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WHERE HAVE ALL THE FLOWERS GONE?
SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS IN CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Where Have All the Flowers Gone?

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Even though we, the human species, have a deeply rooted connection to flowers, a prejudice against them holds sway in contemporary landscape architectural practice. These prevailing trends to suppress the expression of flowers denies the profession many opportunities. The most obvious is a loss of color, fragrance and texture; however, flowers also tie into two issues important of Landscape Architecture – environmental sustainability and social justice. By foregrounding flowers in landscape design, the profession can engage in mutability, stewardship and habitat reclamation—concepts central in the quest for addressing issues of environmental sustainability. Because of our universal love of flowers, the lack of flowers in a professionally designed landscape gives rise to discussions of for who and how we design public spaces, issues that must be resolved in the quest for social justice. The first chapter of this thesis reviews the winning projects for the American Society of Landscape Architecture Professional Awards. This analysis provides convincing evidence that a persistent marginalization of flowers exists in firms’ depictions of their projects. Three methods of dismissal are identified. Each

method, defined as the “green” flower, the “gray” flower, and the “brown” flower, elicits discussions exploring different facets of this foundational prejudice. The second chapter reviews examples of flowers in the modern landscape. The parties responsible for their presence range from bereaved citizens to the large landscape architectural firm Turenscape and horticultural teams responsible for three of America’s largest perennial public gardens. This chapter demonstrates that perennials not only offer color, texture, and fragrance but through their constant cycling through senescence and rebirth encourages an iterative process or systems–led design methodology. The third chapter, the design component of the thesis, describes my personal journey, which led to my commitment to invent teaching methods that encourage the creative expression of a community of people while preserving the important contribution of the principal designer. In this case, teaching students flower garden design through an approach entitled “The Edible Meadow.” It was designed like a game, with instructions to read and rules to follow, broke down the complicated process of flower garden design into a series of steps. Even though the students’ projects were designed within rigorous parameters, their final results were varied, expressive, and beautiful. This thesis was instigated by the desire to see more flowers in the public landscape. Ultimately, the research revealed that the presence of flowers in a landscape represents much more. This thesis is a call for landscape architecture to expand its discourse and give credence to voices previously unheard.

Dedication and Acknowledgments

Dedicated to my patient and thoughtful husband, Darius Sollohub, know that you are a good person and remember it was your idea that I go to graduate school.

I would also like to acknowledge my thesis committee, Professors Anette Freytag, Holly Nelson, and Anita Bakshi for your guidance, encouragement, creative spirit, and love, tough and otherwise.

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Introduction

I am writing this thesis in quarantine. During this global lockdown, so many of us have developed a profound appreciation of the world outside our window. Our public lands are recognized as vitally important for our physical and mental health. Many people



Figure 1: Urban wildflower garden, Newark, New Jersey, 2016.

now experience a growing emotional attachment to that world outside our doors.

Landscape architects have a unique opportunity to enhance and maintain this newly forged connection.

Especially in the light of the profound challenges we face together, it is time to

reconsider the flower. I

believe that flowers

intuitively connect us to our

open spaces.

One example of this is an urban wildflower meadow conceived of by Maia Zhang of Newark, New Jersey (Figure 1). Tired of ignored lots laying fallow, her small group of guerilla gardeners set out to reclaim the right to live among beauty by spreading a wildflower seed mix at the site of the demolished Westinghouse Factory. They then stretched a banner across the chain-link fence quoting the so-called American first lady

of flowers, Lady Bird Johnson, “Where flowers bloom, so does hope.” This lot is located directly across from the Newark, Broad Street Station. In the time of the commuters, hundreds, if not thousands of commuters passed by these flowers and admired their beauty, happy to see flowers growing.

This garden does not exist anymore. However, while the banner is torn down, the sentiment remains true. Through my research, I have come to realize that flowers are not just beautiful but potent symbols. While planting more flowers may not directly solve our most pressing environmental issues, creating landscapes loved by the public will remind us that not only are we dependent on this planet, but that we love it. Reconsidering the flower broadens the conversation on how the profession creates open spaces and for whom.

This thesis sets out to address the paucity of flowers in public open spaces. In the words of the urban ecologist Norbert Kühn, who is also a professor of planting design, “The loss of knowledge about plants among landscape architects has been lamented often and at length.”¹ This confirms my own experience. The predominant response by landscape architects upon hearing about my thesis topic, an unsolicited confession along the lines of “oh, I don’t know plants.”²

In his essay “The Relationship Between Plants and Landscape Architectural Design: An Attempt at Repositioning,” Kühn gives a comprehensive overview of the profession’s growing estrangement from plants.³ “However, there is a logical history behind this development, which has more to do with the self-image of the profession and its mission have changed over time, and less about disrespect for plants as a resource.”⁴

Kühn's explanation, however, does not strike me as logical. It reminds me of the classic break-up line, "It's not you, it's me." Landscape architects avoid plants because the very ontology of plants, particularly perennial plants, feels antithetical to contemporary design methodology and implementation. Plants are challenging: their mutability, their neediness, and their inexorable connection to mortality do not cooperate with contemporary expectations of large public landscapes. This relationship is further complicated when the vegetation happens to flower—their smaller scale, threat of ornamentation, and complication of color and care are often avoided. And so, plants, especially flowers, are dismissed or marginalized. "It's not me, it's really you."

My thesis explores the profession's dismissal of flowers as a medium for expression because this fact confounds me. Dismissal is potent and destructive. It is a conservative force that destroys honest evaluation through an assumption that dominance equals truth. My goal is to expose these foundational prejudices against flowers as well as to celebrate the ontology of the flowers: their mutability, their neediness, their beauty, their color, their life, and their death.

The structure of the thesis is as follows: Chapter 1 explores the implicit bias for and against flowers through the assessment of projects deemed worthy of awards by landscape architecture's respected organization: the American Society for Landscape Architects. Chapter 2 encourages a professional reevaluation of how the flower contributes and can contribute to design. Chapter 3 follows the opportunities and challenges encountered in attempting to teach, grow, and plant a colorful edible meadow.

During our current environmental/political crisis, we as a species must rethink how we live in this world. I posit that landscape architects must reassess what we deem

important and what we invalidate. Getting to know plants, specifically flowers, could help the profession resolve what Kühn describes as a “key conflict”:

This [plants requirement for care] may well all sound rather conservative, even reactionary. However, it inevitably leads us to a *key conflict* [my italics] that shakes and divides the foundations of society today: Human endeavor entails constant, far-reaching change that demands large amounts of energy and resources. On the other hand, we all want a stable secure and livable environment. With new concepts and notions such as sustainability, mindfulness, or resilience, we struggle to reconcile the irreconcilable to continue the exploitation of resources and the basic foundations of life, while still ensuring wellbeing and security.⁵

To continue to create spaces which do not value or center one plants is to re-create this environmental conundrum with a Sisyphean certitude.

Kuhn’s essay “The Relationship Between Plants and Landscape Architectural Design: An Attempt at Repositioning” is quietly revolutionary. Kuhn does not slam down a manifesto but posits radical change through thoughtful discourse. As the subtitle states, his essay is a road map for design firms that are willing to engage in a reevaluation of their own design methodology with regard to planting design, as well as an invitation to modify their relationship with planting design. I believe this engagement will engender profound changes in landscape architecture’s approach to design and practice. I chose to follow this route in my own thesis, because I am convinced that the profession must not neglect to incorporate flowers into this reengagement with plants and planting design.

Notes

1. Norbert Kühn, “The Relationship Between Plants and Landscape Architectural Design: An Attempt at Repositioning,” in *Landscript 3: Topology*, eds. Christophe Girod, Anette Freytag, Albert Kirchengast, Dunja Richter (Berlin: Jovis, 2015), 139.

2. I have worked as a landscape designer for many years before beginning my master’s degree at Rutgers University. I have seen firsthand the power of plants and flowers, in particular, to lure people outside. Flowers are the gateway drug to gardening, and gardening in its best light is stewardship. A few weeks before the start of my education, I had the opportunity to attend a review of students’ work at the Landscape Architecture Program for Penn School of Design. During a break, I met a professor and spoke of my future and my great love of plants and flowers. He promptly turned heel and left the conversation, rendering my proclamation a confession. Over the past three years, I have seen that landscape architecture tends to avoid plants, especially as a design component. I strive to understand this stance and address this issue.

3. Kühn, “The Relationship Between Plants,” 139.

4. Kühn, “The Relationship Between Plants,” 139.

5. Kühn, “The Relationship Between Plants,” 145–146.

Chapter 1: The Invisible Flower

Landscape architecture's implicit bias against flowering plants is a fact supported by personal experiences and observation.¹ In order to move away from the apocryphal and toward the analytical, I endeavored to gain some insight into this phenomena by reviewing all the design projects that received a Professional General Design Award from the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) over the past fifteen years. These 140 projects represent every region in the United States and many countries, creating a transregional analysis of the status of flowers in landscape architecture. Through my research of the winners of the ASLA Professional Awards, I have discovered that flowers are avoided by many in landscape architecture.

The ASLA Professional Awards were created as an arm of the ASLA Fund in order to promote the accomplishments of landscape architecture. For 39 years, the ASLA has awarded approximately 400 projects in the General Design category alone. As of 2020, there are seven categories for professional awards: General Design, Residential Design, Urban Design, Analysis and Planning, Communications, Research, and Landmark. This review focuses on category of General Design as this category most directly addresses aesthetic considerations and design methodology of public landscape.

As a national organization with a global reach, the ASLA acknowledges that its legitimacy hinges on the makeup of the jury:

The prestige of the ASLA awards program relies in large part on the high caliber of the juries convened each year to review submissions. The ASLA Honors and Awards Advisory Committee seeks to assemble juries that represent the breadth of the profession including private, public, institutional, and academic practice, and exemplify diversity in professional experience, geography, gender and ethnicity.¹

For almost four decades, members of the ASLA Awards jury, a veritable who's who in American landscape architecture, have convened to judge which submissions best represent the mission of the ASLA, "the creation of "healthy, beautiful, and resilient places for all."² So, putting an emphasis on the word *beautiful*, what does the ASLA jury deem beautiful? And what is the place of flowers in their aesthetic assessments?

Typical of most design competitions, the jury selection process itself also influences the ASLA Professional Awards. While a jury for a design competition attempts to act independently, their choices often amplify the values of the majority within the profession. In terms of the ASLA Professional Awards, landscape architecture firms attempt to anticipate the cultural inclination of the jury and to create imagery and captions that will engender a favorable response. In turn, the jury tends to choose projects that represent what they consider the spirit of the times for the profession. This echo chamber can create a drag on design innovation and potentially amplify inherent prejudices. The fact that the jury members for the ASLA Awards do not visit the sites—they judge the project solely on the material submitted by the design firm—further amplifies this echo chamber effect. We also cannot ignore the historic underrepresentation of women and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) in these juries. In a time of global reckoning, it is time for landscape architecture, as a profession dedicated to creating open space for the public, to reassess who decides, what is important, and what is acceptable.

I assumed that my research methodology would be quite straightforward, simply review the submissions of each winning project and count how many included photographs of flowers. The statistical analysis of total projects showed a profound

surfeit of flowers—approximately 50 percent. This came as no surprise; my thesis does not promote the commonly held public opinion that all landscape architecture *must* have something to do with plants. This assumption, as Norbert Kühn states, “greatly diminishes the meaning and significance of this profession—nor does it do justice for the responsibility that landscape architects have for people and our living environment.”³ Strangely, it was not the absence of flowers that indicated their dismissal, but how they are portrayed. Often flowers physically existed on the site, yet in many of the winning portfolios, design firms employed methods to render them virtually invisible. Finding the *invisible flower* added a level of complexity that required a thorough scrutiny.

My research has identified three common strategies to render flowers invisible in winning submissions for the ASLA Professional Awards for General Design: (1) photographing the plant before it blooms, which I have named the “green flower”; (2) desaturating the color of the photograph, which I have entitled the “gray flower”; and (3) photographing withered flowers, which I have labeled as the “brown flower.”

As landscape historian John Dixon Hunt states, the act of creating a landscape “involves a whole cluster of motifs and motives.”⁴ This also applies to the act of representing a finished landscape. Each method of representation has prompted me to ask what are the motifs and motives communicated by this choice of rendering? As Hunt observed, “Representation makes visible, at one and the same time, references to itself, to the materials of its creation, and to the idea of place making.”⁵ While Hunt was writing about place-making, his explanation also applies to the creative act of recording the final product. The design projects reviewed in this thesis have garnered one of the profession’s highest awards and so, their winning portfolios are a record of what the profession judges

as excellent. The following sections on the “green flower,” the “gray flower,” and the “brown flower” raise the question, why, in this pursuit of excellence, the profession often deems it necessary to diminish the flower. And by so doing, what do we deny ourselves? Perhaps, we deny the world some hope, as this collage of faded sunflowers (Figure 2) attempts to express. The goal is not to provide definitive answers but to question past conformities and open up exploration to new priorities.



Figure 2: A field of sunflowers, collage by author, 2019.

The “Green Flower”

Photographing a flower before it blooms is a popular technique employed by many winning landscape architectural firms (Figure 3). The reasons for this choice range from aesthetic—limiting color can create a more cohesive image, to psychological—green often expresses a feeling of calm and openness. However, this monochromatic green approach also suggests the profession places a huge significance on the color itself. Green is a very potent color messaging what many consider the predominant mission of the profession: to connect humans to nature. It is accepted practice that this connection is accomplished by producing landscapes that look as if they were created by nature, a style that is defined as naturalistic. Designers of naturalistic landscapes seem to make it point to photograph their landscapes as entirely green.

One example of this is the 2018 winner of an ASLA Honor Award, the redesign of Duke University’s West Campus in Durham, North Carolina, by Reed Hilderbrand.⁶ The winning portfolio, entitled “Legacy and Community: Juxtaposing Heritage and Invention for Duke University West Campus,” celebrates a beautiful and innovative plan that changed a once denuded and ignored part of campus into a comfortable and vital space for faculty and students. Yet all the plants photographed result in different shades of green. With a cursory glance, flowers do not seem to be part of the plant palette. But upon closer study and, with some horticultural knowledge, one can identify plants that will bloom. This is particularly evident when one compares the photograph of the perimeter plantings of Duke University (Figure 3) with the caption Reed Hilderbrand wrote to accompany this photograph in their submission to the ASLA Awards. The caption describes these perimeter beds as supporting “a diverse and seasonally vibrant



Figure 3: Duke University West Campus, Durham, North Carolina, 2018.

planting.”⁷ Their description suggests the presence of flowering plants; however, the photograph records green plants with the flowers still in bud.

The firm’s website also demonstrates a systematic monochromatic green approach. This choice to avoid capturing flowers in bloom is evident in the firm’s portrayal of Mount Auburn Cemetery (Figure 4) and Edward Leather’s Memorial Park (Figure 5) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In both photographs, hydrangeas grow in the foreground, and while these shrubs will push out blousy blossoms of blue or pink or white, they are green in perpetuity on the Reed Hilderbrand’s website.



Figure 4: Reed Hilderbrand's portrayal of Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1998–2014.

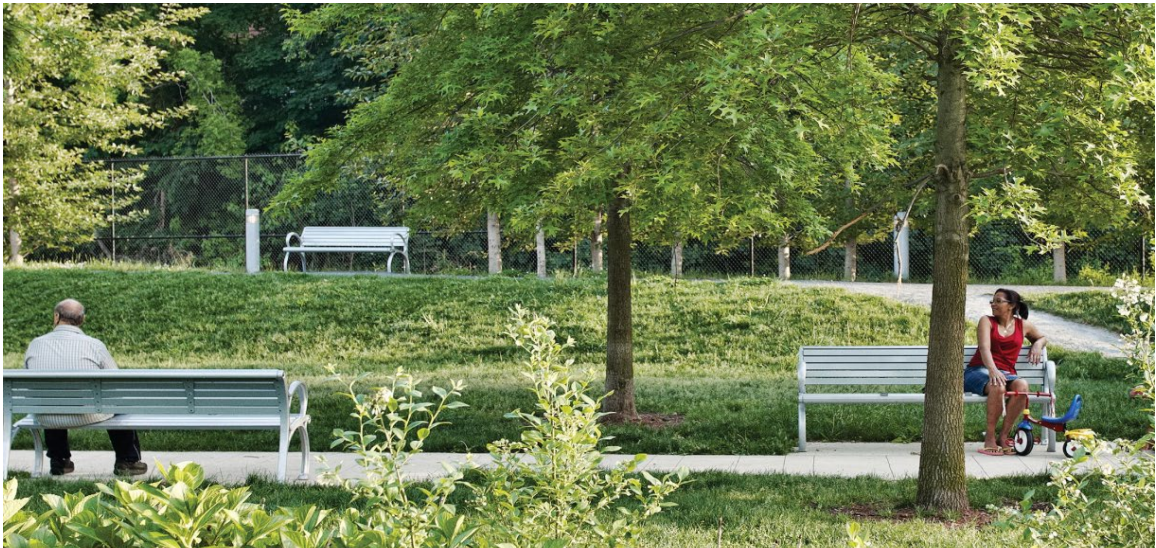


Figure 5: Edward Leathers Memorial Park, Somerville, Massachusetts, with green hydrangeas in the foreground, 2004–2008

Why “green”?

What message is communicated by photographing the “green flower”? This commitment to naturalism, particularly in the United States, is a predominant design methodology for public open spaces. As architectural historian Marc Treib observed, “Public green space, particularly in the United States, came to rely, almost exclusively on naturalism . . . so complete was its dominance that it has remained unquestioned.”⁸ And the color green is synonymous to a naturalistic design, as is evident by Treib’s description of “public *green* [my italics] space.”

This avoidance of blossoms seems to reiterate a predominant narrative of naturalism, which Hunt describes as landscape architecture pitting “the goodies (natural, informal, modern) against the baddies (controlled, formal, old fashioned).”⁹ The unquestioned supremacy of green over any other hue can be traced to the very beginning of the profession in America with Frederick Law Olmsted (1822–1903), Calvert Vaux (1824–1895), and the building of Central Park. Their design, the Greensward Plan, won first place in a juried competition in April 28, 1858. Vaux and Olmsted’s masterful reinterpretation of the picturesque landscape carefully limited the vocabulary of landscape design to tree, shrub, lawn, rock, and water—all decidedly green.

Reed Hilderbrand’s work represents an important continuation and transition to the accomplishments of Olmsted and Vaux. By applying modernist principles to the picturesque landscape, their designs make visible what was once invisible: the hand of the designer. Concurrently, their assiduous analysis leads them to outcomes that feel pre-ordained. As founding partner, Gary Hilderbrand, writes in his essay *On Seeing*, “Observers have said, generally by the way of praise, that our firm’s work looks

somehow inevitable—that qualities one may see in a project seem to reflect a distilled, resonant fit with particular conditions of the site. As if there were no other plausible answer—or that we just make it look easy. It’s not.”¹⁰

This unsung, heroic effort is an important part of the story of creating the picturesque landscape. The sheer tenacity of Olmsted and Vaux to wrest Central Park from rock, mud, and bureaucracy is legendary. As Hilderbrand states in the quote above, creating landscape, especially the large urban landscape, the same conviction, with one caveat: a landscape created by the firm of Reed Hilderbrand feels like a designed space because of the overall concept and tasteful built interventions within idealized nature. Creating idealized nature is the role played by plants in Reed Hilderbrand design. The firm planting design tends to be naturalistic, utilizing grasses, trees, and shrubs. In an overview of close to a hundred featured works displayed on the Reed Hilderbrand website, only four displayed flowers in blossom.

These photographs of blooming spaces are impressive, as the firm was entrusted with the redesign of two iconic flower gardens, including the Blue Garden in Newport, Rhode Island (Figure 6) originally designed by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. (1870–1957) from 1910 to 1915, and Marshcourt Gardens (Figure 7), designed by Gertrude Jekyll (1843–1932) and Edward Luytens (1869–1944) in 1905. These gardens amply prove the firm’s mastery with the expressive capabilities of flowers, evidenced in their exuberant rendering entitled “The Flowers of Marshcourt” (Figure 7), which recently won the 2020 ASLA Professional Award of Excellence in Residential Design. However, these expressions of color and flowers is limited to high-end privately owned gardens. The public spaces designed by this firm are photographed as green. While cost is often the

reason used as to why flowers are limited to private gardens, this prevailing attitude—that the best place for flowers is in the garden—reveals a foundational belief that limits a full expression in a naturalistic landscape.



Figure 6: Reed-Hilderbrand's redesign of Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.'s Blue Garden, Newport, Rhode Island, 2015.



Figure 7: The plant palette for Marshcourt, Stockbridge, Hampshire, England, 2020.

American landscape architecture's so-called founding father, Frederick Law Olmsted, seemed to be uncomfortable with flowers. Proof of his dislike of flowers is recounted in Witold Rybczynski's biography of Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Clearing in the Distance*. During the presentation of the design for South Park in Chicago, Illinois, in 1869, a commissioner asked Olmsted where he planned to place the flower beds, and Olmsted replied, "Anywhere outside the park."¹¹ Olmsted's attitude seemed to have solidified with the passage of time. As author Erik Larson observes in his recounting of creation of the Columbia World Exposition in 1893, "... an acerbic candor emerged most predictably in the presence of men who failed to understand that what he sought to create was not flower beds and ornamental gardens but expanses of scenery full of mystery, shadow, and sun-stippled ground."¹² His avoidance of flowers seems less to do with the flower and more a reaction against the eighteenth-century predilection for the formal ornamental garden.

Perhaps recognizing his own shortcomings, as parents do, Olmsted sent his progeny to redress his firm's relationship with flowers. In 1877, he arranged a meeting

between his young stepson, John Charles Olmsted (1852–1920), and William Robinson (1838–1935), the author of *The Wild Garden* (published in 1870) and great promoter of the use of flowers in a naturalistic setting.¹³ Perhaps John Charles Olmsted was disinterested in flowers; it is a fact that he blew off that meeting and opted to hole up inside a library to study architecture.¹⁴ Imagine how the trajectory of flowers could have changed if John Charles Olmsted was more horticulturally inclined? Would a meeting between him and William Robinson have created American parks in the early 1900s with vast meadows of daisies, ponds ringed by irises, banks of hydrangeas in blue, pink, and white? If this had happened, perhaps Reed Hilderbrand and other landscape architects would have not felt obliged to photograph flowers before they bloom.

Unfortunately, history is suspect when it cooperates with story line. Landscape historian Edward Eigen recounts in his essay “Olmsted and the Origins of Landscape Architecture” the outcome of a meeting between Frederick Law Olmsted and William Robinson at the gardener’s home in Gravetye Manor, in East Grimstead, England. Olmsted was not impressed with Robinson and wrote in a letter that “neither the ‘wild gardener’ nor the equally ‘heretical’ architect Reginald Blomfield¹⁵ . . . had adopted ‘quite the right ground.’”¹⁶ I will focus on Robinson for this crucial critique. To Olmsted, William Robinson could see nothing but flowers. For Olmsted the right ground was just that, the earth and what he defined as the larger opportunities of topography. In other words, reshaping the land through grading, creating circulation through analysis of the lay of the land, etc. Olmsted could not see flowers as a viable mode of expression in the large-scale landscape. As a result of Olmsted’s focus on the ground, Eigen concludes that

what “Olmsted left behind in the name of design, indeed of landscape architecture was the garden plot.”¹⁷ What Olmsted left behind was the flower.

While twenty-first-century landscape architecture firms are much more likely to acknowledge the needs of their clients and add flowers or flowering shrubs to their designs. However, the prevalence of “green flowers” in promotional material in the portfolios of many firms suggests that they, too, would prefer to see these flowers anywhere outside of their parks. The profession is missing an opportunity. Flowers are a part of nature and appropriate for larger scale projects. Imagine their colors, their textures, their movement through time and space on an epic scale? Take Bussey Brook Meadow as an inspiration (Figure 8) with a host of daisies enhancing the topography.



Figure 8: Flowers abound at Bussey Brook Meadow, The Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Summer, 1908.



Figure 9: GGN's Lurie Garden, Chicago, Illinois, 2008.



Figure 10: Stock photograph, Lurie Garden, Chicago, Illinois.

The “Gray Flower”

Let us now look at the next category of the *invisible* flower, which I call the “gray flower.” I use the term *gray flower* to refer to another common practice among landscape architects. Landscape architecture firms often desaturate photographs of flowers in their promotional materials. Gray is considered the de facto color for renderings. Using gray in types and lines is unquestioned. A great deal of time is devoted to choosing the right shade of gray. The color gray communicates good taste and sophistication. This color’s primacy may explain why well more than 50 percent of winning submissions that included flowers in their plant palette chose to replace a percentage of colored pixels with white or gray pixels thereby creating an overall gray tone to the photograph. Landscape architects use the verb *desaturate* frequently in their graphic lexicon. The noun *desaturation* is the medical term describing the loss of oxygen in the bloodstream.¹⁸ And this definition serves as a metaphor for this common promotional practice. When winning firms consistently bleed the color out of photographs that include flowers, they seem to take the oxygen out of the image. A surprising example is the Lurie Garden in Chicago, Illinois, winner of the ASLA 2008 Award of Excellence,¹⁹ designed by GGN (Gustafson

Guthrie Nichols) with planting design by Piet Oudolf. The Lurie Garden is celebrated for its bold use of colorful swaths of flowers. Yet GGN chose to present a much more muted vision (Figure 9) for consideration. This desaturation is evident when one compares their competition winning photograph with one found on a stock footage website (Figure 10), which displays Lurie Garden from the same angle. The stock footage image seems somewhat oversaturated, which means the true colors of the Lurie Garden are found somewhere in between the two images.

Another example of this disconnect can be seen by comparing a photograph taken from the GGN website (Figure 11) with the splash page of the Lurie Garden website (Figure 12). The GGN photo lacks the vibrant pops of yellow and red displayed on the “Visit” page of the Lurie Garden’s website. LurieGarden.org displays vivid colors because a promise of color consistently entices people to visit. This allure is proven, as



Figure 11: The Lurie Garden, Chicago, Illinois, 2008.

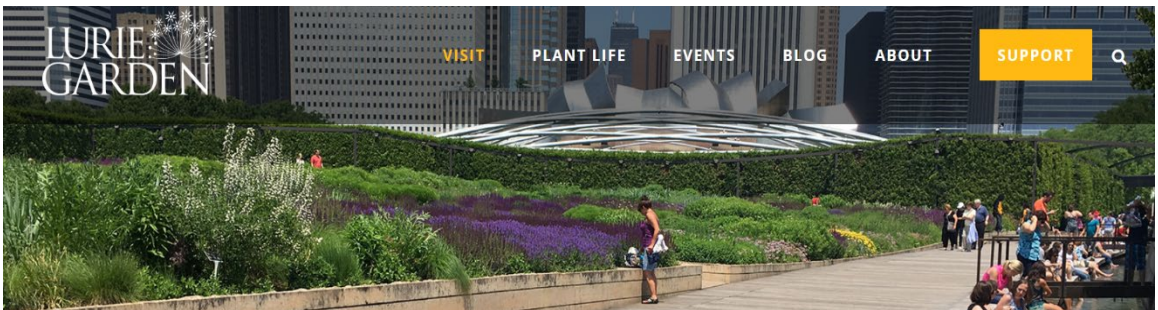


Figure 12: Visit Lurie Garden Splash Page, Chicago, Illinois

the garden has welcomed more than 4 million visitors each year.²⁰ The reviews from visitors focus on the palpable allure of flowers and their colors: one visitor enthused, “It’s so beautiful garden flowers especially has so many kinds of flowers! I went there in midsummer it was so many butterflies, bees, and other insects.”²¹ Another rhapsodized, “A beautiful oasis across from the Art Institute. Many flowers are in bloom and the whole area is very well maintained and cared for.”²²

The flowers of the Lurie Garden are a popular backdrop for recording important events, such as a maternity session by professional photography companies (Figure 13). Because of its kaleidoscope of color, the citizens of Chicago cherish the Lurie Garden.

The last project I want to investigate in this section is the High Line in New York



Figure 13: Maternity photo session in the Lurie Garden, Chicago, Illinois.

City. designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro in collaboration with landscape architects James Corner Field Operations and planting design by Piet Oudolf. This park has

collected two ASLA Honor Awards; one in 2010 for Section 1 (Gansevoort Street to West 20th Street)²³ and another in 2013 for Section 2 (West 20th Street to West 30th Street).²⁴ Similar to the “gray flower” approach GGN for Lurie Gardens, Field Operations chose to record a toned-down version of a colorful space in their photography of the High Line. In their submission to the 2010 ASLA Professional Awards, James Corner Field Operations’ caption to accompany the photograph of the Sundeck (Figure 14) describes the space as “surrounded by fragrant grasses and perennials,”²⁵ while the photograph displays a much more muted version. Perhaps the photograph communicates the taste of the designers while the caption acknowledges the needs of the public.

Similarly, James Corners Field Operations’ submission for the ASLA Awards in 2013 reflects the inconsistencies between what is said and what is seen. The caption for the photograph of the Chelsea Grasslands (Figure 15) reads, “Inspired by the self-sown landscape that grew on the High Line when the trains stopped running, the High Line design team filled the Chelsea Grasslands with wild grasses and vibrant wildflowers that add color and texture throughout four seasons.”²⁶ Despite this mention of color, the photograph in their 2013 ASLA Awards portfolio does not match the verbal description. Instead, Field Operations submitted a photograph with a color palette limited to green foliage and white flowers with white being the lighter cousin of gray.



Figure 14: The Sundeck, High Line, New York, New York, 2010.



Figure 15: The Grasslands of the High Line, New York, New York, 2013.



Figure 16: Spring flowers in bloom on the High Line, New York, New York.



Figure 17: Summer flowers in bloom on the High Line, New York, New York.

The High Line website (thehighline.org) features a gallery of photographs taken by amateur photographers. Two extraordinary photographs (Figures 16 and 17) are a testimony to the colorful flowers of the High Line.

The difference between the photographs from those within and those outside the profession illustrates a deviation between what public desires and what landscape architects have set as standards for professional acceptance. This dismissal of color is an uneasy yoking between the public's desire for color and the gray code of landscape architecture. The "gray flower" represents an unwritten rule with no single legislator. It is an unconscious group decision made through incremental accretion. Does this desire for the "gray flower" create a form of color blindness that limits landscape architecture's range of creativity?

Why “gray”?

Color plays an important role for modern culture. Karl Marx, supporter of the working class, agreed: “The sensation of color is, generally speaking, the most popular form of aesthetic sense.”²⁷ What Marx observed was the burgeoning modern color experience. During the industrial age, people of all classes could for the first time afford to purchase vast quantities of colorful consumer items.²⁸ Once reserved for the very wealthy, color became common, as advances in chemistry created dyes for textile, paint, and ink. Some of the gentry began to fear the changes they observed in the social order and dismissed color as the cause, rather than a sign of change. Many elitist social critics issued dire warnings against color. Such as the author Pierre de Lano wrote in 1896, “Color . . . is a modern taste, born certainly of the nervousness that torments our imagination, the dulling of our sensations, that constantly ungratified desires, which almost tortures us and we apply every aspect to our feverish life.”²⁹

This elitist distrust of color continues to this day and may be one explanation as to why landscape architects feel a need to tone down the natural pigment of color in their photographs of flowers. While this attitude has softened, Field Operations, GGN, and many other firms do create colorful outdoor spaces, their muted renderings signify to their peers that, for them, color is not critical. This paling is a somewhat understandable response. Color is powerful. In this postindustrial age, color is enmeshed in all aspects of culture, politics, and fashion. To desaturate an image creates a fog and distances the space from contemporary culture. Gray expresses a desire that these places move away from the daily quotidian to an outer space, a mythical space that exists only in the picture.

Perhaps the desaturated photograph records the designers' aspiration to distinguish the spaces they created. Their landscapes are not of this color world.

Landscape architects such as GGN and Field Operations seek to distance themselves from popular trends directed by taste makers such as the Pantone Color Institute. This organization guides corporation's "color trend forecasting and brand color development."³⁰ As landscape historian Susan Herrington observes in her book *On Landscape*, many floriculture companies consider it very important to ascertain color trends in order to grow the right colored plants for the following season.³¹ In the summer of 2019, I found proof of Herrington's claim. To set up this story, Pantone's color of the year in 2019 was Living Coral #16-1546 (Figure 18). In that same year, I visited Quebec City where I happened upon the Jardin Saint-Roche (Figure 19), a modern version in the ornate style of a parterre de broderie. Struck by the garden's unique color scheme of coral and puce and a woman wearing a dress in the exact same color as the flowers, I quickly took a photograph. I was unaware at that time of Pantone's 2019 color of the year, perhaps the garden designer and the woman in the photograph were unaware of this fact too. This photograph may have captured a serendipitous moment, but I believe that it



Figure 18: Pantone Color of 2019.



Figure 19: Jardin Saint-Roche, Quebec City, Quebec, Canada, August 2019.

proves the existence of a powerful undercurrent of color trend that influences many aesthetic choices.

While landscape architecture understandably rejects this trend mongering as our designs are meant to last longer than a year, the profession may have overreacted. This suppression of color in competitions and publications is an unnecessary restraint on the debate for what represents excellence in the profession. And these self-imposed limits in order to avoid being labeled as popular or trendy inhibit the full expression of color in design and discourse. While the commodification of color makes it difficult for some to see color as just color, I look forward to participating in new dialogues exploring the benefits of creating a more colorful contemporary practice.

The “Brown Flower”

Piet Oudolf, one of the most prominent advocates of the brown flower, is largely responsible the appearance of withered flowers in submission materials for the ASLA Professional General Design Awards. The photograph submitted by OLIN Partnership



Figure 20: Mill River Park and Greenway, Stamford, Connecticut, 2015.

Ltd. of Mill River Park and Greenway in Stamford, Connecticut (Figure 20), recipient of an ASLA Honor Award in 2015³² is one example. Many of the photographs for OLIN's submission of Mill River Park and Greenway were taken in the late fall when the flowers are well past their bloom. Yet, this photograph works. It tells a story of our mutual, both vegetal and human, cycling through seasons. The child's dinosaur costume takes us back to the Cretaceous period. This cycle has spun for millennia.

Oudolf's greatest contribution to the discourse is extending the season of the perennial landscape into late fall and winter. In 2008, in a *New York Time's* article entitled "A Landscape in Winter, Dying Heroically," Sally McGrane writes, "For Mr. Oudolf, in fact, the real test of a well-composed garden is not how nicely it blooms but how beautifully it decomposes."³³ A main focus of Oudolf's creative career is creating gardens that die gracefully and recording that decomposition. The photographs of an Oudolf garden in winter are extraordinary (Figures 21 and 22).



Figure 21: Oudolf's personal garden, Hummelo, The Netherlands, January 2008

In April 1999, landscape historian Anette Freytag managed a conference for the Austrian Society of Historical Gardens (ÖGHG), "Gardens of Today: History of Tomorrow—In Search of a Contemporary Design," in which Oudolf was invited to speak. Freytag recalls receiving a packet of photographs of his garden in Hummelo, The

Netherlands. The photos of dried seed heads of grasses and flowers rimmed with hoar frost in the photographs were not only beautiful but revelatory. At a single glance, they



Figure 22: Piet Oudolf field in winter, Durslade Farm, Bruton, Somerset, England.

began to break the cardinal rule of gardeners: that winter is ugly and must be endured and ignored. These photographs of brown flowers, Freytag observed, “allowed the invisible to become visible and admired for its hidden beauty.”³⁴ Oudolf celebrates the entire life cycle and the enviable morphology of the perennial plant—a senescence that regenerates, death to life, winter to spring.³⁵ Adding winter as a season seems simple—this is a profound change. A garden does not need to be put to bed before the snow falls. He recommends allowing a garden to decompose because “it reminds you of something in the genes—nature, or the longing for nature.”³⁶ And he replaces housekeeping with

poetry. “You accept death. You don’t take the plants out, because they still look good. And brown is also a color.”³⁷

The profession has easily adopted the maxim “brown is also a color.” However, an overreliance of photographs of withered flowers and avoidance of photographs of flowers in full bloom, once again, suggests a complicated relationship between the profession and the tonality central to the flower.

A quote by landscape architect and scholar Charles Waldheim³⁸ in the same *New York Times* article, “A Landscape in Winter, Dying Heroically,” exemplifies this complication. Waldheim wrote in praise of Oudolf’s design approach, “He’s gotten away from the soft pornography of the flower.”³⁹ This description seems to express the latent prejudices against flowers, prejudices that the profession accepts as truth. An unpacking of this label can allow us to reevaluate our relationship with the flower.

Why “brown”?

The stereotypical photograph of brown flowers, so often used in landscape architecture publications describes a largely monochromatic landscape (Figure 23). These photographs tend toward a formal tonal purity, which reflects the priorities of minimalist art. David Batchelor, in his book *Chromophobia*, questions the design world’s conviction “that minimalism was something you arrived at, a development of sensitivity of the brain.”⁴⁰ Batchelor, a minimalist artist himself, stridently argues that “colour has been the object of extreme prejudice in Western culture.”⁴¹ While *Chromophobia* focuses on literature, film, and art, it references all contemporary design, including landscape. “Colour,” Batchelor writes, “is often close to the body and never far from sexuality.”⁴²



Figure 23: Piet Oudolf field, Durslade Farm, Bruton, Somerset, England.

The conflation of the two, he observes, is often viewed “as ornament, excess and otherness.”⁴³ His suggestions that color is associated with sexuality, ornament, excess,

and otherness may give greater insight into Waldheim's description of flowers as "soft pornography."⁴⁴

Labeling an object as pornographic is a relatively modern phenomenon. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word *pornography* was first defined in 1842 by W. Smith, author of the *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, who listed it along "with all the lower classes of art."⁴⁵ An exegesis of pornography is beyond the purview of this paper; however, an expression of sympathy for W. Smith and other Victorian scholars of ancient antiquity is in order. Imagine their distress when the Victorian crazes for archaeology and categorization drove them to unearth and archive vast numbers of sexually explicit artifacts. This plethora of erotica threatened to undermine the very foundations of Victorian social order. The word *pornography* was invented in order to identify and sentence erotica as "low class." It was a code to warn users that it may cause social embarrassment.

Waldheim's use of the term carries the same connotation. However, despite Batchelor's suggestion of color's connection to sexuality, it is doubtful that it was meant to evoke eroticism. Instead, his *soft pornography* describes the flower as kitsch, another lower-class art form. And honestly, kitsch is very often a problem for the

flower. Search “beautiful, colorful gardens,” on the Internet, especially on hyper visual vortex websites such as Pinterest, and lurid flower gardens (Figure 24) commonly pop up. This is kitsch, not because it is ugly but because it is fake. It is a



Figure 24: A Photoshop pastiche of a fake flower garden.

Photoshopped pastiche of a place that can never exist, created by an anonymous source for an unsecure website called Global Gardening Friends that gives out suspect gardening advice. Even catalogs from reputable purveyors of flowers, such as White Flower Farms, peddle a type of pornography or kitsch, albeit a more tasteful version. Their pages are filled with gauzy closeups of flowers and empty promises of performance.

The problem with flower kitsch is that it ossifies a complex and profound living being into a static, fantastical visual. This objectification causes a schism between hyperbolic promise of the flower and its more nuanced reality. It is no wonder that landscape architects tend to tightly control the use of color and flowers in their design

methodology. Finding inspiration, instead, in abstraction of minimalist artists. In many ways, Waldheim labeling the flower as soft pornography is a fair warning. However, this definition can also lead the profession to dismiss flowers as superfluous and irrelevant, thus limiting our engagement to flowers to their superficial aspects or utility.

Piet Oudolf considered Waldheim's quote so emblematic of his design approach that he chose to have it stand alone on the last page of his monograph *Piet Oudolf: Landscapes in Landscape*.⁴⁶ Given Oudolf's acceptance of Waldheim's description of his own work, examining the quote in context perhaps reveals a more complex dismissal of the flower that coincides with Batchelor's connection of color with sexuality: "He's gotten away from the soft pornography of the flower. He's interested in the life cycle, how plant material ages over the course of the year, and how it relates to the plants around it. Like a good marriage, his compositions must work well together as its members age."⁴⁷

By asking visitors to observe a community of flowers to the very end of their lives, Oudolf celebrates the long-term relationship over the biased, surface-level encounter. However, the fact that Oudolf rarely talks about color in his design hints at a more Puritanical obedience to Waldheim's juxtaposition of soft pornography of the flower versus the good marriage. There seems to be an allergic reaction to any hint of what might be considered superfluous or ornamental. His wariness of the ornamentation of flowers is evident in an interview with the *New York Times* in February 2011: "But don't overdo. A garden does not need to be too decorative. Go for simple flowering plants instead of the double-flower varieties. . . . If you buy the wrong plants, you have to

redo it every year.”⁴⁸ He uses aesthetic terms to define the wrong plant not horticultural concerns. The wrong plant is, for him, a flower with too many petals. There is an orthodoxy to “good design.” Landscape architecture has self-imposed sumptuary laws that discredit the very ontology of the flowers, their sensuality. By defining flowers as pornographic, we dismiss them as low class. Sadly, I cannot at this time address the obvious implications of misogyny in the dismissal of flowers as soft pornography. This is a subject deserving its own thesis.⁴⁹

Our horticultural chromophobia denies the power flowers have over us. It seems to be programmed into our genetic code to physically respond to flowers. Jeannette Haviland-Jones, professor emeritus of psychology and director of the Human Emotions Laboratory at Rutgers University along with husband, Terry Russell McGuire, professor emeritus of genetics and former vice chair of the Department of Genetics at Rutgers University, studied the effect of flowers on people’s moods. They conducted double-blind research in 2005 in which their team presented participants with one of three gifts: a decorative candle, a fruit basket, or a bouquet of flowers. All the participants who received the bouquet of flowers responded by flashing a Duchenne smile.⁵⁰ This is often described as a heartfelt, true smile that involves the mouth, cheek, and eyes. Flowers caused this physical response of pure enjoyment.

Michael Pollan’s brilliant book *The Botany of Desire*, 2002 suggests that flowers have evolved to allure in order to inspire care, such as humans.

[I]t was the flower that first ushered the idea of beauty into the world the moment, long ago, when floral attraction emerged as an evolutionary strategy . . . a handful of plants that manage to manufacture chemicals with the precise molecular needed to unlock the mechanism in our brain governing pleasure, memory, and maybe even transcendence. . . . I would be the last person to make light of the power of the fragrant rose to raise

one's spirits, summon memories, even in some not merely metaphorical sense, to intoxicate.⁵¹

Perhaps flowers really are pornographic. Seduction is the biological imperative for a flower. Without allure, flowers cannot survive. Seduction is a good thing for all parties. Many of us have lost ourselves in the intoxicating fragrance of a flower. I, for one, have had several romantic relationships with flowers and have lived a richer life caring for them.⁵²

Flowers have fallen victim to the profession's fear of ornamentation and a monochromatic obsession with form. Few landscape architects would admit to appreciating flowers simply because they were attracted to them. Instead of exploring the aesthetic opportunities presented by flowers, landscape architects seem to need to justify the presence of flowers in their projects. One strategy for justification is to assign flowers jobs. In submission to the 2018 ASLA Professional Awards, OLIN Partnership describes the flowers for Mill River Park and Greenway simply as native. It is understood that as a native plant, the aesthetic qualities of these flowers are less important than the ecological services they provide. As a native plant, flowers provide food and shelter to the biome. To employ flowers reads as if they have reformed their wanton ways and are now responsible members of society.

The "green," "gray," and the "brown" flower demonstrates that continually downplaying the flower, even when it is already present in a landscape, communicates to those within the profession that form and function matters above all else. This pendulum has swung so far in this direction that its return is inevitable. I look forward to this new trajectory and plan to contribute with teaching, writing, and design to help create a richer

synthesis of emotion, connection, and color to the profession's design methodology. And, of course, the return of the flower.

Notes

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14. Rybcynski, *A Clearing in the Distance*, 333.
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35. McGrane, "A Landscape in Winter."

36. McGrane, "A Landscape in Winter."

37. McGrane, "A Landscape in Winter."

38. Charles Waldheim was the director of the landscape architecture program at the University of Toronto at the time of publication. He is now the John E. Irving Professor of Landscape Architecture at Harvard Graduate School of Design and director of the Office for Urbanism and Landscape Architecture.

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40. David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion, 2013), 22.

41. Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, 22.

42. Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, 63.

43. Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, 63.

44. McGrane, "A Landscape in Winter."

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47. McGrane, "A Landscape in Winter."

48. Sarah Barrett, "Q&A: Piet Oudolf on Designing a Winter Garden." *The New York Times*, February 9, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/10/garden/10garden.html>.

49. This inherent misogyny in the dismissal of flowers is something I think a lot about and plan to write about at a later date. It seems obvious to me that Waldheim sees the flower as female. When Waldheim's refers to "marriage," he is most likely referring to a heterosexual union as the Marriage Equality Act was not passed into federal law until 2015, five years after the publication of *Piet Oudolf: Landscapes in Landscapes* in 2010 and seven years after the printing of the *New York Times* article in 2008. Given this chronology, one can safely assume that the flower, star of soft pornography, is female.

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Chapter 2: The Visible Flower

While I advocate for the return of the flower in professional practice, it is important to note that flowers surround us. We use flowers as extensions of ourselves. Flowers are wedding bouquets and funeral bowers expressing both love and loss. Ralph Solecki (1917–2019), a professor of archaeology at Columbia University, discovered evidence that the Neanderthals placed flowers at gravesites.¹ It strikes me that we have depended on flowers for tens of thousands of years to express our existential truths. This chapter surveys some aspects of our unique connection to flowers and features the following three investigations:

1. “The Artificial Flower” explores the spontaneous displays of artificial flowers in public spaces. Individuals and communities often place flowers to claim space in the public realm. While artificial flowers are unpopular to landscape architects, this common vernacular expression can tell important and complex stories that the profession should acknowledge.² While one does not necessarily have to like flowers (artificial or otherwise), one should not ignore them, as they are often imbued in culture and history.

2. “Turenscape and the Cherished Aesthetic Experience” unpacks the Chinese firm Turenscape’s conviction that a successful ecologically sustainable landscape must also be aesthetically pleasing to as many people as possible. As a result of this imperative of popularity, their designs often use flowers on a large scale. Reviewing case studies of two of Turenscape’s completed projects raises the question if popular appeal contributes to manifesting and maintaining an ecologically sustainable future.

3. “The Creativity of Cutting Back” celebrates maintenance of the perennial garden and how the cyclical nature of care can contribute to the future of landscape

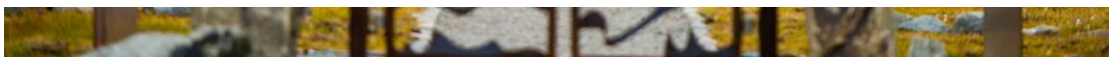
architectural design. The stellar work of the horticultural teams of the Lurie Garden in Chicago (GNN with Piet Oudolf) acts as our prototype. Their efforts to encourage public acceptance of “brown flowers” (see Chapter 1) eventually led to nudging public opinion toward a more sustainable form of beauty. This leads to the necessary reevaluation of a maintenance crew’s contributions. This section suggests that a successful horticultural team does not maintain stasis but directs dynamic change, both in its plant community and, when most successful, in the human community as well. It aims at encouraging landscape architects to realize the creative potential of a horticultural team to manifest change and a reassessment of the role planting design can play in design methodology.

The Artificial Flower

The Iqaluit Municipal Cemetery in Nunavut, Canada (Figure 25), merits a quick review because, while it is a flowerless landscape, it demonstrates the complexity and importance of leaving space for the community to contribute to the design. In this case, it is the decoration of gravesites with fake flowers. Designed by Lees + Associates for the



Figure 25: The Iqaluit Municipal Cemetery, Iqaluit, Nunavut, Canada, 2018.



city of Iqaluit, the Iqaluit Municipal Cemetery received the ASLA Honor Award in 2018.³ The firm worked closely with Inuit elders; they valued and incorporated the community's input into the design process. This collaboration created a cemetery that celebrates the Arctic and the people whose lives are intimately connected to this ecosystem. Much care was taken to protect the fragile tundra soil while creating a dynamic and sacred space for the people who live and die there. In their acknowledgment of the Iqaluit Cemetery, the 2018 Awards Jury stated, "There are certain times when you're working with a landscape that's so beautiful, the best thing to do is as little as possible."⁴

A local common practice is to hang wreaths of artificial flowers on the grave markers (Figure 26). At first glance, I disliked them. To my eye, they were an anathema to the extraordinary interplay of rock, tundra, and ocean. However, as I began to research



Figure 26: Fake flowers, Iqaluit Municipal Cemetery, Iqaluit, Nunavut, Canada, April 28, 2017.

this cemetery, I began to see that these artificial flowers were just as authentic as the

whalebone arches and an important component to the design. These flowers are the community's contribution to the design and express love, hope, and loss. While the Lees + Associates and their community board incorporated traditional indigenous symbols throughout their design, the fake flowers of Iqaluit Cemetery were the contributions of individuals within the community to the landscape. Fake flowers are common in many cemeteries, their permanent bloom an economical way to express unending love and respect for the dead. Their presence in Iqaluit Cemetery also illustrates the complexity of the social fabric of this community. The wreath, a never-ending circle of ever-blooming flowers, gives rise to thoughts of Christianity's promise of life without end. It is the counterpoint between the wreaths of artificial flowers and the design components inspired by traditional Inuit beliefs—a more honest portrayal of the people who live in Nunavut.⁵

Another place where artificial flowers are common are on roadside shrines to victims of car accidents. These shrines are all too common in my new hometown of Newark, New Jersey. Newark is a city of highways built to accommodate the needs of



Figure 27: Roadside shrine, Newark, New Jersey, September 2020.

drivers over the pedestrians. In my small neighborhood, there are two such shrines. All professions committed to creating safe streets should pay attention to these roadside shrines decorated with artificial flowers. They serve as a clear reminder of the grief caused by unjust space (Figure 27). Mapping and studying their locations can identify the most dangerous intersections, the demographics of the victims, and humanize the campaign for safe streets. It is important to respect

the needs of the grieving to memorialize these unnecessary deaths. These flowers act as a conduit for a deeper understanding of the difficulties a community confronts every day.

Landscape architects, perhaps more than any other design professionals, face the opportunity and challenge of creating spaces that are both inspired by the singular vision of a designer or design team and the creative contribution of the community. Because flowers are often a community's aesthetic contribution to shared space, it is time to question the predominant narratives (as discussed in Chapter 1) in which the profession

tends to downplay flowers. The profession needs to ask itself: Why and for whom do we create open space? The artist and landscape architect June Grant explore these issues in her work by asking: “Where does culture get pulled into the design solution? Where is history added into this shaping of land?”⁶ I would like to slightly modify her questions by asking: Whose culture gets pulled into design and whose interpretation of history is added? Landscape architecture’s dismissal of flowers suggests a distancing from the needs and desires of a majority of the population who find flowers not only beautiful but a potent symbol.

The displays of artificial flowers demonstrate how vitally important it is to develop systems within our designed public landscapes that give agency to individuals and communities to claim space for expression.

Turenscape and the Cherished Aesthetic Experience

Turenscape has received many ASLA Professional Awards. From 2005 to 2020, this firm has won ten ASLA Professional Awards, and flowers figured prominently in many of these award-winning landscapes. The photographs they submitted to ASLA display large swaths of flowers in bright colors. I will focus on the exemplary use of flowers in two of their winning submissions: the 2010 Honor Award for Tianjin Qiaoyuan Park in Tianjin City, China; and the 2016 Honor Award for Quzhou Luming Park, Quzhou City, Zhejiang Province, China.

Tianjin Qiaoyuan Park: The “Adaptation Palettes”

In 2010, ASLA gave three ASLA Professional Awards to Turenscape: the Award of Excellence for Shanghai Houtan Park in Shanghai⁷ and two Honors Awards for the Qinhuangdao Beach Restoration in Qinhuangdao City, Hebei Province⁸ and Tianjin Qiaoyuan Park in Tianjin City,⁹ all projects in China. I will focus on Tianjin Qiaoyuan Park, because its unique approach to perennial plant design provides insight into the importance Turenscape places on flowers.

The municipal government of Tianjin City commissioned the firm to design a fifty-four-acre park on a former shooting range and garbage dump. The challenges were great: the site was heavily polluted with significant urban storm water runoff that scoured the soil of nutrients. In order to rebuild the soil and address environmental degradation, the Turenscape design featured twenty-one cavities of various depths and widths. These

cavities slowed down, captured, and ultimately filtered storm water. Due to their varying sizes and depths, some cavities filled up with water while others stayed dry.

Inspired by the perennial herbaceous plant communities that flourish in Tianjin's naturally saline-alkali soil, the Turenscape planting design approach took advantage of the opportunities newly presented by this wide range of habitats. Rather than creating a detailed planting plan, the firm created a strategy they named "Adaptation Pallets."

Turenscape allowed the park to create itself through seed dispersal, creating a seed mix of plants that thrived in dry habitats as well as those that preferred wet. The seeds' success or failure to thrive depended on where they landed. Through this evolutionary process, a beautiful low-maintenance landscape emerged within two years.

Their narrative for the submission of Tianjin Qiouyuan Park to the 2010 ASLA Professional Awards concludes, "This project helps to define the new aesthetics of landscape today, defined by a continuously evolving process. Untidy forms, unplanned biodiversity, and nature's 'messiness' keep going, letting plants live and expose their genuine beauty to enrich the landscape. The ecology-driven Adaptation Palettes has become a valuable and remarkable site of the community of Tianjin."¹⁰ It is important to note that while this is a predominantly native plant palette, non-native ornamental flowers are also a part of the messy aesthetic. Turenscape added the seeds of cosmos and Gaillardia to their mix (Figure 28). While some restoration ecologists would question the

Figure 28: Wildflower meadow, Tianjin Qiaoyuan Park, Tianjin City, China.

presence of these non-native flowers, this aesthetic decision reflects Turenscape's conviction that restoration of environmental balance must include human reconnection to



their ecosystem. Within two months of completion, more than two hundred thousand people had visited this park. Hopefully, popularity is a measure of success and inspires visitors to love what nature has to offer—the messy aesthetic.

One of the stated goals in the Turenscape 2010 ASLA Professional Awards project narrative for Tianjin Qiaoyuan Park was to create a “cherished aesthetic experience.”¹¹ This phrase represents an important distinction in the firm’s approach to design. Their commitment to creating a cherished aesthetic experience can provide insights into why they often use flowers in their landscapes. While almost all landscape architecture firms strive to create outdoor spaces that visitors consider beautiful, the Turenscape “cherished aesthetic experience” carries undertones of an almost messianic

zeal to heal the earth by healing our relationship with our planet. The firm's "About Us" page reads like a parable, stating that people "cut the sacred trees, taste the Forbidden Fruits and destroy the Eden."¹² The statement continues, "We, Turen, but [*sic*] deliver the messages from the spirits of the land to wake our fellow dwellers, adapt to nature's Tao to cure the great suffers [*sic*], and refer to the cultural context to enrich our deprived minds."¹³

Turenscape delivers these messages through their landscapes. They are the haptic representation of the philosophy of Turenscape's founder and principle designer, Kongjian Yu, who received his doctorate at Harvard's Graduate School of Design.¹⁴ These core beliefs are spelled out in the name he chose for his company, the Chinese characters *tu* and *ren*. *Tu* represents dirt, earth, or the land, while *ren* expresses people, the man, or human being. Yu's calling and the calling of his firm express the ardent desire to do everything in their creative power to bring these two characters back together—people and earth—Turen. For Turenscape, popular appeal is a gateway that leads their fellow dwellers into a relationship with the designed sustainable regenerative landscape.

Quzhou Luming Park

Turenscape recognizes the flower's unquestioned popularity as a powerful agent of change. Quzhou Luming Park, Zhejiang Province, China, demonstrates the use of flowers to inspire massive public response. This project garnered an ASLA Professional Award in 2016.¹⁵ While this park has a total area of seventy-nine acres, I will focus on the area called "the meadow." Turenscape designed the meadow to be an urban farm, rotating crops of canola flowers in the spring, sunflowers in the summer, and buckwheat in the

winter. While the narrative written for the 2016 Professional Awards emphasizes that this area is a productive landscape, the most valuable commodity produced by Quzhou Luming Park Meadow is beauty.¹⁶

This is evident in the selection of crops grown there: canola, sunflowers, and buckwheat. While the beauty of sunflowers is recognized throughout the Western world. Many countries also celebrate the blooms of canola and buckwheat. The regions in China where canola and buckwheat are the predominant crop also enjoy a tourist trade during peak bloom time. People travel a great distance to experience the canola fields of Luoping, Yunnan Province, China (Figure 29), and the buckwheat fields of Guizhou Province, China (Figure 30).



Figure 29: Canola fields in spring, Luoping, Yunnan Province, China.



Figure 30: Buckwheat fields, Guizhou Province, China.

The most popular crop in the Quzhou Luming Park Meadow is the sunflower. At the height of their blooms, the sunflowers attract more than twenty thousand visitors a day (Figure 31). Once they have run their course, the meadow is harvested and overplanted with a mixture of annual flowers that reach their full bloom in the fall (Figure 32), attracting tens of thousands of visitors yet again.

This portion of the park is part picturesque stroll garden, part urban farm, and part fairground, built to accommodate massive crowds for relatively short-lived flower events.

Although shade is typically avoided on working farms, large trees flank the main paths in order to provide a more comfortable experience. A series of sinuous paths intersect neat agricultural rows; elevated platforms provide another perspective. With an emphasis on framing views of enticing images, the paths and platforms elicit a feeding frenzy of



Figure 31: Field of sunflowers, Quzhou Luming Park, Quzhou City, Zhejiang Province, China.

photography. As stated in the write-up for the 2016 ASLA Professional Awards, Turenscape believes that “these events encourage residents to be aware of the changes of the seasons that are often obscured by the hustle of urban life.”¹⁷

Have the Turenscape exceedingly beautiful landscapes achieved their goals of advancing a sustainable future? In 2016, Marc Treib also spoke of the need to balance ecological function with the aesthetic at an event organized by the Landscape Architectural Foundation entitled “The New Landscape Declaration: A Summit of Landscape Architecture and the Future.”¹⁸ Similar to the Turenscape goal of creating a



Figure 32: Field of wildflowers, Quzhou Luming Park, Quzhou City, Zhejiang Province, China.

cherished aesthetic experience, Treib speaks of addressing not only the concerns of basic subsistence but acknowledging the importance of pleasure, “We do not love a place because it is sustainable. We love it for its qualities beyond those of performance. If the food tastes insipid, we do not care whether it is organic or not. Without aspirations beyond achieving sustainability, the work of the landscape architect becomes only a form of environmental plumbing. . . . Sustainable is not antithetical to beautiful nor is beautiful antithetical to sustainable. Environments can, and I believe should, represent an approach of *both/and* rather than *either/or*.”¹⁹

The Creativity of Cutting Back

There is a great deal to learn about the future of landscape design, particularly sustainable design, from those tasked with the care of large flower-filled parks such as the Battery Park Conservancy at Battery Park City (2002) in Manhattan, Brooklyn Bridge Park, in Brooklyn, New York (2004), and the Lurie Garden (2004) in Chicago. Caring for acres of perennials required a new type of horticultural director—a head gardener who is also a scientist, ecologist, environmental activist, and educator. Because of their commitment to the environment, they are engaged in rethinking protocols that were once simple and rote, such as, when is the best time to cut back perennials. As discussed in the section on the Lurie Garden, the answer to this simple question is complicated and addresses one of the most important issues today, the mitigation of humans’ destructive desire for the neat and tidy landscape in order to address a greater environmental need.

The horticultural directors for the parks listed above—Eric T. Fleisher, Battery Park City, Rebecca McMackin, Brooklyn Bridge Park, and Scott Stewart and Laura Ekasetya, past and present directors of horticulture for the Lurie Garden—represent the best in their field. They combine a sophisticated knowledge of perennials with a deep sense of environmental responsibility. Each has a personal mission. Fleisher’s commitment to developing sustainable horticultural practices has led him to create a massive, urban composting system. Because of McMackin’s concern about the extinction of native insects, she has encouraged her team to create systems that identify, protect, and

support the beneficial insects found in Brooklyn Bridge Park. Scott Stewart and Laura Ekasetya have used their long tenures to manifest positive environmental changes.

These horticultural directors are designers, not necessarily of physical space but of systems and experiences. I believe that the cyclical nature of caring for flowers inspires a process-led design methodology. The perennial season revolves around a much shorter time span. It is this iterative process that encourages continual refinement, which hopefully results in a fully vetted, well-established, successful sustainable practice. Studying the work of these horticultural directors can provide insight into new approaches of future design methodology in landscape architecture. Focusing on the maintenance can create more sustainable outdoor spaces.

The first case study reviews Battery Park City Conservancy and the composting program implemented by its longtime horticultural director, Eric T. Fleisher. In 2002, the Battery Park City Conservancy commissioned Piet Oudolf to design a horticultural master plan for 195,000+ square feet of perennial gardens. And for more than twenty-five years, Eric T. Fleisher has overseen the care of these gardens.²⁰ Fleisher's nickname "T" came about because he is one of the foremost experts on compost tea. He has initiated and run a successful composting program that recycles food waste generated by local residents and businesses. A state-of-the-art facility composts, liquifies, and then fertilizes the gardens of Battery Park City.²¹

Battery Park City boasts several parks, playgrounds, and gardens. In addition to Piet Oudolf's master plan for their perennial gardens, many landscape architects have created iconic spaces here, including, but not limited to Robert F. Wagner Jr. Park by Olin and Partnership (1996) and Teardrop Park by Michael Van Valkenburgh and

Associates (MMVA) (2004).²² The dynamic of the relationships between the designers of these spaces and Battery Park City's horticultural teams is pretty typical; the team is tasked to maintain the vision of the designers. T's composting is yet another maintenance task, perhaps seen as a more laudable form of taking out the trash. I suggest that this division between design and care is a false dichotomy. Perhaps landscape architects should use a design methodology where a concept such as composting is considered more than a sustainable disposal system but an acknowledgment to create a complete living system.

As the director of the Brooklyn Bridge Park since 2011, Rebecca McMackin has made it her mission to explore the potential for landscape architects to expand their preexisting collaboration with ecologists. MVVA designed the eight-five-acre Brooklyn Bridge Park to be an organic park created with intensive human programming within an ecological framework.²³ Rebecca McMackin, self-described as ecologically obsessed, has embraced the challenge of reversing the devastating effects of urbanization on native insect population.²⁴ According to the website for Brooklyn Bridge Park (brooklynbridgepark.org), the park "is composed of seven ecosystems that both beautify the landscape and offer food and habitat for a vast array of wild life."²⁵ The MVVA design team reintroduced several important landscape typologies for this region from forest to salt marsh. McMackin and her team have taken full advantage of this variety of habitats in an attempt to reverse the depopulation of beneficial insects. Their strategies include identification, creation of habitat, public education, even constructing an entomology nursery. Their work demonstrates that merely creating native landscapes in urban spaces does not guarantee an increase in population of our endangered animals.

This hope that “if you build it, they will come” cannot address the complexity of re-creating a biome where animal and plant species have coevolved for generations. Solid systems of sustainability can only happen through a commitment to an iterative process of design and the delegation of what might be deemed creative decisions to those on the ground engaged in this cyclical nature of care. Environmental progress is only achieved through daily acts of stewardship and years of commitment.

The directors of the Lurie Garden demonstrated how sustainable horticultural practice can influence behavioral change for environmental gain. They worked to expand public opinion on what it sees as beautiful. The Lurie Garden, designed by GGN with Piet Oudolf, was completed in 2004, and it was one of Oudolf’s first and largest design commission.²⁶ As a result, Chicago was the first place where an American public encountered a four-season garden.²⁷ In the early twenty-first century, letting a garden stand withered throughout winter was considered ugly. Nevertheless, the Lurie Garden’s horticultural team followed the maintenance plan specified by the designers and delayed cutting back the garden until the early spring. Public opinion seemed to continue to consider the “brown flower” ugly because fourteen years later, Scott Stewart, as director of the Lurie Garden, felt it necessary to explain this practice. He wrote an article in 2016 for the Lurie Garden website entitled “It’s time to cut down the garden,” where he acknowledged that “waiting until spring to cut down the garden is not conventional but the benefits are visual and ecological.”²⁸ He encouraged readers to view gardens through an environmental and ecological lens and mixed in a little patriotism by suggesting that cutting back a garden in the fall is “a habit reinforced by a horticultural skill set rooted in

European formal gardening practices.”²⁹ Stewart realized that expanding the public’s idea of what was beautiful required effective communication.

Stewart’s efforts must have begun to sway public acceptance. Laura Ekasetya, was promoted to director of Lurie Gardens in 2017 after Scott Stewart left this position to become the executive director of the Millennium Park Foundation. In 2019, Ekasetya continued to push the boundaries of the public’s acceptance of the withered plant. The 2109 article on the Lurie Garden website entitled, “Cutting Back on the Cut-back,” explains a new protocol of allowing dead perennials to stand throughout growing season in order to provide nesting habitats for beneficial insects and bees. The public’s aesthetic concerns are not ignored; much of the article is devoted to reassuring visitors that the Lurie Garden’s colorful spring display would not be marred by dead matter.

An array of tulips wouldn’t be as instagrammable [*sic*] mixed in with a bunch of twigs sticking up from the ground, so it was decided to experiment slowly while leveraging the strengths of each area of the garden. Laura surveyed the overall design plan and chose areas that are a little less picturesque in the very early spring to leave 15-inch stems standing and areas where tulips and crocus bloom en masse were cut down completely as previously done. By mid-spring, the standing stalks were camouflaged by the grown plants and looked as it always has.³⁰

Ekasetya and her horticultural team negotiated between the needs the of the bees and the aesthetic needs of the visitors making design decision that addresses the needs of both communities. Their campaign had many strategies: the gardeners were trained and encouraged to educate visitors; they created signs (Figure 33) as another form of



Figure 33: Sign explaining the “brown flower,” Lurie Garden, Chicago, Illinois, 2019.

communication and wrote articles. The Lurie Garden horticultural team also established systems and solutions that used reiteration of the passing of the seasons to continually address the needs of the perennial plants and the biome they support. At the same time, by acknowledging the aesthetic needs of people, this team began to nudge the public toward a more sustainable view of the beautiful landscape.

In her article “Sustaining Beauty,” landscape designer and theorist Elizabeth Meyers describe the goal of creating landscapes “that provoke those who experience them to become more aware of how their actions affect the environment and to care enough to make changes. This involves considering the role of aesthetic environmental experiences, such as beauty, in re-centering human consciousness from an egocentric to a more bio-centric perspective.”³¹ Those tasked with the care of designed landscapes can provide answers on how to achieve this goal. Many of us understand that our survival

requires that we need to evolve at an unprecedented pace. However, real behavioral change requires a system carrying out repetitive acts of sustainability. Caring for flowers is concomitant to this iterative creative process whose adoption would help implement generational change towards a brighter and more sustainable future.

Notes

1. Sam Roberts, “Ralph Solecki, Who Found Humanity in Neanderthals, Dies at 101” *The New York Times*, April 11, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/11/obituaries/ralph-solecki-dead.html>.

2. Landscape architect Ken Smith’s design for the rooftop of Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York (2009) and his artificial lawn at the Elevated Acre, New York, New York (2002–2005) do embrace artificiality. Martha Schwartz’s Bagel Garden, Boston, Massachusetts (1979) one could argue, is another manifestation of the artificial flower.

3. “2018 ASLA Professional Awards, Honor Award, General Design, Iqaluit Municipal Cemetery,” [asla.org, https://www.asla.org/2018awards/455375-Iqaluit_Municipal_Cemetery.html](https://www.asla.org/2018awards/455375-Iqaluit_Municipal_Cemetery.html).

4. “2018 ASLA Professional Awards, Honor Award, General Design, Iqaluit Municipal Cemetery.”

5. Sadly, the Iqaluit Cemetery has deteriorated over the past two years, a victim of winter thaw and run-off pools. In the spring, dug graves fill up with water. Local citizens struggle to lay flowers on the graves of their loved one, sometimes sinking up to their knees in mud. Many townspeople now question the selection of this site. They claim that the design team should have known that this site was always prone to flooding. Perhaps this is the truth. Perhaps the view of the water overshadowed all other decisions. Perhaps this unanticipated flooding is another symptom of global warming and sea-level rise. There probably is no definitive answer. What is important is to acknowledge is the sad certainty that the Iqaluit Municipal Cemetery cannot, at this time, meet the needs of this community. These artificial wreaths stand as witness to the fact that some things never change. See also Beth Brown, “Flooded Apex graveyard leaves Iqaluit resident with a sinking feeling,” *Nunatsiaq News*, August 17, 2018, https://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/65674flooded_apex_graveyard_leaves_iqaluit_resident_with_a_sinking_feeling/.

6. June Grant in “The Twin Pandemics,” *Landscape Architecture Magazine*, September 2020, <https://landscapearchitecturemagazine.org/2020/08/27/the-twin-pandemics/>.

7. “2010 ASLA Professional Awards, Shanghai Houton Park: Landscape as a Living System,” [asla.org, https://www.asla.org/2010awards/006.html](https://www.asla.org/2010awards/006.html).

8. “2010 ASLA Professional Awards, Qinhaungdao Beach Restoration: An Ecological Surgery,” [asla.org, https://www.asla.org/2010awards/015.html](https://www.asla.org/2010awards/015.html).

9. “2010 ASLA Professional Awards, Tianjin Qiaoyuan Park: The Adaptation Palettes,” [asla.org, https://www.asla.org/2010awards/033.html](https://www.asla.org/2010awards/033.html).

10. “2010 ASLA Professional Awards, Tianjin Qiaoyuan Park: The Adaptation Palettes.”
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12. “About Us,” [turenscape.com](https://www.turenscape.com/en/about/index.html),
<https://www.turenscape.com/en/about/index.html>
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14. “About Us.”
15. “2016 ASLA Professional Awards, Framing Terrain and Water, Quzhou Luming Park,” [asla.org](https://www.asla.org/2016awards/165382.html), <https://www.asla.org/2016awards/165382.html>.
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18. Mark Treib, “Less a Declaration Than Some Thoughts,” Landscape Architecture Foundation, [lafoundation.org](https://www.lafoundation.org/resources/2016/07/declaration-marc-treib),
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20. “B.P.C. People—Eric “T” Fleisher,” Hugh L. Carey Battery Park City Authority, <https://bpca.ny.gov/bpc-people/b-p-c-people-eric-t-fleisher/>.
21. “Sustainability,” Hugh L. Carey Battery Park City Authority, <https://bpca.ny.gov/nature-and-sustainability/sustainability/>.
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26. “Meet the Designers,” [lurigarden.org](https://www.lurigarden.org/about/designers/),
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Chapter 3: Resulting Pedagogy: Teaching Flower Design

I want to start this chapter by thanking Professor Holly Nelson for providing me with the opportunity and guidance to teach flower garden design to her class.¹ In February 2020, when classes were still conducted in person, I had the opportunity to teach flower design to undergraduate landscape architecture students as a section of their core curriculum course, Planting Design. I wanted to introduce students to the fundamentals of designing with flowers—color, size, seasonal bloom, texture—with a primary focus on color. I developed the class during the early stages of research for my thesis when I was regretting my topic choice. How could I, when we are in the middle of the sixth age of Earth’s extinction, be thinking about flowers? However, teaching and observing the students’ interactions with the topic caused me to realize that I, too, had fallen into the common professional trap of underestimating flowers.

The students final presentation of their designs was unlike any other pin-up I had experienced throughout my education at Rutgers. Their descriptions often resembled poetry. They spoke of feelings, color, and fragrance, their goal was to create spaces that connected visitors to this space on an emotional and sensual level. In doing so, they helped reaffirm my original conviction that engaging with flowers in landscape design is important *because* we are facing such profound environmental challenges.

The final deliverable for each student was to create a planting design for three raised beds; four designs would be chosen to fill the beds in the Rutgers’s Urban AG Garden, which was slated for construction in the spring of 2020. Back in the summer and fall of 2019, the university had decided to transform an uninviting, ignored space at the back of Martin Hall on the Cook College campus in New Brunswick, New Jersey, into an

urban agricultural garden. Inspired by the Salad Bowl Garden of UC Davis, California, this Rutgers garden would be forage friendly, open to anyone on campus, and a welcoming place for social gatherings. Dean Laura Lawson supported Holly Nelson's fall 2019 Tectonics class to come up with a design for this interactive, edible outdoor space. Nelson's student, Katherine Rodriguez, designed the winning submission (Figure 34).

Her innovative use of space would encourage staff, students, and faculty to commune and

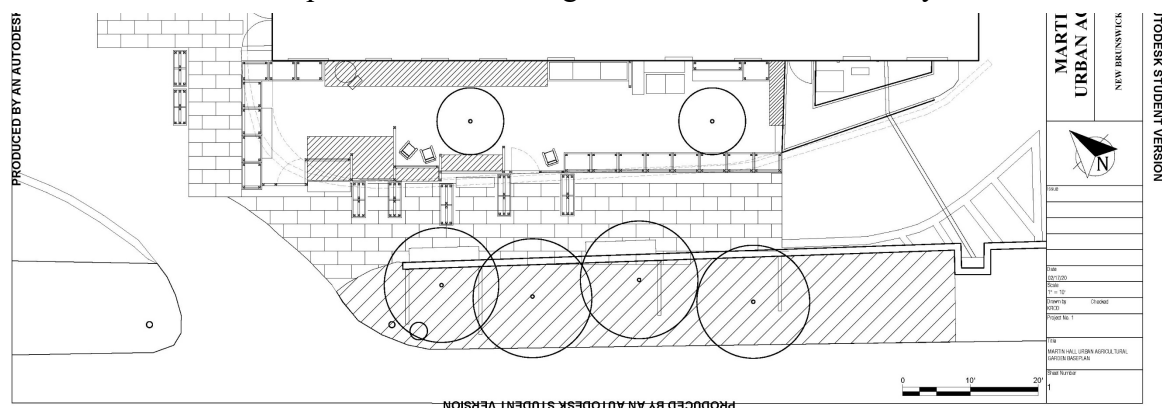


Figure 34: Katherine Rodriguez's winning submission for Urban AG Garden, Cook College campus, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 2020.

graze.

It was my intention that my pedagogy would encompass every aspect of flowers from growth, to design, to care, during that spring semester of 2020. Several undergraduate students expressed their interest to participate in this exploration with me, even though it extended beyond their responsibilities in class. My schedule was set. I planned to recruit students to help germinate unique cultivars of vegetables and flowers and then have the class plant the new seedlings. Throughout the summer, I would document the growth of the plants, the care required, and record how color and beauty contributed to the well-being of the people who encountered this garden. Through this program, I hoped that my fellow landscape architecture students would begin to see that

plants are not just circles on a planting plan but living beings that have strong effects on human beings. Then the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic hit.

As with so many people in the entire world, my plans were abruptly upended. I had received half of my seed order, with the rest of the order delayed indefinitely. The seed companies were grappling with an unprecedented hike in orders. (In early spring, seeds were the horticultural equivalent of toilet paper—once commonplace, now, due to panic buying, extremely hard to come by.) In addition, Rutgers suspended construction of the Urban AG Garden until further notice. I had half of the inventory and nowhere to go.

If there is one thing a career in working with plants teaches you, it is to expect change. As a fellow plant scholar and botanist Norbert Kühn observed, “Any notion of an immovable constancy, of stable living conditions, is as much an illusion as the hope of achieving better, happier conditions through persistent effort, appropriate intervention, and targeted change. This is because change as such is not the problem—it is even inherent in all-natural systems.”² As a professional gardener, I anticipated the fact that some plant would not survive and incorporated redundancy into my germination plan. I assumed the power of a plan could drive and control change and achieve my ultimate goal of creating a beautiful and impressive garden. However, this pandemic is a harsh reminder that humans suffer from the false belief that we manifest our own destiny. Once again, Kühn presented a new perspective: “Plants and vegetation—and horticulture as a caring treatment of the world—can serve as models for action.”³ This run on seeds may have upset my plans, but perhaps it represents a global subconscious embrace of creating this new model, that gardening, caring for a piece of this world, is a way forward. Nicki Graff, head of the Floriculture Greenhouse at Rutgers, graciously took on the job on her

own to germinate this haphazard mix of flower and vegetables.⁴ As these seeds began to change and grow, I began my assessment of what I had learned from teaching flower design.

I have discovered that, when working with plants, designer should approach landscape in a way that is similar to a painter's approach to a canvas: to create balance, drama through contrast, massing, color, and layering. Unlike the artist, our canvas is dynamic and constantly changing and our "paints" are alive. To balance creative expression while acknowledging the immutable needs of this living medium is difficult. Designing with plants requires creative expression within the parameters of a strict set of rules. In order to teach flower garden design, I created a game entitled the Edible Meadow, whose goal was to balance an acknowledgment of the plants and their needs while allowing for playful discovery and expression of balance, contrast, harmony, and drama through manipulation of color, size, shape, and texture. An aesthetic approach is very important for the Urban AG Garden given its prominent location. The foundation of both my teaching approach and the design approach of the Edible Meadow game was a personal experience working as a gardener for Cambo Gardens in Knightsbridge, Scotland, in the summer of 2018. The design methodology employed for the creation of their annual potager garden had a profound impact on me and ultimately influenced how I taught flower garden design two years later. A recounting of the playful approach to designing the potager garden at Cambo explains my commitment to a game like approach to teaching flower garden design.

Cambo Gardens' Potager

In June 2018, I traveled to Kingsbarns, Scotland, in the county Firth, to volunteer for a month of gardening at Cambo House and Estate—1,200 acres surrounded by rocky ocean



Figure 35: Cambo Gardens, Kingsbarns, Scotland, June 2018.

shore and golf courses. Elliott Forsyth, the head gardener from 2000 to 2018, was responsible for the naturalistic plantings in the main ornamental garden surrounded by thick stone walls (Figure 35). In addition, there are several separate garden spaces within the larger garden, including the North American prairie, the woodland garden, and the potager. The Cambo potager acknowledges the fact that the entirety of this walled garden was once the estate's kitchen garden. This modern potager explores the

contemporary design potential of annuals and edibles. As an annual garden, this space is redesigned each year. The responsibility of creating the potager design for 2018 was bestowed upon Camille Le Pape, a student completing her final year at the Royal

Botanical Garden Edinburgh School of Horticulture. Her goal was to create a decorative vegetable garden in the new perennial style, with a celebration of annual flowers with a naturalistic planting design approach and a celebration of color. Le Pape was inspired by Nigel Dunnett's design approach.

Dunnett, a professor of planting design and vegetation technology at the University of Sheffield as well as garden designer, has created colorful, idealized, flower-filled meadows for large places, including the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and the Barbican Centre (Figure 36) in London; and the Grey to Green project in Sheffield,

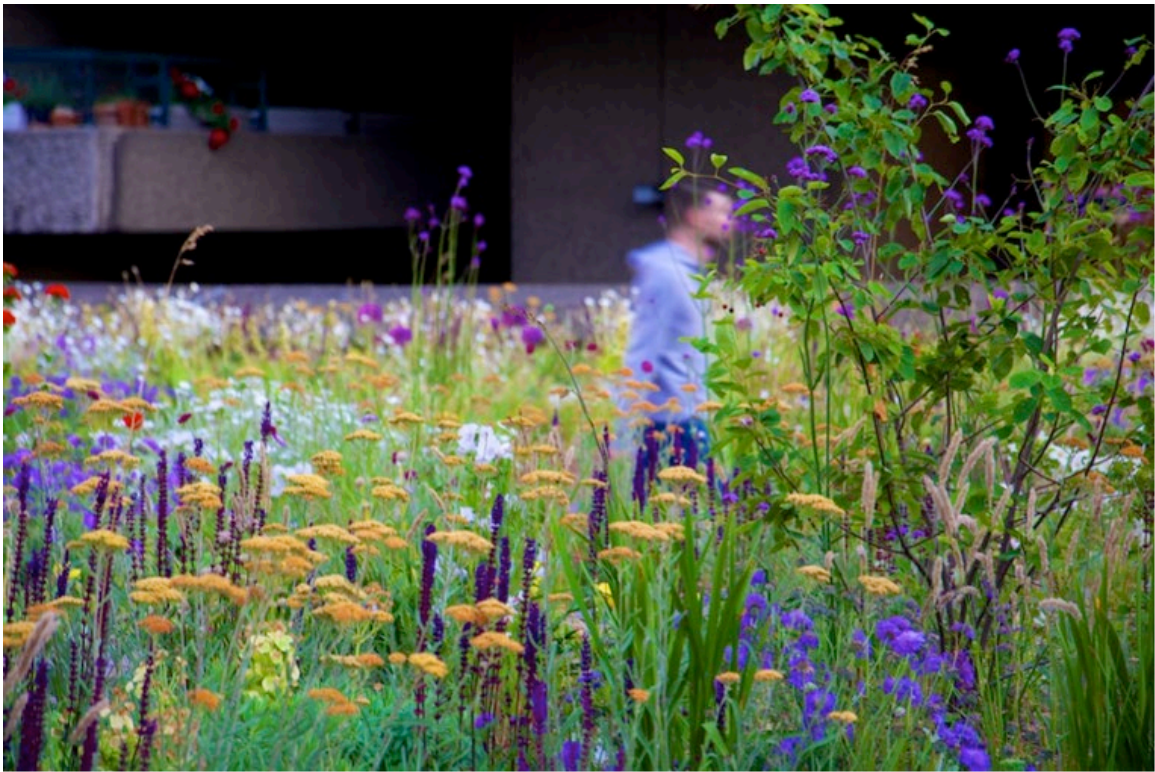


Figure 36: Meadow at the Barbican Centre, London, England, 2015.

which is the largest retrofit of an urban streetscape in the United Kingdom. Dunnett's designs look free-flowing and natural, yet his design methodology is very structured. He assigns categories to each plant—anchors, satellites, and free floaters—representing the roles that each one would play in the overall planting scheme.⁵ Each category occupies a

certain percentage of space within total area of the planting bed. The anchors, Dunnet's starting point, are the highest percentage of the plant schedule and therefore occupy the greatest area of the planting bed. The anchors are "the centres of gravity, exerting the strongest pull. Without them, the planting scheme would fall apart, so you need a clear idea about their placing."⁶ The majority of his anchor plants are ornamental grasses. The third category, the satellites, are flowering plants that orbited around the anchors. The third category is the free floaters, unique plants sprinkled throughout the garden. While the creation of the plant pallet is regimented and controlled, the final placement of plants is intuitive. There is often no planting plan in a Dunnett planting design, instead the designer simply places plants on the ground on the day of planting. Planting the ground with seedlings.

While the grad student Camille Le Pape followed Dunnett's design methodology, she added one important modification: she made it a group project. This group dynamic played out in the following manner. In the winter, the garden crew worked together to create a cohesive plant palette. Many volunteers showed up in early spring to help with the labor-intensive task of starting hundreds of plants from seeds. Le Pape and the rest of the gardeners were responsible for caring for the seedlings, and after weeks of coddling, June arrived and it was time to plant.

This is when this group activity expressed its full potential as a teaching tool.

Each gardener was assigned a planting bed and an illustrated plant schedule, as well as a



Figure 37: Gathering up the plants on the list, Cambo Gardens Greenhouse, Kingsbarns, Scotland, June 2018.

list of plants. With the list in hand, each gardener assembled the exact number of preassigned plants from the greenhouse (Figure 37). Their only other tools were a trowel and a bamboo stick premeasured at 20 cm. The instructions read like a game. For instance, the anchor category read as follows, “They will bind the bed together and create unity. They should be laid out first and planted. They will be placed in groups of three to eight. They will create rhythm

and structure in the border, so should be placed carefully, considering key views. Bounce them through—create 45° angles.”

During the planting process, a transformation occurred in each gardener assigned a particular bed. Typically, the gardeners were constantly on the move but turned contemplative, each one pondering where to place the plant and wondering what their personal slice of garden would look like (Figure 38). Designing these beds was a much more



Figure 38: Contemplative gardener, Cambo Gardens, Kingsbarns, Scotland, June 2018.

challenging task than anticipated and taking more time than they had allotted. And so, they assigned the remaining beds to apprentice gardeners, including myself. I, too, fell into a reverie, following the rules of the planting design game and imagining the outcome: *What would my bed grow into? How would I play with color, texture, and movement during the process?* I had to leave before the potager was in full bloom. However, I kept an eye on its progress through social media. By the fall, the Cambo potager was a lush, colorful, beautiful garden with vegetables and flowers intertwining (Figure 39). I wish I could have returned to the Cambo Gardens to see how different each planting bed was, while these differences would be subtle, almost invisible to most, I am sure that there were some moments where the particular combination and arrangement of plants was particularly successful.



Figure 39: Cambo Potager, Kingsbarns, Scotland, September 2018.

Empowering the team to co-create a garden followed the original mission of Elliot Forsyth, its first head gardener, who was strongly committed to teaching his crew. And as Camille Le Pape's mentor, it seems natural that Le Pape would design a communal/educational approach to creating this potager, rather than claiming sole authorship.

It is important to note that she was not without authority—her role would best be described as “first among equals.” The gardeners at Cambo readily acknowledged that Le

Pape would make the final decisions. She could replace annuals that failed with cultivars of her choosing. She categorized each plant and decided the percentage of their presence for each garden bed. She had the responsibility of coordinating the team effort and so created the rules of design. Even though she was the boss, I was struck by the profound democratization of design. By breaking the design process down into a set of rules, Le Pape created a game that guided as well as challenged her gardeners to play toward creative expression.

This approach demystified planting design, and I left Cambo recognizing its great potential as a teaching tool and vowed to continue to explore its educational possibilities. Setting parameters through preselection of a myriad of details is a great way to breakdown the complexity of designing with plants. The success of a heuristic approach is dependent on the quality of the guide. My goal was to create a systematic approach that encouraged the students to engage in the interplay: color, texture or size, and seasonality. I hoped that by creating a game entitled the “Edible Meadow” and providing a set of rules for planting could free the students to focus on a more artistic approach to design. And so I provided the students with a pre-selected plant palette, a prescribed stylistic approach, and specific methods of design inquiry. One issue that I was constantly aware of was that by creating the rules to the game, I was influencing the methods of expression. This power dynamic between the leader and a group creation presents problematic issues of authorship and entitlement between the leader and the group.

The Idea Becomes a Machine That Makes the Garden

Exploration of this complicated process led me to reexamine the work of the conceptual artist Sol LeWitt (1928–2007).⁹ LeWitt's explores the creative potential of the artist led, communal creation of a piece of art. In his seminal essay for *Artforum International Magazine* in 1967, LeWitt explained the conceptual artist's approach to form making, "When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art."¹⁰

LeWitt's wall paintings are resonant examples of his approach. LeWitt executed more than 1,200 wall paintings through diagrams and instructions handed to others to follow and render.¹¹ An example of his process is *Wall Drawing 797*, first installed in 1995 at the Mead Art Museum, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts. LeWitt instructions were: "The first drafter has a black marker and makes an irregular horizontal line near the top of the wall. Then the second drafter tries to copy it (without touching it) using a red marker. The third drafter does the same, using a yellow marker. The fourth drafter does the same using a blue marker. Then the second drafter followed by the third and fourth copies the last line drawn until the bottom of the wall is reached"¹² (Figure 40). MASS MoCA, a modern art museum in North Adams, Massachusetts, whose retrospective of LeWitt's wall drawing provides the backstory to the first installation of his *Wall Drawing 797*:

Before drawing the initial line, the head draftsman drew test lines on paper and copied them in order to see how the different lines would evolve. The line that he eventually chose to draw in black marker on the wall was inspired by the hills of the surrounding Berkshires landscape. . . . Each copy of this undulating line took the draftsman between ten and twenty minutes to execute. The process of copying takes intense focus. If draftsmen feel that they are about to lose focus and deviate

from the previous line, they take a break, making sure to start at the exact spot from which they lifted the marker.¹³

The look of *Wall Drawing 797* emanates from the choices made by the head draftsman with that first irregular black line, however the installation was created because LeWitt thought up the idea and wrote that first line, “The first drafter has a black marker and makes an irregular horizontal line near the top of the wall.”

Sol LeWitt’s questioning of the sanctity of authorship while maintaining a commitment to the centrality of the created image first drew me to his work. It was LeWitt’s passion for both rigor and randomness that ultimately inspired me. I believe that by creating a rigorous system that celebrates the unplanned, we can accept the inevitability of randomness. There is a great deal landscape architecture can learn from the conceptual art of Sol LeWitt, particularly in regards to planting design. As Norbert Kühn observes, plants “contradict the notion of spontaneity, flexibility and mobility . . .



Figure 40: Wall Drawing 797 rendered by students at University of Hartford, MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts, April 2016.

[and] require a stable environment to grow.”¹⁴ While, at the same time, we are obliged to accept that plants bring about often unanticipated change. I hoped to engage in this dialectic between rigor vs. random by gamifying garden design.

The Edible Meadow

I called my idea for the garden design the “Edible Meadow”. My goal was to create a garden design game that would make students focus on the interplay between colors, learning, and creative expression (Figure 41). Like the Cambo Gardens, the Edible Meadow was a hybrid between the Nigel Dunnet naturalist meadow motif and vegetable garden. Unlike Cambo, and acknowledging the mission of the Urban AG Garden, the Edible Meadow incorporated many more vegetables. I envisioned vegetables and flowers growing through and intertwining with tall grasses. I hoped to encourage each student to generate their own variation of the garden within set parameters.

Play:

The game - each team is given a preselected list of plants. The goal is to mix and match colors, textures, heights and types according to the rules. The rules are both specific and enigmatic.

*“Plant in three main patterns:
- small blocks of emergents (to provide rhythm)
- small blocks of composite drifts (to provide structure)
- mingled ground layer (diffusion, natural-looking) with small groups and single plants of vegetables and flowers
Like a tornado: the mix of plants evolves, repeats, brings emphasis on one plant, then another, etc.
Contrast and echo.”*



Figure 41: The Edible Meadow Game, class material created by author, February 2020.

The Plant Palette

The plant palette was divided into three categories: drifts, flowers, and vegetables (Figure 42). My personal goal when assembling this list of plants was “to do no harm,” meaning not including poisonous or invasive plants. The drift plants were the predominant species of the planting plan (Figure 43). They were to have a light airy texture and a small footprint in order to make room for the flowers and vegetables. Given the meadow motif, grasses were a predominant species in the drift category. However, given that these beds must also support the production of vegetable, only the clumping variety were chosen in order to give space for the flowers and vegetables. The second category, the vegetables, were chosen for their beauty as well as their ability to be eaten raw (Figure 44). A partial list of vegetables included peppers, cucumbers, leafy greens, and tomatoes in unique colors and cultivars. The predominant shade of these vegetables tended to be a deep purple or red, and so these tones informed my color choices for the flowers. The third category, flowers, ran the gamut of size, texture, and growth habit (Figure 45). Each flower was edible and their bloom colors worked well with the predominant deep purple of the vegetables.

The class’s plant palette listed only the common name and binomial nomenclature of each plant. The columns for size, flower color, bloom time, and growth habit were left blank. Each student was required to research and fill in these important specifications. This approach emphasized that plant design begins with a rigorous assessment of a chosen plant. A common mistake for designers working with plants is believing plants are malleable—nothing can be further from the truth. I wanted the students to begin their

design with radical honesty endeavoring to understand and accept each plant and their unique morphology. After becoming acquainted with each plant, I asked the students to select plants from each category with the following instructions: choose approximately 40 percent of your plants from the drift category and plant them in swaths or ribbons (Figure 43), vegetable should take up 30 percent of the plant selections (Figure 44), and flowers followed with 20 percent (Figure 45).

In order to test the students' analyses, I incorporated some flowers that would grow too large to fit in the raised beds. Looking back, I should have added more plants that were not the right choice for the growing conditions and other parameters of the design. This would have added to the complexity of the selection process and further emphasized the importance of picking the right plant for the right place.

Quantity	Cat.	Binomial nomenclature	Common name	Cultivar	Family	Height	Spread	Spacing	Sun S/PS/S	Moisture D/M/W	Soils	Deer y/n/m	Native y/n	Remarks:
	d	<i>Agastache pallidiflora</i>	Hyssop	Rosemint'	Lamiaceae									
	d	<i>Agastache rupestris</i>	Hyssop	'Apache Sunset'	Lamiaceae									
	d	<i>Anemone majus</i>	Queen Anne's Lace	Green mist'	Apiaceae									
	d	<i>Lagurus ovatus</i>	Bunny tails		Poaceae									
	d	<i>Milium nebulosum</i>	Feather Grass	savannah'	Poaceae									
	d	<i>Schizanthus litoralis</i>	Little Bluestem	standing ovation'	Poaceae									
	d	<i>Sorghastrum nutans</i>	Indian Grass		Poaceae									
	d	<i>Stipa tenuissima</i>	Mexican feathergrass		Poaceae									
	e	<i>Allium Giganteum</i>	Ornamental Onion	Globmaster	Amaryllidaceae									
	e	<i>Cynurus cardunculus</i>	Cardoon		Asteraceae									
	e	<i>Helianthus</i>	Sunflower	Claret	Asteraceae									
	e	<i>Phlomis tuberosa</i>	Jerusalem Sage	Amazone'	Lamiaceae									
	e	<i>Verbena bonariensis</i>	Jerusalem Sage	Common	Verbenae									
	e	<i>Amaranthus cruentus</i>	Amaranth	Golden Giant'	Amaranthaceae									
	f	<i>Passiflora coccinea</i>	Passion Flower		Passifloraceae									
	f	<i>Pelargonium graveolens</i>	Scented Geraniums	Designers choice	Geraniaceae									
	f	<i>Borago officinalis</i>	Borago	Blue	Boragaceae									
	f	<i>Calendula officinalis</i>	Calendula	Neon'	Asteraceae									
	f	<i>Centauria cyanea</i>	Cornflower	Red Boy'	Asteraceae									
	f	<i>Cosmos bipinnata</i>	Cosmos	Designerschoice	Asteraceae									
	f	<i>Lavandula angustifolia</i>	Lavender	"Munstead"	Lamiaceae									
	f	<i>Nasturtium</i>	Nasturtium	Designers choice	Tropaeaceae									
	f	<i>Salvia officinalis</i>	Salvia	Designer Choice	Lamiaceae									
	f	<i>Taraxacum officinale</i>	French Marigold	Signet Paprika	Asteraceae									
	f	<i>Zinnia elegans</i>	Zinnia	Benary Giant Lime	Asteraceae									
	h/v	<i>Ocimum basilicum</i>	Basil	Rutgers Variety	Lamiaceae									
	h/v	<i>Origanum vulgare</i>	Oregano	Designers Choice	Lamiaceae									
	h/v	<i>Salvia officinalis</i>	Sage	Designers Choice	Lamiaceae									
	h/v	<i>Salvia rosmarinus</i>	Rosemary	Hardy Hill'	Lamiaceae									

Figure 42: The plant palette for the Edible Meadow, Planting Design Course, Flower Design class, February 2020.

Drifts 40% of the potager are planted in drifts. The drifts bind the bed together. They could be laid out first and placed carefully considering key views and backdrops.

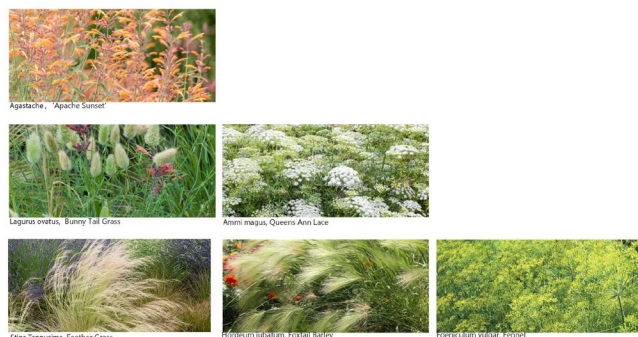


Figure 43: Class material for drifts, rendered by author, February 2020

Vegetables

30% of the potager are vegetables. They are chosen for color and unique form as well as taste. Some climb, some tumble and some stand proud. Kale and Collard greens extend the season to winter.

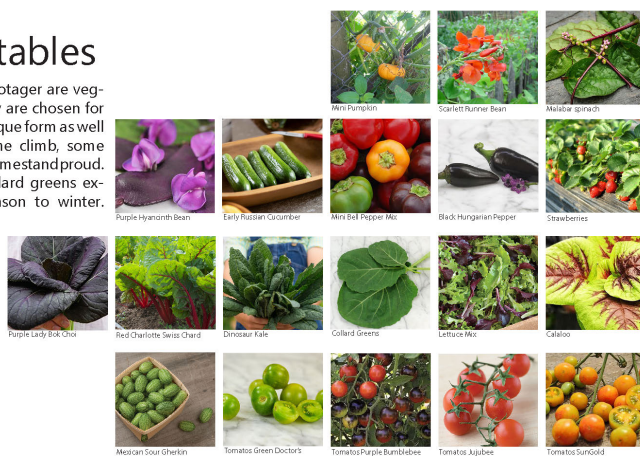


Figure 44: Class material for vegetables, rendered by author, February 2020.

Flowers

20% of the potager are flowers. All are edible. The flowers provide the opportunity to round out a color palette with harmonic or complimentary colors.

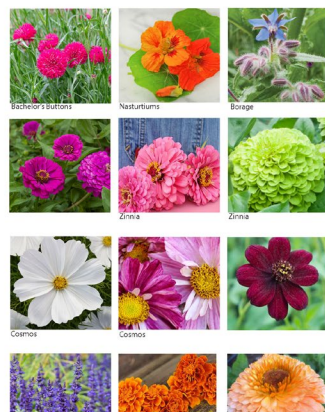


Figure 45: Class material for flowers, rendered by author, February 2020.

The Color Wheel

My flower design section focused on color and encouraged students to recognize that color is a resource by breaking it down into teachable components such as the basics of color theory. We reviewed the color wheel and how to achieve harmony by choosing colors on the same side of the color wheel or intensity by choosing colors from the



Figure 46: Vincent van Gogh's Self-Portrait as a Painter (1887) and Chevreul's color wheel (1861), collage by author.

opposite side of the color wheel. In order to encourage students to see color the way an artist sees colors, I overlaid the color wheel on various paintings to demonstrate that artists follow rules in order to achieve the desired effect, such as *Self-Portrait as a Painter* by Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890) (Figure 46).

Each student began their individual design by creating their own color palette. The color palette influenced their choice of plants. They were required to keep a bloom time chart so that they would understand what colors would appear when, and this insight further refined their color palette. They were then required to render a traditional bloom schedule as well as an abstract image that communicated something about their combination of colors. Below is an example of a final board with these renderings (Figure 47).

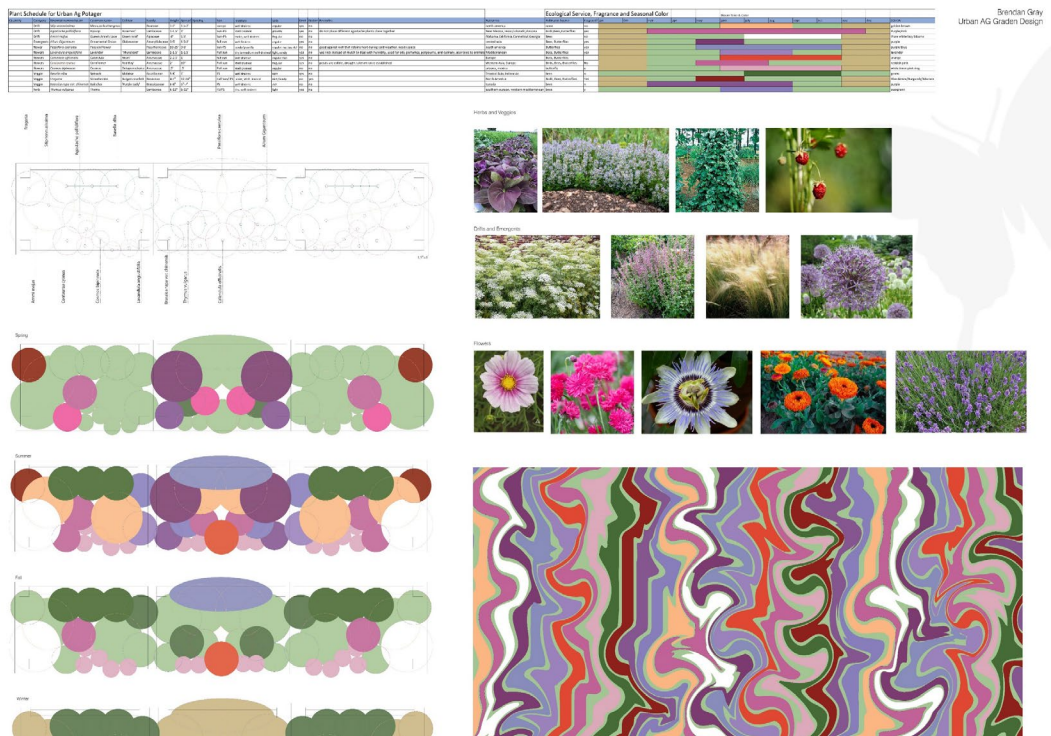


Figure 47: Brendan Gray's final board for the Urban AG Garden design, February 2020.

The Three-Dimensional Movable Model

One of the greatest challenges in teaching planting design is the dependence on the plan view. While the planting plan is the most effective way to communicate a planting design for installation, drawing a series of circles from a bird's-eye view does not adequately illustrate the complexity of the planted landscape. Given that we experience the vegetal world with two feet on the ground, it is important for designers to see a landscape with as if both feet were on the ground. While the section is often utilized to illustrate this view, a traditional section cannot capture the dynamic of moving through a three-dimensional space. In addition to moving through space, planting designers must learn how to move through time, envisioning how plants change from day to day, month to month and year to year. Although computer animation can simulate movement through a landscape, it is time consuming and rudimentary in portrayal of plant materials. Landscape architects still depend upon a model to simulate the visceral immediacy of a three-dimensional designed space. My goal in creating the Three-Dimensional Movable Model was to use the model for plant design. I believe that creating a model for planting design will help landscape architects to envision their creation from the point of view of the visitor of that space.

I created a template for the Three-Dimensional Movable Model for the class to follow. My intention was to focus their creative expression on the rendering their chosen plant material. Each person in the entire class was required to follow the provided construction plans in order to create three identical raised beds complete with trellises. I also instructed that they create a scaled human being, as the height of the raised bed and trellis was taller than an average person. The model must be created in such a way to move around the plant tokens on a game board. For the "Edible Meadow," they filled

their boxes were with rice and attached their rendered plant material on a simple armature I had designed for them. This armature was made out of bamboo sticks with a disc-shaped foot that was measured out to ensure that each plant was planted eighteen inches apart.

Each student was responsible for creating a two-dimensional scaled image of their chosen plant palette. They employed many techniques for rendering including computer aided renderings with Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop as well as hand drawing. Each plant piece was then attached to the stick and stuck into the rice (Figure 48).

It was my hope that three-dimensional movable models would encourage students

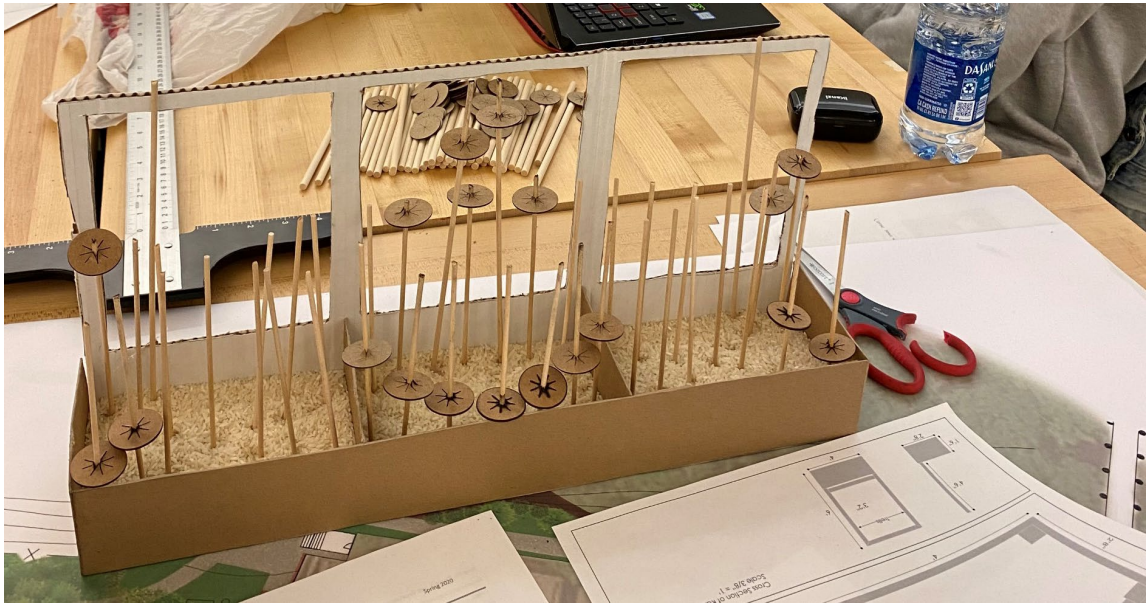


Figure 48: Preliminary setup for three-dimensional movable model.

to move “plants” around and experiment with combinations of color and size; however, their models were in pristine condition. As a final deliverable, these models displayed rendering skills and personal style. These miniaturized gardens charmed the clients, but did not engage the students or encourage experimentation. This is evident in the fact that the majority of the planting designs were somewhat conservative: beds arranged their

plants from the lowest in the front to highest in the back, plant species distributed equally throughout the three raised beds (Figure 49, 50, and 51).



Figure 49: Design and model by Jason Wong.



Figure 50: Design and model by Mackenzie Gilvey.



Figure 51: Design and model by Collin Rieger.

The three-dimensional movable model has potential as a teaching tool for planting design with further modifications. For instance, I believe that the class should create plant material together. They should all use these shared renderings to create their designs. I envision that this activity would occur early on in the design process, and connect to filling out the plant palette. Placing responsibility on the group to decide how to best represent each plant would strengthen the entire class's ability to see each plant clearly. Each individual student would then draw upon a stock of pre-made plant game pieces to create their designs. The motivation for the class drawing creating the same plant game pieces will create a shared vocabulary thereby making it easier to assess the students' ability to express through plants.

Another modification is encouraging the students' adoption of a more abstract depiction of plants. Abstraction could dissuade a tendency toward detailed miniaturization. Slashes of purple, daubs of orange, wisps of green could help students

assess the effects of the juxtaposition of color and texture, massing and fragrance. It would allow them the opportunity to approach planting design the way an artist approaches a canvas. One way to encourage this is by setting a challenging time limit for the rendering of the plant pieces. Creating these renderings quickly would also devalue the object thereby encouraging students to move the plants pieces around. Messing them up would not be a tragedy unlike the more carefully drawn pieces. Other modifications that I would like to consider are sculpting plant pieces because a sculpted piece fully represents a three-dimensional space. The sculpted piece could also express texture and transparency. Transparency is particularly important as it can show horizontal layering as well as vertical layering.

Perhaps the greatest modification is to guarantee that each student creates a scaled human being. One of my greatest disappointments in this three-dimensional model-making exercise was that not one student created a scaled human for their model (even though it was a part of the rubric). In the future, creating the human to scale would be the first assignment. Perhaps creating a human scale for a model of a raised bed seemed superfluous. Nothing can be further from the truth. Planting design is design at a human scale. A difference of inches can significantly affect the experience of a space. Planting design can physically turn a visitor's head. Eyeline is very important, especially in a project as intimate as the Urban AG Garden: planting flowers that tower above a visitor provide a very different experience than planting a flower that blooms at eye level. A simple rendering of a human to scale can help remind the student of the fact that planting design is not about filling in circles or decorating a landscape but creating a haptic experience for human participants.

SARS-CoV-2 and the Community Garden

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, because of the global pandemic I was unable to fulfill the original vision of the “Edible Meadow.” By the spring of 2020, the full impact of the disruption came to a head: the flowers and vegetable Nicki Graff grew were reaching full maturity and had to be planted in the ground; yet, the Urban AG Garden was on hold for the entirety of the growing season of 2020. Luckily, after calling around, I found a home for these flowers and vegetable at the Hawthorne Avenue Community Garden in Newark, New Jersey. As an arm of the Newark Conservancy, the mission of this large urban agricultural garden is to grow hundreds of pounds of fresh vegetables that are distributed to food pantries and soup kitchens throughout Newark. However, the head farmer felt deeply that flowers and color are also provided an important service to the community. As serendipity would have it, he had voiced his desire for more flowers the day before I e-mailed the Newark Conservancy. What he stated to me is “flowers are life.” And so, on a very hot day in July, he and I planted the flowers grown by Nicki Graff at each corner of the Hawthorne Avenue Community garden (Figure 52). It was a haphazard design, using what we had on hand and planting in a very loose manner.

I learned something about planting design on that day. The head farmer planted in a straight line against the fence while I planted in carefully angled planting groups, utilizing the Nigel Dunnett strategy of creating a naturalistic design (Figure 53). The straight lines against the fence was the better choice. The head gardener thought about how these plants would be seen by the neighborhood. By planting flowers, such as the orange zinnias right up against the fence, the flowers eventually grew through and



Figure 52: Flowers at Hawthorne Avenue Community Garden, Newark, New Jersey, August 2020.

reached out beyond the fence and toward the passerby. Many people noticed these flowers and thanked Hawthorne Avenue garden for the offering up flowers for the neighborhood (Figure 53).

I hope that in the future I am afforded the opportunity to create flower gardens specifically for Hawthorn Avenue Community Garden. I would like to explore applying the principles of the “Edible Meadow” once again and initiate another “idea that becomes the machine that makes the garden.” I believe that a better garden would be created if I worked toward providing creative agency and guidance to gardeners in the community. As the initiator of this idea, I would maintain the right to make the first and last decisions, carefully choosing plant selection, creating a schedule, and organizing some design protocol. The team would be responsible for creating a group design methodology and each individual would have a section of the garden to design on their own. My hope is that at least some of them would follow every step of the garden making process from

design, to germinating the seeds, to planting, caring for their flowers and vegetable and harvesting. Imagine this as an annual tradition, each year, a new flower garden is created celebrating some aspect of the community, or the classroom as a record of what was important in that year.



Figure 53: Zinnias through the chain link fence. Hawthorne Avenue Community Garden, Newark, New Jersey, August 2020.

Notes

1. I want to take this opportunity to thank Holly Nelson who provided me with support as well as time and space in her Planting Design class to teach flower design.
2. Kühn, "The Relationship between Plants," 147.
3. Kühn, "The Relationship between Plants," 147.
4. I want to thank Nicki Graff for her willingness to plant my seeds.
5. Nigel Dunnett, *Naturalistic Planting Design: The Essential Guide* (London: Filbert Press, 2019), 123.
6. Dunnett, *Naturalistic Planting Design*, 123
7. Camille Le Pape, *Potager–Emergents* (author's copy, 2017).
8. The apprentices were given weekly plant ID tests where they had to memorize twenty plants in common name, binomial nomenclature and botanical family.
9. I want to thank Kate John Alder, who encouraged me to write a paper about this Sol LeWitt for Landscape Case Studies.
10. Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Art Forum*, Summer 1967.
<http://arteducation.sfu-kras.ru/files/documents/lewitt-paragraphs-on-conceptual-art1.pdf>.
11. MASS MoCA has had a longstanding retrospective of his work that comprises 105 of LeWitt's large-scale wall drawings. See "Sol LeWitt, 1928–2007," massmoca.org, <https://massmoca.org/sol-lewitt/>.
12. Drawn by Jeffrey Howington, Andrea Latvis, Peggy Soung and Lisa Yurwit
<https://massmoca.org/event/walldrawing797/>.
13. "Sol LeWitt: A Wall Drawing Retrospective," massmoca.org, <https://massmoca.org/sol-lewitt/>.
14. Kühn, "The Relationship between Plants," 145.

Conclusion

This thesis begins and ends with flower gardens in Newark, New Jersey. Each bookend—the Wildflower Meadow on Broad Street and the Hawthorne Avenue Community Garden—exist because the gardeners believed in the transformative power of flowers. Mia Zhang’s rampant colorful blooms defied property lines. This was a buoyant reclamation of a chronically abandoned lot. These flowers questioned the legitimacy of the property owner’s power to keep it ugly and proclaimed the community’s right for beauty. Hawthorne Avenue Community Garden head gardener’s conviction that “flowers give life,” expands the definition of what it means to feed a community.

Growing flowers is an act both generous and defiant. In Newark, given the great challenges facing this city, flowers are often dismissed as frivolous. As shown in chapter one, this dismissal of flowers is shared by many in landscape architecture and evident in the consistent portrayal of landscapes in a monochromatic green, gray, or brown color palette. Juried competitions, where the parameters of excellence are set, reiterates this prejudice against flowers which manifests itself throughout the profession from the educational system to professional form making. The question arises, what does the profession miss by dismissing the flower? A narrow definition of professional excellence diminishes opportunities to explore other options, multiplicity, and unscripted possibilities. I hope that this thesis shows that flowers are not frivolous but vital. As discussed in chapter two, flowers are emotional conduits for the community as well as important habitat native insect and bird population. Turenscape’s epic floral landscapes demonstrate Lady Bird Johnson’s maxim, “Where flowers bloom, so does hope,” can apply to a vast urban scale.

These are dire times, few would argue the need for hope. Landscape architecture's central mission is to create better worlds. As designers of public outdoor spaces, landscape architects arbitrate between public and private, the individual and the state, the built form and living systems. And it is because of this ability to negotiate between two often disparate parties that this profession is uniquely positioned to help resolve some of the world's most pressing problems, especially issues surrounding the environment and justice. However, these problems are too complex to suggest that profound change can happen through a traditional approach. For the sake of progress, the profession must evolve, perhaps disassociate with the title "architect," and its limiting dynamic of the sole author and stop pulling away from what the successful landscape professional truly is: a hybrid. To hybridize in horticultural terms means to combine the strongest traits of one species with the strongest traits of another to create a new whole, each part contributing equally and growing together at the same time. The hybrids in landscape architecture are: designer + plants and/or designer + biota and/or designer + community.

Flowers provide the opportunity to experiment and evolve new approaches to design. Their life cycles, a constant revolution from senescence to rebirth and back again, encourage thinking and designing in systems and experiences rather than completed product. By foregrounding flowers in landscape design, the profession can engage in mutability, stewardship, and aesthetics—concepts central in the quest for addressing issues of environmental sustainability and social justice.

My pedagogical approach, the "Edible Meadow", as presented in chapter three used flower garden design to reconsider the importance of the sole author. As a gamified design methodology, the "Edible Meadow" rerouted the information and creative

exchange between teacher and student. I created the rules of this game specifically to help students see flowers and their needs as immutable. In the process, we created two new hybrids: student + teacher, designer + flowers. In the future, I hope to create other planting design games for individuals in different communities. I believe that this approach could help us create more resilient spaces.

I am grateful to the work of Sol LeWitt, who demonstrated that profound creative expression thrives within rigorous parameters. I believe that sustainability, resiliency, and inspiration occur in this this sweet spot found between rigor and randomness. Nigel Dunnet, whose horticultural design work proves that intuitive creative expression creates extraordinarily beautiful spaces upon a strong foundation and a good set of rules. My goal is to take the concept of the “Edible Meadow” and expand upon a conceptual art/gamification approach to create a space of continual place making. Because I believe that the greatest challenge we face is moving towards a better future in the face of constant change. The discipline of rigor while expecting the random can help create these new systems. And there is no greater teacher of the principle’s rigor and randomness than the flower.

Weeds have overtaken Zhang’s meadow and soon a killing frost will end this season’s flower garden at Hawthorne Avenue. That is the nature of flowers: they eventually disappear. Flowers symbolize hope and life because they are mutable and fleeting. Growing flowers reminds us that stability is a fallacy. The cycle of life and death is inevitable. Flowers and hope and life not only require constant care but a commitment to reinvention because things fall apart.

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