

On Drawing and Landscape

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On the borderline between the disciplines of drawing and landscape design there is a terrain vague with interesting intersections which, in my opinion, should be examined. This is an issue that for me, at least, is more sensitive, today, now that I deal more with these problems in my dear old niche of a studio, that is, the artisan workshop I started out in. I am pleased to mention these intersections on this occasion, in which you give me the honor of introducing such a highly qualified assembly of authors. I believe that between the terms “landscape” and “drawing” we can recognize affinities in the meanings related to the projectual actions that we perform in the transformation of the territory. It is little less than a flash between imagination and reality that is established between these two concepts in comparing them, but at times that flash is enough to produce spectacular

effects and to give birth to profound novelties in our vision of the habitat. Both landscape and drawing have, in fact, a common dependency on Vitruvius in their charter of values and vocations, with similar approaches to the diagnosis and interpretation of the contexts in which they operate, as both are sciences of relations, much less objective than those of architecture and urban planning. Both disciplines bring together experiences conducted between material and immaterial elements, actually creating workshops for understanding the recent phenomena of urbanism that are giving rise to entirely new models of inhabitation. The new city of the third millennium, in the search for its own structure and identity, manifests an uncertain and wavering nature. It is perfectly understandable that there is a defensive reaction that rewards landscapes of already acknowledged virtue, but

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Fig. 1. Franco Zagari, A Blue Klein lift for the Castle of Krsan (Croatia). Consulting for Marko Frankovich restoration project.

the projectual objectives, as commonly understood, are much too entrenched in conventional and repetitive systems: monuments, historic centers and nature reserves, considered select places virtually favored by public and private financing policies.

The castle of Kršan, in Croatia, located on the Istrian peninsula, was my baptism by fire with the new technologies of representation, under the guidance of Marko Francovic (fig. 1). I discovered a world, a moving X-ray, sections and elevations of great precision and beauty that seem (and probably are) magnetic resonances, millions of points instead of lines, a real revolution, where everything is possible, such as maintaining perfect alignments between interiors and exteriors. All this found in me, a landscape designer, a perfectly prepared spirit; I don't really know why, but as I believe strongly in subliminal contamination, it must be for that reason that I immediately asked myself what to me seemed the most natural question, that is, if it were possible to walk on water. Indeed, what else does "making landscape" mean, otherwise?

It was possible. Form, statute and function of a public space respond primarily to a need of being consistent conceptual moments strongly integrated with each other. A large pedestrian area, whether it be a square, garden or park, should be like the representation of the crowd that will inhabit it, a magnetic field with the variable tension of the many forces and behaviors of the public establishing an equilibrium. We would give great importance to the thickness of the perimeter and its way of filtering the view of the horizon, to the accesses, the strategic routes, the large optical channels that ensure the fundamental lines of orientation and allow us to estimate the dimensions of the site and, of course, to the play of slopes, excavations and backfills. The representation of all this answered my questions perfectly. Here we can understand how such an interactive definition of drawing, in every kind of space represented, leads from a conception in principle only instrumental to a conception that is also projectual, that is, drawing becomes Drawing. This support of our actions is nothing more and nothing less than a tabula, like that of backgammon, or a chessboard, and as such would seem apparently neutral, but of course this is not so. Each of our actions, at least in part, is influenced by the form and representation of space, which here is dense, here is extended, here different and here united, here articulated in activities and

flows, a place that in any case should never be too assertive and constrictive, but rather suggestive, in perpetual tension, offering options for both emotional and intimate episodes. You will not have failed to notice that the form of space has been presented as an entity that has its own autonomy of meaning.

The representation of this reality, for better or for worse, has become part of the charter of values that promote, or not, particularly appreciated places, to the point of defining them as World Heritage Sites, of which UNESCO holds a monopoly on preliminary responsibility and monitoring: the novelty is that the culture of Drawing now expresses both a physical and a virtual reality, thanks to the autonomy that the space of representation assumes.

I would like to speak to you briefly again about three authors who in recent years have succeeded in involving thousands of people: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Cai Guo-Kiang, and William Kentridge. The familiarity between drawing and project is at the basis of works which we initially defined as ephemeral, and which are anything but. The theme is invariably a known reality, a monument, a historical, landscape or geographical context, of which the installation reveals an unsuspected vitality. The public is directly involved, as in a captivating workshop. Some of their works are installations that start from a theme, the pro tempore rewriting of a place in order to highlight its characteristics. This is the starting point for a great deal of research into the vocation of the sites for intervention and into the method and tools for temporarily modifying them. Three extraordinary lessons in drawing. Three. Extraordinary lessons on landscaping.

A first central moment in the conception of a work is the representation of the context and the project idea. Incidentally, for the artists and the public and private institutions involved, this phase is the most important source of the recovery of expenditures and income. Christo is universally renowned, but his installation on Lake Iseo (fig. 2) constituted an absolutely unthinkable novelty, the invitation to cross the lake by foot, on the surface of the water, in an unprecedented procession of over a million visitors, wrote a page of history that will remain in the memory of this enchanting place: the region went into total blackout, all forms of transport were interrupted. Cai Guo-Kiang, perhaps the most well-paid artist in the world, has grafted his deep knowledge of Western classical culture, especially painting and sculpture, with an



Fig. 2. "Floating Piers" installation by Christo on Lake Iseo, 2016 (photo: Marcio De Assis) <https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Floating_Piers#/media/File:Iseo_Floating_Piers_7.jpg> (accessed 2019, November 10).



Fig. 3. "Transient Rainbow" in Manhattan by Cai Guo-Qiang, 2002 < <https://publicdelivery.org/cai-guo-qiang-transient-rainbow/>> (accessed 2019, November 10).

expressive material typical of his tradition, gunpowder and pyrotechnics, in memorable explosions of the landscapes of Manhattan (fig. 3) and the historic center of Florence (fig. 4). Kentridge, on the other hand, brought the City of Rome to participate in a high-level international debate for which he was then guiltfully absent. He produced a mural on a stone wall along the Lungotevere (fig. 5), using a pressure washer to remove part of the century-old patina of pollution that had settled there. It is like a strip of film, 500 meters long and 9 meters high, dedicated to the triumphs and lamentations of the City. The second moment is the physical fruition, when the public visits the transformed place. This is an event that never lasts more than two or three weeks, and it could not be otherwise, due to the very high daily cost of protecting the work and to the impact, caused by the public, that could destroy this object of desire unintentionally, simply for the effects of the success of a visit that this place has never previously sustained.

The third moment, finally, is the place returned to its state *ante operam*, but deeply modified in the awareness of each of us.

The beauty and dignity of the work should be recognized as the most important values to be affirmed in the transformation of the territory. It is for this mission that projectual actions for its protection, management and enhancement are defined. In this new strategy, drawing establishes new orientations and new qualities of centrality, becoming an integral part of a completely innovative conception of activities, flows and behaviors. These objectives should be pursued without any saving of energies and should be distanced from an excessively easy or complacent imagination, restoring them to the power of a function that is, instead, extraordinary, having its roots in our critical reasoning. In this, drawing today has a function that has been completely divested of a purely technical and executive meaning, and has taken on a value that fully represents the aesthetic, ethical and knowledge-related contents of

Fig. 4. "City of Flowers in the Sky" in Florence by Cai Guo-Qiang, 2018.





Fig. 8. "Triumphs and Laments" in Rome by William Kentridge, 2016.

the contexts that we face. After all, both concepts depend on a selection of data from reality or our imagination. But I will stop here, prudently: *Hic sunt leones...* Behind the beauty of a flower, a landmark, a garden, a square, a park, a field, a settlement, a factory, an infrastructure, or even systems that interest vaster areas such as coastlines, val-

leys, ridges, there must always be a project, which is an indispensable testimony of civilization. Between landscape and drawing there exists a conceptual affinity that is easily intuitable and that would deserve, thanks also to the following contributions, a future work of confrontation and dialogue.

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