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## CONTEMPORARY ART IN THE HISTORIC LANDSCAPE

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### SZTUKA WSPÓŁCZESNA W KRAJOBRAZIE ZABYTKOWYM

#### **Abstract**

The paper discusses the subject of the introduction of modern forms into spaces of a historical character, mainly into historical gardens. Its aim is to present the general tendencies, causes and scope of the introduction of modern art into these types of interiors, the problem of their interference with historical tissue, its scope and goal, along with an outline of general guidelines for these types of projects.

**Keywords:** historical gardens, art, contemporary art, monument preservation, exhibition design.

#### **Streszczenie**

Artykuł porusza problematykę wprowadzania nowoczesnych form do przestrzeni o charakterze historycznym, głównie do ogrodów zabytkowych. Ma ca celu przedstawienie ogólnych tendencji, przyczyn i zakresu występowania współczesnej sztuki w tego typu wnętrzach, problemu ich ingerencji w tkankę zabytkową, jej zakresu i celu, wraz nakreśleniem ogólnych wytycznych do tego typu działań.

**Słowa kluczowe:** ogrody historyczne, sztuka, sztuka współczesna, konserwacja zabytków, projektowanie wystaw

## 1. Introduction

Widely accepted and currently held definitions describe the cultural landscape as a recording of human deeds and history, containing natural and civilisational elements [1]. Every landscape produces emotion and possesses tangible and intangible values. Historical urban landscapes are particularly saturated with them, being urban spaces that constitute the effect of the layering of cultural and natural values, as well as containing a series of attributes that are discussed in the wider context of a site [10, p. 5]. This context includes compositional and aesthetic categories – the analysis of space as a work of art created by generations of architects, urban planners and artists, exhibiting not only the aesthetic currents of a particular period, but also a combination of other factors – including cultural, social and economic ones. The evaluation of a historical landscape constitutes a difficult and still widely disputed problem, in particular as elements that determine its value or that have value in and of themselves, are numerous, overlapping and layered [9].

Art, the art of garden design and the art of the landscape are subjects which have been intertwined since the dawn of history. The landscape, the garden, landscape and garden interiors can constitute a work of art, house other works of art and can be an inspiration for the visual arts (Fig. 1, 2), finally, they can become a scenography, a background for the presentation of these works. The fine arts can round out a work of landscape architecture and garden design, they can create new effects and values. Finally, works of art can be made in order to transform an existing convention and form of a park or a garden (flower and garden exhibition, as well as land art are a separate issue).



Fig. 1. Mirabell Palace and Garden, Salzburg, classic pergola (photo by K. Łakomy, 2017)



Fig. 2. Garden at Arsenale, Venice Biennale of Architecture 2014, pergola as a work of art (photo by Ł. Sarnat, 2014)

## 2. Goal and scope of research

This article discusses the subject of the scope of the interference of a modern artist into historical tissue, especially that of gardens. It features a discussion on the history of such activities: modern tendencies in the visual arts that appear in historical landscapes. On the basis of an analysis of a selection of gardens and historical parks, in which modern forms

have been added, the positive and negative consequences of such actions will be pointed out. The conclusion will be formulated in the form of guidelines that can be used in modern revalorisation work on gardens and those referring to the scope of the introduction of modern objects, elements and materials into the space of areas featuring historical greenery.

According to the “Florence Charter” a historical garden – “is an architectural and horticultural composition of interest to the public, deemed a historical monument, composed of living material and includes the arrangement of an area and its terrain, plant complexes, structural and decorative elements, as well as water” [3]. However, according to Professor Mitkowska, “it is a work formed from plant substance, integrally combined with architectural elements and shapes (...). It is a cultural treasure, of historical, scientific and artistic value” [5, p. 19–20].

The defining and determining of the scope of modern art that is being created by artistic movements, tendencies and manifestos, as well as technology and new media, is much more difficult. Today, the form of artistic expression has an immense amount of potential (media), but its goals remain the same: ethical, aesthetic, communicational, cognitive or ludic. Apart from architecture and design, sculpture, performance art, installations and all manners of new media art forms (as well as multimedia) appear in an interaction with the landscape and the garden.

### 3. Introducing new forms into historical spaces

Works of the fine arts have appeared within garden spaces since ancient times, usually in the form of frescoes decorating the architecture accompanying gardens and sculpture in the form of reliefs, freestanding works and those composed into water layouts. They started to be used particularly often after the Renaissance period [7, p. 227]. Various vases, sculptures, statues, sarcophagi are elements of the furnishing of squares and gardens that round out the basis of composition and the content layer of a garden (through the use of symbolism, allegories or apotheosis). They could take on the form of trophy collections, authentic mementos of travels or forms that bring memories of said travels to mind (Hadrian’s villa in Tivoli) or the fragments of buildings, details, inscriptions, headstones (*lapidarium*). They could play an educational or political (e.g. Stowe) role, constituting a part of a garden’s “narration”, stimulating contemplation (ancient motifs) or create various types of atmosphere (ruins, temples, stones).

They were laid out either individually or in the form of alleys (e.g. Herenhausen), and special spaces within a garden were planned for their exhibition (e.g. Benrath, Fig. 3). They were often provided with a special framing in the form of plant compositions, loggias, recesses or plinths. The objects that were presented originated from earlier periods (mainly from ancient Greece and Rome), however, they were most often from the period in which a garden and its accompanying structure (chiefly palaces and villas) were built, being the result of the inventiveness of designers, deeper ideas or the ambitions of their owners (Sacro Bosco in Bomarzo, Fig. 4) or their passion for collecting (e.g. villa Borghese in Rome).

The tradition of organising sculptural exhibitions in public gardens (e.g. the Royal Baths) dates back to the XVIII century. Sculpture parks, which constitute a variation of a public park, built as a permanent exhibition of a collection of works by a single artist (e.g. the Park of Gustav Vigeland in Oslo) or of numerous artists (Chianti Sculpture Park) are a separate subject (because the idea of their origin and composition is the art exposition) .



Fig. 3. Benrath Palace and garden, Germany, Terrace with statues (photo by K. Łakomy, 2005)



Fig. 4. Sacred Wood of Bomarzo, Italy, Statue of Winged Fury and lions (photo by K. Łakomy, 2017)

In the case of infills within historical greenery performed through the actions of modern artists, their reception can be varied, and decisions regarding their placement within a historical context are widely discussed. Apart from an often obvious desire to stimulate emotions or to play with conventions, symbolism or form, which forces the search for deeper connections between a new element and the historical site, it would be appropriate to point out the aspect of the attractiveness of a space for exhibition purposes. Both historical gardens and parks, as well as historical urban interiors are characterised by order, harmony, often a compactness and uniformity of their composition, as well as by their materials. This is why they constitute an excellent field for exhibition – both due to the uniformity of the background, as well as due to the contrast between the old and the new.

#### 4. Modern art in historical gardens – examples

The adaptation of historical green spaces to the needs of modern users is the basic subject that is discussed in the making of decisions regarding the scope of conservation. According to the Venice Charter (as well as the Florence Charter), every infill within a historical structure should “bear a sign of our times”. In the case of introducing massings into historical gardens, they are usually given a modern form, while in the case of fittings and street furniture, the general tendency leans towards the introduction of forms that are similar to historical ones (the Pilinitz gardens), often using modern materials (concrete, steel), with completely new solutions (e.g. Leonberg, Pomeranzengarten – seats and pergola) being rarer.

Bobola’s gardens in Florence constitute one of the more beautiful gardens of the Italian Renaissance and are included on the UNESCO World Heritage Site List. Their history extends

to the XV century, and their prime is associated with the Medici family, mainly with Cosimo I and his son Francis I. The author of the initial plan was Niccolò Tribolo, however, after his death (in 1550), finishing the construction was successively supervised by other artists, including: Giorgio Vasari, Bartolomeo Ammannati and Bernardo Buontalenti. The garden was successively embellished and redesigned during subsequent periods. Its distinctness is evidenced by an outstanding spatial composition which makes use of the shape of the terrain, that combines geometric and free layouts of greenery with groups of sculptures in a particularly successful manner. They are not only classical forms, but also rustic and ancient ones, the figures of heroes and gods, as well as those of animals (dogs), in addition to the placement of an authentic Egyptian obelisk. In 2008, the “Tindaro Screpolato”, a sculpture by Igor Mitoraj, was introduced into this layout (Fig. 5). The monumental form of a classical, cracked face was placed near a neatly cut row near Prato dei Castagni, providing the space with additional value, eliciting a lot of emotion among visitors.

The layout of the Irish Kilmainham Hospital and Garden in Dublin, which constitutes a part of the cultural heritage of Ireland (Ireland Heritage), currently houses the Irish Museum of Modern Art. The history of this structure goes back to the year 1684, when a hospital for war veterans was opened here- founded by James Butler (the Duke of Ormond and Vicery, followed by Charles II) – modelled after the Les Invalides in Paris. The revalorisation of the whole complex began in the 1980's. The current form of the former herbal garden was based on archival plans and constitutes an example of a geometric, representative formal garden. It also houses classical sculptures, mostly female figures and vases, however, due to its new function, modern art has been introduced here as well. In the courtyard, near the main entrance, “The Drummer”, a sculpture by Barry Flanagan, has been placed, while on the crossing of the main axes of the composition, the “North South East West” fountain by Lynda Benglis, has been located (Fig. 6). Temporary exhibits also appear in the garden, such as the „Kilkenny Limestone Circle” by Richard Long or “217.5° Arc x 12” by Bernar Venet. On the other hand, the terrace between the courtyard and the main garden constitutes a typical exhibition space, although with a decidedly more modest character and a limited amount of greenery.



Fig. 5. Boboli Garden, Florence, “Tindaro Screpolato”  
(photo by K. Hodor, 2009)



Fig. 6. Kilmainham Hospital and Garden, Dublin,  
the fountain “North South East West”  
(photo by K. Łakomy, 2012)

The Chatsworth Garden in England is also a historical garden of unique value, in the interiors of which modern works of art are being presented. In this case, it was an exhibition titled “Beyond Limits – Sotheby’s at Chatsworth: A Selling Exhibition”, which took place in 2012 as a temporary exhibition presenting sculptures meant for auction by the Sotheby’s international auction house. The palace and garden layout under discussion is dated to the year 1555. The first garden in the Elizabeth style was designed by William Cavendish, while it owes its current form to Lancelot Capabilit Brown and Joseph Paxton. Despite this, remaining in the hands of a single family, it has preserved its uniform, formal character and, contrary to the two earlier examples, is subjected to frequent and constant care.

The vast green interiors, the shape of the terrain around the palace, as well as numerous water artefacts make the exhibition of the works that are presented here exceptionally spectacular. This effect is additionally heightened by contrast. During the aforementioned exhibition, against the backdrop of this historical garden, works such as Tony Cragg’s “Declination”, Zaha Hadid’s “Lilas in Bloom” or “Hoop-La” by Alice Aycock were presented.



Fig. 7. Chatsworth Garden, “Lilas in Bloom”  
Zaha Hadid, [11]



Fig. 8. San Quirico d’Orcia, Itay, Temporary  
exhibition in *Horti Leonini*  
(photo by K. Łakomy, 2014)

## 5. Guidelines for areas of historical greenery

Every green historical area represents a set of individual qualities. Adapting these types of areas to new forms of use is always connected with transforming their spatial structure, which, from the point of view of conservation, can constitute a threat [2, p. 160], but also an opportunity to elevate their attractiveness and popularity (ill. 8). Regardless, it is important that during such activity, the following elements are taken into account:

- ▶ the value of a space, the landscape and the value and class of a structure,
- ▶ the uniqueness of a space, the landscape and the uniqueness of a structure,
- ▶ the scale of a space and the scale of the structure,
- ▶ harmony and uniformity or contrast and diversity,
- ▶ the invasiveness of an object of art to the space of a garden,
- ▶ the influence on a change in intensity or form of use due to visitors coming to a garden.

A space of historical greenery can also be a place of organising temporary presentations, both of pure art, as well as from the field of exhibition, for instance in the form of open air thematic exhibitions. In such situations, the designer of such a project should consider the problem through multiple layers. It seems, the basic aspects are:

- ▶ safety (of a park, a visitor, a structure),
- ▶ functionality
- ▶ circulation within a park,
- ▶ circulation within an exhibition project, including one that provides a continuity of narration and a clarity of script,
- ▶ relation with extant space,
- ▶ technological non-invasiveness,
- ▶ the factual accuracy of a project,
- ▶ formal cohesiveness or contrast (form, material and technology, colour, etc.),
- ▶ scale in relation to the park and its elements (plants, fixed furnishings, infrastructure, etc.).

## 6. Conclusions

In light of the analyses that have been performed, it seems that the subject of the introduction of new elements into historical gardens and parks, both of a functional character – such as benches, lighting, litter bins, etc. as well as of an aesthetic one – chiefly works of sculpture, in addition to educational ones – temporary exhibitions, is still quite controversial. However, there is a lack of clear guidelines regarding the form, material, scale and the manner of the placement of such objects within a space. In practice, conservation designs are based on the knowledge, experience and aesthetic taste of their authors. They should always be preceded by studying the structures and by comparative analyses, keeping in mind that new elements cannot interfere too strongly with the extant layout, leading to its significant transformation. Acting in accordance with the principle of Professor Janusz Bogdanowski, that we should always act as to benefit a historical site, modern furnishings, works of art, as well as other activities should enrich historical parks and gardens with new values, content and emotions, while at the same time preserving their historical character.

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