



Delft University of Technology

Second Glance

Landscape Architecture Europe #6

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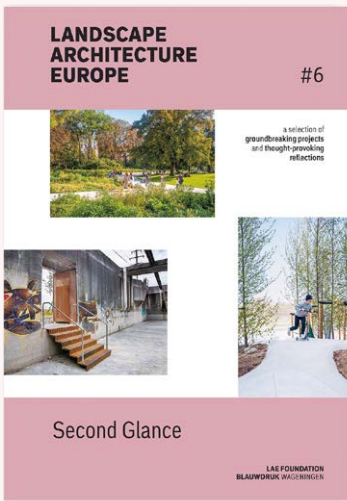
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Second Glance: Landscape Architecture Europe #6

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Review by Saskia de Wit, Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands

It happens to all of us at one point or another: you walk through a park and think ‘OK, this is really pleasant’, and then leave and kind of forget about it. And when you visit, maybe by accident, for a second time, things have grown, the light is different, you walk from a different direction, you see it from a totally different angle and you recognize a deeper meaning. There is more to it than what you assumed the first time. *Second Glance*. This is the title of the sixth edition of *Landscape Architecture Europe*.

As a title *Second Glance* is well-chosen and thought-provoking. Landscapes are essentially complex, layered and ever-changing, formed by both ‘immediate material spaces and mediated immaterial ideas’ (p. 16). ‘Not everything in a landscape is graspable at first glance or through a single story told; qualities sometimes surface only by becoming actively involved with a place through practice and narrating the processes experienced – which requires immersion in a landscape rather than contemplating it from a distance’ (p. 17), as chief editor Lisa Diedrich writes in the introduction. The notion of a second glance suggests not so much a juxtaposition as a melting together of many different polarities: landscapes were both immediate and immaterial, both form in space and dynamic trans-form-ations, both usable and poetic. The projects that the jury found most interesting were those that are imperfect, inefficient, dynamic, open and adaptable. They see a new design culture emerging, one that stages dynamic projects and abandons believing in first ideas, trusting first drawings, taking only a first glance.

This edition of *Landscape Architecture Europe* appeared after *Fieldwork* (2006), *On Site* (2009), *In Touch* (2012), *On the Move* (2015), and *To Care/Create/Act* (2018). It presents sixty-three contemporary landscape architectural projects that the jury (Jandirk Hoekstra, Luka Javornik, Varpu Mikola, Catarina Reposo and Daia Stutz) selected out of two hundred entries. But it strives to be more than an overview. Whereas the first edition, *Fieldwork*, was still a classical overview of projects, over the years the framework of the book has transformed into one that does not

place the projects in the limelight, but uses them to illustrate the themes and topics that the jury discovered as relevant and contemporary. Clearly, the editors had to weigh the effort of producing a physical book against the wide digital availability of plan documentation. The beauty of a physical book such as this is that it allows for the careful unfolding and conveying of a conceptual level that digital media never can. However, the choice not to provide in-depth explanations and exposures of the projects themselves, with the argument that anybody can find this online, is not supportive of the message the book wants to convey: ‘Sometimes a second glance is needed to understand exactly how designers conceive their projects along those lines [to care, create and act as the foundational actions for the profession]’ (p. 11).

The projects are introduced in the first one hundred pages of the book by means of visual and textual one-liners, as a quick and tasteful first glance before the second one. Then follows the unfolding of the four key themes: to counter the climate crisis and other challenges, to develop the long-standing European tradition of public space, to enhance people’s empathy for their social and natural lifeworlds, and to conceive just and healthy urban futures. These themes are elaborated in essays written by the editors. The choice to move from plan documentation to an elaboration of key topics means that instead of classical project descriptions, they are incorporated in the essays, supporting their storyline. The project descriptions are reduced to facts and figures, provided as an appendix. And whereas the editors claim that ‘a second glance is needed to grasp the full potential of landscape architectural work’ (p. 16), this approach means that the unfolding of the project as a whole is missing. And vice versa, to do justice to the many projects mentioned in the essays, they all receive a few summary lines, which leaves no room to dive deep into the argumentation of the essay. The book is larded with single images of the different projects, so that the main entry point to understanding the quality of these projects

Sometimes you need a second glance. To dive deeper, to go below the surface, to take up your mind, to let thoughts mature, to realize what you already knew but had previously disregarded. For many years now, landscape architects have been highlighting their concern about degrading ecological and social living environments for both humans and all other living beings, and they have used their spatial intelligence and professional skills to counter the current crisis through imagination, hands-on work, research and, sometimes, activism. A crisis which in their understanding has a history as old as anthropocentric civilisation, the current pandemic 'merely' being the latest global alert signal. There have been earlier alerts and there will be follow-ups to what Austrian literature scholar Eva Horn terms the 'catastrophe without event' – a slow, continuous and gradual process of deframing change that escapes our attention because it does not produce the big bang commonly associated with a catastrophe. Even though many have experienced the current pandemic as a blow, scholars such as French philosopher Bruno Latour are convinced it is only a 'stress rehearsal' for what still lies ahead. And yet, 'normality' seemed to return for a moment, mid-2021, as if the enhanced call for sustainability simply meant sustaining business as usual, instead of reventing it. The Landscape Architecture Europe series has always aimed at opening the eyes and minds of design professionals, researchers, decision-makers and everyone involved in making the physical world a healthier place. These behind-the-scenes publications have always engaged wider audiences to adopt a landscape perspective to this end: as an approach that can help us to make sense of local physical interventions in a global context, to respect the dynamics of different scales, to reflect interdependencies between the animate and inanimate worlds, to mediate between ecological and social interests – and so on. It is landscape architects as change agents. Maybe it takes a second glance to discover what landscape architecture can do.

Of course, landscape architects also cannot turn the planet into paradise, nor can they alone prevent catastrophe – nobody can. Will it be possible to transform practice and policy, to get tools and techniques in place within this decade which scientists believe holds our last chance to undertake action to ensure a habitable environment for life on this planet? Joining forces is key, as are breaking down the barriers between professional silos, and overcoming distrust and rivalry among specialists. Since its inception, the Landscape Architecture Europe series has shed light on the landscape profession's contribution to creating

places for the common good, while at the same time witnessing increasingly interdisciplinary and collaborative action to take care of, to create, and to act for resiliency, beauty and survival. Care, create and act are the three design actions identified by the jury and editors of the previous edition of Landscape Architecture Europe as foundational for the profession. The sixth edition confirms this finding while stressing the fact that sometimes a second glance is needed to understand exactly how designers conceive their projects along those lines. The Landscape Architecture Europe Jury was excited to discover works whose designers did not recall the 'instagrammable' aspects of design, or attempt to stage themselves as surfers of the world. Moreover, while this book promotes landscape beauty, it does not fall for the glossy screenshot type, and while it does highlight models, it avoids sliding into heroic messages of salvation.

Immediate and mediated worlds. Landscape Architecture Europe believes in the power of immediate – and unmediated – on-site experiences, for landscape designers as much as for those involved in landscape design discourse. Hence the tradition of bringing together jury members, editors and producers at its home base in Wageningen, the Netherlands – a place that offers views and walks across the Rhinish landscapes, as well as spaces for concentrated teamwork, laughter over coffee and meals, and plenty of informal talks on the way to the venue or during leg-stretcher breaks on the terrace. These are exactly those small yet vital interactions in real space that everybody has desperately missed over the past two years of the pandemic. And Landscape Architecture Europe is no exception – the restrictions on European travel meant that the selection process had to be organised online and an even more rigorous protocol adopted for jury meetings and long seven-hour carefully integrated into two extended weekends. Rigorous administration and pre-jury study of nearly 200 European projects submitted in response to Landscape Architecture Europe's call, gave rise to concentrated and animated discussions, with jury members, editors and producers zooming in from Helsinki to Lisbon, Amersfoort to Ljubljana, Zurich to Utrecht, Toulouse to Berlin, Lausanne to Wageningen. Adhering to Landscape Architecture Europe's principle of defining the selection criteria through the first hours of the jury encounter spared overacting reflections on the societal role of the profession, its aptitudes and limitations, the jury's doubts and wishes, before diving into the identified projects over the following sessions. The editors focused on framing the discussions,



'It is great to see that many projects offer a responsive and adaptive design approach, aiming to tackle a specific environmental issue or hazard such as flooding, energy production or biodiversity loss, while combining it with the need for open and accessible public land for leisure activities. These mostly large-scale projects are inherently flexible and process-oriented in terms of their morphology and programme.'

Teunissen



'By reframing an object from the past, the project demonstrates the power of landscape architecture to sensitively reinterpret and frame symbolic traces'

CHATEAU TRONCHON (FR) designed by Pierre, Eric de la Motte and landscape architect, Hélène Landscape Architects



'Inviting the visitor to remember the World War One conflict while offering a positive and calm message of peace'

THE THIRD TRAIN (FR) designed by Gilles Bourard, Marc Bourard and Françoise Lippert



is through the capture of a single photograph. While I fully trust the professional judgment of the selection committee, as a reader I would have liked to have the opportunity to study the projects through the documentation to discover their qualities for myself, to be provided with material that indeed requires a second glance.

Despite this missed opportunity to truly understand the projects, the themes that are addressed are valuable and relevant. As a series, *Landscape Architecture Europe* provides a periodical review of what and how the profession contributes to our physical environment. The three-year interval works very well to highlight the slow changes that happen in landscape architecture. Comparing the different volumes sheds a light on how the themes, interests and values are changing over time, providing a sign of the times. Whereas the first edition unfolded the necessary attention to the site specificity of 'the field' on which we work, searching for a European identity and its cultural differences, in the search for the dynamic relationship between culture and nature, the emphasis in the current edition has shifted to the latter: the four themes all revolve around the urgent need for greening our planet, for renaturalisation, 'an anti-hardscapes attitude that was already apparent in the previous editions of

Landscape Architecture Europe and seems to have reached a climax now' (p. 19). While the creation of public spaces has been a core issue of every edition, as an expression of democracy and cultural values, the jury of this edition was sharply critical of designs with few vegetative features, 'which show the designers' belief in the value of open space while still missing out on providing an answer to the rising climatic and environmental challenges we're facing today' (p. 19). The third chapter, 'Mind', focuses on the role of landscape architects not in solving the world's problems as such, but in raising awareness, in being mind-openers. And here again a new aesthetic is recognized, expressing 'green' issues such as circular economies and biodiversity. Even the chapter named 'Urban' focuses on green and soft spaces, in relation to the ecosystem we inhabit. A second red thread that emerges throughout the book is the recognition of a new design culture: staging 'dynamic' projects instead of 'static' ones, projects that are open for change, and allow for different forms of appropriation and unpredictable social and ecological processes. Projects that are worth revisiting again and again, because one never fully knows how they will develop, creating curiosity and expectation. Projects that deserve a second glance.