

Press information

Garden Futures Designing with Nature

25 March to 3 October 2023, Vitra Design Museum

An exhibition by the Vitra Design Museum, the Wüstenrot Foundation, and the Nieuwe Instituut

Gardens reflect identities, dreams, and visions. Deeply rooted in their culture, they can unfold immense symbolic potential. 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 avantgarde. The exhibition »Garden Futures« at the Vitra Design Museum is the first to explore the history and future of modern gardens. Where do today's garden ideals come from? Will gardens help us achieve a liveable future for everyone? The exhibition addresses these questions using a broad range of examples from design, everyday culture, and landscape architecture – from deckchairs to vertical urban farms, from contemporary community gardens to living buildings to gardens by designers and artists including Roberto Burle Marx, Mien Ruys, and Derek Jarman. The exhibition architecture was designed by the Italian design duo Formafantasma.

Gardens are full of hope and promise. Wherever people stake out a piece of nature to create a garden, its layout and design reveal much about how they relate to nature, be it as individuals or as a society. This is illustrated by the works of such diverse artists and architects as Hans Thoma, Georg Gerster, Athanasius Kircher, Gabriel Guevrekian, Barbara Stauffacher-Solomon, Alvar Aalto, Thomas Church, Vita Sackville-West, and Luis Barragán, all of which feature in a media installation at the start of the exhibition. They show the garden as an idealized space that pervades our daily lives as well as our imaginations – a place in which immediate practical function and profound symbolic, philosophical, or even religious significance are readily compatible.

Even the most private garden is more than a personal retreat. Every garden bears the marks of social and historical developments, political and commercial interests, and cultural value systems. This is addressed in the second part of the exhibition, where we learn that many plants forming a basic component of Western gardens have deep roots in colonial history. The Wardian case invented in the nineteenth century made it possible to send live plants all around the world. Its impact on the plant trade and on private gardens was significant, but it also contributed to the spread of invasive species and played a central role in breaking monopolies on important crops like tea or rubber, reaping huge benefits for the colonial powers.

The nineteenth century also saw the emergence of numerous urban planning concepts that sought to reconcile city and garden. In 1898, for example, the British social reformer Ebenezer Howard published his description of a garden city whose inhabitants would be able to grow their own food. The Green Guerrilla group co-founded in New York by Liz Christy, in turn, has been striving to redefine the garden as a place where social justice and public participation are actively negotiated.

The group formed in the 1970s, but the questions raised by it and its predecessors still remain the subject of much debate: who is entitled to a garden, what is a garden for, and how can gardens be integrated into an urban environment?

There are many different ways of answering these questions. The third part of the exhibition introduces nine ground-breaking garden makers from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The Brazilian landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx (1909–1994) won international acclaim for emphasis on native plants, Piet Oudolf's plant compositions are attractive all the year round, and author and gardener Jamaica Kincaid takes her garden in Vermont (USA) as her starting point in addressing colonial history, repression, and cultural appropriation. Artist and filmmaker Derek Jarman (1942–1994) faced his impending death by creating a variegated work of garden art in a place where it hardly seemed possible, amidst the hostile shingle on the coast of Kent, England, near a nuclear power station. A community garden in Kuala Lumpur co-founded by Malaysian landscape architect Ng Sek San exemplifies the many grassroots initiatives in megacities and metropolises all around the world. The extensive Liao Garden designed by Chinese artist Zheng Guogu draws on the aesthetic of the »Age of Empires« video game and thus builds a bridge between virtual and real environments. These and other fascinating projects demonstrate how gardens articulate their makers' creative approach and show that garden-making – a creative form of expression at the interface of the visual arts, architecture, and design – merits far more attention than it has hitherto received.

The exhibition's final section examines contemporary projects addressing the future of gardens. In an age of climate crisis, social injustice, biodiversity under threat, and social isolation, the garden offers a place in which to reimagine the future and develop solutions – a place of healing, spirituality, and learning. The walkable textile »meadow« made specially for the exhibition by Argentinian artist Alexandra Kehayoglou highlights the dramatic threat that climate change poses to seemingly timeless landscapes. How to translate a growing awareness of this threat into innovative action in cities, buildings, schools, and other areas is illustrated in a six-metre scroll by architect Thomas Rustemeyer which, alongside contemporary projects, also features traditional and indigenous practices. In the age of the Anthropocene – that is the message of these and similar projects – the entire planet emerges as a garden that we need to cultivate, tend, and use responsibly.

Featured artists and designers (selection)

Céline Baumann, Burle Marx, Mien Ruys, Kieran Dodds, Leonardo Finotti, Formafantasma, Zheng Guogu, Alexandra Kehayoglou, Jamaica Kincaid, Piet Oudolf, Ng Sek San, Lalage Show, Chew Yue Siew, Howard Sooley, Stefano Boeri, Mien Ruys, José Tabacow, Henk Wildschut, Julia Watson, Marjan van Aubel, Dan Pearson, Midori Shintani, Full Grown, Fritz Haeg, Catherine Mosbach, James Hitchmough, Bas Smets, Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg, and many others.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a lavishly illustrated publication including in-depth essays, conversations with leading garden makers, and case studies of pioneering projects. Hardcover with cloth binding, 24 x 28.5 cm, 228 pages, c.180 images, ISBN 978-3-945852-53-8 (English), 55.00 €, also available at: www.design-museum.de/shop

The **Nieuwe Instituut** is the Netherlands' national museum and institute for architecture, design and digital culture. Based in Rotterdam, a global centre for design innovation, the institute's mission is to embrace the power and potential of new thinking, exploring past, present and future ideas in order to imagine, test and enact a better tomorrow. Encouraging visitors of all ages to question, rethink and contribute, the institute's exhibitions, public programmes, research, and wide-reaching national and international initiatives provide a testing ground for collaboration with leading designers, thinkers and diverse audiences, critically addressing the urgent questions of our times.

In addition to housing the National Collection for Dutch Architecture and Urban Planning, the institute manages the 1933 Sonneveld House, a leading example of Dutch Functionalist architecture, as part of its campus in Rotterdam's Museumpark. In 2022, the Nieuwe Instituut became the world's first Zoöp, a ground-breaking model through which all areas of the museum's operations and programming are informed by its impact and benefit to other forms of life. Ecological management and creating a high level of biodiversity are also the starting points of the New Garden. The institute also serves as commissioner of the Dutch pavilion at the biannual Venice Architecture Biennale and, in 2023, will act as the Artistic Director of the London Design Biennale.

The **Wüstenrot Foundation** looks after material and non-material cultural heritage. At the same time, the foundation searches for ways to enable our community to rise to the diverse challenges it faces in the future. In doing so, it views cultural heritage as the starting point and as an important point of reference. The foundation's goal is to provide impetus through the development and propagation of practice-oriented models, and thereby bring about positive change beyond its own actions. In the thematic fields of monuments, future questions, urban & rural regions, literature, arts & culture, and education, the Wüstenrot Foundation conceptualises and realises its own projects, and promotes the ideas and proposals of other not-for-profit institutions. The foundation is particularly focused on quality of life, the built environment and interaction with our shared cultural heritage, whereby the main emphasis lies on cultural assets from the period after 1945.

Weleda was founded in 1921 as a pharmaceutical laboratory with its own plant garden. Today the company is the world's leading manufacturer of certified organic and natural cosmetics and medicines for anthroposophical therapies. From its beginnings, Weleda has been committed to a world in which both people and nature can thrive. Weleda products are available in more than fifty countries all around the world. The majority of the raw materials are grown organically or biodynamically or harvested in the wild according to certified sustainability standards. Since 2021, Weleda has also been a certified B Corp and is committed to contributing to the environment and public welfare, thus contributing to a more sustainable economy.

After its presentation at the Vitra Design Museum, the show will travel to the Design Museum Helsinki and the Museum of Finnish Architecture (10 November 2023 – 31 March 2024), the Vandalorum in Värnamo (27 April – 13 October 2024), the Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam (November 2024 – March 2025), and the V&A Dundee (April – December 2025). Further venues are planned.

General information

Exhibition title: Garden Futures: Designing with Nature

Dates: 25 March 2023 to 3 October 2023

Curatorial team:

Vitra Design Museum: Viviane Stappmanns, Nina Steinmüller

Nieuwe Instituut: Marten Kuijpers, Maria Heinrich

Exhibition design: Formafantasma

Hashtags: #VDMGardenFutures

Contact: www.design-museum.de
T +49.7621.702.3200
info@design-museum.de

Press images: www.design-museum.de/pressebilder

Press contact: Vitra Design Museum
Johanna Hunder
Head of Communications
T +49.7621.702.3153
E communications@design-museum.de

BUREAU N
Stefanie Lockwood
T +49.30.6273.6104
E stefanie.lockwood@bureau-n.de

An exhibition by the Vitra Design Museum,
the Wüstenrot Foundation, and the Nieuwe Instituut

WÜSTENROT STIFTUNG



**Nieuwe
Instituut**

Global Partner

WELEDA
Seit 1921

Partner

 **GARDENA**

Thanks to

**Design
Circle**