Landscape architectural academic William A. Mann (USA) provided this definition of landscape in his text for students: 1. The noun landscape evolved from the Dutch landschap and the German landschaft, meaning a place that is both human-altered or inhabited and surrounded by forest or WILDERNESS.  The overlays of meaning and significance that can be laid on 'gardens' may be different from those associated with 'landscapes'. In recent times two works have been published that explore the 'theoretical' gap concerning gardens and their creation, meaning and use: Moore, Charles W., William J. Mitchell, and William Turnbull Jnr (1989), The Poetics of Gardens.; and Francis, Mark and Randolph T. Hester Jr, eds. (1990), The Meaning of Gardens: Idea, Place and Action. A renewed concern for meaning in landscape architecture—and the ways by which meaning can be achieved—resurfaced during the early 1980s after an absence in professional publications of almost half a century. This essay examines the sources of significance in landscape design and the possibilities—and limits—of designing meaning into landscape architecture. Six approaches currently employed are discussed: the Neoarchaic, the Genius of the Place, the Zeitgeist, the Vernacular Landscape, the Didactic and the Theme Garden. Meaning, it is argued, results less from the effects of a particular design than from the collective associations accrued over time. Questioning the absence of a more active pursuit for personal pleasure in the landscape, the author suggests that pleasure could help link individual experience with a broader cultural grounding for creating significance.

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Must Landscapes Mean?: Approaches to Significance in Recent Landscape Architecture

Marc Treib

Abstract

A renewed concern for meaning in landscape architecture—and the ways by which meaning can be achieved—resurfaced during the early 1980s after an absence in professional publications of almost half a century. This essay examines the sources of significance in landscape design and the possibilities—and limits—of designing meaning into landscape architecture. Six approaches currently employed are discussed: the Neoarchaic, the Genius of the Place, the Zeitgeist, the Vernacular Landscape, the Didactic and the Theme Garden. Meaning, it is argued, results less from the effects of a particular design than from the collective associations accrued over time. Questioning the absence of a more active pursuit for personal pleasure in the landscape, the author suggests that pleasure could help link individual experience with a broader cultural grounding for creating significance.

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