develop independently and in accordance with their own laws, and they are subject in all sorts of ways to the natural forces that play on them. Wind bends trees and ruffles water, water itself flows "naturally", light alters colour and textural and mass effects, and is itself unpredictable; plants grow quickly or slowly, or they are growing or dying, or even doing both at once. While this aleatoric nature is to a degree true of other arts too, e.g. architecture, dance and music, it is present in landscape design to a much greater degree. And the materials of landscape design therefore need to be chosen and combined in such a way that the virtual spatial image created by the artist can exist in spite of variations in the constituent elements, those variations indeed serving to enhance, vary and enrich the living form rather than detracting from it.

Perhaps, just as architecture is sometimes described as frozen music, landscape design to be successful needs to be thought of as thawed music! Or perhaps as others have suggested (Barnett, 1986), a garden is only "successful" in artistic terms for one superb moment in its life - a sort of Cartier-Bresson caught moment. But these suggestions, while diverting, take us no further ahead, because they ignore the artistic essence of landscape design as a creation of a virtual cultural domain.

Before leaving Langer it is well to consider one element involved in architecture and landscape design which she omits to consider: the temporal element. A piece of architecture or landscape design has a temporal element as well as a spatial one. Our temporal experience of either is partially ordained by the artist, so that, for example, a garden path offers a "melodic" sequence of experiences, the succession of which the artist controls. And landscape design has of course a further temporal element too in that "all that is only living can only die" (T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets). But both of these "objections" find their solution in an understanding and putting into practice of the ideas in the previous paragraphs.

Besides the problems inherent in the aleatoric nature of plant material, there is a host of other problems arising from landscape design as practised when attempting to see...
it as an art. Some of these more general objections, which relate not only to Langer's theories of art, will now be considered.

The first again concerns the naturalness of the materials commonly used. Plants are part of nature, obviously, and as such all sorts of connotations concerning god, nature and beauty often accrue to them. But these connotations are not necessarily of any relevance when considering the artistic importance of a garden. A plant, be it a massive oak or a dahlia, is a material that contributes to garden elements and finally to the virtual image. The dahlia or oak is not necessarily any more important than, or carries more essential meaning than a beam in a pergola, when it comes to assessing a garden as a virtual cultural domain. This is hard to accept given the horticultural basis of much landscape design thinking. And it is hard to accept too in the light of the general acceptance of the thinking of the English landscape school designers, and countless people since, that nature, whether "real" or improved, equalled beauty, which in turn equalled art if not, in the case of Rousseau and others, God.

Another problem, again related to plants, is that of the difficulty of abstraction from something that is real, tangible and not even man-made. Most art theorists agree that there is no use in just reproducing reality, and that some abstraction from reality is necessary for the creation of a work of art. This abstraction is especially difficult to achieve in the case of plants, which, as discussed above, are themselves actual objects of beauty and connotation per se. There was an outcry when Marcel Duchamp's signed urinal, called *Fountain*, was exhibited in New Zealand. But I suspect the outcry was only partly occasioned by the type of objet trouvé he chose to exhibit. What he had done was to take an existing object, sign it and exhibit it. But this is what happens all the time in gardens and there is no outcry. The nature of the plant object is the key to why this practice is perfectly acceptable to people who may be outraged by the idea of other objets trouvés being considered as art objects: plants are "beautiful", "natural" objects, urinals are not. But the principle remains that both are "found objects".

Perhaps the dada-ists had a point and landscape designers should consider plants as "the disturbing object which is the first step towards art" (Duchamp, quoted in Jung, 1964). But the problem is that plants, by and large, are not disturbing objects. Sounder advice comes from Paul Klee when he says that "the object [plant] expands beyond the bounds of its appearance by our knowledge that the thing is more than its exterior presents to our eyes" (quoted in Jung, 1964). And sound advice comes too from Eliot in the *Four Quartets*. Here, although he is speaking of music and poetry,
the same principles can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to plants in landscape design: "Words move, music moves / Only in time; but that which is only living / Can only die. Words, after speech, reach / Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern / Can words or music reach / The stillness [i.e. meaning]."

Garden making is thus forced to carry the burden of being the most abstract and the least abstract of all the arts. No-one, for instance, would think it important to enquire what brand of ink or species of fly was involved when the businessman drowned the fly in ink in Katherine Mansfield’s short story, *The Fly*. Whereas the fact that in a garden a crocus is not only a crocus but even a particular cultivar of crocus can be a fact of quite some significance, and equally a distraction when considering the garden as an artistic entity.

A major stumbling block to considering landscape design as art lies in its refusal, generally speaking, to become a fully contemporary art. "At all times", writes Jaffe (quoted in Jung, 1964), "the artist has been the instrument and spokesman for the spirit of his age ... He gives form to the nature and values of his time which, in their turn, form him." Yet landscape design is not a contemporary art. Read a book on contemporary theatre, cinema, dance or music and you are confronted with the complexities of 20th century life translated into artistic terms. Then pick up a book on "contemporary" garden design and by and large you are confronted with a world that has had its back turned on the real world for 150 years. Gardens used to be contemporary, that is they used to deal with man and his place in the contemporary world. Now, and of course there are exceptions (v. Chapter Four), garden making, artistically speaking, involves escaping from the real world. This is not to say that escape is not a valid way of confronting the real world, for it is, and it has been a tradition in garden making for centuries. But, and this is crucial, the artistic form of that escape must be informed by the spirit of the age if it is to be valid art. It is not enough just to create green, paradisical havens. Such creations, to have validity as art, must by their living form reflect the cultural domain, a domain which today knows about nuclear war, space travel, relativity, ecology, media culture, social inequality, etc., etc.

What then can be said of the main schools of living form styles this century, viz. modernism and post-modernism? Modernism, as an architectural and landscape architectural attempt to grapple with the scientific and social milieu of its time, was and is largely unsuccessful. Only in the hands of artists (e.g. Mies van der Rohe) was the concern for form expressing function, a concern finally and obviously concerned with...
materials and functions, transcended and mirrored in the creation of forms expressive of the cultural domain. Christopher Tunnard, landscape architecture's chief modernism apologist, in his writings (1949) stresses the traditional doctrine, but he too, in some of his work, transcends this to achieve gardens that succeed in creating virtual cultural domains (v. Newport, Rhode Island, Garden, 1949) [Fig. 25]. And Thomas Church, another designer not usually regarded as an artist, achieves artistic success too in some of his gardens (v. Donnell garden, Sonoma, California) [Fig. 26].

As for post-modernism, one is reminded of the tacking on of the baroque manner onto a dying classical tradition in the 16th and 17th centuries. Those artists who succeeded then, Bach, for example, succeeded because they successfully integrated the new cultural spirit of the baroque into new forms. Today's post-modernism is essentially a similar tacking on, an attempt to prolong the life of a by now effete modernism with a facelift of emotionalism and "meaning". Artistically the same problems are to be solved as in the baroque period. If in fact life is now different from earlier this century, then it must be reflected in different forms, not just in the grafting on of new decorative elements onto a desiccated modernism. "To copy the historic form of the past is to raise a corpse from the dead and pretend it is alive", says Jellicoe (1983). "Only the spirit can be alive in the present."
Another potential impediment to considering gardens as art lies in the functional aspect of garden design. The client's brief is seen as a set of criteria to be fulfilled, rather than being merely the parameters within which a work of art can be created. Obviously landscape design, like architecture, is a functional, applied art. But that functionality is simply an aspect of the culture and as such it is to be subsumed into the illusion of the cultural domain - it is only one constituent, albeit a very important one, of that illusion.

Similarly a "brief" may be a set of philosophical concerns imposed on him/herself by the designer. Such concerns may be for preferred ecological, horticultural or social values. But to examine the designer's success according to whether he/she has created a sustainable ecology or allowed for community involvement in the design or execution of the project, for example, is not to judge his/her creation as a work of art. Just as the artistic success of Swan Lake is not to be judged by the physical fitness of the dancers, nor that of Bertolucci's Last Tango in Paris by the palatability or otherwise of the moral values its characters espouse.

Finally, a peripheral concern when thinking of landscape design as an art is that there is a serious lack of critique and critical work relating to it as an art. That is to say that neither the landscape designers themselves, nor their various publics yet take their work seriously as an art. But some of it certainly deserves to be taken thus seriously, such work being largely the work of those who are regarded as "artists" anyway. Some of them and their work will be discussed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR

THREE GARDEN ARTISTS

Compared to the other arts, garden design has produced comparatively few universally acknowledged works of art this century. Some possible reasons for this have already been suggested and a further one may now be added. During the last 25 years or so there has been a distinct movement in the arts towards the replicable, the reproducible and the transportable (v. film and magazines as art). These things gardens patently are not. The contemporary garden in general has remained "together with the 6{\textsuperscript{th}} novelette, the last bastion of romanticism" (Tunnard, 1949). While the other arts flourish producing inventive, innovative creative visions of man in the world in the 1980s, the art of garden design tends to mirror the escapism of Mills and Boon novels or the old wine in new bottles approach of the Swingle Singers.

There have been exceptions however, and this chapter discusses the work of three "landscape artists" whose work merits close attention as genuine contemporary art. But it begins with a caveat: "It is very good advice to believe only what an artist does, rather than what he says about his work" (Hockney, 1976). So with this in mind let us proceed.

The first landscape artist to be discussed is Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe [Fig. 27]. He was born in England in 1900 and still(!) practises his art. He is and has always been a sophisticated, urbane, intellectual man, a man very much in tune with the goings-on in the worlds of art, science, philosophy and psychology. As such he could not help but be caught up in and influenced by the tremendous intellectual and artistic upheavals of the first quarter of this century.
Principal among the influences on him during those early years was the work of Freud and Jung, especially as transmitted down through the works of the various schools of abstract artists. The notion of the unconscious led to a revolution in the art world comparable only to the impact of Einstein’s relativity theory, which latter has also powerfully influenced Jellicoe’s work. Jellicoe, together with his friends the abstract artists Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore, aimed to subdue the narrative and intellectual content of art so as to communicate directly with the subconscious by using only shapes, colours, textures and patterns. The “idea” thus communicated was, he thought, fundamental, not as content so much as form, to the success of landscape art. This communication of an idea is the most crucial and original aspect of Jellicoe’s work. Without it any work, no matter how beautiful, is, to him, pure technique.

Another important influence on his work is his continuing Italian love affair. He studied there for two years in his early twenties, and ever since then motifs from Italian gardens, architecture and painting of the renaissance period have continued to turn up in his work as decorative elements and, especially where the paintings are concerned, as important design clues in a fundamental sense.

Jellicoe’s interest in things scientific has been important too in his development as an artist. The theory of relativity and the development of the science of ecology have
both affected him deeply. Relativity has led him to an increasing consideration of space-time as a fourth dimension in his work, while the development of ecology finds him placing increasing emphasis on the importance of the existing natural site values when creating a work.

All of the influences discussed above are expressed in his garden for Stanley Seeger at Sutton Place, Guildford, a garden which has been described as "the 20th century garden" (Jane Brown, 1987).

The garden, built from 1980 onwards, is a portrait in landscape of its owner's psyche and also of the collective human psyche. Its form was dictated, at first unconsciously, says Jellicoe (1983), by a grand allegory. This allegory is one of Creation (the lake landscape), Life (the gardens) and Aspiration (the Ben Nicholson wall). And within the garden as a whole are smaller allegorical incidents too, for example the glass-roofed grotto mentioned in Chapter Two. Another such incident is the viewing pavilion [Fig. 28] where one looks out on "the four pleasurable elements in the landscape that have fashioned civilized man: the window towards the moss garden overlooks the landscape of dreams and imagination; the second window sees the forest from which as Homo erectus he emerged with all faculties complete; the third window looks upon the savannah country in which he hunted for survival and which inspired the English 18th century school of landscape; and the fourth upon the work of the settler and classical man" (Jellicoe, 1983).
While the garden is informed by the spirit of the age, Jellicoe has built carefully on the existing architectural, landscape architectural, artistic and historical elements; which elements were not insubstantial considering the house had remained virtually intact architecturally since the 16th century, and considering too that the original garden layout, with Jekyllian additions, was also evident. His is not a purist restoration, but he has been far more sensitive than many other restorers in that he has carefully examined the past "so that his work creates another layer in time (and space), a kind of continuum of thought and expression" (Brown, 1987). A restoration in fact in the fourth time/space dimension.

He has been equally careful of not violating the natural ecological profiles of the site. A full ecological report was commissioned, and it was only after taking account of this that Jellicoe felt able to begin creating his work of art (Thompson, 1986).

The Italian dimension is present too and, Jellicoe says, the "restoration" has taken its structure from Italian Mannerism in general and from the Villa Gambareia in particular. At the smaller scale Italianate details abound, including a direct "quotation", in the moat balustrades, from Bernini's *The Allegory of the Souls* [Figs 29 and 30].
In summary, Jellicoe's contribution to the art of landscape design has been profound. His lasting influence will be felt through his work and equally, even bearing in mind Hockney's admonition, through his thinking, lecturing and writing. For he is that rara avis in the landscape field, one who has been able and fortunate enough to put into elegant practical effect his equally elegant theorizing. He is a classical artist who has brought together the worlds of landscape design, contemporary science and psychology in a disciplined, artistic way. His contribution is unique.

The Brazilian Roberto Burle Marx differs fundamentally as an artist from Jellicoe. But there are linking threads in their work, notably in the area of ecological concern and in their shared certainty that landscape design is assuredly art.

Burle Marx [Fig. 31] is a romantic by temperament and a latter day renaissance man. He is active as a conservationist, a painter, a sculptor, a set designer for opera and ballet, a town planner, a hybridist, plant collector and nurseryman, a musician, a flower arranger, and as a celebrity (Gregory, 1981). Perhaps, if he were younger, there would by now be a line of Burle Marx clothing and perfumes! Still, he calls himself a gardener.
He was born in San Paulo in 1904 and shortly after the family moved to Brazil, where he has been based, in Rio, ever since. He was surrounded by all the arts from an early age and a passion for these, together with a true "amateur's" passion for plants, have remained with him ever since. Although he began hybridizing the local flora while still in his teens, it was apparently when, as a young man in Germany, he saw such plants "in isolation" that the direction of his gardening art became set. He saw the tropical plants at that stage for what they really were: dramatic, colourful and, given the reigning European gardening style in Brazil, an untapped and disappearing resource. This last quality was to him especially important, and ever since he has been a passionate apologist for, and practical field worker in, the conservation of Brazil's indigenous flora and fauna (Gregory, 1981).
His gardens are widely imitated all over the world. They are dramatic, highly coloured, tightly organized compositions, featuring tropical but also exotic plants as texture and colour, and making much use of water and paving materials, this latter often being the traditional *pedro portuguesa* or stone mosaic [Fig. 32].

![Image](image.png)

*Fig. 32*

Burle Marx himself sees his gardens as three dimensional realizations of two dimensional paintings and he sometimes actually works that way. He sees nature as an object - "a marvelous, unruly, incoherent object that needs to be ordered and adjusted before she can claim to status in artistic circles" (quoted in Bardi, 1964). One such aspect of this ordering is layout. He favours a layout which, somewhat paradoxically, is a reflection of the natural and, as he perceives it, irregular order of the flora. So his art, while ordering "unruly" nature, does so according to nature's "laws", thereby overturing all conventional garden notions of symmetry and rectangularity and, in their turn, substituting a gardenscape of sinuous curves.

Another aspect of this ordering process involves the treatment of plant materials. Trees, shrubs and ground cover Burle Marx tends to treat along the lines of the Dadaists disturbing object (v. Chapter Three) [Fig. 33]. The participant is confronted by plants which, either by their isolation or their careful, often highly original juxtaposition, force us to see them for what they "really" are: plants *qua* plants, but primarily in an
artistic not a naturalistic, botanical or ecological sense. Their artistic essence is abstracted to become an element in the whole work of art.

Philosophically his work appears contradictory to some, which is something that possibly wouldn't concern him in the least. This apparent contradiction resides in his love and understanding of nature and her processes finding their artistic expression in gardens that to some appear tightly organized or even contrived. W. Robinson Fisher goes so far as to say Burle Marx's gardens show no connection with nature, let alone the "comprehension of it" cited by the artist. He attributes to his gardens the same Cartesian man/nature dichotomy evident in the work of le Notre at Versailles. Only the geometries, he says, are different. And this is true: but equally true is that both are artists, and that Robinson misunderstands the role of plants in landscape art. Perhaps a more valid criticism of the work of Burle Marx concerns his statement that garden designing is "painting with plants" (Bardi, 1964). This has the ring of a convenient slogan about it but, if it is true, and from photographs of some of his work it would seem to be at least partially true, then whole potential dimensions of garden design as a unique spatial art are necessarily being ignored.

Burle Marx intends to live until he is 120, so it may be premature to assess his legacy as a garden artist! However, thus far he has made accessible for decorative purposes a vast new flora. And he has created gardens full of joy, energy and temperament, gardens reflective of his own and the Brazilian way of being in the world. For New
Zealand's landscape designers he is an exciting model. We too have a superb flora. As yet we have hardly begun to make significant artistic use of it.

A New Zealand landscape artist who has constantly strived to use our own and exotic flora as art objects, one whose stated aim is to create works of art as opposed to merely attractive gardens, is Aucklander Ted Smyth. He began his adult life as a visual artist in more conventional media, viz. painting and sculpture, but for over 25 years now he has been working as a garden maker.

His approach is unique in New Zealand and is, it is interesting to note, one that is frowned upon by the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects. For although today he only designs, for most of the last 25 years he has actually been sole contractor and labourer in the execution of his gardens.

Ted Smyth divides garden making into three categories: landscape gardening, landscape design and architecture, and art. The first category, landscape gardening, he sees as being the work of the average home gardener or contractor - work where functional and horticultural requirements are probably paramount. The second category, landscape design and landscape architecture, he sees as the work typically carried out by competent or even inspired landscape designers and architects: work in which functional and horticultural requirements are balanced against aesthetic criteria, and in which actual art objects (e.g. sculpture) may play a role. The third category of garden making he describes as art. Here the functional, horticultural and aesthetic demands are satisfied in such a way that the "higher" requirements of a work of art are simultaneously satisfied. Any sculptural work in such a garden must, he says, be the work of the garden maker him/herself. No importation of existing art work is desirable or can in fact be countenanced.

For landscape artists he sees problems in two main areas. The first area concerns the fact that landscape designers are traditionally called in too late to do anything but cosmetic work. And concomitant with this is the problem of control. Architects, not landscape architects, traditionally control sites, yet for the landscape artist control down to the smallest detail is crucial for the creation of a work of art.

The second area of problems is related to the first. It comprises the problems inherent in getting an art object executed. Unusual construction methods and unusual materials and plants often cause an attitude of "It's easier to do it this way" from contractors. Smyth says it is crucial for a landscape artist to know his/her materials.
and methods intimately so that s/he can say, as Smyth does, "I may be arty but I can build it too". Now that he no longer executes his designs himself his working drawings have become increasingly detailed, running to 20 or more pages, for instance, for some domestic gardens.

A further problem he sees for landscape artists is in the area of expense. Landscape design, he argues, is an extremely expensive art form. It involves land, materials, and others' skills, and time, both for execution and maturation. These commodities are all expensive - his budgets sometimes reach as high as $500,000 - and need to be provided for the artist by a patron (or matron).

His gardens are characterized by a start modernity [Fig. 34]. Unusual plants (e.g. the Tahitian *pohutukawa*) feature widely, as do commoner plants used in unconventional ways. Water, neon, hard surfaces and stainless steel abound, and in fact he sees gardens without plants, i.e. as architecture without a roof, as being theoretically and practicably possible. And like Burle Marx he sees plants and other natural objects as being by chance beautiful, but as not worthy of consideration as art elements unless in some way shaped or organized by the hand or mind of man.

An recent, much photographed example of his work surrounds a Pip Cheshire house on the beachfront at Milford near Auckland. Here in part of the garden he has created a subterranean grotto which displays features common to much of his work [Fig. 35].
There are few plants and they are in tubs, and the space is dominated by a sculpture of water, neon and stainless steel. The effect is one of cool eeriness, an effect exaggerated by the dripping sound of the "fountain". But not only is this grotto subterranean, it is also "submarine" (i.e. well below sea level). And this knowledge, together with the sounds of the nearby sea, created an extra frisson of meaning for the author when he visited it.

Ted Smyth is not alone in creating artistically satisfying gardens in New Zealand, but in that field he is certainly outstanding. Other visual artists (e.g. Bill sutton and Rodney Fumpston) have, in their own gardens, created gardens that merit attention in this way. The latter however, who goes to the extent of changing the "gold"fish in his pond to avoid clashes with the water lilies in flower, says of his garden, "That's where I go to get away from art!" [Fig. 36]. Be that as it may, the gardens of these garden makers/artists and of Ted Smyth offer to the would be landscape artist in New Zealand tangible and visible evidence of what can be achieved in this field.
CHAPTER FIVE

GARDEN MAKING AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

A thesis implicit throughout this dissertation is that gardens are meaningful entities and that their meaningfulness exists on a variety of levels. Certain plants, combinations of plants and materials, and formal layouts, for example, have throughout history connoted various meanings. However the most potent and elusive meaning occurs, it is suggested, when the garden functions as and is experienced as a work of art.

The every elusiveness of this meaning has resulted in a plethora of writing, thinking and talk concerning gardens as works of art that is philosophically, intellectually and semantically untidy. The author asserts that gardens are potentially works of art but, as has been stated earlier, and often, there are good reasons why it is difficult to think of gardens, and especially "contemporary" gardens, in this way (v. Chapters Three and Four). This problem has not remained unaddressed by contemporary writers in the field of landscape aesthetics.

Robert Thayer (1976) argues that we need a new aesthetic theory which will bridge the gap between the ideal and the real perceivable 20th century landscape. His concern is mainly with finding a way of incorporating our new ecological knowledge and its demands into garden design, and he writes: "There has been no impetus, no theory to enable the student (of landscape design) to progress logically from ecological analysis to spatially aesthetic solutions ... The student is taught the new methods of landscape analysis and the old philosophy of landscape design ... Despite increasing scientific knowledge of environmental relationships, a type of naive romanticism has persevered" (Thayer, 1976).

Although Thayer stresses the ecological dimension to the exclusion of all other dimensions of the cultural domain, his criticism is perceptive and relevant. Krog (1981) and Laurie (1983) also show perspicacity in exposing the aesthetic problems attendant on contemporary landscape and garden design. They both argue that much of the design practised today is unrealistic and non-contemporary in spirit, and therefore cannot merit being considered as art.
But a warning should be sounded. It would be naive to assume that a work of art would automatically occur just because the various practical concerns these writers raise (e.g. social participation, ecological stability, economy, regional relevance) were successfully addressed. As has been said before, the successful solution of "problems" in these areas is important and possibly even a *sine qua non* for artistically successful landscape design in the 1980s. But it is in itself no guarantee of the creation of a work of art. And it would be salutary to remind ourselves that a work of art (a garden) could equally well be created which ignored or even contradicted all these criteria.

For we are concerned with the creation of a virtual cultural domain, an illusion not a real thing. The garden is merely the content, not the illusion, in which latter the work of art resides. And that illusion presents for our contemplation an aspect of our otherwise ineffable inner, subjective reality. It is not concerned finally with trees, paving, water, etc., at all. They are merely its materials, and together they bring to life the elements of the "living form".

If garden design is indeed to be considered as a potential form of artistic creation then there are implications for the way in which courses in landscape design and landscape architecture are taught. There is a need to broaden the humanist base of such studies to include exposure to and a discussion of a wide range of arts, and there is a need to examine the nature of art itself. There is a need for students' artistic personalities to be nurtured and encouraged. (Has a landscape design student ever applied to the QEII Arts Council for a grant?) And there is a need to alter the attitude that commonly prevails that garden design is something to do while a landscape architect is setting him/herself up, or when there is nothing "better" to do. While this attitude is perfectly understandable in economic terms, it bespeaks a narrow view of what is valuable in life, albeit a view accepted reluctantly and in the cold light of economic survival.

If garden design is to be taken seriously as an art then those who teach and practise it need to understand that the art they are involved in is probably the most complex and difficult art of all. It is at once the most and the least abstract of the arts; it has at once spatial and temporal dimensions (although its illusory field is purely spatial); and, like architecture, it usually needs to answer functional demands. To create a work of art within these restrictions is indeed challenging. The opportunity is ours.
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