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HERRENHAUSEN SYMPOSIUM  
HERRENHAUSEN PALACE, HANNOVER

## SUMMARY REPORT

FROM GARDEN ART TO LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE –  
TRADITIONS, RE-EVALUATIONS, AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

Organizers: Leibniz Universität Hannover, Herrenhäuser Gärten, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Gartenkunst und Landschaftsarchitektur (DGGL), European Garden Heritage Network (EGHN), Schlösser und Gärten Deutschland, Volkswagen Foundation

These days, in times of ever more visible threats to the nature around us, landscape architects have an increasingly important task: Their profession – in a nutshell – ensures the right balance between intervention in nature and its preservation – both in urban contexts as well as in the regional countryside. But does their brief stop at what boils down to a technical task? In the history of the profession, which was once called garden art, were there not primarily creative demands and criteria? The international symposium "From Garden Art to Landscape Architecture", conceived and organized by the Leibniz Universität Hannover, Herrenhäuser Gärten, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Gartenkunst und Landschaftsarchitektur (DGGL), the European Garden Heritage Network (EGHN), Schlösser und Gärten Deutschland and the Volkswagen Foundation, set out to explore the professional self-image of landscape architecture from a broad temporal and geographic perspective. The focus was on the ever-present – yet constantly changing – tension between socio-political and ecological demands as well as on questions of design and art. Such questions influence not only the self-image of the profession, but also the field of (university) education, aspects of possible interdisciplinary cooperation, and the task of communicating information to the public.

**Old dichotomies**

In his introductory lecture on the history of concepts, **Hubertus Fischer**, Leibniz Universität Hannover, explained that, in a historical perspective, the contrast between the artistic and the architectural and landscape-planning aspects of the profession was always evident. But perhaps what separates theory is

already united in practice? – “We should start with what we need”. According to **Anette Freytag**, Rutgers University, addressing today's urgent tasks helps to overcome the often obstructive historical dichotomy. The central task remains an urban planning that is to be developed from open space, from the smallest to the largest scale, but not least in global agglomerations. Tradition, though, still remains important as it offers a variety of paragons: From Lenné's Potsdam beautification plan, which considered the entire framework of rivers, roads, soil conditions and regional culture, to Adolphe Alphand's comprehensive Parisian green design, to modern-day actors such as Kathryn Gustafson and Dieter Kienast. What is important is a comprehensive approach that also pursues human experience on a deeper level.

The relevance of historical aspects was also emphasized by **Yichi Zhang**, University of Technology Sydney, on developments in China; **Sonja Dümpelmann**, Harvard University, on developments in the USA; and **Makoto Akasaka**, Chiba University, on Japan. In their case analyses, they illustrated the global influence of European garden traditions in the 19th century – both theoretically and aesthetically. Examples ranged from the renewed image of the traditional Chinese garden to the designer self-image sometimes created by American landscape architects, whereby it should be emphasized that in this case the term “designer” served as an upgrading differentiation from the architect as a businessman.

### **Profession with a future**

A symposium which, as in Herrenhausen, brings together important players from different continents is also an important platform for early-career scientists to present their current research projects. The seven projects discussed ranged from studies on the appreciation of urban greens on the part of the population of Beirut, the historical influence of German landscape architects in Portugal and the installation of lighting concepts in Hanover, to the discovery of something like an early form of “tree sculptures”, the so-called “cathedrals of trees” in Great Britain. A side note, almost all of the young researchers were women: Are we witnessing a trend, perhaps?

### **Future Challenges**

**Karsten Jørgensen**, Norwegian University of Life Sciences, emphasized the social dimension of landscape architecture, which is often underestimated in current practice. “Our future commons” would be the appropriate approach to tackle today's challenges – whether in megacities, slums or sensitive neighborhoods. It is generally accepted that political guidelines work in this approach – the right to participate in shaping the city, the right to live in a healthy environment, and not least the right to have access to free public green spaces. The future tasks section also included a critical analysis of the current

situation regarding education in the field of landscape architecture by **Stefanie Hennecke**, University of Kassel. Her overview of educational locations, study programs and curricula offered the picture of an increasing multiplication of tasks since the Bologna reform and of a field of tasks that was diversified down to the smallest module, which could not decide between specialization, basic training and interdisciplinarity and, moreover, was characterized by a loss of social and political responsibility. Her plea: to give the students more freedom in choosing their specializations and to reduce “schooling tendencies”. **Philip Belesky** from RMIT University, Australia, presented new digital processes within the design process of landscape architecture, the aim of which is no longer merely to speed things up, but increasingly a "human-machine-dialogue".

### Where's the art going?

The relationship of landscape architects to contemporary art was the subject of an interesting panel discussion in the evening. The leitmotif remained the question of how genuinely aesthetic aspects could be integrated into the changed brief of landscape architects. While **Stefan Schweizer**, Stiftung Schloss und Park Benrath, depicted the history of the profession as a way of continuously increasing rank in relation to the classical arts, the cultural scholar **Michaela Ott**, Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg, took a look at the Land Art artists of the 1960s, whose works in America's desert landscapes aimed at a sublime visual effect. More recent developments have been shaped by the adoption of the work concept and an often processual and participatory concept of art. **Tulga Beyerle**, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden/Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg, introduced the design profession, which likewise today is no longer primarily oriented towards industrial use, but emphasizes social integration. Whether such aspects could make it possible to gain perspectives for a stronger cooperation between art and landscape architecture remained an open question. According to **Udo Weilacher** of the Technical University of Munich, a purely technical orientation, no matter how ecologically necessary it may be, is certainly not enough to make the aesthetic qualities of landscape designs comprehensible. As long as art is restricted to “decorative salon art”, both society and landscape architecture are in danger.

The discussion continued the next day with lectures in the section "(Garden)Artist, Designer or Both". **Christophe Girot**, ETH Zurich, pointed out that the number of artists/landscape architects whose work combines both was not so small as presumed, mentioning, among others, Carl Andre, Peter Walker, Bernard Tschumi in Paris of the 1980s, Dieter Kienast, Daniel Buren or Olafur Eliasson, who placed blocks of ice on the city squares on the occasion of the 2017 Paris Climate Conference in order to demonstrate the melting

process in the Polar Regions. There is also Maya Linn with her “wave field” and most recently the Frenchman Pierre Huyghe with his combinations of nature and high-tech. They all testify to the high level of interest shown by contemporary artists in the theme of a changing nature. As "garden artists" at the intersection of art and landscape architecture, **Mario Schjetnan** reported on work and experiences in urban park projects in Mexico, **Monika Gora** on projects in Sweden, and **Kamel Louafi** on his work in Berlin. Monika Gora presented a work that perhaps most immediately demonstrated the diversity of approaches: In northern Sweden, within sight of a remote lake, she installed "two piers" on a meadow slope, long footbridges that seem to lead into nowhere. They have neither a decorative nor an obviously practical meaning. On treading them, however, they convey an intense perception of the lonely landscape and the human presence in it. Art can, if it goes well, broaden the horizon in an immediate sense. Kamel Louafi, Berlin, is concerned with strengthening the urban figure – with works that tend to emphasize the site-specific character. His lecture also addressed an aspect that is otherwise ignored: The experience gained with his various gardens for Expo 2000 Hannover also made clear the rivalry between the professions: Occasionally, according to Louafi, renowned artists use the work of landscape architects as a mere framework for their own, prominently placed objects.

The West Midlands around Birmingham was the heartland of England's industrialization in the 19th century, notorious for its smoking chimneys and still bearing the scars today. **Kathryn Moore**, a professor of Birmingham City University, presented at the end of the symposium and as a look into the future the ambitious attempt to develop this region into England's 16th national park. The aim is for people to feel their identity more strongly through the landscape, rivers, topographies, plantations or agricultural land and less through the industrial past. That this broad task also offers opportunities for artistic accents to play a role in the awareness-raising process is entirely possible: Whether in the form of a personal artistic direction or in the form of cooperation. Seen in this light, the symposium certainly opened up perspectives for the profession to expand its scope.

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