

Contemporary Representations for Landscape Design

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Abstract

This paper addresses the issues related to contemporary representation for landscape design through significant experiences developed from the 1990s to today, born from the collaboration of architects, landscape designers, and artists such as Yves Brunier, Enric Miralles, Inside Outside (studio founded by Petra Blaisse), Mark Smout, Laura Allen, Teresa Moller Landscape Studio (studio founded by Teresa Moller), Openfabric (studio founded by Francesco Garofalo), 08014 arquitectura (studio founded by Adrià Guardiet and Sandra Torres), Mir (studio founded by Mats Andersen and Trond Greve Andersen). Contemporary trends in landscape design representation include hybridizations aimed at integrating the communicative power of the concept with photography through the expressive value of manual experience; schematic drawings of project management systems; detailed analytical representations of the multiple areas involving the landscape; botanical investigation representations; communicative images to narrate atmospheres, materials, and colors. The analysis of the methods, forms, and language in use allows for probing the expressive potential of representation. Over this time, the methods and tools have changed, but it is possible to trace a common denominator, namely the role of representation in relation to the type of narrative objective. Representation does not manifest itself simply as a product/image but as a process of construction of form and of the design and figurative content.

Keywords: representation, landscape, project, graphic languages, hybridizations.

Introduction

The current cultural debate surrounding the broad theme of landscape design – and, more specifically, the design, recovery, and reuse of open spaces, whether they are public spaces or large urban parks, historical heritage sites, or post-industrial areas with an agricultural vocation– cannot overlook the dialectical relationship that landscape design establishes with representation. For these reasons, this paper aims to address issues related to contemporary representation in landscape design. The goal is to examine landscape design as a mode of representation, as a form of communication, and as an expressive language, through an analysis of some contemporary projects born from collaborations among architects, landscape architects, and artists, including Yves Brunier, Enric

Miralles, Inside Outside (a studio founded by Petra Blaisse), Mark Smout, Laura Allen, Teresa Moller Landscape Studio (founded by Teresa Moller), Openfabric (founded by Francesco Garofalo), 08014 arquitectura (founded by Adrià Guardiet and Sandra Torres), and Mir (founded by Mats Andersen and Trond Greve Andersen).

Amid the diversity of contexts and dimensional scales, and the variety of space types and materials present in the contemporary landscape, the changes that the project assumes entail images of the before and after, as well as transformative strategies to be implemented, including the time variable. The communication of the idea and the description of the geometrically defined space are two aspects that are inevitably embedded in

the representation of contemporary landscape design. In particular, they are not simply products/images, but rather a process of constructing both the form and the project's conceptual and figurative content, making the relationship between drawing and project inseparable [Pierluisi 2014]. The critical significance of the figurative investigation emerges from the different approaches of the designers, where the correlation between landscape design and representation is crucial for understanding how contemporary trends unfold in this area: "Representation travels along the line of the 'visible', of the distinguishable, and simultaneously of the immaterial; for this reason, we cannot speak of the representation of the landscape without a clear understanding of its role in contemporary expressionism" [Cianci 2008, p. 22].

Hybridizations

In landscape design, the manipulation of images through the blending of techniques, tools, representation methods, and analog, photographic, and digital modes has a dual significance: on the one hand, to communicate the design concept, and on the other, to serve as a means and method for generating design inputs.

As Falbel, Pousin, and Urlberger note [Falbel, Pousin, Urlberger 2023], photomontage, which was already present in 19th-century photography [Koetz 2023] and employed by the avant-garde movements of the 20th century as a radical cultural and formal break—allowing for the questioning of the singular perspective of linear vision—enables work with the eidetic image. This type of image can conceive ideas, prompt design intentions, and play an active role in the design process [Corner 1999].

In this regard, the experiences of Yves Brunier and Enric Miralles are particularly significant, albeit with differences. In Yves Brunier's collages for *Trois jardins particuliers à Brasschaat* created in 1991 [1], the project's prefiguration takes place through the hybridization of analog, photographic, and collage techniques. The representation is a composition derived from the digital plan representation of the existing homes, to which heterogeneous fragments of photographic images and analog patches in yellow, green, blue, and white are added to communicate lawns, trees, plant species, materials, and colors. The composition conveys the design idea of organizing outdoor space and the relationship between the garden and the house (fig. 1).

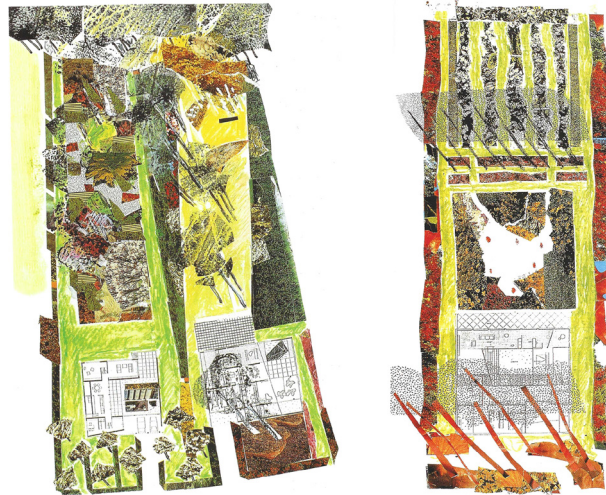


Fig. 1. Y. Brunier, photomontages of the three private gardens in Brasschaat, Antwerp, Belgium, 1991 [Jacques 1996, pp. 78-79].

"Graphic with harsh colors, brutal forms wrapped in sheets of aluminum, raw paints, supports borrowed from industry, raw materials, foam, rubber, plastic. To represent the landscape and the building, cotton swabs, electrical wires, pieces of cloth, screws... Everything, as if hastily thrown, in anguish" [2] [Blaisse 1996, p. 19]. The project's prefiguration is achieved through montages to gather inputs and images that then become unexpected suggestions, facilitating the emergence of new spatial interactions and new figurations. The use of diverse materials, textures, and forms assembled together is a means to generate new figures and, consequently, new prefigurative imaginary spaces. Through collage, Brunier disrupts traditional representation methods by overlaying heterogeneous portions to suggest textures, materials, colors, and atmospheres of the project.

As Freytag highlighted, Yves Brunier's representation functions like a microtopography, featuring multiple overlapping layers and textures, thanks to the effective depth of materials and techniques used [Freytag 2014, p. 107].

"In landscape design, the drawing must convey mutability, seasonality, evolution, and even the pliability of vegetation. The centrality of space gives way to an environmental representation capable of narrating, either directly or with synesthetic devices, those chromatic, olfactory, and



Fig. 2. E. Miralles, collage for the Mareta Museum of Lanzarote project, Spain, 1999 (Benedetta Tagliabue – EMBT Architects and Fundació Enric Miralles).

atmospheric factors that substantiate the perception of a place" [Consalez, Rocca 2013, p. 52]. Morabito, drawing from Benjamin's concept of the originality of the artwork –unique because it maintains a recognizable aura over time and space– asserts that: "Brunier's contemporary landscape drawings retain their originality, surviving their projects, whether realized or not" [Morabito 2020, p. 52]. These images are based on a strong evocative power and the narrative capacity of representation [Auricoste 1996; 1997]. Yves Brunier's work demonstrates his pursuit of an expressive and communicative vocabulary between design and narration, between representation and manual experience [Rocca 2017].

Enric Miralles uses photomontage for documentation, experimentation, and to initiate the project development process. Influenced by David Hockney, Miralles developed

a way to transform reality. By reassembling photographic images in a different manner, he created a system that allowed him to generate new suggestions, enriching his spatial vision [3]. The partial and fragmented shots, subsequently recomposed while maintaining overall perspective integrity (sometimes accompanied by additional overlaid textures), allowed him to expand figurative possibilities (fig. 2). Photomontage and collage became integral to the design and communication process, capable of generating meaning. They serve as an initial step in the design process that enhances spatial prefiguration.

The integrated use of painting, photography, and collage techniques relates to a craft-based dimension of representation and, at the same time, to a material dimension of landscape design. The craft and gestural aspects of cutting and reassembling disparate fragments, originally belonging

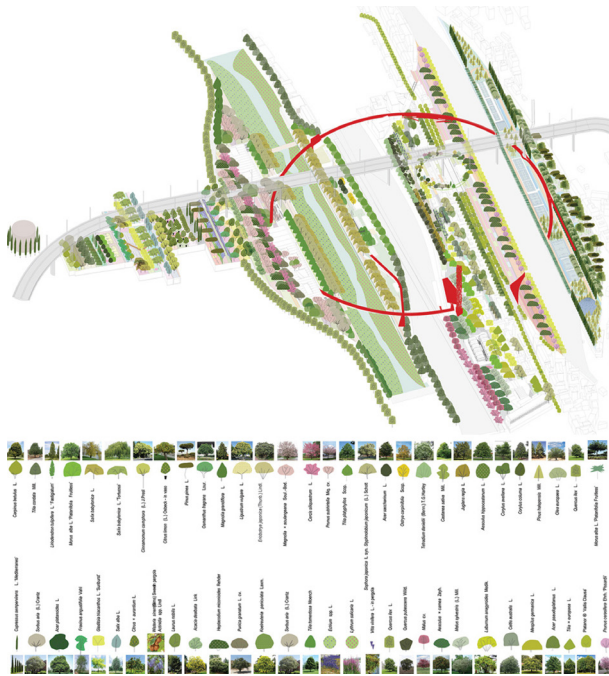


Fig. 3. Inside Outside, Parco del Polcevera, Genoa, Italy, 2019 (<<https://www.insideoutside.nl/>>; accessed 15 December 2024).

to other images, guide the design concept and create an evocative image that accompanies the creative act, which is an intellectual act [Miralles, Tagliabue 2006; Spellman, Miralles 2017].

Transformative strategies

The landscape project aims to develop representations that best describe the transformative strategies under consideration. Often, these representations do not focus on depicting a defined geometric space but rather on communicating the transformative strategy over time. Contemporary trends are oriented toward multiple graphic and linguistic forms and different methods of representation depending on the objective: analytical-descriptive, informative, communicative, expressive, or as a specific investigation into certain aspects of the project.

For the *Polcevera Park* project in Genoa in 2019, the Dutch studio Inside Outside, founded by Petra Blaisse, developed a park consisting of a series of parallel linear fields of varying widths, each intended for a different type of garden to promote biodiversity. The rich variety of botanical species is well expressed through abstract graphic geometrizations of the plant elements. Each plant species is represented through a synthesis of the arboreal element in which, however, its shape and color value are clearly recognizable. This allows for an effective and immediate communication of the richness and diversity of the plant life, a key strength of the project's concept. This approach is complemented by a more descriptive representation of the botanical species through a chart that highlights the abstract graphic element, realistic image, and name for each species (fig. 3).

Mark Smout and Laura Allen, in collaboration with Geoff Manaugh, presented the *Rescue Lines* project at the 17. *Biennale di Architettura di Venezia* in 2021, focusing on the restoration and expansion of forests in the United Kingdom. The map displays vast green areas intersecting with the urban fabric and the road network. In the image, these green spaces have the greatest visual weight compared to the lighter territorial background and the built environment, depicted in white, as they represent the strengthening of connections between British forests. The project involves graphic additions and subtractions in the map image to identify the nature that should be reinforced and supported within the contemporary city. The representation highlights a structuring framework for the territory

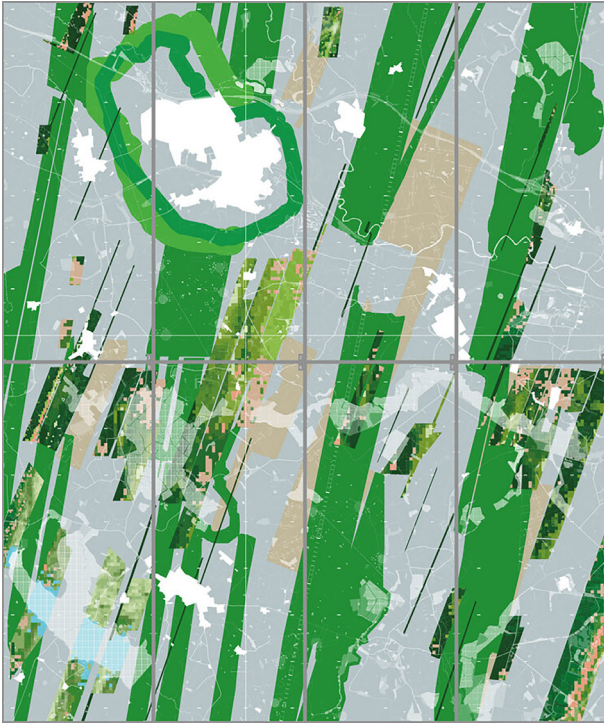


Fig. 4. M. Smout, L. Allen, G. Manaugh, R. Lines. Project exhibited at the 17. Biennale di Architettura di Venezia, 2021 (<<https://www.smoutallen.com/>>; accessed 15 December 2024).

that needs to be emphasized and consolidated for design purposes (fig. 4). The project, presented on a transparent base with acrylic representations and 3D wooden models, emphasizes the need to integrate digital and analog techniques for a tactile and artisanal communication of the landscape project (fig. 5).

For the *Harbour Park* project in Sydney, Australia, in 2023, *Teresa Moller Landscape Studio* designed a park in an area reclaimed from the harbor, on the waterfront near Central Barangaroo. The awareness of being above water, the presence of the built city, and the need for a prevailing natural environment shaped the development of the concept. The mapping representation that illustrates these choices is developed across three plans, each describing different systems through an expressive graphic language. The first



Fig. 5. M. Smout, L. Allen, G. Manaugh, R. Lines, 2021. Transparent base with integrated digital and analog representations in acrylic and wood, 280×320×70 cm (<<https://www.smoutallen.com/>>; accessed 15 December 2024).

plan emphasizes the linear elements that structure the spatial organization, namely the water lines (in blue) and the pathway lines (in white), set against a material background with ochre/earth tones. The second plan indicates, in addition to the structuring lines, the vegetation along the water channels and grassy areas. The third plan, finally, describes the entirety of the project's defining elements, including the masses of trees and shrubs that integrate with the city (fig. 6).

For the *Saline di Molentargius* project in Cagliari in 2023, the Italo-Dutch studio *Openfabric*, founded by Francesco Garofalo, conceived the site –now decommissioned and undergoing a process of rewilding– as a park connected to the nearby urban areas through pathways crossing the dams, with recreational activities that preserve botanical and wildlife biodiversity. The planimetric representation of the area primarily aims to highlight the complex system of dams connected to the Molentargius lagoon through the network of paths and numerous integrated activities. Some graphic



choices are particularly notable for making the project's concept instantly comprehensible: the semicircular cut of the urban settlement area surrounding Cagliari's hinterland, the descriptive information on activities, access points, architectural and infrastructural features, and the overall composition based on a circle, from which the park system stands out. Simplified diagrams focusing on individual systems accompany the project's narrative, facilitating more immediate communication: the natural and artificial water systems, the pathways and accessibility, and the program and activities. The system-based approach helps to understand their internal functioning and their interrelationships (fig. 7).

In landscape design, various types of representation come into play, each created with different methods, techniques, and tools depending on their purpose, which may be descriptive, communicative, or emotional. For example, Openfabric uses photographic images of the salt flats to digitally integrate the project, aiming to convey the atmosphere (fig. 8). The expressive power lies in the atmospheric, chromatic, and material aspects of the area, where natural elements and wildlife are predominant. The compositional choice aims to emphasize the natural character of the site in contrast to the human interventions, which focus on pathways for traversal and enjoyment.

For the landscape regeneration project of the *Camí de Cabrianes* in Sallent, Spain, carried out between 2017 and 2019, the Spanish studio 08014 arquitectura, founded by Adrià Guardiet and Sandra Torres, intervened on the path connecting Sallent to Cabrianes. The intervention included the demolition of the railing that sharply delineated the boundary between road and landscape, redefining the path by reconstructing its edges with local resources, and opening up spaces along the trail. These interventions are well illustrated in the choice to depict the section in two temporal moments: the first (in gray tones) represents the existing condition, while the second includes some ochre parts to illustrate the *post operam*. The section shows the terrain's profile, the tree and shrub vegetation, and the type of human activity through raster images. Additionally, attention is given to the depiction of the root system, to show that the tree develops as much above as below ground (fig. 9). The representation, although lacking real RGB data, effectively conveys the transformative strategy of the landscape regeneration project.

Fig. 6. Teresa Moller Landscape Studio, Harbour Park, Sydney, Australia, 2023 (<<https://teresamoller.cl/en/>; accessed 15 December 2024).

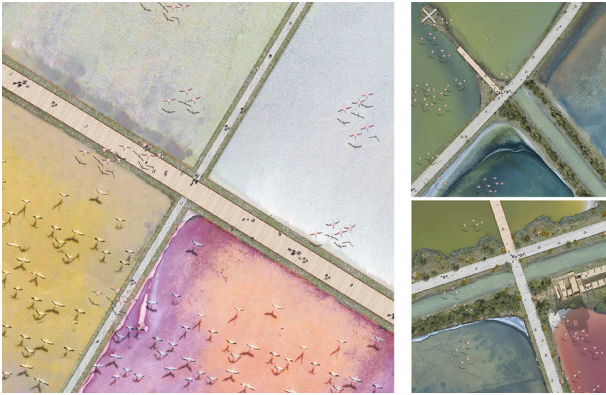


Fig. 8. Openfabric, *Saline di Molentargius*, Cagliari, Italy, 2023 (<<https://www.openfabric.eu/>>; accessed 15 December 2024).

Fig. 9. 08014 arquitectura, *Landscape regeneration project of Camí de Cabrianes*, Salient, Spain, 2017-2019. (<<https://www.estudi08014.com/>>; accessed 15 December 2024).

Multiple information

In recent years, the representation of landscape projects has seen an increase in the production of illustrations containing multiple layers of information, not limited to depicting geometrically defined space. This development likely stems from the need to create representations that are as descriptive and comprehensive as possible, covering the various aspects of landscape design. This trend is particularly evident in the representation of detailed sections. In the 2023 proposal for the *Park of the Oil Refinery Factory* in Hangzhou by Openfabric, the representation of open space is enriched with graphic and textual information on the various aspects related to the landscape project.

The section, in fact, illustrates not only the morphological layout, the relationship between vegetative masses and empty spaces, and the diversity of plant life, but it also graphically and textually indicates air pollutants, root systems, soil composition, tree and shrub species, human activities, fauna, and dimensional annotations (fig. 10). This is a raster image obtained through photomontage with realistic rendering, depicting topographic variations, shrub species, different types of trees with varying saturation between those in the foreground and background, the extent of root systems, and the stratification of the subsoil, though in a simplified form.

Various informational layers have been added to the section. The first layer relates to human use, incorporating human figures to illustrate how the space can be utilized.

The second informational layer involves photographs of the flora and fauna: detailed images of tree species at the top, which convey the density, color, and texture of the foliage; detailed images of shrubs at the bottom, showing texture and color; and images of animals that inhabit the area in the center.

The third informational layer includes graphic codes: arrows to indicate movement, chemical symbols, figures to document atmospheric temperature variations, and elevation markers expressed numerically and with horizontal lines every five meters.

The fourth informational layer is textual, consisting of captions and brief explanatory notes.

This type of representation shows that the project has considered all the listed issues and has sought to find strategic solutions. Similarly, the representation has been directed towards a descriptive enrichment through graphic languages, symbolic codes, representation methods, and

1. Wetland forest

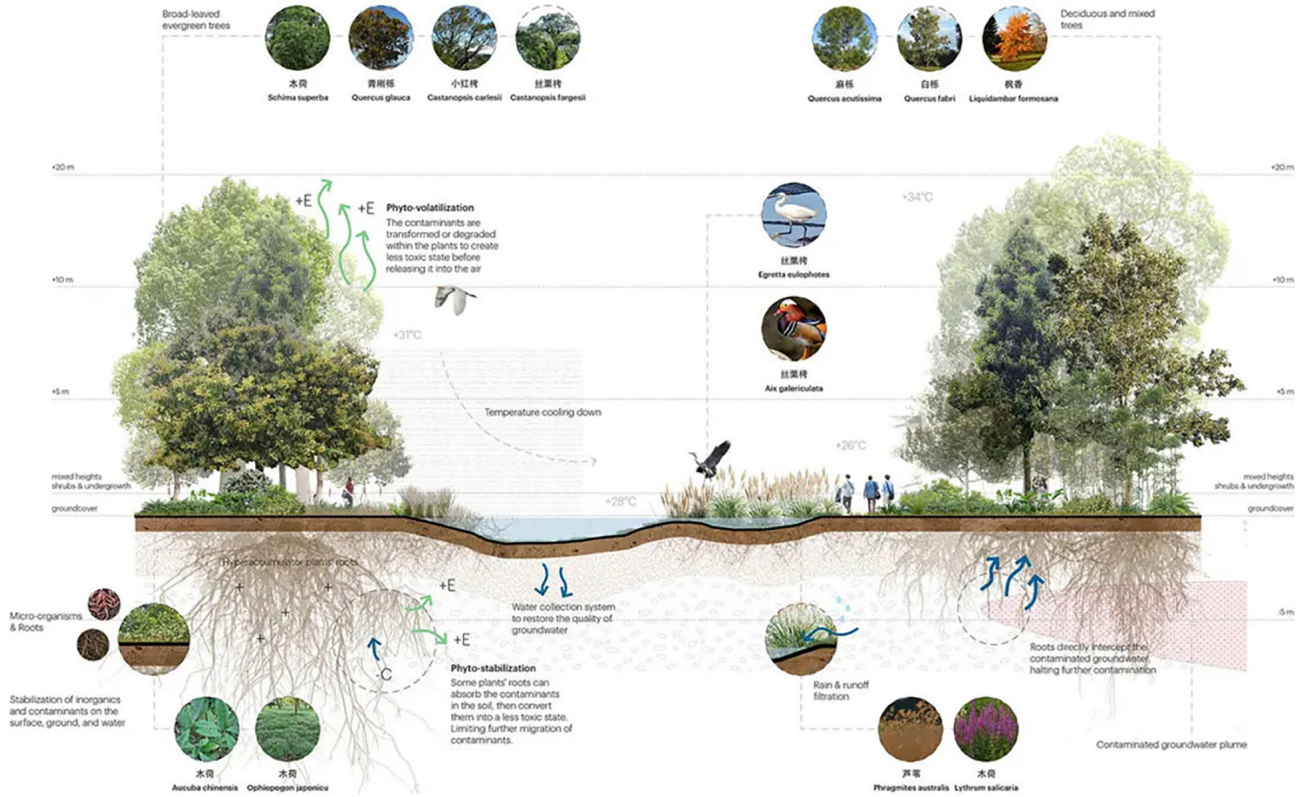


Fig. 10. Openfabric, Oil Refinery Factory Park, Hangzhou, China, 2023 (<<https://www.openfabric.eu/>>; accessed 15 December 2024).

texts that support the project's objectives: "The perspective of landscape design works with the particular ability to grasp or establish 'relationships' between elements of various kinds, both material and immaterial, rather than between defined objects in themselves" [Zagari 2006, p. 25].

Visualizations

In the representation of contemporary design, three-dimensional visualization is essential, in fact in recent years architectural visualization (archviz) has undergone exponential development, also thanks to the technological progress of IT tools. In particular, landscape design has been the object of interest of archviz for application experiments, for the verification of the expressive potential of IT and digital, for communicative contents [Farinella 2020].

In the visualization proposal of the *Nunavut Inuit Heritage Centre* in Iqaluit, Canada, in 2023, the Norwegian studio Mir (founded by Mats Andersen and Trond Greve Andersen) has created, on behalf of the Danish studio Dorte Mandrup, some documents that attest to the attention to the theme.

The design concept of the cultural center for the promotion of Inuit culture derives from the movement of snow and wind, therefore its sinuous and organic shape is established in continuity with the morphological structure. The roof, covered in rock and peat, rises from the ground, leaving only the vertical wall visible like a cut in the topography.

Mir's communication strategy highlights the camouflage of the architecture, enhancing and exalting the natural and atmospheric components of the landscape. Figure 11 is a digital image, expertly constructed, in which the first and second floors are occupied exclusively by the ground, that is, by the natural topographical arrangement made up of rocks and vegetation. Only in a small central portion is the presence of the constructed architectural object noted. It is revealed by the strip of land/covering that rises, determining the curvature that reveals the vertical glass wall. The top floor also tells the story of the surrounding environmental context. Two human figures on the covering restore the scalar dimension, simulating the type of use and the type of perception that could be had, while the background of the image denotes a totally



Fig. 11. Mir, Nunavut Inuit Heritage Centre, Iqaluit, Canada, 2023 (<<https://www.mir.no/>>; accessed 15 December 2024).

leaden sky. It is clear that the communicative choice does not want to show only the built architecture, but also the landscape context in which it is inserted and the relationship between architecture and landscape, therefore the natural morphological, vegetal, atmospheric, material and chromatic components assume a predominance in the image. Similarly, in the visualization proposal of the *Norrøna Lodge*, in Senja, Norway, created by Mir in 2024 (construction planned for 2026) on behalf of Dorte Mandrup we find the same design and communicative intentions. Dorte Mandrup states that the project is a hotel conceived: "as individual lodges connected by a large stone roof that continues the formations of the surrounding landscape, almost dissolving the boundaries between architecture and landscape to create an engaging experience of being in nature" [4]. If the landscape assumes a substantial role in determining the concept of the project, it is not possible to omit this role in the representations. It is revealed and is valorized to the maximum terms. In fact, figure 12 highlights the sea and the rocks of the coast in the foreground, the hotel in the background and a rocky spur in the top floor. The background of the image is occupied by the sky, the sun, the clouds. Finally, a further natural element, namely snow, characterizes the composition.

The built architecture is never exhibited in its entirety, but is revealed partially as an integration of the landscape, which in turn is represented in all its components: geo-morphological with precise atmospheric and light conditions linked to a particular moment of the day and season.

Conclusions

The critical analysis of methods, forms, and language used in contemporary landscape design allows for an exploration of the expressive potential of representation. The references presented provide an overview of significant graphic experiences developed from the 1990s to 2024. During this period, methods and tools have evolved, but a common thread can be identified: the role of representation in relation to the intended narrative goal. Contemporary trends highlight the aspects toward which representation is directed: overall project representations, in axonometry or plan view, to convey the concept; representations aimed at illustrating the transformative strategy; schematic drawings of individual systems for project management; detailed representations for describing the various aspects that make up the landscape project; in-depth illustrations on botanical issues; expressive images to narrate atmospheres, materials, and colors.

In the cases of Brunier and Miralles, the focus is on initiating the project development process to enhance its spatial vision through representation. These hybrid approaches aim to combine the communicative strength of the design idea with the descriptive capacity of pre-intervention photographic images, enriched by the expressive value of manual techniques.

In more recent cases, such as those of *Inside Outside*, Mark Smout and Laura Allen, Teresa Moller Landscape Studio, *Openfabric*, and *08014 arquitectura*, we observe drawings that, while employing different methodological and graphic language solutions, effectively describe the systems and the overall design framework. The dual approach, intended to convey both the general functioning and the diverse thematic areas (vegetation, fauna, human use, subsoil stratification, atmospheric qualities), is evident in the works of *Inside Outside*, *Openfabric*, and *08014 arquitectura*. The representations by *Openfabric* and *Mir* demonstrate a focus on atmospheric and material phenomena specific to natural components, which enhance the expressive quality of the representation.

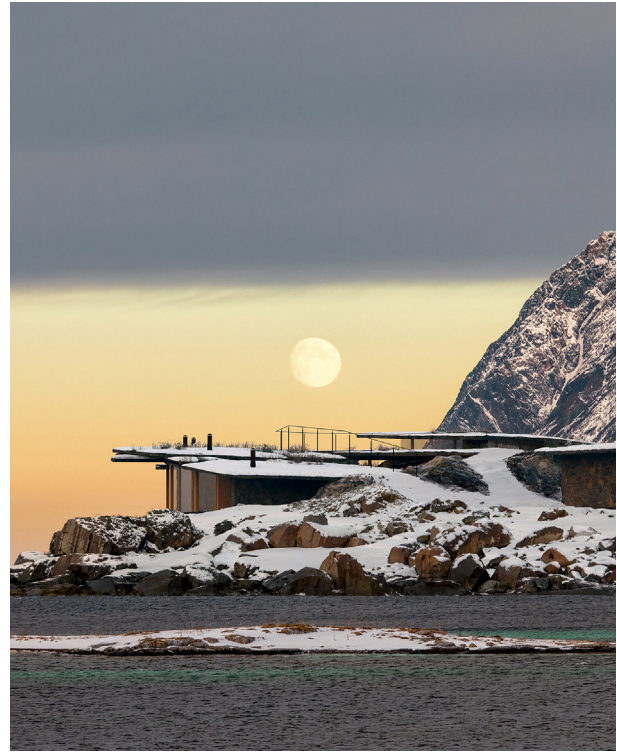


Fig. 12. *Mir, Norrøna Lodge, Senja, Norway, 2024 (expected 2026).* (<<https://www.mir.no/>>; accessed 15 December 2024).

Thus, representation serves a narrative function, capable of fully describing the lexicon, content, and form of the landscape project, both in analytical and expressive terms. The emphasis on diverse figurative forms reflects the ongoing relationship between architecture, landscape, and representation, arising from a process of form-building rather than being merely a graphic product.

Additionally, drawing a landscape project (a garden, a park, or a landscape configuration) is a complex and multifaceted task, as it requires not only graphic and expressive skills but also knowledge of the discipline of landscape architecture: "One cannot look at the landscape without understanding the landscape itself; this understanding implies attention to all its components and, above all, respect for its meanings" [Cianci 2002, p. 34].

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Allen, Teresa Moller Landscape Studio, Openfabric, 08014 arquitectura, Mir, Dorte Mandrup for kindly granting the images.

Notes

[1] Three private gardens in Brasschaat, Antwerp, Belgium, 1991. Realized project. Architects: Willem Jan Neutelings (*maison N.*), Stephan Beel (*maison B.*), Xaveer de Geyter (*maison SN.*). Landscape architect: Yves Brunier. Project manager: Jérôme Boutterin.

morceaux de tissus, des vis. Le tout, comme jeté à la hâte, dans l'angoisse; talles étaient les maquettes / projets d'Yves Brunier" [Blaisse 1996, p. 19].

[2] "Des graphismes aux couleurs grinçante, des formes brutales emballées de papier alu, des peintures crues, des supports empruntés à l'industrie, des matériaux bruts, mousse, caoutchouc, plastique. Pour figurer le paysage et le bâti, des coton-tige, des fils électriques, des

[3] <<https://www.artribune.com/progettazione/architettura/2021/05/enric-miralles-benedetta-tagliabue/>> (accessed 15 June 2024).

[4] <<https://dortemandrup.dk/news/dorte-mandrup-and-norronea-crea-te-unique-nature-hotel-above-arctic-circle>> (accessed 30 June 2024).

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