

# *Landscape artists:*

## *Between land, art and landscape architecture*

- with examples from Maya Lin, Lars Vilks, Monika Gora and Martha Schwartz

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Fig. 1 - Monika Gora's Jimmys in Stadsparken, Katrineholm.

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# Abstract

Art has always been one of the most indeterminate notions. All the different art forms make it even harder to define and comprehend. But at the same time it is something that often gives and rarely takes, evokes emotions, gives structure and meaning to our world. Art of public spaces usually means works on sites with open public access. The term 'site-specific' is often mentioned in this paper and refers to both – art installations on given sites and art that is also the design of the site itself, which is one of the main aspects of land art and is often applied to landscape architecture. Landscape architecture is technical work and a form of art on its own, but this cannot always be seen in practice and sometimes it may even seem like there is a big gap between the two fields. However, some artists have a way of bridging this gap and uniting them into one whole. With focus on Maya Lin's *Eleven Minute Line*, Lars Vilks's *Nimis* and *Arx*, Monika Gora's and Martha Schwartz's work, this paper attempts to contribute to uncovering of what lies behind those ideas and how this bridge is built. Mentioned landscape architects have a special relation to art; this leaves a big impact on their work, which is imbued with modernity, humour and magic.

*"We live at a time in which the world, i.e. our environment, can be experienced from new dimensions... It is now time that we realise that every grave that is dug, every road that is constructed, every field that is converted into a building-site, represents a formal change in our environment, whose implications transcend by far their purely practical, functional meaning..." (Gerry Schum in Kastner, 1998: 283)*

# Introduction

## Background

Landscape architecture can be defined as the shaping and design of outdoor and public spaces striving to achieve aesthetic, environmental and socio-behavioural balance. It means applying artistic and scientific principles to the research, planning, design and management of both ‘natural’ and built environments. The work involves analysis of the landscape, which means systematic investigation of existing ecological situation, geological conditions and social circumstances. This research evolves into design interventions that aim to result in the desired outcome – environments that serve useful, aesthetic and enjoyable purposes (WP1).

Landscape architect’s work is not easy; it means combining so many different worlds and still getting something logical and useful out of it. At the very beginning of our studies we were taught that nothing would ever be simple concerning our work. The first exercise we had to do in our design course at home was to draw a garden for a house in the suburbs, which would please the needs of the client. In the next days we all brought different drawings, but most of them included some tree lines, shrubs, flowers in simply shaped flower beds, benches or sitting areas, lamps along the paths, maybe a tool shed or a barbeque... and that was about it. The teacher told us nobody succeeded, that our gardens are boring and lifeless, so we needed to redo the exercise, this time with a little more imagination. The second time around, some of them were better, more interesting, some were too ‘crazy’ and

dysfunctional, and others were more or less the same as the day before – still lacking creativity. So this way our process of endless weighing began: form and function, aesthetics and usability, feasible or astonishing... combining all into a creation that will be of use and benefit for its users, functionally and aesthetically. With this story I only wanted to outline one of the main challenges in the work of a landscape architect in my opinion. It has to be interesting, extraordinary and carry a hint of art, but still fulfil all functionalities and serve its purpose. I see it as art with function.

As Martha Schwartz argues, by just marching along and doing what everybody expects us to do, we will never bring anything of interest and value into the world.

*“This profession is on the verge of another transformation, which will be leveraged through the efforts of the new landscape artists. I know that collectively we are changing the way people see and use the landscape, and how we learn to live in balance with our natural environment. Ultimately, it has to be an environment that we humans cherish, respect and can thrive in, while wishing to have a life of purpose and meaning. Our need for meaning, truth and beauty are fundamental requirements that many of our landscapes must fulfil.”*  
(Martha Schwartz in Richardson, 2008: 8)

## *The objective*

Through this essay I would like to contribute to exploring the idea of art in landscape architecture, how significant the two fields are for one another and in what way they are related. What role does public art or land art play in the field of landscape architecture? I would also like to deepen my understanding about their differences and discuss where the line between art and landscape architecture might be. More importantly I will focus on how they can be combined in order to achieve more extraordinary results in landscape design and if this can contribute to successful landscapes and avoiding dully organised environments, which is also one of the problems in landscape architecture. To try and shed light on this I will investigate landscape artists, who have their own way of uniting aesthetical and functional aspects, but I will focus on leading thoughts, ideas and notions behind their work.

## *Method*

With the help of literature on the topic of landscape artists, art, land art and landscape architecture combined with other related theoretical and empirical studies I will, through this essay, deepen my understanding about the idea of art in landscape architecture - its role and importance for it. The paper begins with shortly exploring the concept of public art and art in landscape architecture and then moves further to land art and investigating different landscape artists and architects, like Martha Schwartz, Monika Gora, Maya Lin etc., with focus on some of their projects and ideas behind it. These artists, in my opinion, have a good way of combining form and function. I will also try to contact some of them and ask a few questions about their work, what inspires them and what the ideas behind some of their projects are. After this part the paper will conclude with a discussion about what art means for landscape architecture, how they are intertwined, how they can benefit from one another and if this can solve any of the problems concerning lack of creativity in landscape architecture.

This is mainly a theoretical study, investigating the idea of art in landscape architecture. As a basis to begin my investigation the following books were studied: Landscape Artists and Landscape Art by Francisco Asensio Cerver, Art, Space and the City by Malcolm Miles, Land Art by Ben Tufnell, Between Landscape Architecture and Land Art by Udo Weilacher and other sources.



# Art, space and landscape

## *Art and public art*

As Miles (1997: 5) writes, the term 'public art' generally describes works commissioned for sites of open public access; the term 'site-specific' is also used, both for art made for installation on a given site, and art that is the design of the site itself. In some cases a work is made in a small edition or can later be reproduced and sited in more than one place; an example of this are Monika Gora's Jimmys, but I will return to it later.

Works of art have the power to take us on a journey; they may intrigue our thoughts and stimulate our imagination. They can make us feel like we entered a new dimension and provide insight into another world, time, place or way of thinking. I believe that this notion is especially strong when speaking about land art or landscape architecture, because these works will never come to a nearby museum, they need to be seen and experienced on site, individually and not massively or one after the other, like in a gallery for example, where you need to concentrate on hundreds of artworks in a single day. Another particularity is that these artworks are exposed to everyone, not only to certain groups of people that are interested in art and culture; they are encountered by very diverse publics, who often have no contact with art in galleries and museums (Miles, 1997: 14).

Considering other art forms, public art is not as wanted or desired among curators, dealers and critics; Miles calls it a 'marginal area' within art practice. The reason for this is that it usually cannot be reproduced, bought or sold, put in a galle-

ry or be used in an exhibition; it does not have the autonomy of contemporary art and it usually does not manufacture reputations and fame in the same sense as modernist art (Miles, 1997: 1).

In his book *Art, Space and the City*, Miles (1997) questions how art and design can contribute to urban features. There is a duality between public art and art; with public art the aesthetics of the object is important, and with art the emphasis is on continual processes of social criticism and provocation. More frequent practices of (public) art in urban development could help strengthen the opposition to (the type of) city planning, which is inclined to excluding the interests of its inhabitants. Miles (1997) suggests two roles for art; first is art as design decoration in our everyday urban environment and the second is art as engagement that helps define public space as a complex field of interest for many people. He argues that the tension between the two positions is creative.

I believe that our public spaces have a lot to gain by including art, not only for its aesthetic values, but also because it can be a continuous source of our learning and evolving into more creative beings. Art can heal, it can make us forget and take us to another time or place. It can stimulate our mind but at the same time bring us a sense of tranquillity.

According to Miles (1997: 12f), another advantage of including public art in urban planning is that it contributes to urban regeneration, even though the contemporary art values are not in many ways

related to or they might even ignore the problems of city life. In some cases the interests of artists and the public are contradictory, because the artists often create a large static autonomous aesthetic field in our surroundings, which has no connection to everyday life and people have trouble relating to it or calling it a success. While Miles (1997: 13f) mentions how places like Paley Park and Greenacre Park in New York (Fig. 2 and 3), both designed by landscape architects, were many times observed as successful public spaces, although they do not include public art.

Of course just involving artists in planning projects or putting art objects to certain places will not necessarily revive them. Many times this is carried out senselessly, without listening to the *genius* of the place, and is in more ways unsuitable for it. This may be another task for landscape architects – to explore where it is needed or where it would be nonsensical and why. I believe that public art combined with good landscape architecture practice can add a lot to many kinds of settings and also contribute to more liveable cities. The problem still remains, how to say with confidence what could be considered as art and what could not. Art criticises, provokes and invents at the same time. But what is landscape architecture and does it embody any of those characteristics? What does art have to do with landscape architecture? I think landscape designs often lack those three attributes, which is why the combination with art sometimes seems even more reasonable.

In Weilacher's (1999: 8) opinion, Bernard Lassus cleared things when he simply stated: *"Art and landscape architecture are the same thing for me."* By this he did not mean that every artist working with landscape in any way could replace a qualified landscape architect. The problem is that so many artists simply reproduce, being too anxious to find some sort of global solution, which will not be achieved this way.

As Weilacher (1999: 8) argues, it is completely reasonable that the garden should be a product of an integral aesthetic vision infused with notions and concepts of modernist art, while remaining deeply pervaded with the great tradition of landscape and garden design. This tradition is actually very much alive today, which is a good thing, but the puzzle here is how to support and restore this vital connection between the traditional and contemporary practices. They represent the key link in sustainable design and rejuvenation of stable aspects of the landscape architects' profession.



Above: Fig. 2 - Paley Park in New York.

Below: Fig. 3 - Greenacre Park in New York.

Both parks include water and green walls without any extraordinary features, but are still seen as successful public spaces that are used by many people.

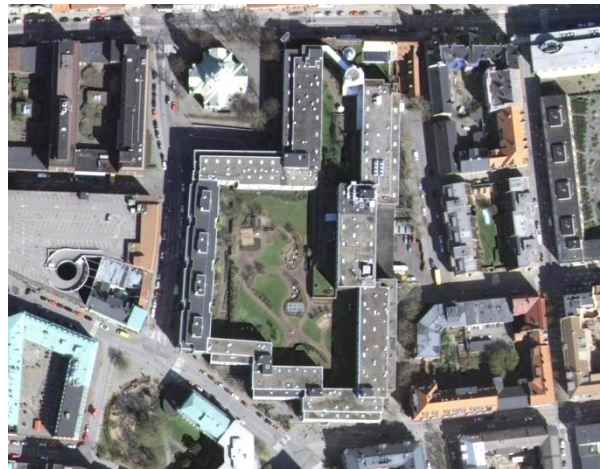


### *Less successful examples*

Throughout this paper I am mentioning, how lack of creativity and inspiration can result in less successful landscape architecture projects; these are works that may lack imagination and the artistic touch or they might not be functional enough because they are carried out too artistically. They might just not fit well into their surroundings or they could completely disagree with the needs of people there and are therefore empty and unused. Either way it is easy to find places like these everywhere. To illustrate what I mean by less successful urban landscapes, I will describe two different courtyards in Malmö.

The first one is located in the central part of the city, in the middle of large apartment blocks (Fig. 4-6). Fundamentally it includes everything a yard like this should offer in order to satisfy everyday needs of its tenants: lawn, pathways, shrubbery, different trees, children's playground area (Fig. 6), a water feature etc., but it is empty most of the time, with exceptions of warm, sunny days when a few children come out to play, and even then they only use the playground area. But why is it so? I believe this is an evident case of when a place is perfectly functional and includes all the necessary elements, but lacks that additional essence of boundless imagination, art and creativity, which would make it special, interesting and thus popular among its residents, who would surely use it more often or at least observe it with delight from their windows and balconies.

The second example is a bit distanced from the



Above left: Fig. 4 - An air view of the first example, where its simple plan can be seen.

Above right: Fig. 5 - A map showing locations of the two yards in Malmö (first one above - near Caroli City, second one below - near St. Pauli church).

Below: Fig. 6 - A panorama of the first courtyard with the children's playground area on the right.

city centre and is surrounded by smaller (four or five) apartment houses. In this case, the yard is neither functional nor aesthetical; another problem is that it is not well maintained. There is a lack of greenery, most of the ground material are old concrete slabs and asphalt, two wooden benches represent the seating area, and the only feature for children is a small sandbox (Fig. 7 and 8). The tenants said they use the yard solely because of the bike shed, where they leave their bicycles, motorcycles and other equipment during the night.

I believe that these two cases are in need of renovation and I guess it could be achieved by interweaving artistic features and more thought over and designed elements in the yards. This kind of intervention could revive them and make them useful (again). Otherwise a place, which is designed without imagination, will not encourage people to use it in creative ways, and will thus hardly contribute to making their surroundings more livable.



*Fig. 7 and 8 - Photographs of the second courtyard, showing a dull environment that cannot stimulate creativity.*



## *Land art: site-specific art*

To try and make sense of all the talk about urban art or art of public spaces and link it to landscape architecture I feel almost obliged to at least mention land art. To me, landscape architecture is like a fusion of public art and land art, combined with practical knowledge.

As Dempsey (2006) writes, land art - also known as earth art - emerged in the late 1960s as an artistic trend or movement that tried to break through the boundaries of traditional art practice, like painting and sculpture, especially in terms of materials and places to operate. Probably the most important novelty then, and a significant attribute of this art form, was seeing and exploring the potential of landscape and environment as both material and site for their art. Land art was, in its beginnings, strongly influenced by growing interest in ecology and awareness of dangers of pollution and consumerism; many artworks carry a message marked with different points of view on the mentioned topics. “By drawing attention to this debate, Earth artists make an appeal to us to see the ‘art’ in nature, or to respect and value nature as highly as we do art.” (Dempsey, 2006: 8f)

It is hard to determine, when and where exactly land art arose, but one of its beginnings must have been in early 1968 when Michael Heizer started investigating the landscape as a canvas for artworks - earth works. He chose El Mirage, a dry lake in the Californian Mojave Desert and made a series of artworks on the lake bed. Sometime later Walter de Maria joined him and made

two works on a larger scale: *Cross* and *Two Parallel Lines* (Fig. 9). The latter, also known as *Mile Long Drawing*, consisted of two shallow lines around ten centimetres wide, etched into the lake bed, each half a mile long.

As Tufnell argues (2006: 6f), an artwork like *Two Parallel Lines* needed to be experienced differently than other kind of artworks. In order to grasp it, physical contact was necessary and even then the observer had to walk the whole line and take time to completely comprehend it - this meant much bigger effort to discover its message and intention than with looking at a traditional painting in a museum. After that there has been a burst of different actions, projects and artworks, which are so diverse that it seems hard to make sense of them or link them together. Tufnell (2006: 12) thinks that they share a single key characteristic – they are actions and processes of art making carried out in the landscape and not in a studio or a gallery. And this, I feel, is the main connection to landscape architecture. They share this inevitable inseparability from the given site.

“During school I paid close attention to the earth-works artists, such as Robert Smithson, Walter De-Maria, Michael Heizer, Mary Siss and Richard Long. Breaking free from the traditions of the studio and the commercial New York gallery scene by venturing out into the wilderness, they introduced the notion that a piece of sculpture could be derived from and be responsive to a specific site. They created monumental, landscape-inspired sculpture that could not be contained in a gallery or sold for



Above: Fig. 9 - *Two Parallel Lines* or *Mile Long Drawing* by Walter de Maria in the Mojave Desert.

Below: Fig. 10 - Robert Smithson's famous *Spiral Jetty*, Great Salt Lake, Utah. It is considered to be one of the fundamental works of land art.

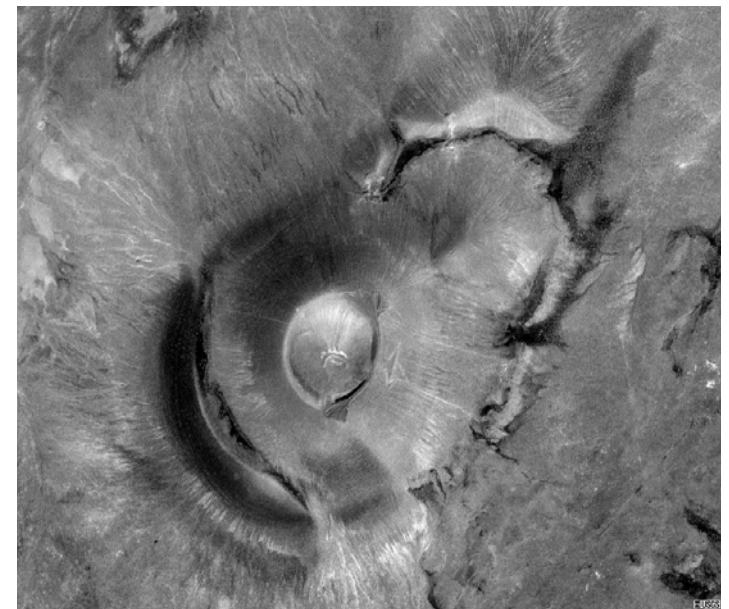
*profit, and in the process they ushered in a new wave of environmental awareness. Art was reinstated as part of our environment, not an isolated event accessible only to an effete few.” (Martha Schwartz in Richardson, 2004: 82)*

Weilacher sees land art as an attempt to create a space in which a relationship between man and environment becomes possible again. In his opinion land art is an exemplary approach to the search of a new language in the landscape, but has become such a fashionable term that its genuine concept is rarely discussed. He argues that nowadays any kind of design, which seems to have artistic qualities, is called land art, without any critical view and with little respect to the meaning it carries (Weilacher, 1999: 9).

As John Dixon Hunt (Weilacher, 1999: 6) argues, land art has been privileged in the otherwise rather dull conceptual field of landscape architecture, because of its sense for creativity and a steady basis in ideas. Land artists have shown new approaches and aspects of how to respond to land and had no fear of combining them together with ideas of art and design. Land art seems to have the capability of restoring to landscape architecture and its old consensus for the entangled junction of site, sight and insight.

If not much else, landscape architecture and land art have one thing in common; and that is what all the mentioned authors are writing about; they cannot be framed or contained in a glass box of a museum, but are inseparable from the given site.

This is what makes landscape architecture a special art form and I think it is also one of the main reasons, why architects cannot be careless or reckless in their creativity while designing, but they need to take so many things into account, because they are usually working with a ‘living body’.



Above: Fig. 11 - Nancy Holt's Sun Tunnels outside Lucin, Utah. They consist of four massive concrete tunnels and are famous for the dazzling effect, which is caused by the play of light inside them.  
Below: Fig. 12 - Roden Crater, site of an artwork by James Turrell outside Flagstaff, Arizona.



## *Lars Vilks: Nimis & Arx*

Lars Vilks is a Swedish artist and art theorist from Helsingborg. Around 30 years ago, in year 1980, Vilks began with his construction of *Nimis* (Fig. 13 and 14), which he has been complementing ever since and is now supposed to weigh over 80 tonnes. It is a wooden construction located in the Kullaberg nature reserve in Höganäs municipality in Skåne. He added another sculpture called *Arx* (Fig. 13) that he built out of concrete, which he carried in his backpack to the difficultly accessible beach (Timm Knudsen, 2010: 134). Some years later, in 1996, Vilks named this area Ladonia and it is supposed to be an independent country.

Because this area is a natural reserve, the project was illegal and once the authorities noticed what Vilks is doing, they demanded for the sculptures to be removed. There have been many disputes and also court trials about *Nimis* and *Arx*, but the sculptures remain to be illegal and no map refers to their locations. This might make them harder to find or access, but definitely not any less popular. Vilks's work has become a tourist attraction and gets many visitors every year. With its unusual character and remote location it tempts the visitors, especially children, to get involved, to play with it and climb on it (Fig. 14), although it might not be the best idea concerning their safety.

After reading about Lars Vilks and his *Nimis* and *Arx*, I could not help but wonder, what was actually his first intention and inspiration, when he started constructing the sculptures; if it was about art and aesthetics or merely provocation. I was also wondering if he considered the land

scape, how the sculptures would fit in and respond to the environment. I contacted him and asked if he was willing to answer those questions. His response was affirmative and I received some answers to my questions. He wrote:

*"I was inspired by land art. I had the idea to build a pyramid of stones but then I found the driftwood and started to build with this. I did not have an idea and I never got one. But of course the relation between the landscape and the growing piece was important. But when the authorities came into the picture it became a battleground for survival of this work. It became a process work where the participants made the work, or at least the content. Arx was started when I had Nimis rather secured from the authorities. I had the idea that I knew how an artist can always win the fight against bureaucracy. And I also wanted to use the stones on the shore. Both pieces are consciously related to the landscape. Nimis is following the rhythm of the valley and ends when meeting the sea, Arx is growing up from a stone landscape."*



Above: Fig. 13 - *Nimis* and *Arx* (in the back) in Kullaberg nature reserve outside Höganäs, Sweden.

Below: Fig. 14 - *Nimis* tempts children and adults to climb inside and explore it.



## Maya Lin: *Eleven Minute Line*

"I feel I exist on the boundaries. Somewhere between science and art... art and architecture... public and private... east and west... I am always trying to find a balance between these opposing forces, finding the place where opposites meet, water out of stone, glass that flows like water, the fluidity of a rock, stopping time... Existing not on either side, but on the line that divides and that line takes on dimensionality, it takes on a sense of place and shape." (Lin, 2000)

Maya Lin, otherwise best known for her Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, strived to create something completely different in Wanås, Sweden. Her *Eleven Minute Line* (Fig. 16) does not cut through the pasture, but rather just winds across it, reminding one of a reptile. It possesses a transitional feeling of time and history, together with the organic matter in which the sequence includes a beginning, a process of change and an inevitable end. As Tsai (Wachtmeister, 2004: 36) argues, the tone of the *Eleven Minute Line* is sincere, without irony or critique. It explores the site specificity, which has roots in American art of 1960s and 1970s.

Wachtmeister (2004: 29) describes the process of making the *Eleven Minute Line* and how it started to become a part of the pasture and not at all something alien to the landscape. She writes about how Lin's work emphasises the sense of timing; it tempts the visitor to get involved, to spend time with it and walk the line in order to comprehend it.

"Time is also a crucial element in how I see my ar-

chitecture. I cannot see my architecture as a still moment but rather as a movement through space. I design the architecture more as an experiential path..." (Lin, 2000; 2:07)

Maya Lin's *Eleven Minute Line* is the first in a series of what she calls 'earth drawings'. In the next years she intends to realise some more at various locations. While the *Eleven Minute Line* seems loose and is organically shaped, others are planned to be strictly geometric and dug into the ground (Wachtmeister, 2004: 45).

The *Eleven Minute Line* is located in an organic farm with cows walking and wandering around and on it (Fig. 18); the Swedish weather is rather changeable, which offers different aspects of the artwork – once covered with snow and another time lit up by the sun. The whole surrounding nature of Wanås is quite extraordinary, which makes this work even more interesting and its location only emphasizes the boundaries that Lin is talking about. This is a place where opposites meet – nature, the organic farm, art and culture, the cultivated and the wild (Wachtmeister, 2004: 30).

The *Eleven Minute Line* is almost 460 metres long, 4.6 metres wide and varies in height between 2.1 and 3.7 metres. It is one of the permanent works of the Wanås collection, which was finalised and built in 2004, but it seems as though it has been there for a long time. The reason for this might be its form looking back to prehistoric earth-works such as the Serpent Mound (Fig. 15), which Lin also mentions as her inspiration for the *Eleven Mi-*



Above: Fig. 15 - The Serpent Mound in Ohio is a prehistoric effigy mound, which served as an inspiration to Maya Lin when she created her *Eleven Minute Line*.

Below: Fig. 16 - An air view of the *Eleven Minute Line* in Wanås, Sweden.

minute Line. She created this line as a response to the gently rolling topography of the site, it has a special character, in a way it seems very simple and laid-back, like she scribbled it in a couple of minutes, but once having a closer look at it, one could tell it has been thought over many times and created precisely and carefully. As Tsai (Wachtmeister, 2004: 34) writes, to an inattentive passerby Lin's intervention in the landscape might seem like an irregular horizon line (Fig. 17 and 18), but visitors that are curious enough to climb over the fence are the ones to become aware of the experiential aspect of the *Eleven Minute Line*. Once being in the pasture makes is almost impossible not to have a walk from one end to the other, which is supposed to last about eleven minutes.

With the *Eleven Minute Line* Maya Lin wanted to explore the relationship between two dimensional and three dimensional space – how a two dimensional mark (on a piece of paper) is experienced three dimensionally. With it she tried to share a certain ambivalence and contradiction, questioning whether it would be seen as a drawing or experienced as a walk in the land. For her it is somewhere between a walk and a line (Wachtmeister, 2004: 4f).

Maya Lin has an admiration for simple minimalistic forms that she intentionally makes irregular by hand, which is rather unusual for architects, but for her it is standard practice. This is very clear and obvious with the *Eleven Minute Line* as well as with some of her other works, such as the *Wave*

*Field*, which she made in a way that not even two curves are identical (Tsai, 2004: 40).

Maya Lin's work creates a sense of place, which means she integrates the landscape as part of the work. She reads clues from the existing site, always trying to identify some feature or character to build on, without prevailing or dominating the existing landscape, but working with it in order to frame the site. She seeks for inspiration in the natural phenomena, geology, topography and tries to create landscapes from a 21st century perspective, through the lens of technology.

*"I do not believe anything I can create can compare to the beauty of the natural world, but these works are a response to that beauty."* (Lin, 2000; 2:07)



Fig. 17 and 18 - Maya Lin's *Eleven Minute Line* as observed from behind the fence. From this distance there is not much to see but an irregular horizon line in the pasture and cows wandering around it, which is why the experiential aspect is rather important in this case.

# *Landscape artists: seeing landscape architecture as art*

“There are growing calls for landscape architecture, which as Garden Art was once respected as one of the most important and influential art forms, to take part in the search for a modern form of expression. It is nearly one hundred years since the pre-eminence of aesthetic quality in landscape architecture was abandoned in favour of functional, sociological and ecological considerations. The accompanying loss of expressive force and stimulus to society had serious implications and marked the beginning of a development which resulted in complete inarticulateness. Neither the constant, unreflective repetition of the classical vocabulary of the French Baroque garden or the English Landscape Garden nor the retreat to the purely functional means of expression of landscaping can be accepted as a contemporary form of dialogue between man and nature. The search for a way out of this crisis and the increasing rejection of a purely technologically-driven approach to nature has led to increasing reinstatement of ART as a unique tool of non-verbal communication.” (Weilacher, 1999: 10)



### *Monika Gora: Jimmys and the Glass Bubble*

Monika is a Swedish landscape architect and artist who has been working with her own office since 1989. The office is called GORA art & landscape and is located in Malmö, Sweden. She holds a master's degree in landscaping from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. In her practice she has systematically chosen her own paths – experimenting and challenging – combining this with an ability to find practicable solutions. She continually explores the limits and the interaction between nature and culture, concepts and objects, art and architecture. As stated on the Sveriges Arkitekter webpage (WP2), GORA art & landscape works with the design and change of places and urban spaces - assignments that involve permanent formation of a larger site, as well as the inclusion of a single object that temporarily changes the value and meaning of a place. Gora's office works artistically, with embellishments and concepts, exhibitions and installations. The overall aim is to always strive for a meaningful solution and intelligent landscapes, where the architectural and artistic activities are common fields of knowledge to be applied in the mission. She often works with these seamless combinations of landscape architecture, public art and building.

As Asensio Cerver (2001: 126) states, Gora uses synthesizing materials, plastics and even intangible materials like ice to build landmarks, with which she is trying to illuminate the importance of the present and exceptional nature of a momentary experience; she practically never relates

to what is constructed in advance, thought or reasoned. In her artworks Monika Gora always has the tendency to separate the world of all that is solid, constant and stable, and the world of unusual experiences in which she locates her work. She sees the former as a basis for everyday life and the latter as the door leading to extraordinary moments of the adventure called life.

I think that all aspects mentioned above are important to consider when planning for any kind of (outdoor) area. Landscape architects should not only focus on timelessness and solidness of their works, but rather on what kind of emotions they could evoke in people, who might only be passing by or are regular users and spend a lot of time in the area. Is it not everyone's wish to have a few moments to themselves every now and then? Moments, when they can forget all troubles of the past and future, enjoy what is here and now, and just seize the moment. I believe Monika Gora is quite successful in stimulating these thoughts and I think she does it by entangling art and bold imagination into public space.

As a part of her work I would like to present glowing sculptures, called *Jimmys* (Fig. 1 and Fig. 19-22), made of polyester reinforced with fibreglass. The sculpture group was first shown at a solo exhibition in 1997, and has become a permanent feature in many public spaces in Sweden and abroad; they are placed in different locations in Sweden (the last in Katrineholm in 2009 - Fig. 1), Norway, Denmark and Germany. *Jimmys* are intended to



Fig. 19, 20 and 21 - Monika Gora's *Jimmys* in Pildammsparken, Malmö. From a distance they remind one of fire, but once the visitor comes closer, their clear and irregular shape is revealed.

be used for children's games in public places, but its size implies they are appropriate for adults as well. Collections consist of pieces of different heights (between 0.3 and 1.2 metres) and colours (orange, yellow, pink and green) in groups up to ten blobs.

One of the *Jimmys* installations (collection of four pieces) is set in Pildammsparken in Malmö (Fig. 19-22). Their main characteristic is the lively orange colour and quite extraordinary shape, which is organic and reminds one of water bubbles or plasticine blobs. As written on GORA art & landscape homepage (WP3), *"they warm you up and make you happy, they seem to have fallen out of a bag of candy: delicious and a bit disgusting at the same time."*

I could not agree more; they truly have a certain energy that draws you closer and when you come very near, it is almost impossible to leave without spending some time there – playing, touching or just observing the blobs with their appealing shapes and colours. Their combining light and colour create an inviting and playful atmosphere, which is hard to resist (Fig. 22). During daytime *Jimmys* appear almost transparent, because the sunlight penetrates their fibreglass shell, but the darker it gets, the more they start to glow and stand out from their surroundings.

As Asensio Cerver (2001: 123) writes, Gora's works share a need to intervene on the given areas of old urban landscapes in an unusual, unexpected and daring fashion in order to provoke reactions of surprise, pleasure and maybe even contradic-

tion in random observers. Monika Gora achieves this by introducing new and foreign materials from industrial sources to places of the old historical city. Another common aspect of her work is using the variations in everyday sunlight to cause a metamorphosis of her objects - through weather shifts or with the passing hours (from day to night time). This way her works stay 'silent' during the day and melt with their surroundings in a way, but after dark they become shining spotlights that illuminate everything around them.

There is another project of Monika Gora, which I feel almost obliged to mention, because it is located in Malmö's rather famous residential area - Västra Hamnen or Western Harbour (Fig. 23). The *Glass Bubble* (Fig. 24-26) is set in a U-shaped courtyard, simultaneously opening and closing to it (it feels closed because it is a bubble, but feels open at the same time because it is transparent), while also contrasting one of Skåne's most remarkable landmarks - the Turning Torso (Fig. 26). As written on Gora's webpage (WP4), the *Glass Bubble* was designed as a solution both to architectural dilemmas and to problems of landscaping. The bubble seems so distinct from the given area and from Sweden and Swedish climate in general, that it gives an exotic feeling to the visitor. It is created in a way that it is possible to use it all year, despite its location in an extremely exposed and windy urban environment of cold winters and rather hot summers. There is a garden inside the bubble - in the raised flowerbeds exotic species like citrus, camellia and magnolia



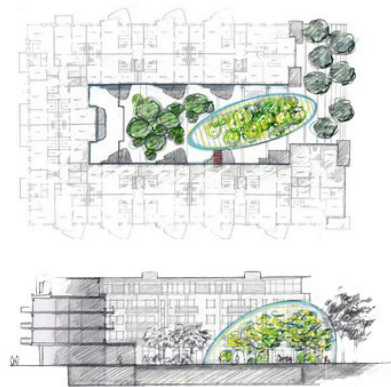
Above: Fig. 22 - *Jimmys* are very tempting with their bright colours and extraordinary shapes, which makes it hard not to touch them and play with them in some way.

Below: Fig. 23 - *Jimmys* are located in Pildammsparken (lower mark) and the *Glass Bubble* in Western Harbour (upper mark).



are growing. This is possible because of its flat crystal clear low-iron glass structure, that lets a maximum of light into the climate controlled interior. This structure reflects light into the courtyard and offers protection, without closing it visually or disturbing the view of the sea. The floors inside and the low flower bed walls are made of Norwegian shale, which is known for its interesting colour that shifts between rust and blackish green. The bubble is also interesting for its simple rounded shape amongst a multitude of angular ones. During the night the *Glass Bubble* becomes a volume of light, making Western Harbour brighter (Fig. 24). As written in a review on Mimoo webpage (WP5), the *Glass Bubble* is a juxtaposition of climates and floras, it is a membrane of intersecting biotopes; it is architecture, sculpture and paradise compounded.

Asensio Cerver (2001: 126) argues that Gora's objects oppose the necessary search for 'whys and wherefores', which are typical for the entire rationalist construction tradition. Her works are a product of pure imagination and creativity, which denies, opposes and sometimes even challenges this tradition. "These processes of intervention are intended to give our everyday physical surroundings precisely what they are lacking: mobility, ongoing transformation, variable luminosity, unsuspected relations with the human body."



Above: Fig. 24 - The Glass Bubble glowing in the dark, with the Turning Torso in the back.

Below: Fig. 25 - A plan and section sketch of the Glass Bubble.

Right: Fig. 26 - The Glass Bubble during the day, with visible exotic greenery inside.



## *Martha Schwartz: Splice Garden and the Dickenson Residence*

As Francisco Asensio Cerver (2001: 19f) argues, Martha Schwartz is a landscape architect that sees landscaping as art, is interested in rethinking traditional concepts, and is also willing to investigate the relationship between art, culture and landscape. Her projects show how to be original without feeling obliged to be correct or complacent, she can research without acting in a programmed way.

In Richardson's (2004: 17) words, Schwartz has found a comfortable professional place midway between visual artist and landscape architect, she shows that a landscape can be made of anything, and also that it can be about anything; this is one of her leading concepts throughout her work. Schwartz is known for creating dramatic impact through the use of unexpected, unusual and apparently asymmetric and discordant elements, which she sets in a strictly formal design. She often works with colour, one of the reasons for that is her belief that western society is 'colour-phobic'. For her, colour is an element that can evoke emotions but at the same time play a strong role in imposing order on a site. Her work is personal and witty, sometimes puzzling or comic; she has her own sense of humour, with which her designs are often imbued. Because of her extraordinary ideas, Schwartz is often faced with refiguring the design or walking out, and she rarely chooses to do the latter. In Richardson's (2004: 15) words, one of her strengths is the ability to re-plan aspects of a design without compromising its integrity. According to Asensio Cerver (2001: 19f), she is occasionally inspired by minimalism, but her

deep belief remains in the possibility of improving social conditions through public planning. Her demands are often close to those based on the idea that landscaping is not only art, but also a science at the service of humanity, which is typical for ecological artists.

*"I do not make objects, but produce an environment where the art and landscape components are indistinguishable. I see the landscape as a vehicle for self-expression. My work is an attempt to address the many needs inherent in designing landscapes - programmatic, formal, aesthetic, and stylistic - while trying to satisfy the ever-present urge to create something that is my own."* (Martha Schwartz in Richardson, 2004: 122)

Some of Martha Schwartz's main works are the *Bagel Garden* (Back Bay, Boston), the *Splice Garden* (Cambridge, Massachusetts), *Center of Innovative Technology* (Fairfax, Virginia), *Becton Dickinson Atrium* (San Jose, California), the *Dickenson Residence* (Santa Fe, Mexico), *The Citadel* (City of Commerce, California) and many more.

Whitehead Institute *Splice Garden* (Fig. 27 and 28) is probably one of Schwartz's most famous, important and at the same time controversial works. The conditions on the rooftop, where she was supposed to create this garden, were very unfavourable but the clients still wanted a fast and cheap solution. She did not really agree with that so the whole design was her angry response to it. Schwartz made all the plants in the garden plastic and the



Fig. 27 and 28 - The famous Whitehead Institute rooftop *Splice Garden* by Martha Schwartz, 1986. French Renaissance part of the garden on the left and the traditional Japanese part on the right; all the plants in the garden are plastic.



composition combined out of two contradictory landscape styles - one side is based on a French Renaissance garden, and the other on a traditional Japanese garden (Fig. 27). In that sense she called it a monster and said *“if a garden is a representation of nature, then this is a re-representation of nature. Something that will not weigh anything makes no demands and will not involve having to keep things alive. It is like human beings who will not make a commitment.”* (Richardson, 2004: 95)

I think it is important that works always have a message to tell and Schwartz usually tells it with no regard of what people might say or think and just listens to her inner voice. This means taking risks, which do not always have a good result and may get negative responds as well. Anyhow, it is important for people to draw meanings from one's works and to be able to relate to them.

One of her projects that I also found interesting is the Dickenson Residence in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The existing layout of the house and garden was a series of unconnected spaces, which the visitor had to go through in order to get to the rear terrace that offers astonishing views (Richardson, 2004: 163). The landscape surrounding the house is quite fascinating, so it was, in Schwartz's words, impossible to compete with it. By using simple materials, such as gravel, brick, coloured tiling and local species of plants she chose not to distance herself from the local traditional appearance, but tried to establish harmony with its surroundings (Fig. 30). There is only one

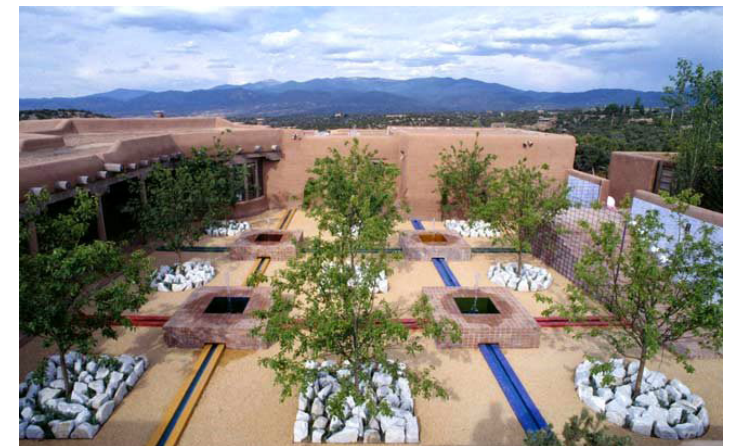
small part covered with grass, representing a 'carpet' outside the bedroom. She used numerous lights and water features to make the garden more interesting also after dark (Fig. 31).

I think it is a good example of joining art, aesthetics and function. The garden is perfectly functional, but still has a mysterious feeling to it, which might be hard to grasp and that is what makes it special in my opinion.

Schwartz writes in her essay (Richardson, 2004), how her exposure, education and love of art have taught her that landscape is a fine art and a means of personal expression. She argues that it is not enough that the landscape performs as a functional, intermediate fabric, as a simple break from everyday life, as a decoration around some building or just a pleasant place to be. It needs to evoke thoughts, meanings and emotions; otherwise it will not contribute anything and remain an empty designed shell or just an attempt of changing a certain environment for the better.

*“Like other art forms it must provide stimulus for the heart, mind and soul if it is to contribute anything to the culture. It can be an expression of contemporary life and made from a contemporary vocabulary. The landscape can be a medium, as art and architecture, whereby ideas can flower and evolve. In this way, we can develop a meaningful language about our own place, culture and time”* (Schwartz in Richardson, 2004: 87)

We need more than just functional, useful and tidy everyday environments, we need something



Above: Fig. 29 - Plan drawing of the Dickenson Residence (1991), showing its rather simple linear scheme.

Below: Fig. 30 - The 'backyard' of the Dickenson Residence, based on square shapes, consisting of simple materials, such as gravel, brick, coloured tiling and local species of plants.

to provoke us and make our imagination run wild. And that, I believe, can be achieved by interweaving art into our landscapes, being creative and daring, not only trying to please and solve problems or answer questions.

In Schwartz's opinion the ultimate test of a design's success is whether or not the space is actually used. She respects the obligations that public art carries, so beneath the vivid and colourful appearance of her works there lies a very practical strategy based on problem solving. She does not force her wild ideas and then try to fit them into the space by bending its needs. Her inspirational concept for the project is always a result of in-depth research, meaning many site visits, consultations with the client, and last but not least, the needs of people who are intended to use the place. Besides all that she keeps a fundamental sense of freedom and exploits landscape as an artistic medium, which results in her works sometimes being more resemblant to an art installation than landscape architecture (Richardson, 2004: 12f).



Fig. 31 - The 'backyard' of the Dickenson Residence after dark, when its rather plain scheme, consisting mostly of regular square and round shapes, is enlivened with water features and colourful lights.

# *Concluding discussion*

Through investigating and reading about different artists and their work I have learned that it is hard to find a good balance between form and function, aesthetics and usability, astonishing and feasible etc. There is such a thin line between both that makes it very easy to 'fall on one side'. Each of the artists I investigated has their own sense and idea about art, landscape architecture and links between them. There is no ultimate recipe for creating successful landscapes. As I mentioned a few times throughout this paper - it is a combination of numerous factors that need to be taken into consideration, which always results in something different. In some examples a place could benefit from including art and in other cases it might be completely unnecessary and irrelevant.

It is quite common of people to think about landscape in a rather limited way, the majority begins to talk about forests, waterfalls, the prairie and other environments that tend to have a note of pristine nature in them. If one asks them what about the cityscape, they come up with parks, waterfronts and plazas. The work of landscape architects is to remind them that landscape includes all spaces that are to be found outside buildings, this means sidewalks, parking lots, alleys, highways, utility corridors etc. Landscape means our whole environment, everything that surrounds us, including representations of places and things that we can imagine (Schwartz in Richardson, 2004: 127).

Schwartz argues (Richardson, 2004: 123) that in

order to serve the role our manifold landscapes play in our lives – backyards, highway corridors, strips, plazas, courtyards, waterfronts – they must be designed to accommodate all the uses people bring to them, as well as to respect or enhance ecological standards and practices.

Landscape architecture, like land art is very site-specific as landscape artists and architects like to say. This means that they still carry a lot of responsibility and cannot afford to just go out there and do whatever comes to mind or seems meaningful and interesting in the given moment. It all depends on the analysis of the area and the research done there. As Martha Schwartz writes in her essay (Richardson, 2004: 124f) the research presents a multi-layered picture of the site that then begins to suggest an approach; the most important objective is to create a space about which people care, enjoy using and are motivated to sustain.

I agree with this, because I believe that one of the first things we need to think about are users of the site and what their demands, wishes and needs are. Giving priority to people over other aspects is probably the only way for a landscape architect to be successful at their work. If one creates a masterpiece of landscape design, which nobody wants to use, then it is a lost cause and I guess it cannot become a work of progress, pride and content.

Of course we cannot work against nature or rather the 'predisposition' of the area; if the site-analysis shows that some idea cannot be realised, one



must find another way to answer the question, solve the problem and satisfy its users, but still try to keep the main concept without degrading it. Another important thing, in my opinion, is not to lose the primary inspiration and bend one's creativity on the account of demanding site conditions. In this profession, like in many others, it is very significant to make compromises - between one and their co-workers, between one's inspiration and the users' demands, between users' wishes and conditions of the site etc., but I guess the hardest part is when having to compromise oneself.

As I mentioned before, it is important to take risks and have a purpose, intention and something to tell with one's work. It should evoke emotions and always carry a message, so some people can relate to it, some may not care and others might oppose it, but it is still better to get opposition than no response at all and watch one's works get 'run over by time'. This makes it more than just architecture; it makes it meaningful and outstanding. Not just multiplying, copy-pasting, reproducing... There must be an essence that the landscape architecture carries. It might be dependent on a multitude of influences, such as site conditions or its purpose, but it can also rise from a buoyant force of momentary imagination; it might only be a seemingly unnecessary thing that people and their surroundings are lacking (like Gora's objects for example) or it could be something of great importance and reminiscence (such as monuments or memorial sites).

But how to know what to interweave in our environments, where to locate it and in what measure? This question brings me back to the beginning, it is all a part of a landscape architect's job, weighing different options and making decisions based on all those factors and conditions. If I comment on the case of Martha Schwartz whom I have been writing quite a lot about, I would not say that everything she creates is a success, some of her works might look like something to put on a shelf or hang on a wall, and not really an environment, which people would feel comfortable using every day. But she certainly has her own artistic approach and sticks to it. For example the *Splice Garden* is barely anything of a landscape architecture, it has no real function, but it is rather strong in the artistic aspect. She could have just put a few benches there, added some greenery in pots and the problem would have been solved. But I believe it is important to think out of the box and do the unexpected from time to time. A similar intervention could not be done anywhere else, she did it there, because she had a reason for it, a message to tell and she did not think function was necessary. The other case of the Dickenson Residence is quite the opposite. It is a perfectly functional garden, without any spectacular shapes or astonishing elements, but I think it can still be seen as something simple and beautiful. Also interventions, such as Monika Gora's *Jimmys*, may not necessarily be landscape architecture on their own or are not forming the landscape as a whole, but I believe they contribute to reviving some places and giving them special character.

It is up to us to research, investigate, sketch and decide in what way a certain place could benefit the most and then try to realise it the best way possible.

Although I mostly presented projects that are rather extraordinary and not something to be seen every day, I do not think this is the only way to create successful and interesting landscapes. I do not believe all places can benefit from putting artistic elements and colourful objects in them. It is important that all elements work as an integrated whole with the given landscape. This means art is also in the detail, in organising everything and in the technicalities as well. Even if it might not be as obvious as in the works I presented in this assignment, it does not make it any less important for this profession. Already a thoughtfully carried out project with many small particularities, like well formed and differently shaped curb stones or specially selected materials, can be a work of art on their own. And this is the real task of a landscape architect, to be able to create beautiful and functional environments without 'blinding' everyone with colours and lights. Like I mentioned in the beginning, Paley Park and Greenacre Park have worked as successful environments for many years, without an obvious intervention of art or something spectacular. There are many places like that, which are in a way self sufficient, for example the Central Park in New York could also be called a work of art, even though it is in some ways only imitating nature and does not offer any astonishing and pompous elements.

Creating interesting and extraordinary landscapes requires a personal connection to the land and to the environment in which one dwells. I believe that the sense of place is important, the one who is about to shape the environment for many people must know how to read it first. This includes perceptions of time, being and memory. The language of an artist must be translated by the user through the artist's forms, materials and details. If people can relate to this language and the experience of the place, they can render personal meaning to it (the landscape). In this sense, art cannot be extracted from the body, place or site. Another aspect an artist or architect should consider is that site and culture are inseparable. Engaging all senses is important, not only sight, but also touch, smell and hearing. Combining and juxtaposing traditional materials to modern materials can result in interesting compositions. I believe it is important that these are responsive to the natural energies and conditions of climate, light, shadow and wind.

*"The landscape architect's job is to design the landscape. We are to imbue it with form, meaning and beauty. We are to create context, memory and place. We are in charge of shaping the very human artefact of landscape. We must therefore look to the traditions that will give us history and context for the expression of visual ideas, we must look to ART. The artists are the true researchers of the visual realm. Viewing the landscape as a cultural art form, like architecture, painting and sculpture, demands that training in art and art history be a*

*fundamental part of the education of landscape architects.” (Martha Schwartz in Richardson, 2004: 122)*

In this world of modern thinking, mass design and loss of many moral values, it is important to go back to art, back to beauty and aesthetics. In my opinion, this means away from ready-made designs and mass production in landscape architecture, it means going back to history or rather story of a place; back to its authentic structures and genuine qualities - combining traditional and contemporary practices. It also means considering landscape's ecological dispositions and listening to people that form it.

*"Landscape design is a doctrine, a way of perceiving what is human and its relation to nature and the universe." (Asensio Cerver, 2001: 19)*

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- WP5: MIMOA (modern architecture) webpage; retrieved December 6, 2010 from: <http://www.mimoa.eu/projects/Sweden/Malm%F6/Glass%20Bubble>

## Illustrations

Fig. 1: Katrineholm, Sweden, 2009. Source: [www.hjalmarenstidning.se](http://www.hjalmarenstidning.se), photographer Urban Århammar.

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Fig. 31: The Dickenson Residence, Santa Fe, New Mexico. Source: [www.marthaschwartz.com](http://www.marthaschwartz.com)

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