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FEEL THE MOUNTAIN

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

FEEL THE MOUNTIN

CONTEMPORARY SACRED SPACE FOR WORSHIP

By TIAN HAO

Thesis Director:

Kathleen John-Alder

What exactly is sacred? What is mythic geography? How is it expressed in the landscape? Can it be designed?

This project is thus one of a traveler, or pilgrim, on a journey of discovering sacred landscape. What follows is my attempt to experience these questions through the medium of painting, poetry, and landscape design.

To help me in my transitional exploration of the sacred in the American landscape, I have turned to the poetry of Gary Snyder for guidance.

Following in the footsteps of Snyder, and his translational attempt as an American studying the sacred landscape of Asia, I call upon his ideas to help me express, as an Asian studying in America, my understanding of the universal qualities that define the sacred landscape.

In honor of Snyder, I have formatted this thesis as a landscape poem, comprised of five verses, each of which contains multiple stanzas.

Also, Grace Farms church as an important community religion space, is my design exploration. The main objective is to reintroduce sacred to the neighborhood.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my thesis director Prof. Kathleen John-Alder for all the intelligent guiding and enthusiastic supporting over the year. This thesis is not only a significant academic achievement for master degree, but also a wonderful psychological journey. I also would like to thank my other committee members Anita Bakshi, Prof. Richard Alomar for pointing me in the right direction during the design process.

Last but not the least, I am perpetually grateful to my parents, for all the spiritual and financial supporting my decision to pursue master's degree in United States.

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Verse 1: Introduction

"What we have here is a sacred, mythic geography, the only kind effectually real, as opposed to profane geography. The latter being 'objective' and as it were abstract and non-essential— the theoretical construct on of a space and a world we do not live in, and therefore do not know."

I became interested in the topics of sacred landscape several years ago when I traveled to the United States to study landscape architecture at Rutgers University. During the course of my studies, I was asked to document and analyze the landscape in history class. One of the things that I discovered during this exercise were the western landscape of churches and sacred spaces of worship. These places were unlike anything that I had seen in my native country of China. But, I also discovered many similarities with western notion of the sacred. Themes seen in sacred building and their setting in the West are symbolic of a universal landscape that similar to the East, landscape features such as mountain, water and trees, all express divinity.

I used Grace Farms church, a glass-walled Episcopal Church, recently constructed on an 80 acre historical farm in New Canaan, Connecticut by the Japanese Architectural firm SANAA, as the case study for my design exploration.

¹ Mircea, Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*. Princeton University Press,1991.

Verse 2: Mountains and Rivers Without Ends

Stanza 1: Orient Sacred History of Mountain

Clambering up the trail cold mountain path, The cold mountain trail goes on and on: The long gorge choked with scree and boulders, The wide creek, the mist-blurred grass. The moss is slippery, though there's been no rain The pine sings, but there's no wind. Who can leap the world's ties And sit with me among the white clouds?²

Gary Snyder—Beat Generation", American poet, Zen Buddhist, Mountaineer, Asian Sacred Art and History Expert, Deep Ecology Philosophy, Environmentalist (Fig. 1).



Snyder's poetry blends physical reality and precise observations of nature with inner insight received primarily through the practice of Zen Buddhism. And he purposely sets out to bring about change on the emotional, physical, and political levels by emphasizing the ecological problems faced by today's society.³

A visit to Seattle Art Museum when Snyder was a young kid,

Fig. 1: Gary Snyder where he saw a Chinese landscape scroll(Fig. 2), "Ch'i shan wu chin" ("Streams and Mountains Without End), is a 17th century hand scroll attributed to the Chinese painter Lu Yuan, peaked his interest in Oriental philosophy.



Fig. 2: Landscape scroll, Ch'i shan wu chin

² Gary Snyder, Riprap; and, Cold Mountain Poems. Counterpoint Press, 2010

³ Ensign, Todd. "Gary Snyder: A Postmodern Perspective." Modern American Poetry. September 13, 2017. http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/s_z/snyder/ensign.htm

The scroll is over sixteen feet long. When looking at this painting, one is immediately drawn to the intricate landscape and its microcosm of natural symbols. At first the viewer notices a thick fog encompassing a temple. Next, one sees the rhythm of the streams, leaves, and the echoing sound of the bell tolling. Like most who view the scroll (Fig.3), when I look at the image of the majestic mountains and astounding peaks, it definitely touched my heart and purified my soul.



Fig. 3: Zoom in view of the landscape scroll

As noted by the historian Kiyohiko Munakata in Sacred Mountains in Chinese Art (1928):"In ancient China, mountains were not only revered but were considered as forbidden spaces where gods and mysterious creatures resided. The mountains gradually became familiar and provide heavens for those who sought to attain supernatural powers or spiritual enlightenment."

But as Munakata also noted, naturally feared the unfamiliar wilderness areas surrounding them; they expected all sorts of dangers, including those posed by snakes and roaming animals. The high, large mountains and deep forest had a forbidding presence, and people imagined that peculiar and fearful creatures resided in them. This

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⁴ Kiyohiko Munakata, *Sacred Mountains in Chinese Art*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1991.

fear was easily elevated to animistic worship of the mountains.⁵ Moreover, "the worship of the great mountains as embodiments of mysterious power was one of the major elements of the Chinese state religion. Emperors of the successive dynasties from early period of the Zhou dynasty ⁶ through the end period of the Qing Dynasty⁷ in 1912 - prayed to the sacred mountains at imperial altars to ensure the prosperity of the state.⁸

Additionally, many mountains are associated with mythological and historical legends and are sacred objects of special veneration. Some of them were objected of imperial, such as the 'Five sacred mountains', or the 'Four garrison mountains.⁹ Many other mountains were the objects of worship by the people in local communities. They were often considered by Daoist as extremely important religious sites, and have been the centers of Daoistic religious practice and studied for long time.

The art historian Christopher Thacker, extended this line of thinking when he observed, mountain worship has always occupied a significant position in the Chinese sacred system. Moreover, in ancient China, to represent these feelings landscaping painting became closely tied with gardening, indeed so much so that the four arts of poetry, calligraphy, landscape painting and gardening are thought of as interdependent, each requiring an understanding of each other, proficiency in each being necessary in order to achieve proficiency in any one.¹⁰

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⁵ Kiyohiko Munakata, *Sacred Mountains in Chinese Art*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1991.

⁶ Zhou dynasty, 256 BC

⁷ Qin dynasty, 221-207 BC

⁸ Kiyohiko Munakata, *Sacred Mountains in Chinese Art*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1991.

⁹ I bid.

¹⁰ Christopher Thacker. *The History of Gardens*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California. University of California Press, 1985

Undoubtedly, mountain plays an extremely significant role in the sacred history of the orient.

Stanza 2: Cold Mountain, Han-Shan

As an American scholar studying sacred history of Asia, Gary Snyder spent the most time of the 1950s and 1960s in China and Japan, and other west Asia countries. In the 1950s, Gary Snyder translated the Chinese word Han- Shan, as "Cold Mountain" in English. Han- Shan was the name used by a legendary Chinese poet who lived in the Tang Dynasty¹¹. Han- Shan, "Cold Mountain", as Snyder noted, took his name from where he lived. He is a mountain madman in cold Chinese line of ragged hermits. When he talks about Cold Mountain he means himself, his home, his state of mind. His poems, are Taoist, Buddhist, Zen.¹² Snyder further observed: "He looked like a tramp, his body and face were old and bear. Yet in every word he breathed was a meaning in line with the subtle principles of things, if only you thought of it deeply. Everything he said had a feeling of the Tao in it, profound and arcane secrets.¹³

According to Snyder, Han-Shan (Fig.4) lived alone seventy 3.5 kilometers west of the T'ang-hsing district of T'ien-t'ai at Cold Mountain. He was extremely elusive, and it was arduous to find him. But, as Snyder also observed, if you took your time, and interpreted his words carefully, you would not only find a beautiful description of the mountainous scenery of the natural world: you would also find the deep traditions of a civilized people. In this landscape, mountains and rivers are the visible expression of cosmic principles; the cosmic principles go back into silence, non-being, emptiness; a

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¹¹ Tang dynasty: 618-907

Gary Snyder. The Gary Snyder Reader. Washington, D.C. Perseus Books Group: Counterpoint. 1999

¹³ Gary Snyder. Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems. Washington, D.C. Counterpoint Press. 2010

¹⁴ I bid.

¹⁵ Gary Snyder. *The Great Cold- Notes and Memoirs Nature and History in East Asia*. Berkeley, CA. Group west: Counterpoint press. 2016

Nothing that can produce the ten thousand things, and the ten thousand things will have that marvelous emptiness still at the center. 16 Attuned to more than the physical quality of the land, these poems, he wrote, are not really about landscape or scenery. Instead, the distant hills become "the space in life; a condition the poet-critic Lu Chi called "calm transparency". ¹⁷ In line with the central ethos of Ch'an, what Snyder discovered were landscapes to match inner moods, and a deep sense of reverence for this obvious actual mystery of a real world.¹⁸



Fig. 4: Han- Shan

¹⁶ Eliot Weinberger, The New Directions Anthology of Classical Chinese Poetry. New York, NY. Directions Publishing Corporarion.

¹⁷ Gary Snyder. The Great Cold- Notes and Memoirs Nature and History in East Asia. Berkeley, CA. Group west: Counterpoint press. 2016 I bid.

Stanza 3: Literature by Han-Shan and Gary Snyder

The following are Chinese poems from Han-Shan and translated by Gary Snyder:

一自遁寒山

一自遁寒山, 养命餐山果。 平生何所忧, 此世随缘过。 日月如逝川, 光阴石中火。 任你天地移, 我畅岩中坐。¹⁹

If I hideout at Cold Mountain, Living off mountain plants and berries All my life time, why worry? One fellowship karma through. Days and month slip by like water, Time is like sparks knocked off flint. Go ahead and let the world change I'm happy to sit among these cliffs.²⁰

粤自居寒山

粤自居寒山,曾经几万载。 任运遁林泉,栖迟观自在。 寒岩人不到,白云常爱逮。 细草作卧褥,青天为被盖。 快活枕石头,天地任变改。²¹

I settled at Cold Mountain long ago,
Already it seems like years and years.
Freely drifting, I prowl the woods and streams
And linger watching things themselves.
Men don't get this far into the mountains,
White clouds gather and billow.
Thin grass does for a mattress,
The blue sky makes a good quilt.
Happy with a stone under head
Let heaven and earth go about their changes.²²

19 寒山, 项楚注校、《寒山诗注》中华书局. 2000

²⁰ Gary Snyder. The Great Cold- Notes and Memoirs Nature and History in East Asia. Berkeley, CA. Group west: Counterpoint press. 2016

²¹寒山, 项楚注校,《寒山诗注》中华书局. 2000

²² Gary Snyder. *The Great Cold-Notes and Memoirs Nature and History in East Asia*. Berkeley, CA. Group west: Counterpoint press. 2016.

我家本住在寒山 我家本住在寒山,石岩栖息离烦缘。 泯时万象无痕迹,舒处周流遍大千。 光影腾辉照心地,无有一法当现前。 方知摩尼一颗珠,解用无方处处圆。²³

My home was at Cold Mountain from the start, Rambling among the hills, far from trouble. Gone, and a million things leave no trace Loosed, and it flows through galaxies A fountain of light, into the very mind - Not a thing, and yet it appears before me: Now I know the pearl of the Buddha-nature Know its use: a boundless perfect sphere.²⁴

Above these beautiful words of nature, Snyder expressed the central ideas of Zen that life is characterized by Dukkha(suffering) and Anicca(impermanence), being far from the negative emotion, and forget all the trouble and pain of profane world. Undoubtedly, Orient scared philosophy always inherently connect with the nature.

²³ 寒山, 项楚注校,《寒山诗注》中华书局. 2000.

²⁴ Gary Snyder. *The Great Cold-Notes and Memoirs Nature and History in East Asia*. Berkeley, CA. Group west: Counterpoint press. 2016.

Verse 3: Sacred Geography: Pilgrimage Route

Fifteen years passed. In the eighties
With my lover I went where the roads end.
Walked the hills for a day,
looked out where it all drops away,
discovered a path
of carved stone inscriptions tucked into the sagebrush
"Stomp out greed"
"The best things in life are not things"
words placed by an old sage.²⁵

In American Poetry since 1960: Alan Williamson wrote that Snyder's writing is a process of meditation, and a spiritual exercise that clears "the path from temporal life to the moment of Enlightenment—the sudden dropping-away of the phenomenal world in the contemplation of the infinite and eternal, All and Nothingness."²⁶

Kumano Kodo is a network of Pilgrimage Routes that stretch across the mountainous Kii Peninsula of Japan. Since prehistoric times, this pilgrimage route has been associated with nature worship. The route connects three unique shrines—Kumano Hongu Taisha, Kumano Hayatama and Kumano Nachi Taisha—and includes four routes—Nakahechi, Kohechi, Ohechi, Iseji—which interconnect the famous sacred sites in Kii Peninsula. Deeply embedded within the cultural landscape of Japan, this route traverses forested mountains, with natural features such as waterfalls, gigantic rocks, old growth evergreen trees, and deities may descend can be found among this natural sacred phenomenon. This landscape, as noted by the cultural historian Sylvie Guichard-Anguis, is also the ideal

²⁵ Sharin N. Elkholy. *The Philosophy of The Beats*. The University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky. 2012.

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²⁶ Poetry Foundation, "Gary Snyder.", Poetryfoundation.org. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/gary-snyder. (Accessed August, 21, 2017).

expression of the merger Shintoism with the Buddhist ascetic practice of mountain worship.²⁷

The deeply spiritual and energetic dialogue between human and its landscape, through the work of people like Snyder, will become important in contemporary sacred culture and thinking.

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²⁷ Sylvie Guichard- Anguis, Walking through World Heritage Forest in Japan: The Kumano Pilgrimage. Journal of Heritage Tourism, 2011.

Verse 4: The Timeless of Sacred

Stanza 1: Transnational Sacred Culture

Gary Snyder, as an American studying the sacred landscape of Asia, spent many years there and translating its literature into English from ancient Chinese and Japanese texts. His work, in its various permutations, helped me express, as an Asian studying in America, my understanding of the universal qualities that define the sacred landscape of critical importance to Snyder, and by extension to me, was the mural that expressed the ideas of sacred held my the eastern mystic Han-Shan. I used this mural, and Snyder's philosophical description of it, as a model for my explorations of the environment. In emulation of Han-Shan, I painted a landscape scroll. I also wrote sacred landscape poems. The following diagram (Fig.5) represents my translation process:

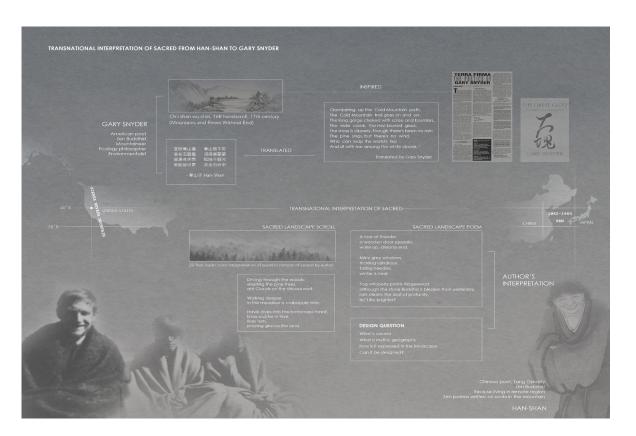


Fig. 5: Diagram of transnational sacred culture research

Stanza 2: Sacred Landscape Poems by Thesis Author

Rainy Morning

A roar of thunder,

a wooden door squeaks,

woke up, dreams end.

Misty grey windows,

trickling raindrops,

falling needles, taxodium distichum,

winter is near.

Fog whisperly paints Ridgewood,

although the stone Buddha is bleaker than yesterday,

rain cleans the dust of profanity,

Isn't life brighter?

The Land of Grace

Driving through the woods,

smelling the pine trees,

ah! Clouds on the sinuous roof.

Hawk dives into the bottomless forest,

birds scatter in fear,

lives turn,

praying graces the land.

Stanza 3: Sacred Landscape Scroll by Thesis Author

My landscape scroll (Fig.6) is a 20 foot long watercolor painting. It expresses what I see as universal symbols of the sacred. It was inspired by the concept of pilgrimage. The images transition from dark to light, dense to airy, and solid to ethereal.



Fig. 6: 20ft water color interpretation of western notion of sacred by author.



Fig. 7: Five sections of landscape scroll

The five sections of that comprise my landscape scroll (Fig. 7)are foggy mountain forest, peaceful mountain lake, murmur of mountain streams, birch forest, before night falls.

Verse 5: Sacred Landscape Design of Grace Farms

Stanza 1: The River Building

Grace Farms, is the case study for my design exploration. The site is 80 acres, and it is located in New Canaan, CT (Fig.8).



Fig.8: Location map of the site

The Japanese architecture firm SANAA designed the nondenominational Christian church at Grace Farms. This building, which is named River Building because of its form, is constructed of concrete, steel, wood and a near- transparent glass-walled envelope. It consists of a series of rooms connected by a continuous winding roof that gently slopes with the land. The River Building connects a series of indoor and outdoor public spaces that include a 700-seat sanctuary, library, dining room and living room, a recreation space. About 77 of 80 acres of this property consist of meadows, woods, wetlands and ponds.

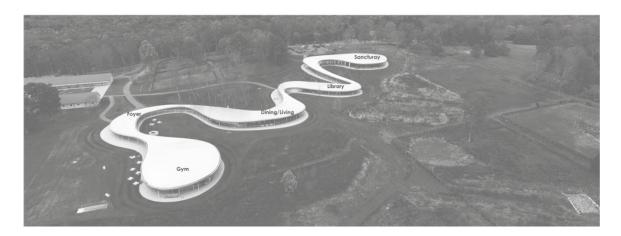


Fig. 9: Multiple-function space

The building has multiple gathering spaces. (Fig. 9) the first gathering space is the Sanctuary. In this space, there are almost 700 seats, a semicircle stage. The room's glass wall provides a panoramic picture of the landscape. Visitors can see the trees, and hear the birds. There appears to be no solid boundary between the interior and exterior. The second space is the library. This gathering space contain individual and group reading spaces, a small meeting room and staff offices. The third space is the Commons, which includes a restaurant and café. The fourth space is the pavilion, which contains an interior courtyard. The last space is the Court, a sunken basketball court surrounded by a narrow observation corridor at the ground level.

Stanza 2: Design Intention and Concept of The River Building.

The series of spaces seamlessly integrate the: "Experience Nature, Foster Community,
Pursue Justice, and Explore Faith.²⁸

Furthermore, Kazuyo Sejima, the architect of SANAA stated: The goal of architect was to make the architecture of the river become part of the landscape without drawing attention to itself, or even feeling like a building, we hope that those are on the property will have a greater enjoyment of the beautiful environment and changing seasons through the spaces and experience created by the River.²⁹(Fig.10)



Fig. 10: Model of River Building in MOMA

²⁸ Grace Farms, "About Grace Farms", Grace Farms.org, http://gracefarms.org/about/ (Accessed August, 7,2017)

²⁹ Archdaily, "*Grace Farms/ SANAA*", Archdaily.com. http://www.archdaily.com/775319/grace-farms-sanaa (Accessed August, 28, 2017).

The River Building, as its name implies, emulates water flowing down the side of a mountain. Accordingly, it is located on midway down the slope of a hill. The building as it exists today, is surrounded by meadow. (Fig, 11-12) It is visited by people who live in the surrounding community, and also by travelers from other states and countries. One visitor, amazed by incredible sinuous roof of the building observed, the sunshine was reflected by metal roof is extremely soft, spherical melt in the winding picture window, also the smooth gravel path, shimmering floor lamps, warmed its landscape.





Fig. 11: Outdoor relax space

Fig. 12: Pavilion of River Building

Stanza 3: Existing Conditions and Topology Study

The site is 80 acres, it is at suburban residential area of New Canaan, Connecticut.

And it is surrounding by extensive woods and bunch of streams (Fig.13).



Fig. 13: Aerial view of Grace Farms

An aerial image of the site reveals the arrangement of the building and their relationship to the landscape. (Fig.14) In addition to the River Building, there are education and office building, a pond at northeast corner of the site, ten rectangular fenced farms, and two parking lots which serve about 200 cars. During conctruction, most of existing trees were retained. Additionally, what doesn't shows in the map is a rough path goes through the meadow, and the woods space.



Fig. 14: Mater plan of Grace Farms by SANAA

When I visited the site, I felt that the River Building attracted all the attention. Very few people ventured into the landscape. People come to see the famous building design. You could see the landscape, but it was hard to experience it. (Fig 15-16) I immediately decide this omission had to be addressed, I planned a scheme that had more opportunities to let people engage with the land.





Fig. 15: Existing pond

Fig. 16: Existing meadow

Stanza 4: Reintroduce Sacred

My design builds upon the intent of the architecture, It manipulates the existing topography, adds a pilgrimage route, and enhances the existing planting design to more fully enhance notion of mountain and water into the landscape experience. The following is the concept diagram (Fig.17):

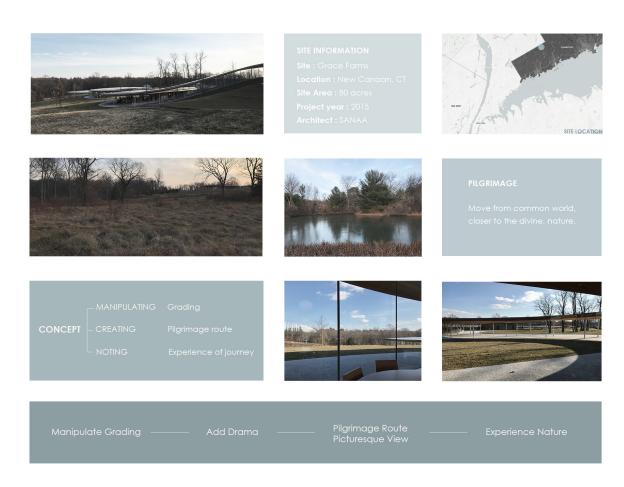


Fig. 17: Existing pictures and concept diagram

During the first step of my design process, I manipulated the site's grading and circulation (Fig. 18). Contour lines that reinforce the shape of building. This manipulation added drama and enhanced the visual qualities and mystery of the site. (Fig. 19)

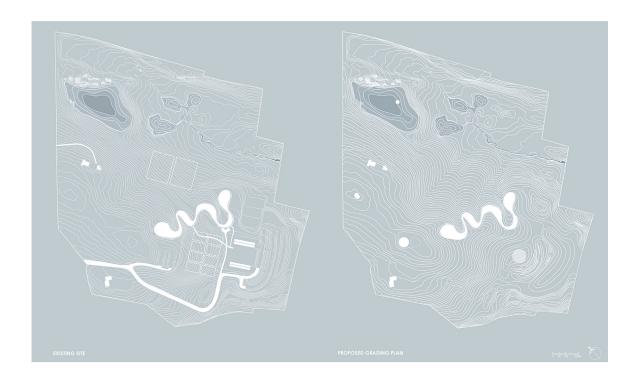


Fig. 18: Existing site (left) and proposed grading (right)

I next created a pilgrimage route with viewing and three meditation spaces. The meditation spaces are in the woods, above the pond, and among the rocks. In this sense, the sacred, as conceived in both eastern and western cultures, consists of the territory covered by pilgrims during a pilgrimage. (Fig. 19)

I also added an education center near the sanctuary, created an amphitheater to the south and east of the River Building with an outdoor stage. The amphitheater is surrounded by a terraced garden.



Fig. 19: New programing and Pilgrimage

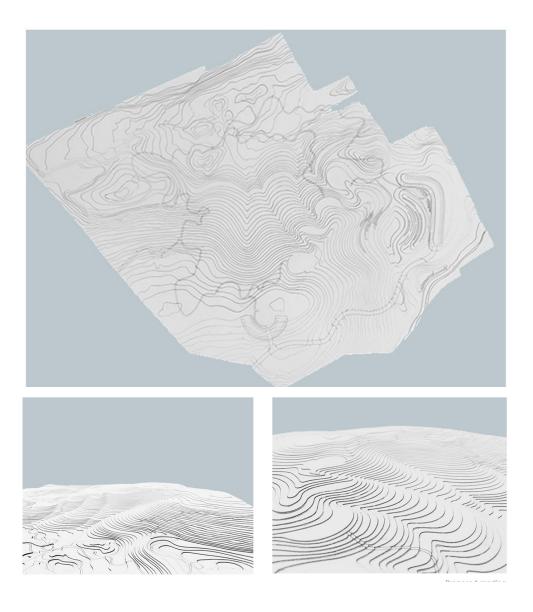


Fig. 20: 50 scale laser-cut model shows the proposed grading

The second design development is note the route to indicate what would be discovered during the journey (Fig.21). The intent is to create a landscape of contemplation in which it is easier pause, reflect and meditate upon life and our connection to our surroundings. The route encompasses a meadow, woods, water, and rocks, and a cultivated garden. Pilgrims on this route will transverse the landscape as they move from high overlooks down to a woodland stream and back to the building through an amphitheater and garden.

The intent is to illustrate that the experience of the sacred is as much a process of experience and a destination rather than a singular object or form.



Fig. 21 Noting of sacred journey

The third step is involved the creation of a planting design that includes a dry meadow, dry woodlands, wet meadows, and wet woodlands (Fig. 22).



Fig.22: Proposed massive planting plan

The following are planting schedule (Fig.23, Fig.24), include the botanical name, drawing and seasonal color of leave and flower:

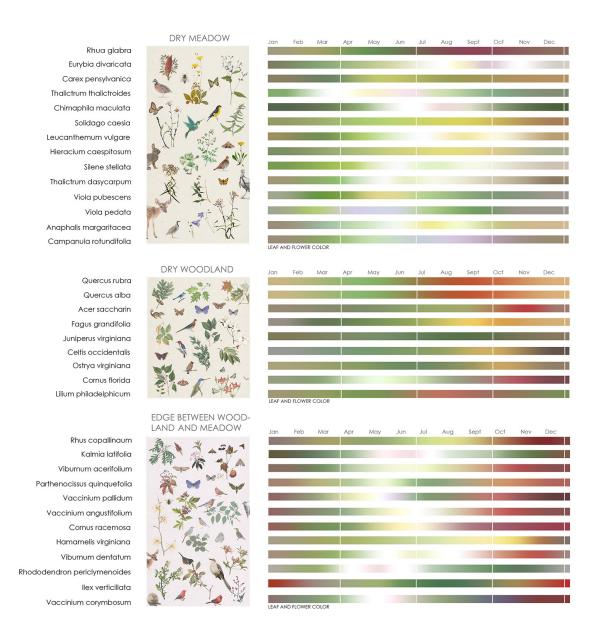


Fig. 23: Planting schedule of dry meadow, dry woodland, edge between woodland and meadow.

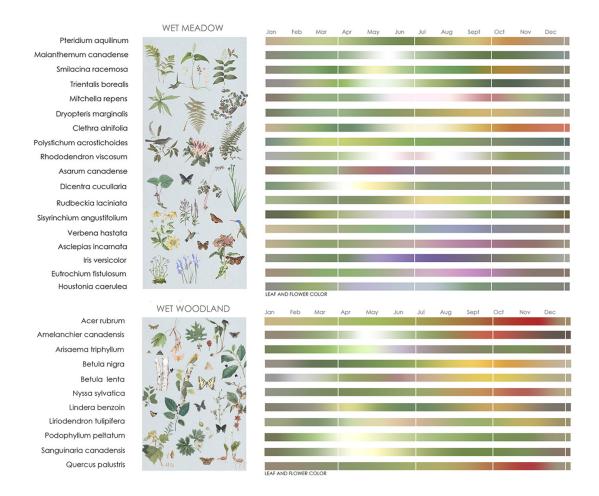


Fig. 24: Planting schedule of wet meadow and wet woodland

Furthermore, culminating the experience with a garden terrace, in which visitors can experience and enjoy the bounty of the land.

Stanza 5: Sections of Proposed Design



Fig. 25: Sections through the site

The proposed design has 86 foot grade change as illustrated in five site sections: (Fig.25)

- Section 1: Section through the smaller parking lots and educational center.
- Section 2: Section through River Building, terrace farms, amphitheater and parking lots.
- Section 3: Section through wet woodlands, streams to the River building.
- Section 4: Section through meditation spaces among the rocks and above the pond.
- Section 5: Section through the meditation spaces in the woods and sloped grass.

Stanza 6: Seasonal Perspectives:

A rendering of terrace farm in spring illustrates the harmonious connection of the amphitheater and garden. (Fig.26) Visitors can walk through the field, or seat on the stone path. It is also a good opportunity to hold some community educational events about agriculture.



Fig. 26: Terrace farm in spring

The unique peaceful and quite meditation space above the water (Fig.27).



Fig. 27: Water meditation space in the summer

Amphitheater, a big open gathering space in the nature, the stone seating are soften peacefully by the surrounding plants (Fig. 28).



Fig. 28: Amphitheater in fall color

Pilgrimage in winter, beautiful view composed by birch tree forest and snow (Fig.29).



Fig. 29: Pilgrimage in winter

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 Diagram of transnational sacred culture research Image created by author using multiple computer aided design/drawing Softwares

 ${\it 6.\,20 ft\ water\ interpretation\ of\ western\ notion\ of\ sacred}$

Image created by author using watercolor

7. Five sections of landscape scroll

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8. Location map of the site

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9. Multiple-function space

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10. Model of River Building in MOMA's exhibition

Photo by author (taken June 12, 2016)

11. Outdoor relax space

Photo by author (taken July 07, 2016)

12. Pavilion of the River Building

Photo by author (taken July 07, 2016)

13. Aerial view of Grace Farms

Photo by Kimberly Tryba (taken Jan 10, 2017)

14. Master plan of Grace Farms by SANAA

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15. Existing pond

Photo by author (taken Dec 20, 2016)

16. Existing meadow

Photo by author (taken Dec 20, 2016)

17. Existing pictures and concept diagram

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18. Existing site plan and proposed grading

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19. Proposed pilgrimage and new programing

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20. 50 scale laser-cut model shows the proposed grading Photo by author (taken Dec 20, 2016)

21. Noting of the sacred journey

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22. Proposed massive planting plan

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23. Planting schedule of dry meadow, dry woodland, edge between woodland and meadow

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24. Planting schedule of wet meadow and wet woodland Image created by author using multiple computer aided design/drawing Softwares

25. Sections through the site

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26. Terrace farm in spring

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27. Water meditation space in summer

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28. Amphitheater in fall

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29. Pilgrimage in winter

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