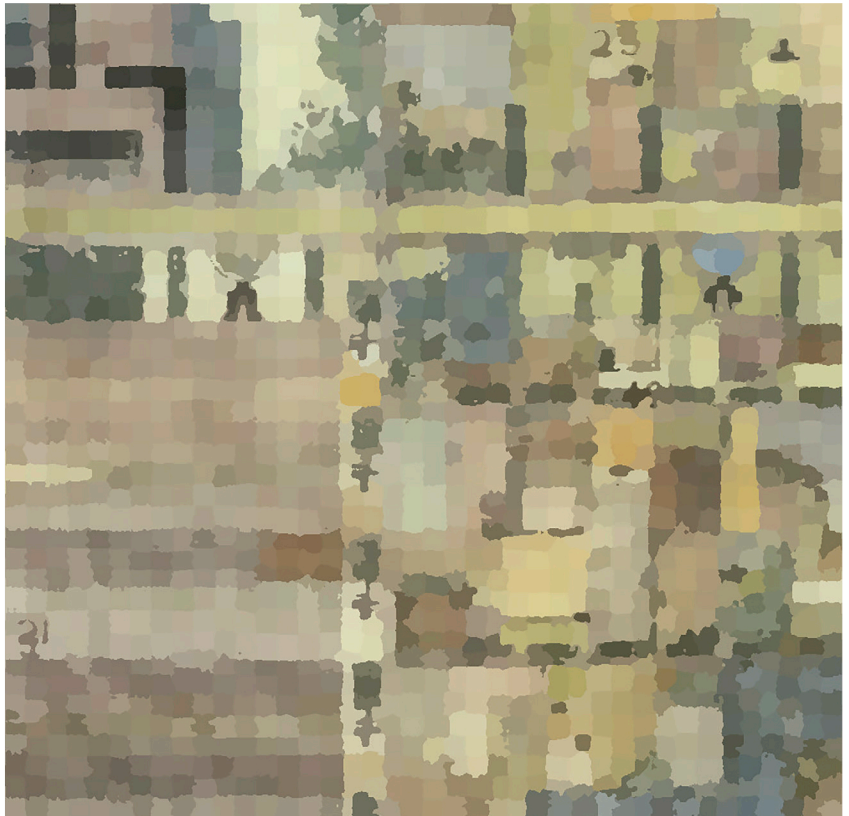


# LANDSCAPE PROJECT

ARCHITECTURE, URBANISM, AND ECOLOGY

Javier Pérez Igualada



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ARCHITECTURE, URBANISM, AND ECOLOGY

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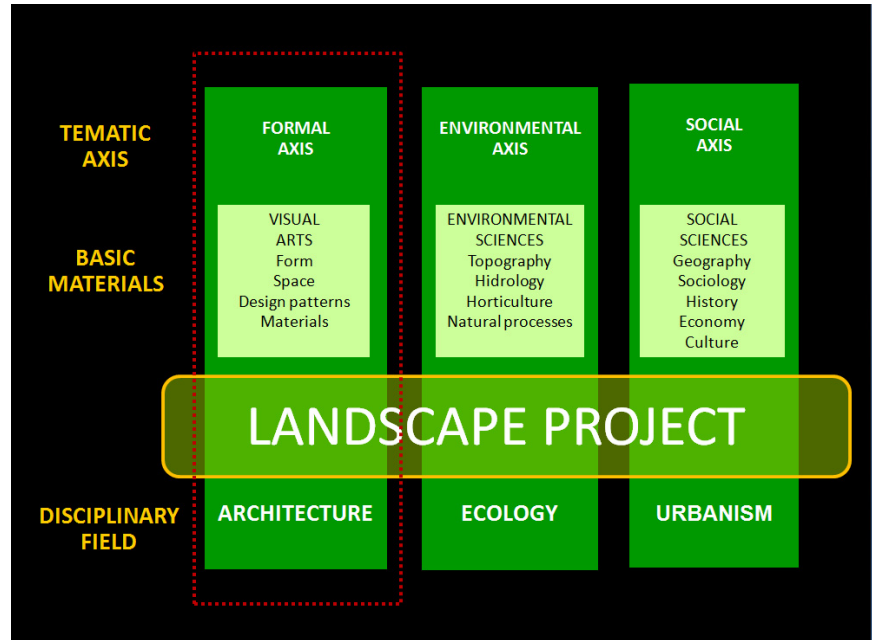
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## INTRODUCTION

The term landscape has been associated with architecture in the academic and professional world since the beginning of the 20th century. Frederick Law Olmsted, designer of New York's Central Park and the Boston Park System, first used the professional title of landscape architect in 1863. By the turn of the century, a degree in landscape architecture was being taught at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, and it continues to be taught to this day. Many architecture schools around the world now offer academic landscape programmes.

The underlying reason for the integration of landscape in the academic offer of architecture schools is the growth in this discipline in recent decades, from its traditional dimension -associated with horticulture and gardening- to an architectural and urban dimension. Landscape is now placed within the sphere of design disciplines, covering all the scales from design to architectural projects, and from urban projects to spatial planning.

The approach to landscape from the form is that of the design disciplines, and it is necessary to vindicate that territory, in architecture and urbanism. But, at the same time, the arguments from which the formal definition is approached must be integrative. The form must be understood as the crystallization of the ecological, cultural, and social aspects that converge in a certain place.



Thematic axes, base materials and disciplinary fields in landscape project.

We consider, therefore, that the orientation of landscape as a design discipline architecture must necessarily base on a solid theoretical basis. But on a theory that is not a mere accumulation of the complementary cultural knowledge of practical project work, but conceived as a conceptual structure in which we can insert the rational approach to the specific problems faced in the design decision-making process.

The orientation of landscape architecture from its architectural-urban dimension is perfectly compatible with the recognition of its character as a multidisciplinary field, which includes diverse components: project and design disciplines, creative arts, technology, environmental sciences, and social sciences.

In this book we will address the landscape project as a disciplinary field located at the confluence of three thematic axes or sources of meaning: the formal axis, the environmental axis, and the socio-functional axis.

Each of these axes integrates several base materials. On the formal axis, the base materials belong to the sphere of visual arts (form, space, design patterns, and materials). On the environmental axis, these materials are those of the sciences that study the physical environment and its processes (such as topography, hydrology, and horticulture). Finally, the socio-functional axis integrates materials from disciplines such as geography, sociology, history, economics, and culture.

The exploration of these three axes of the landscape project -formal, socio-functional, and environmental- will be conducted from a perspective linked to the disciplinary fields of architecture, urban planning, and ecology, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

For each of these fields, the book collects a wide selection of examples of relevant works, combining international references with others of more local nature and deliberately seeking a diversity of contexts and scales. These examples, presented with an abundance of graphical material, are shown below the texts that develop each section, and so enable us to see how the concepts apply, take shape and materialise without interrupting the argument of the discourse.

The perspective adopted, and the contents that are presented based on it, make this book the perfect complement to the book *Landscape architecture: Form and matter*, also published by the author at Editorial UPV. Together, the two books form a coherent body of contents in landscape architecture, which includes the basic conceptual materials, and aspects of formal definition and constructive materialisation. In this way, a general body of teaching resources is configured, both for an approach to the landscape from architecture studies and as a support for a deeper and more comprehensive study through postgraduate or master courses.

J.P.I.

1. This approach to the landscape project is a variant of that proposed by Marc Treib, who places landscaping at the confluence of three thematic axes: the formal; the environmental; and the cultural (See Treib, Marc, "The Contents of the Landscape Form (The Limits of Formalism)", *Landscape Journal*, 20, 2001).





ART, ARCHITECTURE, AND LANDSCAPE



# ART, ARCHITECTURE, AND LANDSCAPE

## The formal axis in the project of open spaces

### The convergence of landscape design with modern art and architecture

The formal and spatial principles of the new aesthetic that prevailed in modern art and architecture from the 1930s onwards were not immediately transferred to landscape design. The justifying argument, which James Rose reproduces in his article *Freedom in the Garden* (1939), was the following: the new materials and construction systems led to a new architecture, but in landscape design, the base material, the vegetal elements, had not changed, and, therefore, the traditional design models, those of the English landscape garden and the formalist *beaux-arts* garden, were still fully valid. “A tree is a tree, and it will always be a tree; therefore, we cannot have a modern landscape design”<sup>1</sup>

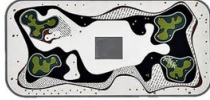
However, the new principles of modernity, which guided avant-garde art and the architecture of Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, Wright, and Neutra, would also impose themselves in landscape design from the late 1940s onwards.

In this process of convergence of landscape design with contemporary art and architecture, the teaching of Christopher Tunnard, author of the influential book *Gardens in the Modern Landscape*, played an important role. Tunnard moved to the United States in 1939, and taught Garret Eckbo, James Rose, and Dan Kiley at Harvard. The ground-breaking works of Fletcher Steele, Jens Jensen, Alfred Caldwell, Burle Marx, and Thomas Church were also instrumental in the formal change in thinking in landscape design.

In the following pages, we analyse some of the achievements that, fighting on two fronts simultaneously, against the English landscape garden and the *beaux-arts* one, brought the landscape project to modernity between the 1940s and 1950s.

1. James Rose. *Freedom In the Garden. A Contemporary Approach In Landscape Design*. Pencil Pens 10, 1938.

Opposite page: Paley Park, New York, Zion & Bren Associates, 1965.



## ROBERTO BURLE MARX

### The garden as a work of art

The main contribution of the modern movement to landscape architecture is the work of Roberto Burle Marx. His training as a painter allowed him to, firstly, carry out an operation that was fundamental: transfer the abstract language of avant-garde painting to the design of garden plans. He used organic curved forms of intense colours inspired by Jean Arp, Miró, and Le Corbusier, which were appropriate to represent the exuberant colours of the tropical vegetation of his country, Brazil.

Burle Marx's gardens are formalistic, and represent a clear break with the predominant naturalistic picturesque garden design that appears in the urban proposals of the modern movement. Rather than winding paths over a large green meadow, Burle Marx's compositions are elaborate overlapping layers of warm-coloured pavements and upholstery plants, from yellow to red, in which green is a rare colour. For this reason, his reference, as Ábalos points out, should be sought in the parterre of the classical garden, although reworked from the repertoire of forms of abstract painting.<sup>1</sup>

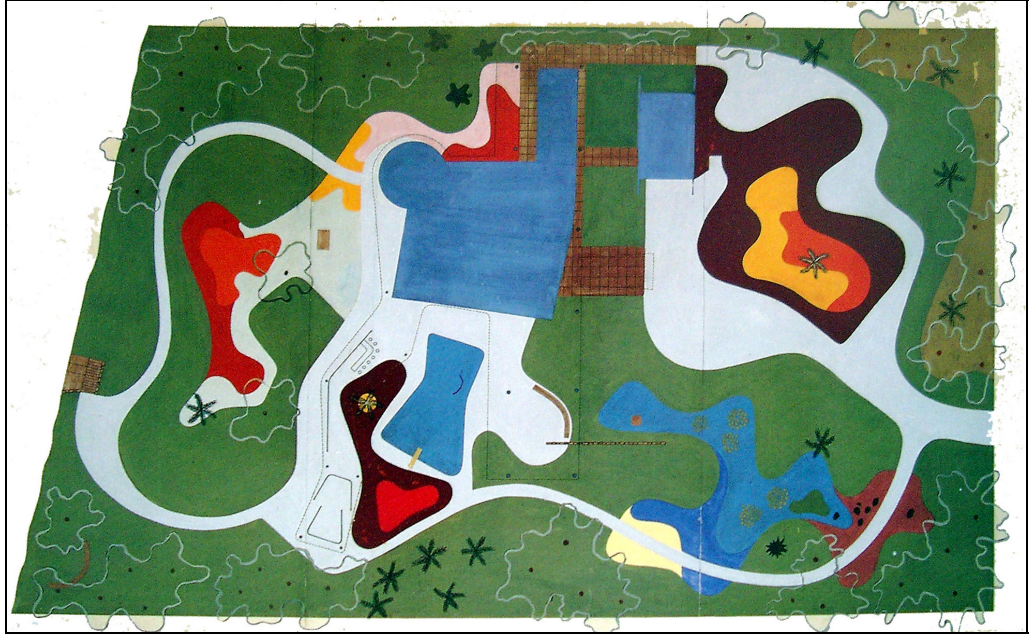
The landscaping of the square and the roof of the building of the Ministry of Education and Health in Rio de Janeiro (1938) is a notable example. In this famous work, instead of winding paths that cross green meadows, we find superimposed biomorphic forms of bright contrasting colours, in a composition like an abstract painting. With this, Burle Marx manages to create a form for the modern garden, dissociating it from the English landscape model that even Le Corbusier had until then adopted, as well as going much further in exploring the possibilities of the roof-garden.

The compositional pattern of the roof-garden of the Ministry of Education was used by Burle Marx in numerous later projects, such as that of the Plaza Senador Salgado Filho (1938), or that of the Banco Safra Park.



Roberto Burle Marx

1. Ábalos, Iñaki, "Roberto Burle Marx. El movimiento moderno con jardín", *Paisea*, 2, 2007.



Gardens of the Burton Tremain residence. Santa Bárbara, California, 1948.



Saenz Peña Square, Rio de Janeiro, 1948.

But the work of Burle Marx does not stop there: the transcendent formal finding of the link between landscape design and modern art will later be completed and enriched with the introduction of two new substantial ingredients. The first of these is a progressive and increasingly profound knowledge of the flora of Brazil, with which he will be able to base and give solidity from a botanical point of view to designs that began as plastic experimentation. The second is a sensitivity towards the place, which will bring it closer, as Ábalos points out, to the approaches of picturesqueness. The integration of the three elements –plastic, botanical and genius loci- gives rise to a mature period, of which the private garden of the residence of Odette Monteiro, from 1948, can be considered the first significant example.



Exterior pavement built with white and red limestone, black basalt, pebbles and expanded clay. Roof-garden of Banco Safra Park, Sao Paulo, 1983-1986.





East Park. Caracas, Venezuela. 1959

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