

An aerial photograph of a formal garden, likely the Palace of Versailles, showing a complex network of green hedges forming geometric shapes and paths. A small, light-colored building is visible in the middle ground. The overall scene is lush and meticulously maintained.

Garden Futures

Designing with Nature

Vitra
Design
Museum

Garden Futures

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with Nature**

**Vitra
Design
Museum**

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Carolina Maddè is an art historian, Project Manager at the Vitra Design Museum, and Curator of G10 Projektraum, Darmstadt.

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Dr. Luke Keogh is a historian and curator. He is a lecturer in history at Deakin University, and Senior Fellow in Australian garden history at the National Museum of Australia, Canberra.

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Dr. Oliver Sukrow is a Vienna-based academic who is currently completing research on architectures and landscapes of health.

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Liz Christy was an artist and activist who is credited with founding the guerilla gardening movement. She passed away in 1985.

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Dr. Jochen Eisenbrand is a cultural scientist and Chief Curator at the Vitra Design Museum.

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Kris Kozlowski Moore is a writer and editor based in London. His work has appeared in publications including *Real Review* and *American Suburb X*.

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Jochen Eisenbrand

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Dr. Nina Steinmüller is an art historian and Collections Curator at the Vitra Design Museum.

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Isabela Ono is Director of the Instituto Burle Marx in Rio de Janeiro.

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Dr. Astrid Sprenger is head of medicinal plant cultivation at the cosmetics and natural remedies manufacturer Weleda.

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Jamaica Kincaid is an Antiguan American novelist, essayist, gardener, and gardening writer.

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Céline Baumann is a Basel-based landscape architect who works predominantly on urban projects but also maintains a prolific practice as an artist and educator.

Viviane Stappmanns

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Hanno Rauterberg is deputy head of the arts section of the German weekly *Die Zeit*. His award-winning features and commentaries follow events in the world of art and architecture.

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Bas Smets is a landscape architect and engineer whose projects range from private gardens to territorial visions and infrastructural landscapes.

Dr. Lisa Dabscheck is an ethnographer, writer, and editor based in Munich. Her work explores culture, society, and identity.

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Yujia Bian is a researcher specializing in landscapes, architecture, and art.

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Julia Watson is a landscape architect based in New York City. With her studio Lo—TEK, she has conducted a multi-year research project into sustainable, climate-resilient, nature-based technologies.

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Ng Sek San is a Kuala Lumpur-based landscape architect and activist who focuses on local design and simple solutions.

Viviane Stappmanns has degrees in journalism and design. She is a curator at the Vitra Design Museum.

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Marten Kuijpers is senior researcher at the Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam. He is currently coordinating a three-year program to develop an archive for garden and landscape design in the Netherlands.

Maria Heinrich is an architectural researcher and designer working for the Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam. Her research focuses on material cycles and ecologies of care.

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Gilles Clément is a gardener, botanist, entomologist, biologist, and writer. In his writing and landscape architecture projects, Clément promotes an approach to landscape management that embraces the entire planet.

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Christoph Miler explores migration, technology, and the environment through essays, interviews, and experimental poetry. Together with Isabel Seiffert, he forms the design studio Offshore with a focus on research and design education.

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 In northern Ethiopia, agricultural deforestation has left behind arid plains. For Dr. Alemayehu Wassie Eshete, the well-being of the region now hinges on those caring for the remaining pockets of biodiversity.

Dr. Alemayehu Wassie Eshete is an Ethiopian forest conservationist who has worked with local church communities on preservation projects for over 20 years.

Viviane Stappmanns

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Imagining Futures Otherwise or Why We Should All Be Gardeners

Introduction

by
Viviane Stappmanns
Marten Kuijpers
Maria Heinrich



← Bagh-e Shahzadeh,
Persian garden near
Mahan, Iran, 2014

That our relationship with nature must change has never been clearer than today, with climate and ecological crises threatening humanity and the planet. Yet in the face of complex challenges, where do we find real, impactful answers – let alone a completely new attitude? The garden is a good place to start looking. Gardens present the world in miniature. What constitutes nature for us and how we relate to it – be it as individuals or as a society – are questions that, again and again, across all ages and cultures, have always been negotiated in the garden.

Every garden, no matter how big or small, has always been a place where futures were made and conceived. For centuries, gardens have been spaces on which to project our hopes and aspirations. The anxious amateur gardener huddles over small pots in the basement in late winter, sowing tomato seeds in the hope of a bountiful summer. The absolute French monarchs, planning vast gardens arranged in strict geometry around a centre of power, outlined a future – theirs – in which all living beings, even the plants, would be under their control.

Gardens reflect identities, dreams, and visions, and this is what *Garden Futures* is about – an exhibition curated by the Vitra Design Museum and the Nieuwe Instituut, alongside which this book was created. The recent revival of horticulture has focused less on the garden as a romantic refuge than as a place where concepts of social justice, biodiversity, and sustainability can be tried and tested. Gardens have become places of the avant-garde.

With the exhibition, we wanted to find out where today's garden ideals come from. But we also wanted to explore how gardens can help us achieve a liveable future for everyone.

In exploring the garden's past, its symbolism, and its significance for the future, it was inspiring to come across the work of like-minded researchers. In their book *Earth Perfect? Nature, Utopia and the Garden*, researchers Naomi Jacobs and Annette Giesecke argue that it is important to analyse and reconstruct the history, symbolism, and vital potency of gardens. And they go on to wonder: "Can a new ethos grounded in gardening lead us to a more sustainable relationship between humanity and the natural world?"¹

We found much value in Jacobs's and Giesecke's suggestion to look at the past in order to learn for the present. The multilayered stories that garden design can tell us often reveal remarkable connections. The English landscape gardens of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for example, presented images of untouched nature, but in reality, every blade of grass was meticulously planned as part of an orchestrated whole. "Like nature, only better", novelist and critic Jim Lewis remarks – better for humans, that is, or, in the words of Lewis "with all the awkward bits smoothed out"² Today, the lawns that originated in eighteenth-century England have morphed into monotonous green expanses engulfing public parks and suburban gardens all around the world. Landscape

Where do today's garden ideals come from? How could gardens help us achieve a more livable future?

architect James Hitchmough calls them "green deserts"³ On their bare surfaces, the beliefs that have defined the Western world for hundreds of years lie exposed in startling nakedness, including the conviction that Man must have dominion over nature, and that nature is merely a playground for his activities.

Since the Vitra Design Museum and the Nieuwe Instituut are both institutions with a focus on the remit of design in the broadest sense, we were also guided by the question whether (new) practices of gardening, of caring for and working with nature, might hold the promise of a new attitude and practice of design as well.

Even contemporary design often has little to do with sustainability, instead functioning as "a commercial tool executed at the direction of clients or employers". This is a point raised by curators and critics Paola Antonelli and Alice Rawsthorn, who in their 2022 book *Design Emergency* suggest that design's "limited role to which it was confined in the industrial age" needs to be broadened to "build a better future not only for human beings, but also for the other species with whom we share this planet"⁴

The concept of the garden as a healer and saviour is a recurrent trope taking on a wide variety of shapes.



Our research led us from the dominant concept of the Western garden as we knew it towards collective, traditional, and Indigenous practices of caring for nature, which are not usually discussed under the rubric of “gardening”.

We discovered that even the earliest and most original concepts of the garden yielded valuable clues, given that the expressive power of gardens as a human-nature interface is particularly evident in myths and religions, in literature and the fine arts. The Islamic concept of the garden brings paradise to Earth – but only for a chosen few. Because of their layout, these gardens are known as *chahar bagh*, or “four gardens”. The spread of Islam carried them from Ancient Persia across the Middle East to Mughal India, North Africa, and Mediterranean Europe, and their four-part structure found its way into other art forms, too, like miniature paintings or Persian carpets.⁵ In Christianity, the Garden of Paradise is a crucial concept as well, as is the Garden of Eden. And here, too, nothing is for free. Access to the garden is a reward; exile is a punishment. In either case, the garden is a space of yearning and transcendence.⁶

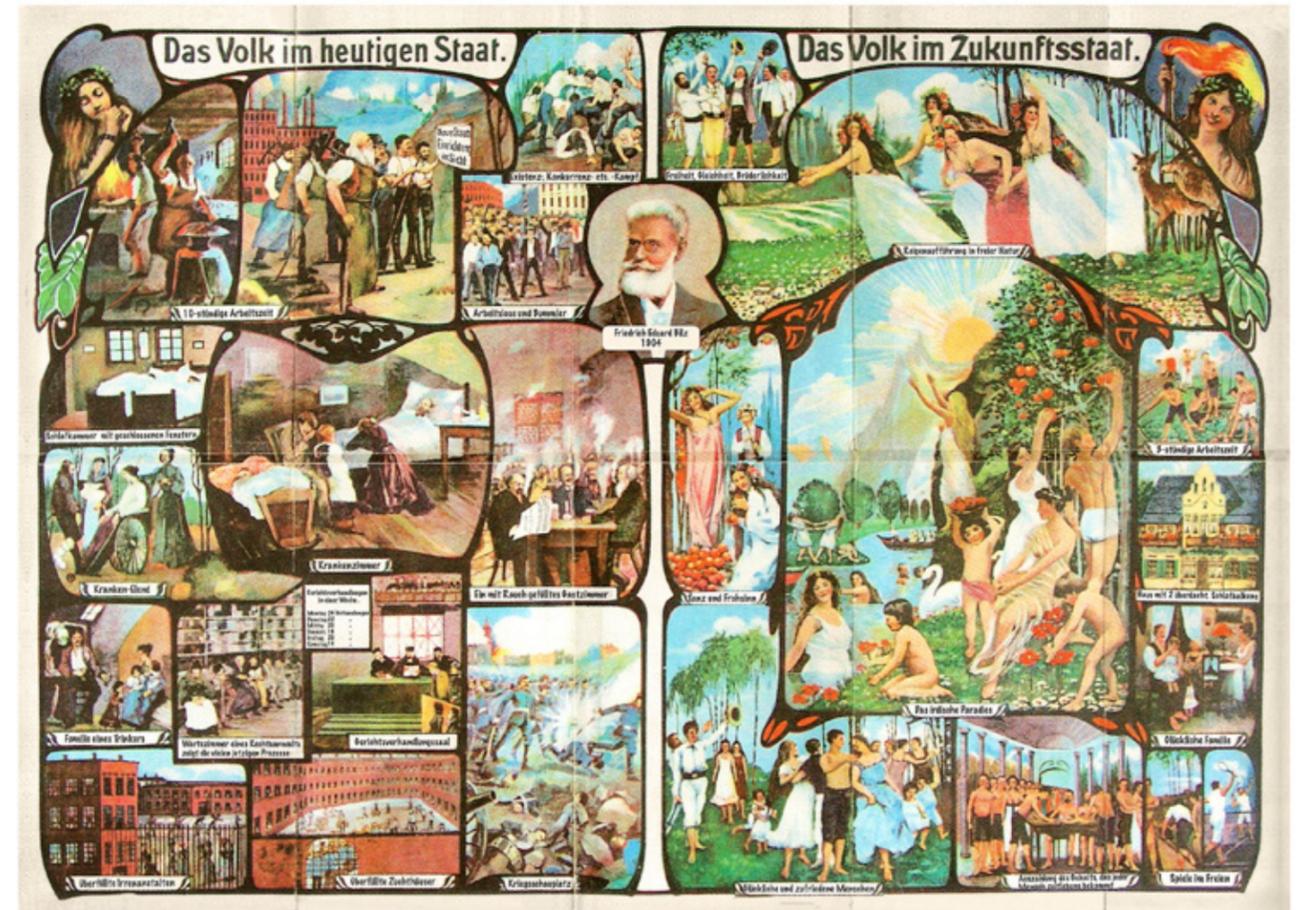
The concept of the garden as a healer and saviour is a recurrent trope taking on a wide variety of shapes and forms across the centuries. In the industrialized West of the nineteenth century, it resurfaces in the allotment gardens promoted as a counterweight to urban squalor. In Germany, they bear the name of an ardent advocate, the physician and educator Gottlieb Moritz Schreber. While the Schreber gardens guaranteed a basic supply of food, they were also considered a moral institution: the sunlight, fresh air, and exercise provided by working in the garden was expected to counteract temptations towards drink or violence. The garden became a symbol of a better, greener, and healthier future.

However, while the garden never lost its power as an idyllic retreat, it is also a projection space and battlefield in which political and commercial interests, societal value systems, and individual desires clash.

“The rich man owns a garden,” landscape architect and designer Barbara Stauffacher Solomon remarks, “the poor man works in it.”⁷ While she is referring to European aristocrats and their expansive gardens, the principle applies on a global scale as well.

Western colonial powers owned plantations, enslaved people and indentured labourers worked on them. The colonies also served as study sites for botanical inquiry which often requisitioned Indigenous knowledge of nature and the properties of plants. The notes of a select few who travelled in the name of science often throw a chilling light upon this. On her journey in 1699 to Suriname, entomologist and botanist Maria Sibylla Merian recorded that a plant she was studying, the Peacock flower, was used by enslaved women to induce abortion – to prevent children being born into slavery.⁸

The notion of exclusion defines the garden – quite literally. The word “paradise” originates from an ancient



← Unknown gardener in the Monte Verità commune, Ascona, Switzerland, c. 1920

→ *Das Volk im Zukunftsstaat* (The People in the Future State), Illustration by Friedrich Eduard Bilz, 1904

Persian word meaning “walled enclosure”⁹ and even today, most dictionary definitions suggest that what actually constitutes a garden is its separation from its surroundings by some kind of enclosure. A convent garden was a *hortus conclusus* – a contained garden. But all gardens were designed to keep out undesirable elements:¹⁰ the faithless, naturally, but also non-human life – plants and animals – which is admitted only if it serves a purpose for the humans tending to the garden, adding to whatever they seek from it – sustenance, leisure, pleasure, healing, and – usually – some kind of escape.

Only a controlled nature can offer people sustenance and refuge: this paradigm needs revisiting. “Do we continue to nourish dreams of escaping,” philosopher Bruno Latour inquires, “or do we start seeking a territory that we and our children can inhabit?”¹¹

So whom can we learn from? Many twentieth-century landscape architects and gardeners spent a lifetime experimenting with the garden as an interface between culture and nature.

Brazilian landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx described the garden as “the interaction of man and nature”, a place “where the right balance between the small interior world and the immensity of the exterior world recreates harmony and achieves serenity”.¹² He explored this relationship in both his drawings and – on a grand scale – in the gardens he created, often using native plants he had discovered in the Brazilian rainforest.

Dutch garden designer Mien Ruys was a true plantswoman – and foregrounded issues of privilege and hierarchy in her work. Her books and her many articles in newspapers or her own magazine *Onze Eigen Tuin* (Our Own Garden) provided amateur gardeners who could not afford to hire a garden designer with instructions on how to design and plant their gardens.

Some theoretical approaches of the past, too, have lost none of their relevance. In 1966, landscape architect Ian McHarg – whose book *Design with Nature* continues to inspire landscape architecture students to this day – was part of a group who announced that

Paradise

The garden as a refuge and earthly paradise, a perfect world where humans and nature coexist in perfect harmony, has been a constant strand of human history since time immemorial. The garden according to this narrative is not just a physical place, but also a conceptual space onto which our hopes and dreams are projected.

The monotheistic religions celebrate the Garden of Eden as a symbol of earthly – albeit unattainable – bliss. Ancient oriental carpets were adorned with oases of superfluity, while the walled *hortus conclusus* of the Middle Ages afforded both physical safety and spiritual seclusion from the vagaries of the wilderness outside. The Japanese garden forms a bridge to the beyond, while the very formality of the perfectly manicured gardens of the French Baroque reinforced the ideal of the absolutist ruler as the seat of all power. Whether laid out on a vast scale as a utopian vision or arduously eked out from an unpromising patch of land, whether an opulent pleasure garden or an austere rule-bound work of art, the garden as our own personal image of paradise has always reflected our own relationship with nature, and, with it, that of the society and era we inhabit.

↳ Lucas Cranach the Elder, *The Golden Age*, c. 1530

The "Golden Age" is the idea of an original ideal state, based on ancient sources and rediscovered during the Renaissance: according to the myth, this was a period characterized by perfect harmony between humans and animals and an abundance of food and freedoms. Lucas Cranach the Elder made two versions of this representation: in both, a wall protects the lush garden in which young naked people live in harmony with wild animals such as lions and deer.

A garden is a garden because it is protected from the wilderness by a fence. The word "paradise" comes from the [Iranian] Avestan word "pairi", which means "roundabout", and "daeza", which means "wall". Also, the Indo-Germanic root of the word garden, "ghorto-s", refers to a woven fence. Across history and culture, the garden is a place of tranquility and peace, where humankind wants for nothing.¹

Nadine Olonetzky, Author



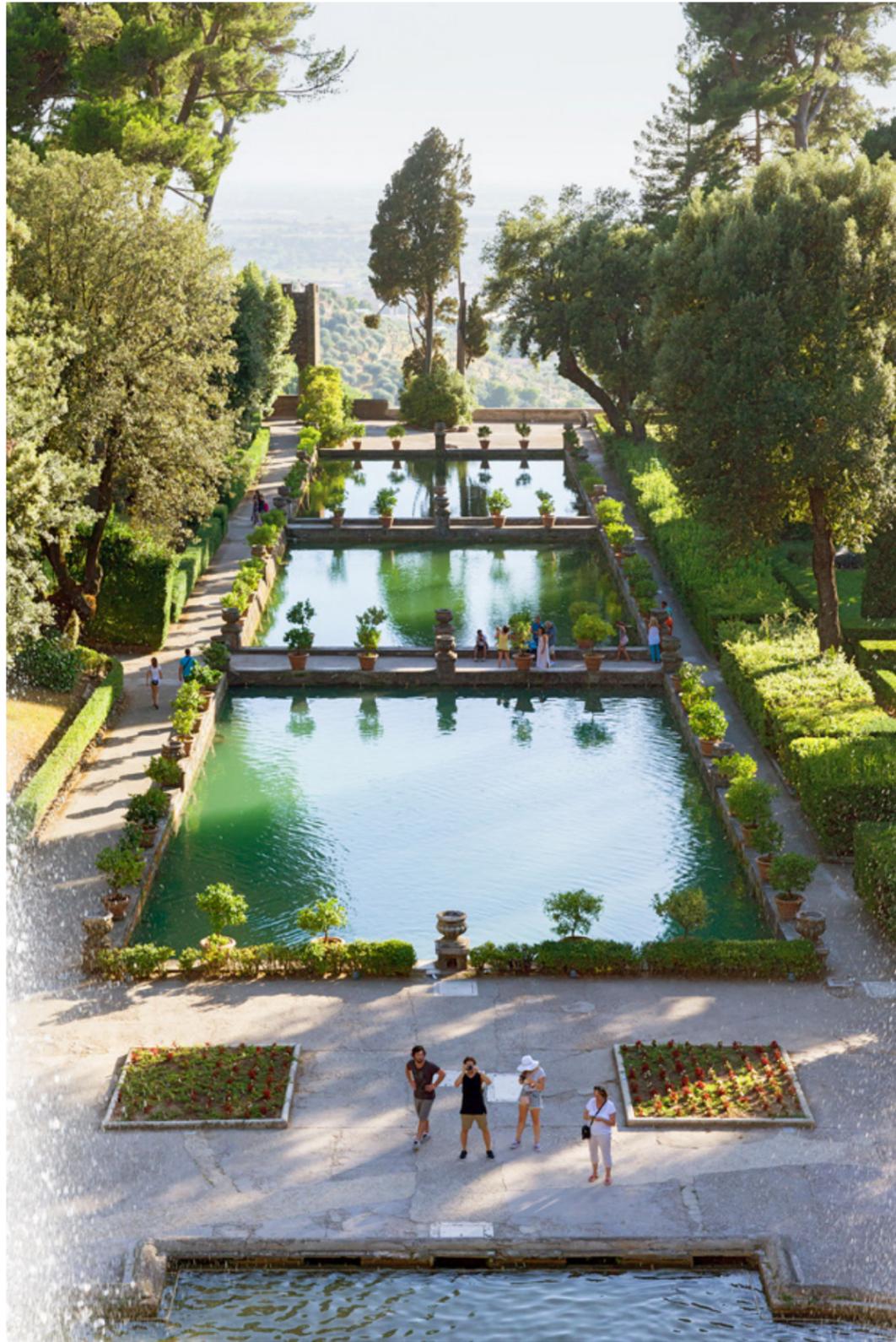
κ Thomas Burke, *Cupid inspiring plants with Love, in a tropical landscape*, c. 1805, after Philipp Reinagle

In Roman mythology, Cupido or Cupid is the personification of irresistible love. In Thomas Burke's colour print, Cupid moves in a tropical landscape in which plants – like people – can be joined together as couples.

Each culture and time is unmistakably expressed in gardening²

Tobias Roth, Poet and essayist

Paradise



← Pirro Ligorio, Garden of the Villa d'Este, Tivoli, 1550–65, View from the Fountain of Neptune across the fish ponds

The park of the Villa d'Este in Tivoli near Rome is a unique example of an Italian High Renaissance garden. Cardinal Ippolito d'Este commissioned the papal architect Pirro Ligorio to construct the palazzo and gardens from 1550. The numerous water features and pools are a hydraulic masterpiece. Ligorio used the local river's hydroelectric power to create a complex system of sluices to fill and distribute water to the fountains, waterfalls, and waterways. For example, the water gushing from the Fountain of Neptune was collected in three large ponds at the foot of the fountain, in which freshwater fish were once kept. This garden not only tells of man's sovereignty over plant life, but also over water; and thus, over nature as a whole.

If people of different times and places have had very different ideas of the way a garden should be organized, it is largely because they have made very different assumptions, strongly affecting their aesthetic preferences, as to the relationship between man and nature.⁹

Elizabeth B. Kassler, Former Director of the Department of Architecture and Design, Museum of Modern Art, New York



↑ Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola, Garden of the Villa Lante, Bagnaia di Viterbo, 1486–1500

The objective is to shift the premises for urban lifestyle and access to nature in tall buildings away from formulaic Modernist design. This alternative offers inhabitants a unique opportunity to assert their personal presence and celebrate their choices of vegetation in the cityscape.²¹

James Wines, Artist



← James Wines, *Highrise of Homes*, 1981

With his speculative and some realized projects, American artist James Wines – with his design firm, SITE – was one of the most important protagonists of the rising interest in architectural environmentalism in the 1970s and 1980s. One of his most distinctive motifs is the “Highrise of Homes”, which began as a research project on housing. The drawing combines the typology of the high-rise with the American Dream of the suburban single-family home. Thus, Wines addresses the fact that while vertical, cellular forms of housing bring with them undisputed social and ecological advantages, this rational view nonetheless will always be in conflict with the desire for an individualized living environment that features a private garden.

↗ Residents gardening in the Bärensteinstraße, Berlin, photo: Peter Zimmermann, 1982

Gardening in the GDR was much more than a hobby – gardening offered opportunities for socializing and self-sufficiency. Residents planned, planted, cultivated, and managed parcels of land in allotment gardens on the outskirts of the city, and utilized the green areas amidst housing estates for the same purpose.

If the planet is a garden, we are all gardeners – perhaps we are not aware of it, yet our choices and lifestyles have an impact on the biosphere and on our collective vital space.²²

Gilles Clément, Gardener and garden philosopher



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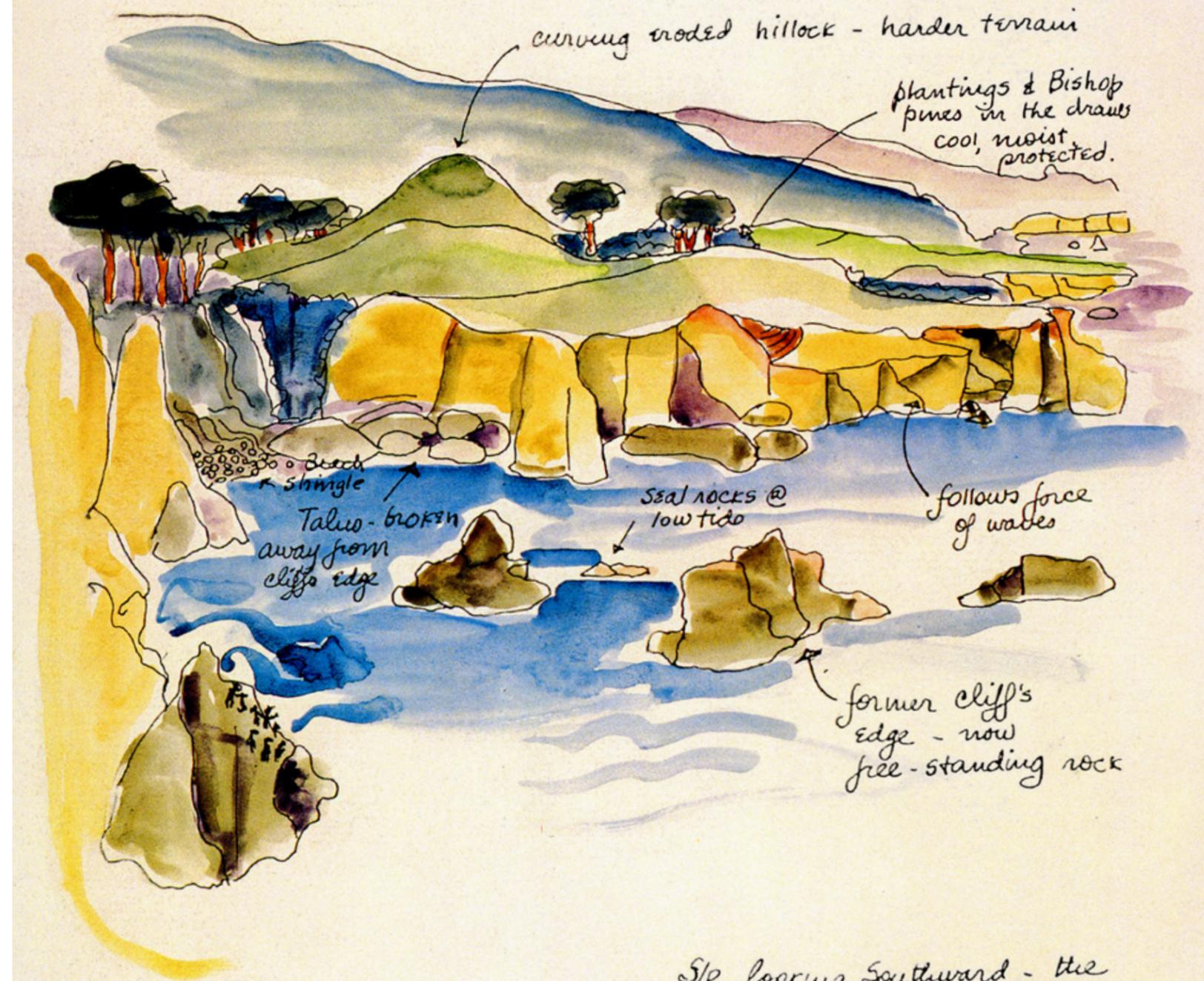
Garden Politics

Who owns a garden, the purpose it is to serve, and the place it is to occupy in the urban environment – these are questions to which numerous concepts of urban and regional planning have sought to give answers. Among the best known of these are the “garden cities” of the early twentieth century. Even the act of gardening has been instrumentalized for political purposes. National governments in times of crisis have declared growing vegetables a patriotic duty, while citizens with grievances have often wielded spades to lend emphasis to their demand for a say or simply a full stomach. Many an exotic flowerbed has deep roots in the history of colonialism, and how the dream of a luxuriant but easy-to-maintain recreational paradise should look is determined not just by gardeners, but also by the designers who stage its colourful displays.

The idyll is deceptive, however, as the ideal garden has long been shaped by influences both political and commercial. Exactly whose interests are manifested in gardens becomes apparent only on closer inspection of the objects and milestones of garden history, which tells us that gardens have always been less of a refuge and more of a battlefield than we perhaps thought.

From Garden City to Post-Industrial Landscape

Gardens have always reflected an imaginary future, utopian repositories for a yearned-for relationship to nature, even. To the extent that gardens represent social ideals as well as ideological systems, they can also be understood as political sites in themselves, as OLIVER SUKROW demonstrates here in the following case studies.



S/R. looking Southward - the shapes & processes of the Coast
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Halpern

It was during the Enlightenment, around 1800, that the ostensibly “natural” English landscape garden became the new model to aspire to – not just in terms of aesthetics and design, but also morally. The “garden revolution” that first showed shoots in the United Kingdom had however eclectic roots. The natural looking garden conveyed an understanding of freedom that was diametrically opposed to the courtly, hierarchical systems presided over by the absolutist rulers of the baroque period, with all their attendant limitations. In his multivolume *Theorie der Gartenkunst* (1775–85), garden theorist Christian Cay Lorenz Hirschfeld took up the philosophical ideas and in particular the criticism of civilization of French Enlightenment thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in which the reclamation of an idealized (if hypothetical) state of nature played a key role.

The process of defortification, which entailed tearing down medieval walls and gates of cities, gave

rise to new urban spaces for sociality and activities that the upwardly mobile middle classes soon claimed as their own. In cities like Vienna, the old bastions and city walls were turned into promenades, tree-lined boulevards, and public green spaces. This also helped improve sanitary conditions, and to this day serves as a graphic reminder of how the city literally burst out of its medieval confines. Various urban planning measures such as the zoning of residential areas with parks and boulevards, and the more fluid because no longer fortified boundaries between town and country, projected an image of the city that was no longer turned in on itself but open and outward-looking. Monuments, vistas, and thoroughfares served to dramatize this same process of opening up. When urban planner Christian Zais began expanding the city of Wiesbaden in 1818, for example, he proceeded from each side of the pentagon defining the limits of the



Green spaces helped improve sanitary conditions, and to this day serve as a graphic reminder of how the city literally burst out of its medieval confines.

medieval town centre and worked outwards. As the nineteenth century progressed, the former residence of the Dukes of Nassau was enlarged and “prettified”, and more and more baths and pump rooms built to turn it into a major spa town. The new, whitewashed facades and neoclassical buildings lining the promenades “looked out” onto the surrounding countryside – one vast landscape garden, as it were.

The city planning and sanitation reforms initiated in the early days of the nineteenth century had to be adapted to keep up with the greatly changed socio-economic conditions just five decades later, a time when gardens and parks were assigned an important and often politically relevant role. Industrialization saw large numbers of people flocking to the cities and

more often having to live in subhuman conditions. Their squalid homes, compounded by long working hours in exchange for a mere pittance, led to unrest and uprisings. The people’s demands for better living and working conditions were taken up by mostly left-wing political parties and movements, who made them a matter of some urgency. Cities and municipalities, usually acting in concert with local employers, responded by implementing social housing projects that also incorporated green spaces. Industrialists with a social conscience followed suit, sometimes building whole estates for their workers.

The first to float the idea of a garden city – a concept that continues to resonate today – was almost certainly the British stenographer and social reformer

➤ Richard Riemerschmid, Terraced houses in the garden city of Hellerau near Dresden, c. 1910

← Alexander Fach, Development plan for the expansion of the city of Wiesbaden, 1871

Gardening in Times of Crises

by Jochen Eisenbrand

Throughout the twentieth century and up to the present day, gardens have played a central role in times of crisis, war, and displacement – as a means of survival through self-sufficiency, but also a refuge, a bucolic antithesis to the horrors experienced, or as a symbol of resistance.

During the two world wars, gardening was declared a patriotic and thus political act in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, or Switzerland, and accordingly encouraged by state and government institutions.

In war zones and refugee camps, gardens reflect the hope of those affected to eventually be able to put down roots again. The rhythms inherent to gardens, which follow the cycles of nature, are both reminiscent of a time before and look towards a future after the crisis.

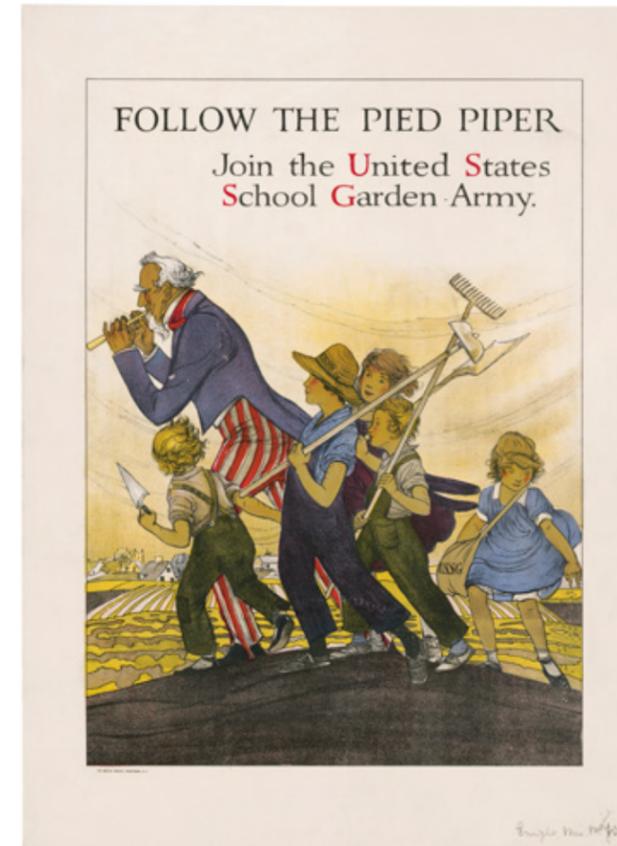


Towards the end of World War I, multimillionaire Charles Lathrop Pack founded the National War Garden Commission (NWGC) in the US to foster an interest in gardening among the American public. Posters released in various languages, advertisements in magazines, and educational programmes were targeted primarily at women and children. The campaign had several goals: increase food production, strengthen a sense of community and national spirit, and, finally, to return an increasingly urban and suburban society to its agricultural roots.

James Montgomery Flagg’s poster depicts Columbia – a common personification of the US used well into the 1920s – scattering seeds with her hands in a gesture of generosity and with her head held high. The poster’s title stylized the prospect of winning the war as a kind of harvest.

In a propagandist effort, the gardens that sprang up on the initiative of the NWGC on private properties, around schools, places of employment, as well as prominent public sites such as the National Mall in Washington, D.C. were called Victory Gardens. In fact, the number of private gardens in the US increased from 3.5 to 5.3 million between 1917 and 1918.¹

→ James Montgomery Flagg, *Will you have a part in Victory? Every Garden a Munition Plant*, poster for the National War Garden Commission’s campaign, USA, c. 1918



In addition to the National War Garden Commission, there were other initiatives to promote horticulture in the US during World War I. While the Victory Garden programme was intended primarily to encourage women to garden, United States School Garden Army (USSGA), funded by the War Department, was aimed at city youths.

In this poster by Maginel Wright Enright, the children of the School Garden Army follow Uncle Sam as he plays the flute. The reference to the legend of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, who lures children out of town, is obvious. Enright worked as an illustrator for magazines and children’s books. She was the sister of architect Frank Lloyd Wright.²

← Maginel Wright Enright, *Follow the Pied Piper. Join the United States School Garden Army*, 1919

During World War II, planting a Victory Garden was once again praised and encouraged as a patriotic act, not only by the government but also by many employers and educational institutions. According to US Department of Agriculture estimates, towards the end of the war the nation’s private gardens yielded around 8 million tons of vegetables – about 40 per cent of the nation’s total demand.

→ Children’s school Victory Garden on First Avenue between 35th and 36th Street, New York City, c. 1944





Dutch photographer Henk Wildschut often focuses his lens on the living conditions of refugees and migrants. The two photographs shown here are from his book *Rooted* (2019), in which he documents gardens in refugee camps.

“Despite the scorching desert heat, I was amazed to find little garden plots complete with garden ornaments all over the Choucha refugee camp when I visited it in Tunisia in 2011. [...] Aware of probably being fated to a long stay in the camp, the inhabitants felt a need to distinguish themselves from the monotonous official surroundings. These little gardens were expressions of resistance to bureaucratically imposed victimhood.” – Henk Wildschut, July 2011

↑ Choucha refugee camp, Tunisia, July 2011, photo: Henk Wildschut

“The rose originally comes from Asia and has been bred and cultivated for its fragrance and beauty for thousands of years. The rose has great symbolic value and was used in ancient times to adorn temples and palaces.” – Henk Wildschut, May 2018

→ Spray Rose, Terbol, Lebanon, May 2018, photo: Henk Wildschut



- 1 Garance Franke-Ruta, “When America Was Female”, *The Atlantic* (5 March 2013), online: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/03/when-america-was-female/273672>, accessed 16 January 2023.
Rose Hayden-Smith, “‘Soldiers of the Soil’: Wartime Gardening Programs of World War I”, *Pennsylvania Legacies*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2017), pp. 20–25.
Charles Lathrop Pack, *The War Garden Victorious*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1919.
- 2 Paula E. Calvin and Deborah A. Deacon, *American Women Artists in Wartime, 1776–2010*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011.
- 3 Hans Jenny, “Versuch einer schweizerischen Agrarautarkie”, *Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv*, vol. 58 (January 1944), p. 88.
- 4 <https://www.seismopolite.com/ecologies-of-resilience-westminsters-bomb-crater-garden-and-the-dig-for-victory-campaign>, accessed 16 January 2023.

The Invention of Leisure – From Park Bench to Lawn Lounger

by Nina Steinmüller



Both British and Prussian iron foundries were producing large numbers of cast iron furniture even in the late eighteenth century. The mid-nineteenth century then saw the proliferation of lightweight outdoor furniture, especially in France, made of slender, bent iron bars, which as a material was more weatherproof than wood and lighter than cast iron. These chairs were also cheaper and easier to manufacture and could be produced in any number of variations. Although lightweight and readily movable, they were sturdy to sit on. This was thanks to the construction of the chair, in which the seat rests on four U-shaped iron bars whose ends converged at each corner to form the chair legs, removing the need for bracing. So popular were these chairs and benches that numerous competitors in both France and Germany soon began manufacturing similar products of their own.

↗ Garden chair, c. 1850–1900

→ Elegant French chairs in the spa gardens of Vichy, no date

The garden city and allotments for growing vegetables were among the concepts to emerge in relation to the appalling living conditions in the rapidly industrializing cities of the West during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Whether a public recreation area or a secluded private retreat, the garden came to symbolize relaxation and regeneration.

This transformation can be inferred from changes in the design of garden furniture, as seen in the variations produced for recreational purposes. Among them was the deck chair, whose name recalls its origin as seating on the sun decks of ocean-going liners; the lounge; folding chairs; and furniture that was sturdy but light enough to be moved around.



→ Adirondack Chairs in a backyard rose garden, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1948



The most widely used item of garden furniture in the USA is almost certainly the Adirondack Chair. While countless variations of this armchair have surfaced over the years, the basic structure has remained the same. With its deep, backward-sloping seat resting on rear legs angled out, a tall backrest made of wooden slats, and wide armrests, the Adirondack makes for a relaxed sitting position with a low centre of gravity. However, it is not so easy to move as the chair is both heavy and bulky.

The Westport Chair shown here is considered a precursor of the Adirondack, but differs on account of its narrow backrest made of a single wooden board. Its inventor is thought to have been Thomas Lee of Westport, Upstate New York, whose prototype was patented and produced for home use by his friend, Harry C. Bunnell.

↖ Thomas Lee, Westport Chair, c. 1903

Testing Grounds

How is a garden designed? Those who believe that garden design begins and ends with choosing the right selection of plants for the location have overlooked the fact that gardens, unlike designed objects and interiors, are never actually finished but are rather in a perpetual state of becoming. All gardeners experience failure, enjoy success, and negotiate and collaborate both with other people and with nature. What gardens demand of us is lifelong learning. Here, personal and social fantasies are tested, experiences are processed, insights are gained, and new relationships to the environment and to nature are defined.

Just how varied the approaches to this can be is evident from the eight case studies presented here. As examples of how important contemporary and historical figures have aesthetically staged their own gardens, they each represent different stand-points and intentions that have taken on material form. While one is a place for coming to terms with personal trauma, another is a vehicle of well-being for everyone. While one gardener has dedicated his whole life to nature conservation and the scientific study of plants, another views them as symbols of oppression or empowerment, and another still belongs to the age-old tradition of cultivating plants for medicinal purposes. The inevitable tension between nature and culture, between gardens and architecture is a constant theme of urbanist discourse. But as these contemporary examples in particular show, gardens today are also an important field of experimentation for visions of the future. Instead of serving as miniature worlds or refuges from reality, they have become promising prototypes in which to put socially and environmentally fairer societies or business models to the test.

Case Study #5

For the past 30 years JAMAICA KINCAID'S Vermont garden has been more than a place of work and pleasure. For Kincaid (b.1949), it has also been a springboard to interrogate aspects of colonial history, cultural appropriation, and displacement.

The Disturbances of the Garden – In the garden, one performs the act of possessing

My obsession with the garden and the events that take place in it began before I was familiar with that entity called consciousness. My mother taught me to read when I was very young, and she did this without telling me that there was something called the alphabet. I became familiar with words as if they were all wholly themselves, each one a world by itself, intact and self-contained, and able to be joined to other words if they wished to or if someone like me wanted them to. The book she taught me to read from was a biography of Louis Pasteur, the person she told me was responsible for her boiling the milk I drank daily, making sure that it would not infect me with something called tuberculosis. I never got tuberculosis, but I did get typhoid fever, whooping cough, measles, and persistent cases of hookworm and long worms. I was a “sickly child”. Much of the love I remember receiving from my mother came during the times I was sick. I have such a lovely memory of her hovering over me with cups of barley water (that was for the measles) and giving me cups of tea made from herbs (bush) that she had gone out and gathered and steeped slowly (that was for the whooping cough). For the typhoid fever, she took me to the hospital, the children’s ward, but she visited me twice a day and brought me fresh juice that she had squeezed or grated from fruits or vegetables, because she was certain that the hospital would not provide me with proper nourishment. And so there

I was, a sickly child who could read but had no sense of consciousness, had no idea of how to understand and so make sense of the world into which she was born, a world that was always full of a yellow sun, green trees, a blue sea, and Black people.

My mother was a gardener, and in her garden it was as if Vertumnus and Pomona had become one: she would find something growing in the wilds of her native island (Dominica) or the island on which she lived and gave birth to me (Antigua), and if it pleased her, or if it was in fruit and the taste of the fruit delighted her, she took a cutting of it (really she just broke off a shoot with her bare hands) or the seed (separating it from its pulpy substance and collecting it in her beautiful pink mouth) and brought it into her own garden and tended to it in a careless, everyday way, as if it were in the wild forest, or in the garden of a regal palace. The woods: the garden. For her, the wild and the cultivated were equal and yet separate, together and apart. This wasn’t as clear to me then as I am stating it here. I had only just learned to read and the world outside a book I did not yet know how to reconcile.

The only book available to me, a book I was allowed to read all by myself without anyone paying attention to me, was the King James Version of the Bible. There’s no need for me to go into the troubles with the King James Version of the Bible here, but when

→ Jamaica Kincaid in the garden at her home in Vermont



Case Study #6

PIET OUDOLF (b.1944) is one of the most renowned garden designers working today. Celebrated for his elaborate artistic planning, his designs celebrate the beauty of all the seasons.

by Hanno Rauterberg

Can Art Be Nature?

“Society sees itself reflected in its gardens” – a statement like this is typical of Piet Oudolf. And he makes it almost in passing, as if it were a truism that is surely blindingly obvious to everyone, and especially to those at the DIY store hunting for a digital irrigation system or some window box flowers for the balcony; the same store which just recently started stocking large wooden boxes that supposedly make growing vegetables both faster and easier. Is that society, too – this crating of vegetation, this casketing of the earth and the fruits of the earth along with it?

Oudolf is not a sociologist, nor is he a philosopher. He is an artist, some say. Certainly, his name has been bandied about in the art world for some time now, and he has designed many a luxuriant garden for American museums. Hauser & Wirth gallery in England also had him stage a performance of perennials and grasses for its Somerset location. And in Weil am Rhein, the garden now growing alongside the Design Museum of the furniture manufacturer Vitra is an open invitation to an aesthetic experience without parallel. For here, nature becomes art, and art nature. Does society see itself reflected here, too?

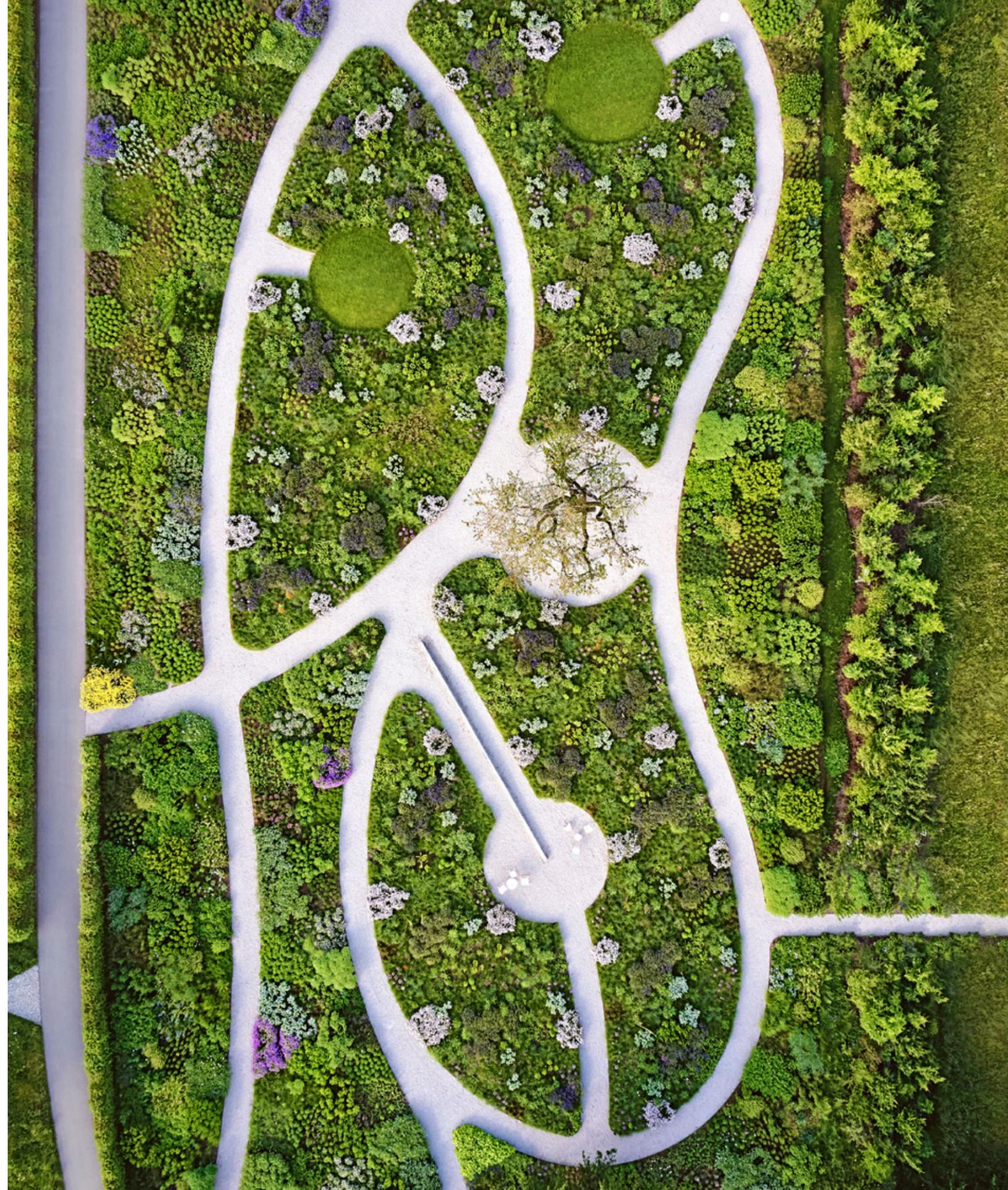
Oudolf is certainly proud, if a little surprised that someone like him, a garden and landscape designer who for decades was only known in horticultural circles, is suddenly being hailed by art and design magazines as an avant-garde artist. And he can scarcely cope

with the flood of enquiries that he receives. The perpetual extravagance of the art world seems rather remote out here in Hummelo, a poor, industrialized landscape geared towards efficiency not far from the German-Dutch border, where Oudolf and his wife Anja converted an old farmhouse and where at this very minute a herd of black and white piebald ruminants are grazing nonchalantly in front of his studio window.

If Oudolf is an artist, then he is one who lives his ideas – a conceptual artist, in other words. He sits at his desk strewn with coloured crayons and tracing paper. A few squiggles of purple here, some small blue dots there: the sheets are full of mysterious patterns at once ebullient and entirely abstract – at least to the layman. To Oudolf, they are speaking signs. Because hidden behind each line is a three- or rather four-dimensional image of colour, shape, mood, scent, and even swishing sounds. Although “image” is the wrong term here, since what Oudolf actually creates is a multilayered, multivalent experience. Anyone who plants a garden, plants in time.

Oudolf says that before going to sleep he likes to immerse himself in this sensory world and review his drawings in his mind’s eye. How might it look if the quivering dewdrop grass was interspersed with cream-pink allium globes? Is there enough contrast between their textures? How will the colour interact

→ Aerial view of the Oudolf Garten on the Vitra Campus, Weil am Rhein, Germany, designed in 2020



Case Study #8

In Kuala Lumpur, one of the world's most densely built-up megacities, the civic engagement and community spirit of a group of citizens led to the KEBUN-KEBUN BANGSAR initiative, which repurposed wasteland into a thriving garden. And this is hopefully just the beginning, says one of the initiators, NG SEK SAN.

Interview by Viviane Stappmanns

“All of our work is about connecting.”

Kuala Lumpur-based landscape architect Ng Sek San retired from professional practice in 2013, but he did not stop working; after 30 years of delivering projects for commercial clients and government agencies, he started to serve his community. Kebun-Kebun Bangsar, a neighbourhood garden project initiated post the general election campaign of that year, was the first of its kind in the Malaysian capital. Situated on eight acres of land in central Kuala Lumpur, the garden was conceived as an act of resistance to top-down planning of public spaces with little regard for community needs and participation. Operating since 2017 with temporary permissions – recently extended after protests against potential closure

proved successful – the garden is not only a haven for families and volunteers, but embedded in a larger system of local supply and waste management. It turns the kitchen scraps of the entire neighbourhood, including those of shopping complexes, into compost, and supplies food to families in the area. Apart from being an asset to the community, the garden is a model for biophilic (increased connectivity to the natural environment) and decentralized design practice, which Ng Sek San hopes will be applied elsewhere in the city, where population density is high and planning for adequate green space still lags behind the rapid urbanization that has prevailed since the 1950s.

→ Building phase of the Kebun-Kebun Bangsar community garden in Bangsar, a neighbourhood in Kuala Lumpur, 2017



We were teaching people how to plan for an uncertain future by growing food.



When you returned after your studies in Aotearoa New Zealand in 1994, you were one of the first local landscape architects practising in Kuala Lumpur. What kind of garden and landscape design culture did you encounter on your return?

Compared to some of our neighbours, like Bali, or even Japan and China, Malaysia does not have a traditional history of garden design. It was a rural and agricultural landscape. The big change in this part of the world has happened in my lifetime. In the past 60 years, when cities like Kuala Lumpur rapidly expanded, landscape architecture became a necessary practice.

But in the 1990s, the big public projects were still done by landscape architects from Europe and America. Now, we have a lot of schools that are training young people to be landscape architects and designers. It is also now a requirement that new developments have green space or gardens.

That wasn't the case before?

No. In Europe, landscape and garden planning underwent a big shift 200 years ago, with industrialization and the urbanization that came alongside it. When cities became barely liveable because of pollution

and population density, planning frameworks were developed to provide access to green space. Because of Malaysia's much later yet incredibly fast urbanization, there were no planning frameworks for gardens and landscapes until the 1990s. When I first started working here, landscape was not a requirement of any architectural development. Architects needed to submit building plans to local authorities for approval, but there was no such thing as a landscape submission. Only in the last 20 or 30 years has the legal framework slowly developed. So anyone developing buildings now must also put in a landscape or garden submission.

I heard you only work on local projects, is this correct?

Strictly speaking, I am retired. In 2013, I realized that I'd been doing a lot of projects for private developers, essentially serving the top 5 to 10 per cent of our society. I gave up my commercial practice and have been trying to bring design to the lower end of the spectrum of our society ever since. I am involved in community health projects and making design very simple, accessible, and affordable.



↖ Hilltop view from Kebun-Kebun Bangsar, looking south-east from the street Lorong Bukit Pantai 4, Bangsar, 2021

↗ Building phase, 2017

The World as a Garden

Given that there is not an inch of the planet that has not been impinged on or affected by human activity, the question that really exercises the minds of designers, planners, and researchers is this: if we cannot avoid having an influence, might not that influence be made less destructive, or even turned into a positive? There are certainly examples to prove that this is possible. After all, these days there is more biodiversity in an ordinary suburban front garden than on a field leached of all life by industrial farming. Might we not learn to view the whole Earth as such a garden that we have a duty to cultivate, tend, and use responsibly?

For many artists, landscape architects, designers, and scholars, the garden is an opportunity. It is a place in which to ponder and try out in miniature what might be practised on a much larger scale. It is above all in the garden, where the gardener's attentive, caring hand is constantly at work, that we can counter the challenges of climate change, the threats to biodiversity, growing social injustice, and ever greater isolation with confidence, and so enable new forms of togetherness and a better, more harmonious coexistence with nature to thrive.

Images of the garden as a place of healing, spirituality, or learning are often associated with the gardens of the past, which for many people were a kind of sanctuary in which to create a domesticated version of untamed nature. In the Anthropocene, however, we are bound to ask who needs protecting from whom?

In northern Ethiopia, agricultural deforestation has left behind arid plains where forests once thrived. For DR. ALEMAYEHU WASSIE ESHETE, the well-being of the region now hinges on the gardeners caring for the remaining pockets of biodiversity.

Interview by Viviane Stappmanns, Photography by Kieran Dodds

“If we destroy the forest, we risk everything.”

For the past three decades, Dr. Alemayehu Wassie Eshete has been working to preserve and restore the once abundant woodlands of his native Ethiopian Highlands. His ally in this mission has been the Orthodox Tewahedo Church. Central to their belief system is the principle that forests are sacred places; the trees surrounding the church must be cared for by the priests. When the entire forest in the northern province of Ethiopia was logged and nearly eradicated, this stewardship helped save some small pockets of ancient forest. Today, these sacred and multispecies havens are key sites of biodiversity, and the efforts of the priests – treating the sites as paradisaical gardens to be preserved – are not only crucial to the survival of the forest but to a sustainable agriculture.

You started working as a forest ecologist in 1992. The tree coverage in the Ethiopian Highlands had been on a steady decline. From around 40 per cent one century ago to less than 5 per cent today. How did this happen?

In Ethiopia, population growth has been at a continuous 3 per cent per year. In the 1960s, the total population was around 50 million people. Now it is 110 million. Most people live off agriculture. They herd cattle and grow crops, various pulses, and cereals. But it's not modern farming, not like in Europe, where the existing land is made more arable. In Ethiopia, we don't intensify farming, we expand. When there are more mouths to feed, you clear more forest and convert more land to farming. And that is what happened.

→ Debre Ensese, South Gondar, 2018





You quickly realized that scarce areas of forest could be found around churches. Why?

According to the law of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, the forests around that church, including all creatures living in it, have to be protected. The priests think of these forests as Gardens of Eden. It is a kind of metaphor. They are God's gift. We think God exists there. So, the priests take care of the forest.

But they didn't notice that these forests, too, are degrading. Every year they are shrinking by one or two metres, pushed by neighbouring farmers. Nobody noticed that. Until I and an American colleague of mine, Dr. Margaret Lowman, went through the painstaking work of reconstructing this shrinkage with the help of Google Maps and showed them the changes over the past decade. Although the priests loved the forests, they hadn't noticed. It was our science that helped them to understand that they are degrading slowly.

So you started working with the priests to help them not only conserve but restore, and in some cases even expand those forests. How did you do that?

My job consists mainly of teaching people. For instance, I go out and give talks to the priests, or I work with school children so that they start appreciating and caring for the forest.

I read that there are 20,000 such church forests in Ethiopia. How do you roll out an education programme on this magnitude?

Actually, I don't work with all 20,000 forests. If I could get help from the international community, I could include more. But for now I am focusing on a select number. These forests represent a new approach to agroecology. So far we have reached about 35 to 40. Every time I get more funding, we integrate more forests into the programme. The ambition is to reach all 20,000; not directly but by creating role models that the caretakers of each forest can learn from.

This is interesting. In our exhibition, we have been looking at the design of gardens in different locations and over time. There is something very particular about how gardening knowledge has been passed on. Regardless of time and geography creating gardens appears to be the ultimate open-source design. Manuals and role models serve to guide the users, who implement the work mostly by themselves. On a very practical level, what do you tell the priests?

Firstly, it is about running awareness seminars based on my research. We give tips and instructions for conservation. For this, we have to run refreshers every year, because the knowledge gets lost.

An act of maintenance and care, like gardening itself.

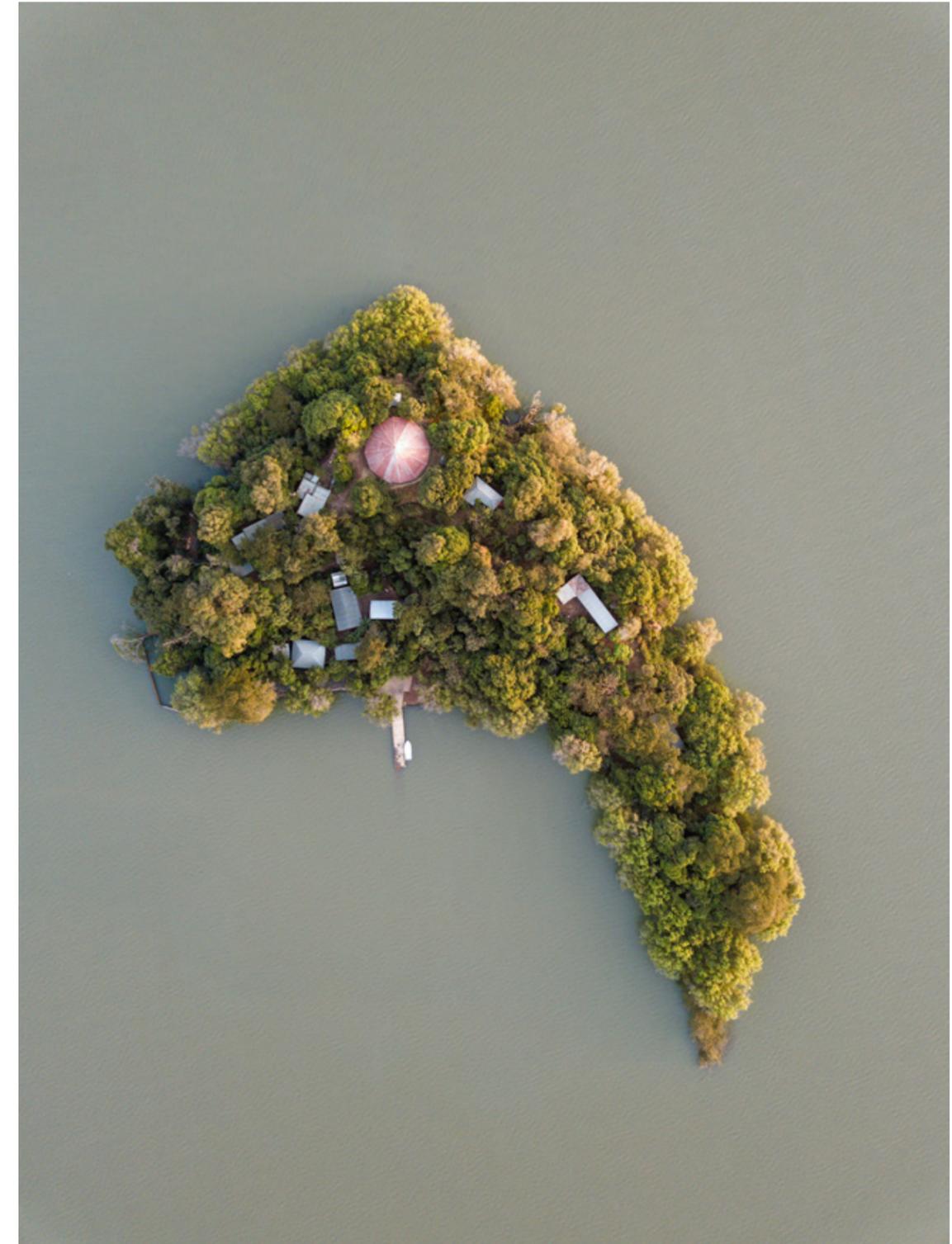
Ethiopia does not really have a culture of gardening. We are crop and livestock people, agrarian people. You don't really see so-called gardening as in Europe.



← Ura Kidane Miheret I, Lake Tana, Ethiopia, 2018

✓ Fields near the Bahirda Michael II, West Gojam, Ethiopia, 2018

➤ Entos Eyesus, Lake Tana, Ethiopia, 2018



Landscape architect CÉLINE BAUMANN designs urban environments, but she also maintains a prolific practise as an artist and educator. Her Basel-based studio is committed to research on plant life and interrelations with humans. Her intersectional lens in turn informs her design work, in which she aims to create dynamic open spaces that respect the ecology of both humans and nature.

Interview by Viviane Stappmanns

“Human habitats need to accommodate other living beings.”

Today, many designers are concerned with creating living *environments*, especially our urban environments, in which plants and animals can also thrive. Is this a new conversation?

The discussion is not new but all the more pressing today, as it is now widely acknowledged that human activities are having a catastrophic impact on all the other species. Everywhere we go, especially as westerners with our high levels of consumption, we bring a lot of destruction, corrupting the planet in an unprecedented way. In 2019, the United Nations released a *Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*, whose conclusions are dramatic. We are on the brink of ecological collapse, with one million species facing extinction within decades.

As you say, this is not new. In the early 1960s, Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, a very influential book that drew attention to the damage of herbicides and pesticides on the planet. It is often named as a precursor to the environmental movement that followed in the 1970s and 1980s. *Silent Spring* was published exactly 60 years ago, yet environmental destruction has only increased. Do you think this moment is any different? As a practising landscape architect can you see that there is real change ahead? Or is it just an academic discussion?

Action is being taken – the problem is being tackled from different directions. David Holmgren, the founder of the permaculture movement, describes this very well. In 2008, he published an essay narrating

→ Céline Baumann, Detail of the installation *Parliament of Plants*, Matadero Madrid, Centre for Contemporary Creation, 2019–20





↙ Australian permaculture gardener and public intellectual David Holmgren envisaged four future scenarios about energy transitions and converging crises: 1) Brown Tech / Top-down constriction 2) Green Tech / Distributed powerdown 3) Earth steward / Bottom-up rebuild 4) Lifeboats / Civilization triage. Here, these are visualized by illustrator Andrew Merritt (Something & Son), Art direction: EcoLabs / Johanna Boehnert, 2009.

↘ Studio Céline Baumann and architects Davis Manz, Barbara Thüler, and Farquet Architectes, Model of the new Walkeweg School, Basel, winning competition entry, 2022

The project offers play-scape amenities for students as well as ecological corridors for an urban flora and fauna.

David Holmgren's four scenarios already exist simultaneously in our current reality. The question is which one will ultimately dominate.

different scenarios for the future. In all, he assumes that resources will decline and climate change will occur, but he imagines different responses. In one, technology – like geoengineering the weather – plays a central role. Another corresponds more to the ideal of the 1970s: it involves degrowth, consuming less, and an urban exodus; paired with severe climate change, it leads to a neo-feudal system with hamlets, gated communities, and bartering. Anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing calls this “life in the capitalist ruins”. Another of Holmgren's scenarios – slow decline of resources coupled with mild climate change – offers a more hopeful vision where compact cities use renewable energy and apply an eco-rationalist approach. And yet another tells a cautionary tale of how our future will look if we continue to do “business as usual”. Those four scenarios already exist simultaneously in our current reality. The question is which one will ultimately dominate. Personally, I am very critical of the technocentric approach. It is like proposing to fix the cause of the problem with the root of the problem. As feminist Audre Lorde stated in 1979, “The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.”

So on a very practical level, what do you see happening that is hopeful?

We might look to very simple, individual gestures as well as custom-made solutions for each problem, including reducing grey energy and CO₂ emissions, building less, applying the principles of the sponge city at a wider scale. Those measures are unfortunately unspectacular and hardly reach newspaper headlines.

But don't the simple gestures, like green roofs, also require a lot of technology to work?

In fact, green roofs need very little technology, just slightly more investment to ensure the building structure underneath can carry the extra weight. I am part of a team who recently won a competition to design an ecologically sound school complex in Basel. One of the buildings will have a green roof that is just for plants and animals, not for human use; it will have a decent amount of soil. This will allow for a rich biological life, and it will retain water without too much technology. The fact of making it inaccessible to humans will hopefully allow this roof to be rapidly colonized by the local fauna and act as a sanctuary.

So concepts like the sponge city – in which rainwater is retained and reused on an urban scale – are not technology intensive?

Not necessarily. In our densely populated urban environments with all the sealed surfaces, water cycles have been completely disrupted. The rainwater is often unable to infiltrate the ground to be naturally filtered. And overflowing sewage systems have occasionally resulted in devastating floods. To restore the water cycle we need to replace sealed, paved surfaces with porous ones. This is a completely low-tech solution, which is also cost-efficient. It implies that the space for motorized traffic be reduced, a measure which is often met with stubborn resistance.

I have noticed that in terms of addressing complex, networked planning processes, new skills and networks of people are needed too. Do we need new ways of designing?

Yes. We are currently working with a company specialized in circular material reuse on the school project. They collect components from current demolition



All landscapes are interconnected on a shared, global scale, says Belgian landscape architect BAS SMETS. In order to create environments that are liveable while keeping our planet in balance, new microclimates can be introduced with a long-term view to less intervention.
by Lisa Dabscheck

“Let’s call it biospheric urbanism.”

“Exemplary” and “augmented” landscapes are terms coined by Bas Smets to describe the crux of his approach to creating new urban microclimates. The “exemplary” landscape refers to reading the natural components obscured by the visual clutter that has been introduced into a given site over time. Once these inherent elements have been identified, they can be foregrounded and consolidated. That is the point at which the “augmented landscape” – essentially an enhanced version of the exemplary landscape – emerges. In the southern French city of Arles, Bureau Bas Smets transformed the semi-desert climate of an industrial wasteland into a Mediterranean ecosystem with the introduction of 80,000 plants. An early project in London metamorphosed a sunken

domestic courtyard that was bereft of wind and sun into a subtropical forest with the use of residual structural heat and the realization that an incongruous yet ideal microclimate existed there. His winning commission to redesign the public space surrounding the fire-damaged cathedral of Notre-Dame, in what, referencing Victor Hugo, Smets refers to as “the cradle of Paris”, utilizes, among other innovations, a thin layer of water on the parvis in front of the cathedral. It will cool down hordes of tourists in high summer with an evaporative cooling that replicates the effect of a warm-weather rain shower.

While Smets’s work is grounded in the doctrines of engineering, he remains guided by our animalistic responses to the landscape, which he calls “corporal

→ Bureau Bas Smets,
Landscape Project,
Luma Arles, France, 2021,
Photo: Iwan Baan



A Garden of Ideas



When it comes to future challenges for ecological and social sustainability, the answer may be found in the garden and in the act of gardening. Maria Heinrich, Marten Kuijpers, Viviane Stappmanns, and Lisa Dabscheck glean a collage of ideas around how to collaborate with each other and with nature in our cities, buildings, schools, and living environments. The collective picture is one of hope. And just like in the garden itself, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Trial and error, responding to local conditions, and the realization that everything is connected are always at play.

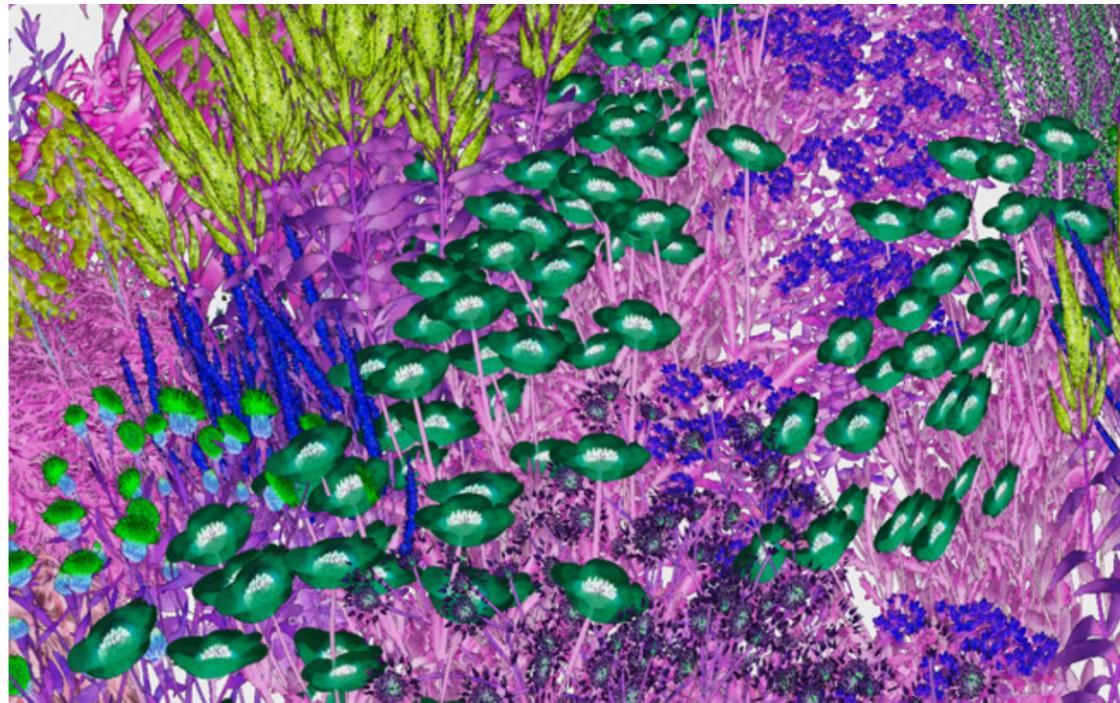
Growing Objects

In the mid-2000s, when 3D prototyping and printing became viable technologies in design and manufacturing, Alice and Gavin Munro took an alternative route. They reconsidered human interaction with nature by looking back to the agricultural revolution, and as a result decided to grow furniture – literally dispensing with conventional production altogether to instead use “air, soil, and sunshine” as source materials in a process they call designing with a “carbon sink 3D printer”. In 2008, they planted 3000 trees. It took four years and much trial and error before the first harvest of prototypes (chairs, lamps, and other experiments) was produced, via “biofacture” as opposed to manufacture, in 2012. In the years since, the couple have refined their products and established Full Grown, an organization dedicated to researching, testing, prototyping, and putting into practice agricultural design methods to shape trees directly into objects. These – mostly chairs and lights – can take up to nine years to grow, and each is shaped individually as it matures. No two pieces are alike, with different species revealing their peculiarities as they develop. While the initial plan to harvest a chair was to grow four trees next to one another and join them to form a seat, the current crop are trees grown upside down around a custom-made frame.

→ Full Grown, The Grown Chair, 2012–16

← ↓ The Full Grown orchard in Wirksworth, Derbyshire, where up to one hundred objects are maturing at any given time.



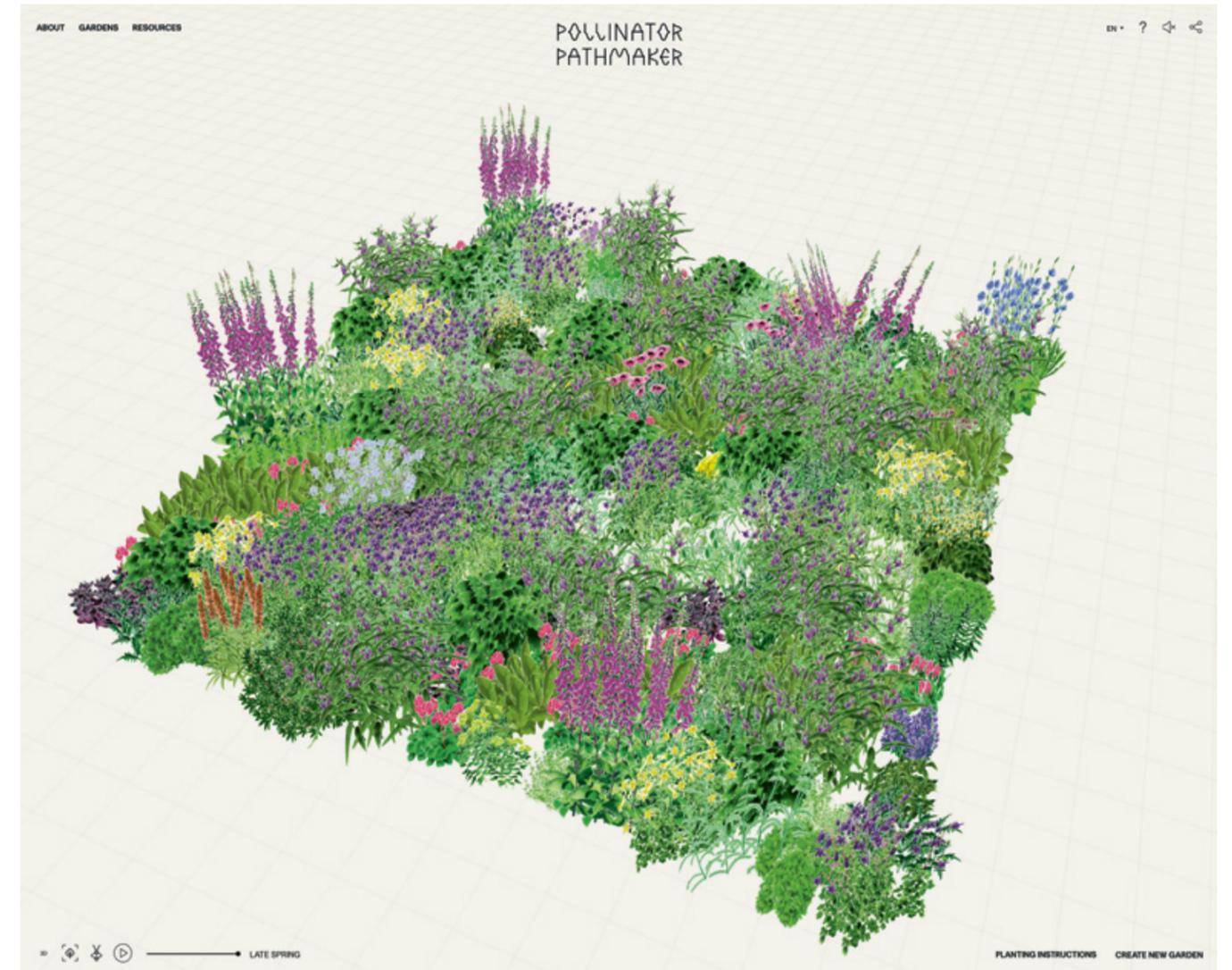


I want to transform how we see gardens and who we make them for: let's create art for pollinators' tastes, not human taste.

Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg

Art for Pollinators

If bees, butterflies, moths, wasps, and other pollinating insects could design their own gardens, what would humans see? Certainly something very different from the gardens we design for ourselves. For the past decade, British artist Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg has created artworks across various scales to critique and question the human-centricity of design – from the perspective of tiny, synthetically engineered organisms to a digitally revived extinct rhino. Her project *Pollinator Pathmaker*, “an artwork for pollinators, created and cared for by humans”, inverts the usual imperatives and economies of scale and scarcity. With the goal of becoming “the world’s largest climate positive artwork”, *Pollinator Pathmaker* aims to counteract the decline in flying insect numbers, which in Germany alone have plummeted by 75 per cent in 30 years. Ginsberg convened the brainpower of horticulturists, scientists, and pollinator experts into an altruistic algorithmic tool and encouraged thousands of grassroots participants to collaborate on creating this decentralized living artwork for pollinators – in suburban gardens, in schoolyards, on roofs and balconies. Originally commissioned by the Eden Project in Cornwall, UK, *Pollinator Pathmaker* begins with an interactive website, pollinator.art, where participants feed in the parameters of their garden-to-be. Once location, climate, size, and soil specifications have been entered, the *Pollinator Pathmaker* generates a unique garden plan optimized to serve the maximum diversity of pollinators. Users can print their planting instructions to help them create their piece of the *Pollinator Pathmaker* puzzle and receive a digital certificate for their artwork. From the first large “Edition” gardens, which opened in 2022 at the Eden Project and for London’s Serpentine Gallery, the project is now being catapulted from the UK into new climatic zones. As this requires expanding the plant palette, Ginsberg collaborates with local experts and art institutions. In Germany, Light Art Space and the Naturkunde Museum Berlin, in 2023, are creating a large public garden made for pollinators and providing a catalyst for many more, smaller “DIY Editions” across the city, each supporting the flourishing of the others.



↶ Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg, *Pollinator Pathmaker*, 2022, digital rendering

← *Pollinator Pathmaker*, Eden Edition Garden in Bodelva, Cornwall, photographed in July 2022

↷ Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg, *Pollinator Pathmaker*, online tool

Post-Extractivist Landscapes

Louvre-Lens Museum is situated in a 20-hectare park designed by landscape architect Catherine Mosbach in northern France. This subsidiary museum of the Louvre in Paris is placed on the grounds of a former coal mine in the industrial city of Lens. Mosbach's design interprets this post-extractivist landscape as a symbiotic environment, where soil, water, organisms, as well as pollution form an ecosystem. As such, it is a healing site where the memory of the economic and ecological devastation of the ground is decisive for the composition of soil and plants. The post-industrial park is tended to by four gardeners, whose task is to preserve the biodiversity of the site and create a space of comfort in an industrialized environment.

→ Aerial view of the urban center of the city of Lens, the university town and the mining basin of Nord-pas-de-Calais, January 1969

↘ Mosbach Paysagistes (landscape architecture), SANAA (architecture), Passage sous Bois Pionnier (Path between the pioneer trees) and Prairie Estrade-Auditorium, Louvre-Lens Museum Park, 2012



Post-Plantations

CATPC (Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise) is an art cooperative of plantation workers in Lusanga in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Their aim is to buy back the depleted land of former plantations by making and selling art, turning them into ecological, sustainable, multi-species post-plantations. The plantation workers create sculptures out of clay, which are then digitally scanned and remade from plantation materials such as cocoa, sugar, or palm fat, and shown in museums worldwide. Alongside the sculptures, they also create NFTs as a tool for digital restitution, criticizing the current ownership of many cultural artefacts of the African continent and the consequences of colonialism. As of 2022, the farmers have bought 50 hectares of land and transformed it into a food forest with a museum on-site. This museum, White Cube, was designed by OMA and is a centre for a museum programme aimed at decolonizing the plantation and creating the post-plantation.

← Agronomist Charles Munanga with cocoa seedlings in CATPC's plant nursery, Lusanga, 2017

↙ CATPC's plant nurseries in the post-plantation, Lusanga, 2017

↓ Mbo Mangala with cocoa seedlings in CATPC's plant nursery, Lusanga, 2017

