

A CRITICAL LOOK AT THE VALUE OF THE VISUAL

by

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(Under the Direction of Brian LaHaie)

ABSTRACT

The separation of the senses and intelligence enables the deliberate disregard of conscious (visual) information. This paradigm, a direct result of the Western scientific conceptions of rationalism, creates major problems within the visual and spatial medium of landscape architecture. Recent research explores the relationship between art and architecture and recognizes the consistent skill of fine artists to develop imaginative and sensitive design solutions. Responding to this research, this thesis looks directly at the design process of fine artists and questions current methods within contemporary landscape architecture discourse. In order for landscape architects to claim the art of design it is necessary to understand and cultivate visual skill. Highlighting the values of openness and materiality, the work of two contemporary artists illustrates an intelligent artistic sensibility and provides a noteworthy contrast to narrow approaches within the discipline of landscape architecture. Understanding the landscape in relation to a wider cultural context, this thesis seeks to expand critical discourse about the role of the visual and the value of design expertise.

INDEX WORDS: landscape architecture, art, consciousness, intuition, openness, materiality, rationalism, visual, artistic sensibility, design process

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DEDICATION

To all my teachers.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Describing a new interdisciplinary science building (fig 2.1) at Columbia University by the Spanish architect José Rafael Moneo, a recent architectural review in *The New York Times* states that “this is a building conceived in opposition to our contemporary culture, with its constant visual noise and unforgiving pace. Mr. Moneo aims to lift us, if only momentarily, out of our increasingly frenetic lives — to slow us down and force us to *look* at the world around us, and at one another.”¹



Figure 1.1. José Rafael Moneo, *Northwest Corner Building*, New York City (2010).
Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2011/02/09/arts/design/MONEO-slideshow.html>

¹ Nicolai Ouroussoff, "A Building Forms a Bridge between a University's Past and Future," *The New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/09/arts/design/09moneo.html?_r=1&ref=nicolaiouroussoff.

Problem: Ignoring Material Realities

But what is the value of taking the time to look at the world around us, and perhaps more importantly, what are the consequences of *not* taking the time or “overlooking the visual”?² In conjunction with the visual and spatial medium of landscape architecture, a number of practitioners have raised concerns related to the deliberate disregard of conscious information: the qualities of the real world all around us that make up our everyday experiences. A recently published book, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design* by Kathryn Moore, plays a critical role in this thesis. In order for landscape architects to “claim the art of design” it is necessary to understand the actual mechanics and skill involved in the process of creating a quality outdoor environment.³ With this goal in mind, *Overlooking* proposes reconsidering the sensory, and especially the visual, qualities of the landscape in an informed and educated manner, thus reconnecting the senses and intelligence. Hiding behind the familiar notion that design is a mysterious and highly personal act creates significant problems for the applied design disciplines such as landscape architecture.⁴ Concepts such as “design expertise” and “artistic sensibility” are not contradictions of terms.⁵ Designing takes a conscious effort to distill and apply knowledge in a skilled way.

Significance & Purpose: Sensible Discussions Towards Better Design

Complex multi-layered design problems are not unusual. Growing concerns of sustainability, finance, culture, and technology (to name a few) overwhelm almost every design decision. Considering this challenging environment, all designers of the built

² Kathryn Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

³ Ibid., 15.

⁴ Ibid., 5.

⁵ Ibid., 6.

environment, including architects, landscape architects and urban planners have the “profound responsibility to intelligently apply their design expertise and create functional, quality places.”⁶

Complex design problems demand imaginative and responsive solutions. Graeme Sullivan, author of *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts*, explains “gone are the presumed certainties and stable entities that make the process of finding out about things a relatively simple task.”⁷ Traditional rational and linear modes of thinking do not fully address the tangled and dynamic forces present within contemporary landscapes. On the other hand, the long-established and arcane methodology that supposedly searches for a site’s invisible “essence” has the potential to discount the physical qualities of a place. These contrasting ideologies represent the problematic divide between the senses and intelligence.

Until the importance and validity of *visual dimensions* (the physical, spatial and material qualities and relationships of a site or object) are acknowledged in landscape architectural discourse,⁸ examples of narrow methodologies within the professional and educational areas of the discipline will prevail. This will further isolate the discipline from critical and intelligent discourse. The art of design can and should be taught. Design methods that ignore material realities and visual dimensions keep the artistic sensibility involved in design hidden. This thesis seeks to expand the discourse about the role of

⁶ Ibid., 3.

⁷ Graeme Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 64.

⁸ Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*, 52.

design expertise and the making of visually appealing places; discussions which are vital to the visual and spatial medium of landscape architecture.⁹

Research Methodology: Appreciating Intelligent Art

Current research highlighting the collaboration between landscape architects and artists calls attention to the ability of *artists* to create sensitive and inventive design. In an attempt to transcend an insular approach to design, looking to the related discipline of the fine arts provides a variety of encouraging alternatives to landscape architecture design methodology. Artists purposefully explore and engage with visual dimensions present in order to develop critical visual skills and techniques necessary to create inventive artworks with their selected media. *Visual skill*, the ability to understand the significance of what we see, is a learned ability and requires conscious critical engagement and cultivation. This understanding clarifies misconceptions about the division between the senses and intelligence and brings the art of design back into intellectual discourse.

Just as there rarely can be a tidy and linear solution to a complex design problem, it may be neither desirable nor possible to define specific roles of an artist or landscape architect. This thesis does not attempt to break down these roles nor does it seek to map out any one specific design process for the practice of landscape architecture. Instead it is an attempt at exploration of ideas that cross disciplines and offers landscape architecture an opportunity for reflection on modes of operation. In particular, highlighting the work and processes of two contemporary artists offers a conversation in an effort to consider and transcend the often narrow architectural conceptions and approaches.¹⁰

⁹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰ Jes Fernie, ed. *Two Minds: Artists and Architects in Collaboration* (London: Black Dog, 2006), 59.

This thesis also does not attempt to differentiate the roles and responsibilities of a landscape architect versus those of an architect. There are undoubtedly important differences between the roles of these two allied professions, however there are also similarities. Since much of the current research tends to group the two professions together, this thesis also uses the terms interchangeably.

Overview of Chapters

The next chapter, Chapter 2, introduces the publications that primarily inspired and influenced this thesis. Questioning current ways of thinking and practices within the landscape architecture discipline, the chapter establishes the background for developing an artistic rationale. Chapter 3 explores the imaginative and intelligent work of fine artists. Identifying the necessary values of *openness* and *materiality* within the fine art discipline, the chapter distinguishes the benefits of reaching beyond the boundaries of landscape architecture in the quest for good design. Differences in methodologies between art and landscape architecture are illustrated by researching two specific contemporary artists. Chapter 4 discerns and synthesizes the major points of the thesis. Since the main premise of the thesis expands upon the importance of the visual, diagrams of these major points are also included. Finally, Chapter 5 sets up potential areas of further research and investigation based on the findings of this thesis. Sensible discussions about the importance of the visual within the art of design will enrich the discipline of landscape architecture.

CHAPTER 2

A CALL FOR CONSCIOUSNESS

A Practitioner's Perspective

Our education, knowledge, and experiences help shape our perception of the world. However, in creative applied design disciplines such as landscape architecture, the hazy and seemingly magical idea of *intuition* is often defended as a concrete basis for design. How can this be? Design by intuition, the instinctive, subjective knowing without the apparent use of reason, stirs up controversy on a variety of levels.

In *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*, Kathryn Moore attempts to throw light on the process of design.¹¹ Thought provoking and convincing, Moore, past President of the Landscape Institute and Professor at the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design in the United Kingdom, aims to radically re-evaluate the way we think about design. In doing so she reveals ways to “develop aesthetic and artistic sensibility, and instill the confidence to make judgments in a spatial, conceptual medium.”¹² Moore’s copiously researched evidence, which reaches back into the philosophical underpinnings of the relationship between critical and artistic discourse and its application to design education, provides an opportunity to rethink some of the fundamental teachings within the discipline of landscape architecture.

¹¹ Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*.

¹² Ibid.15

Overlooking the Visual recommends a clear pragmatic method and holistic approach to incorporating everyday visual dimensions and the design process. The central idea of this book challenges the process of perception and urgently calls for a new relationship between the *senses* and *intelligence*. Contrary to the deep-seeded ideas of Western scientific conceptions of rationalism,¹³ Moore believes there is no need to choose between the senses or intelligence. Arguing against theories of perception, Moore explains that there are *not* two separate modes of thinking (an artistic sensory mode vs. a rational scientific mode).¹⁴

This practical realization enables designers “to avoid the rationalist polarity between an objective reality and subjective realism that has caused many to oscillate...nervously between the two in a ‘pattern of recoil’.”¹⁵ Not choosing one or the other allows designers to find a middle ground and comfortably rely on their educated, informed responses to the world we see rather than “trusting the world to pass messages to us through sense data, perfect forms, or amenable spirits.”¹⁶

The rational paradigm comes with the expectation that in order to “fully understand something we need to classify, organize, compare, and reference information so that it fits comfortably within an accepted system of knowledge.”¹⁷ Therefore, “artistic sensibility is sufficient but *not* necessary to fully understand.”¹⁸ Embracing the concept that our senses and intelligence are not disparate modes of thinking allows for an educated, critical conversation. For Moore, this is an important step, since she believes

¹³Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts*. A central tenant to the philosophy of rationalism describes that knowledge and truth is the outcome of logical reasoning and deduction.

¹⁴ Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*, 17.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 33.

¹⁷ Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts*, 65.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

that the mysterious world of intuitive thinking, the special allure of art and design “is what continues to isolate artistic sensibility from critical intellectual discourse.”¹⁹

The Role of Intuition

One of the fundamental assumptions of rationalism is the existence of “pre-linguistic starting points.”²⁰ This idea explains that language is invented to give expression to our sensory intuitions in order to communicate their meaning. The belief that the senses are a primitive pre-linguistic mode of thinking aligns with the ever-present air of mystery which encompasses the creative disciplines and furthers the arbitrary separation between intelligence and the senses. However, Sanda Iliescu, editor of *The Hand and the Soul: Aesthetics and Ethics in Architecture and Art* reminds us that, “Even the simplest creative act- dripping brightly colored paint on a white surface or dragging a stick through wet mud- possesses its own distinctive practical intelligence.”²¹

This is not to say that within design there are no poetic moments of clarity and understanding, but that in these moments the designer is not disconnected from the content of her consciousness. She is not a passive bystander. Moore explains designers *do* have a choice about which concepts they work with in order to design, and that it is vital to encourage students and practitioners “to become conscious and fully aware” of the concepts they are working with and why.²² In becoming fully conscious, designers make the choice to *actively* question their direction and decisions. This important component brings design back from mystery into the realm of consciousness and back into the realm of physical materiality.

¹⁹ Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*. 42

²⁰ Ibid. 19

²¹ Sanda Iliescu, ed. *The Hand and the Soul: Aesthetics and Ethics in Architecture and Art* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009).

²² Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*. 161.

Within landscape architecture, Moore uses the idea of *genius loci* to illustrate the problems arising from an intuitive and primitive bodily way of thinking. An enduring theory in the profession, *genius loci* originates from classical Roman religion in which it was considered the protective spirit of place.²³ In contemporary Western usage it designates sensitivity to a place's distinctive atmosphere or its "essence". In reality, the *genius loci* concept is based on a narrative and provides only limited description of a site. This theory has the potential to provide a strong conceptual approach to a site design, but not one that can promise landscapes worthy of realization and implementation.²⁴ As Moore explains, the *genius loci* "is no closer to the universal truth or essence of place than a drawing of a site's contours or its geology."²⁵

Problems develop when designers discard the visual dimensions and materiality when searching for the underlying, and presumably, invisible feeling of the place. The elevation of the landscape architect to status as "seer" of something above and beyond human knowledge, "obscures a whole range of aspirations, including the call for a return to the old ways of seeing, utilitarian pleas to design the practical way, the search for symmetry and balance, ecological diversity, public participation, and classical architecture."²⁶ Moore explains, this implicit reliance on concepts such as the *genius loci* only "serves to reinforce existing preconceptions and prejudices rather than encourage a more challenging or imaginative approach."²⁷ Reinforcing existing prejudices is surely

²³ Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1980).

²⁴ Catherine Dee, "Form, Utility, and the Aesthetics of Thrift in Design Education," *Landscape journal* 29, no. 1 (2010). 26

²⁵ Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*. 57.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

not a methodology designers would choose to learn in school or would ever aspire to practice.

Intuition does have a role in design, but “rather than it being a quick subconscious fix, it is based on knowledge, experience, and reflection.”²⁸ *Overlooking the Visual* was deeply influenced by the work and writings of William James, an important American philosopher involved in the Pragmatist movement. Pragmatism was an intellectual movement developed in the beginning of the 19th century to demystify the speculative basis of disciplines. As Paul Shephard describes in the forward of *Overlooking*, pragmatism was created “to explain the abyss between what we know and what we want.”²⁹ Pragmatism declares that the value of any truth is utterly dependent upon its use to the person who holds it; that mind, nature and experiences are *inseparable*. In a pragmatic light, James, in 1879, criticizes the division between seeing and knowing, arguing that:

The traditional claim that we must conceive of our sensory experiences as intermediaries between us and the world has no sound arguments to support it and, worse, makes it impossible to see how persons can be in genuine contact with a world at all.³⁰

Cultivation of Visual Skill

An alternative interpretive view of perception, not new in theory, but one that has been overlooked in recent years, enables us to imagine sensitive observation as a cultivated *skill*. A learned critical visual skill is “comprised of the observation and

²⁸ Ibid., 163.

²⁹ Paul Shephard, "Foreword," in *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design* (New York: Routledge, 2010), ix.

³⁰ As cited in Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*, 27.

discernment within the traditions, materiality, and ideas of a particular medium.”³¹

Visual skill requires the acknowledgement of the physical and material information all around us and the understanding that what we see is *interpretive* and based on each of our own experiences and observations of the world. Visual skill is not just about recognizing these differences, but “about opening up one’s own decision making to oneself, affording a view that may lie outside the scope of other disciplines.”³² Moore explains the pragmatic value and importance of this realization:

Developing an understanding of how our responses are affected by what we have read, seen, and heard, recognizing the significance of the social and political content of what we see, realizing what a landscape might symbolize or represent and being able to interpret the evidence of its history, this is visual skill. When you first see the Manhattan skyline or the Statue of Liberty, the impact is so intense because of the associations gleaned from numerous books, films and anecdotes. These influences flood in because we recognize directly the physical fabric of what we see, its spatial, visual qualities, its form and character, its myth and legends.³³

Perception is our way of building a profound awareness and orienting ourselves within the world. When perception is supported with a pragmatic framework it is not a passive act or a “mindless sensation.”³⁴ Moore believes in the importance of intelligently considering the sensory qualities of design; that the recovery of the intellectual component of perception and the visual is vital to the future of design disciplines.

³¹ Ibid., 42.

³² Thomas Berding, "The Sense of the Senses and the Ethos of an Aesthetic Pursuit," in *The Hand and the Soul: Aesthetics and Ethics in Architecture and Art*, ed. Sanda Iliescu (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 141.

³³ Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts*, 65.

³⁴ Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*, 30.

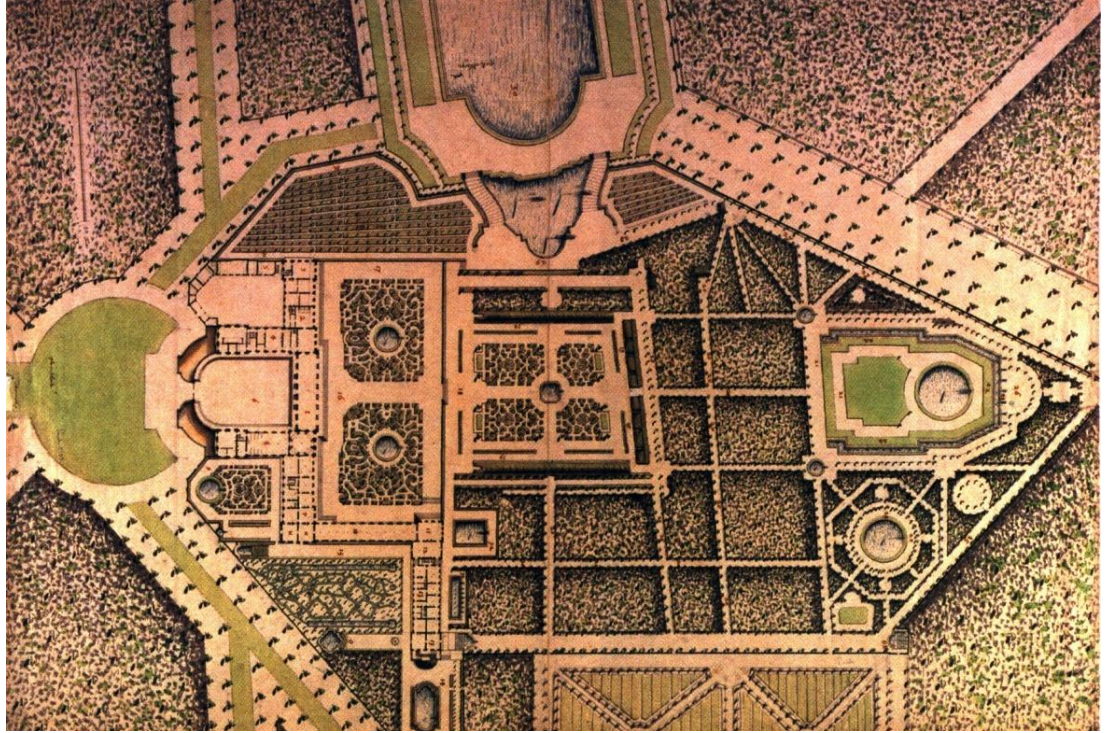


Figure 2.1. Andre le Notre, *design for the gardens of the Grande Trianon at Versailles* (1694).
 Source: Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art f Design*, 4.

Describing a face-to-face encounter with an original plan drawing and the accompanying eight pages of manuscript by Andre le Notre for the Grand Trianon at Versailles (fig. 2.2), Moore remarks upon the “astonishing skill and confidence in the expression of ideas in form, through technology, with elegance and panache.”³⁵ The design responds to the site with an inventive asymmetrical layout, thus effectively “intensifying perspectives, foreshortening views, skewing natural crossfalls and creating vistas.”³⁶ Knowledge of the culture, topography, and context is all evident in le Notre’s powerful and artful design. It illustrates “artistic judgment, aesthetic expertise, and technological know-how,” all part of an artistic sensibility.³⁷

³⁵ Ibid., 5.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 35.

Artistic sensibility is a conscious awareness towards imaginative solutions. The artistic sensibility illustrated by the work of le Notre encompasses a wide range of abilities vital to a landscape architect and builds the necessary foundation for imaginative and responsive design. The essentials of this sensibility, according to Moore, include: the knowledge of artistic practice comprised of concepts such as composition, materials, form and a familiarity with the history of the discipline (*the “who” and “what”*), the aptitude necessary to recognize how ideas and emotions have been expressed (*the “how”*), and having the confidence to understand the effectiveness, appropriateness and imagination involved (*the “why”*).³⁸

Moore’s elation for the brilliance of Le Notre’s responsive and imaginative design is quickly dispelled as she comments on the current clouded state of the discipline. Moore believes that “a powerful force is currently undermining any serious attempt to develop the kind of expertise le Notre exhibits.”³⁹ The metaphysical notion that design is a “warm, fuzzy and essentially private experience” beyond teaching has a negative impact on all design disciplines.⁴⁰ Le Notre’s knowledgeable garden design and our ability to analyze it for the Grande Trianon at Versailles proves that design skill is something that can be learned.

Since resourcefulness and inventiveness arise from an explicit material knowledge and understanding, we cannot afford the detached acceptance of information.⁴¹ The skill and intelligence involved in any artistic practice should be recognized and applied. Moore calls for a return of outward directed attentiveness, or consciousness, in creativity

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁰ Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts*, 74.

⁴¹ Dee, "Form, Utility, and the Aesthetics of Thrift in Design Education," 32.

and design. Complexities of context, mood and prejudices all play a part in the process of design, but ultimately, reminds Moore; we are limited *only* by the breadth of our own knowledge and experience.⁴² That being said, in order to reach a level of design expertise on par with that exhibited by le Notre, it is important to foster a serious interest in the rigorous development of artistic sensibility.⁴³

Mechanization of the Visual

Interestingly, during the present period of image overload, the role of the physical and material dimensions of the visual has decreased.⁴⁴ This decline, according to editor James Elkins and other contributors to the book *Visual Literacy*, demands our attention.⁴⁵

Moore claims the root of the problem of discounting the visual is nested within the “intractable rationalist paradigm” that has come to control our way of thinking to such an extent that “we no longer give it much thought.”⁴⁶ In other words, questions are not being asked about the importance of what we physically see and feel because the sensory experience belongs to its own mode of thinking. This sensory mode of thinking is considered separate from the rational and scientific and has therefore been discounted as unnecessary. The uncritical dependence upon rationalism breaks our consciousness into small, bite size pieces unnecessarily dividing all aspects of design into categories. This division reflects a hermetic and linear thought process and prevents informed discussions of the functionality of the way things look in the landscape, the materiality and

⁴² Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴⁴ Barbara Maria Stafford, "Ch 2," in *Visual Literacy*, ed. James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2008), 48.

⁴⁵ James Elkins, ed. *Visual Literacy* (New York: Routledge, 2008). (Introduction, Elkins, 4)
This collection of essays focuses on the possibility of teaching literacy through images at the university level.

⁴⁶ Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*, 6.

physicality of what we see.⁴⁷ Additionally, narrow and separated focus on aspects of the design process deprives the designer of a much-needed holistic approach and undermines the value of learned visual skill and design expertise.

Discussing the ill-effects of a scientific, rational way of thinking, Jonathan Hale, author of *The Old Way of Seeing*, claims that architecture after 1830, in the beginnings of the industrialization and mechanization era, is completely about performance.⁴⁸

Inventiveness is pushed aside as the scientific “truths” take center stage. Accuracy and professionalism trumped exploration and play.⁴⁹ Historically, the 1830’s brought such inventions as the electromagnetic telegraph by Samuel Morse (1838) and the photograph by Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre (1837).⁵⁰ At the beginning of this new era Thomas Carlyle wrote in *Sign of the Times*, “It is the Age of Machinery, in every outward and inward sense of the word. Wonder, indeed, is, on all hands, dying out....What cannot be investigated and understood mechanically, cannot be investigated and understood at all.”⁵¹ Consequently, Hale explains, much of the American landscape felt bland and mechanized.

It is interesting to compare the cultural issues of the 1830’s to the modern critique expounding the potential problems of mechanized thought created by the growing role of information technology in our daily lives. Within the climate of technological innovation, there exists the paradigm of information technology, that it is an efficient, mostly invisible, automated transfer of information.⁵² Indeed, our senses seem quite inept when

⁴⁷ Berding, "The Sense of the Senses and the Ethos of an Aesthetic Pursuit," 135.

⁴⁸ Jonathan. Hale, *The Old Way of Seeing* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), 30.

⁴⁹ Ibid. The “old way of seeing”, according to Hale, is the skill of being able to find the relationships and proportions among parts, to play among the patterns of light and dark.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 43.

⁵¹ As cited in, Ibid., 32.

⁵² Stafford, "Ch 2," 40-41.

compared to the faster and strong capabilities of “seeing” technology (i.e. geographic information system [GIS]). These technologies have added to the distrust of one’s own sensory experiences. Has this self-organizing mental mode influenced the way we *see* the world? Perhaps we are becoming too much like the ubiquitous nonconscious mechanisms; automatically screening out what supposedly does not matter.⁵³



Figure 2.2. Apple Inc., iPad™ (2011).
Source: <http://www.apple.com/ipad/features/>

A smartphone, iPad™, or laptop should not be seen as a viable replacement and/or extension of our own conscious operations and sensory faculties (fig 2.2). These digital tools, without question, have greatly changed the working methods of all design disciplines. However, constantly looking through these “virtual” screens questions the “basic notions of the body’s sense of balance and spatio-temporal orientation.”⁵⁴ What happened to seeing, rather than *seeing as*?⁵⁵ Ralph Ruguff, director of the Hayward Gallery in London, a prominent venue for the exhibition of contemporary art since its opening in 1968, suggests that:

⁵³ Ibid., 45-46.

⁵⁴ Ugo Rondinone, *The Night of Lead*, ed. Klaus Biesenbach, et al. (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2010), 347.

⁵⁵ Stafford, "Ch 2," 46.

As we spend more and more time logged into the impalpable realms of electronic communications- from the internet to the cash machine, from Google Earth to video game consoles- our tendency to conceive of space in purely visual terms has taken precedence over responses of both thought and action deriving from the uses of our senses.⁵⁶

It is most likely true that designers today are spending far more time in front of a computer screen than in the landscape. The lack of outdoor experience in a discipline which designs environments for outdoor experiences would seem to have negative implications. Catherine Dee, landscape architect, artist, author and founding co-editor of the *European Journal of Landscape Architecture* (JoLA), agrees with these sentiments. Dee claims that this imbalance of experience “has repercussions for a wide range of necessary design skills and particularly for a comprehension of real or human scale, the material capacities of landscapes, and the everyday observances of how nature works.”⁵⁷

Undoubtedly, landscape architects must make use of the computer’s powerful capabilities, however, the rationalized disconnect between the senses and intelligence raises a number of questions that need to be critically addressed.

A Designer’s Responsibility

There is a renewed practical recognition that the “physical, cultural, and social condition of our environment has a profound effect on the quality of life,” and designers have the ability to play an important role in the creation of “good-looking quality places that lift the spirit and have a dramatic effect on people’s morale, confidence, and self-worth.”⁵⁸ The education and learned visual skill of a landscape architect should enable

⁵⁶ Ralph Rugoff, "Preface," in *Psycho Buildings: Artists Take on Architecture*, ed. Ralph Rugoff, Brian Dillon, and Jane Rendell (London: Hayward Pub., 2008), 11.

⁵⁷ Dee, "Form, Utility, and the Aesthetics of Thrift in Design Education," 26.

⁵⁸ Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*, 3.

those within the profession to make informed and intelligent spatial decisions and designs.

Landscape architects have a dedicated responsibility “to the public health, safety, and welfare and recognition and protection of the land and its resources.”⁵⁹ Given the overwhelming amount of demands put on landscape architects from various stakeholders, demands related to sustainability, ecology, aesthetics, function, and economics, it takes a rigorous education and diverse skill set to design well.

Supporting the basis of design with metaphysical rationale (genius loci, intuition, subconscious, and essence) ignores the responsibility of designers to understand and respond to their own thoughts and actions. Confronting increasingly complex tasks with no one right answer; designers must be armed with the tools necessary to be critical and confident in their design expertise.

Moore states, “We need people in the landscape profession who can deal with the ideas and concepts, who are able to push the boundaries in order to realize the full potential of their discipline. They should always be looking for new ways to describe the landscape....Fitting in with the context is fine as long as the context is worth fitting in with, if not the results can be aesthetically moribund.”⁶⁰

Rather than staying isolated in an ivory tower of design, waiting for hidden meanings to emerge from endless amounts of data or thin air, Moore makes an appeal to designers to re-evaluate the way we think about design so that designers *can* make informed, imaginative, and often difficult decisions.⁶¹ The landscape architect’s job requires a

⁵⁹ American Society of Landscape Architects, "Code of Professional Ethics," ASLA, http://www.asla.org/Leadershiphandbook.aspx?id=4276&ItemIdString=e0fa05764_34_120_4276.

⁶⁰ Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*, 77-78.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

significant amount of knowledge and technical ability to create thoughtful, functional spaces. We cannot afford to leave design to chance. It is important to bring design back into the circle of awareness.

A recent article by Catherine Dee discusses issues within the current design education framework and attempts to redefine the “functionality of landscape aesthetics.” In a time where the ecologic, sustainable, and social criteria are “now more or less automatic in evaluation of landscape projects,” Dee makes an argument for the return of material and form oriented studies using criteria and a pragmatic approach she titles the “aesthetics of thrift.”⁶² She is concerned that many designers are now taught primarily with words while overlooking the visual, material, and spatial aspects so important to the discipline.⁶³ Knowledge of ideas communicated through writing are an important part of landscape practice, but words on their own discourage a full understanding of the visual/spatial medium landscape architects work in. Remarking upon the negative effects of hyper-rationalization, Dee believes that the “separation of art, ethics, utility and nature can leave aesthetics with an atrophied, and, indeed, frivolous role in landscape education.”⁶⁴ Contrasting the prevalent form-less approaches to design (i.e. narrative, process-based, textually sourced), Dee suggests building a formal understanding of the environmental, social and material processes and functions of landscape. Dee is influenced by, among other things, the idea of craft and the “redefinition of contemporary craft as a unique, socially oriented skillful practice involving distinctive and undervalued- though

⁶² Dee, “Form, Utility, and the Aesthetics of Thrift in Design Education,” 20.

⁶³ Ibid.: 24-25. Dee describes the term “thrift” as comprised of the “ethics of modesty, precision and care with material landscapes in studied action”.

⁶⁴ Ibid.: 21.

indispensible- types of knowledge.”⁶⁵ Suggesting that the necessary traits of resourcefulness and ingenuity arise from an accurate knowledge and understanding of the tools of our discipline (plants, rocks, soils, water), Dee explains that the development of skill comes only after repeated practice with the material technologies of landscape.⁶⁶

Jorge Silvetti, former chairman of the Department of Architecture at Harvard Design School, expresses concern for the future of the discipline in relationship to consciousness in his essay, *The Muses Are Not Amused*.⁶⁷ Silvetti illustrates four emerging trends and methods within academia involved in the design process that, he believes, “are turning the architect into a dazed observer of seductive wonders.”⁶⁸ One trend, coined “Programmism” by Silvetti, derives its concept from an “over-enthusiastic embrace” of the idea of program (vs. function). Program, in this sense is an accumulation and manipulation of complex nonlinear information “that animates, inspires, impacts, grounds, influences, colors a design.”⁶⁹ However, the power of its quantity or compelling graphic representations cannot make up for the uncritical manner in which the information has been realized. Paralleling Moore’s argument against the so-called unteachable aspects of design, Silvetti places the “Programmism” trend “in the realm of primitive magic,” an example of mindless design. He even suggests that this process has the possibility to remove the architect from the creative role.⁷⁰ Clearly, Silvetti discourages the automatisms displayed by the trend within academia to rely on the collective impact of *enormous* amount of data to carry the design. He instead calls for

⁶⁵ Ibid.: 22.

⁶⁶ Ibid.: 24.

⁶⁷ Jorge Silvetti, "The Muses Are Not Amused: Pandemonium in the House of Architecture " *Harvard Design Magazine*, no. 19 (2003).

⁶⁸ Ibid.: 22.

⁶⁹ Ibid.: 23.

⁷⁰ Ibid.23

awareness. In alignment with Moore's thinking, Silveti also mentions the importance of "hard work, knowledge about architecture's own history, rigor, imagination, and cultivation of creative talents" as requirements for any architect.⁷¹

In a recent collection of essays discussing the inherent tension between aesthetics and ethics within design, Thomas Berding's article, *The Sense and the Senses and the Ethos of Aesthetic Pursuit*, explains the value in the conscious reconnection between aesthetics and sensory components of experience.⁷² His article looks to examples of contemporary artistic practice in a hope to resituate "the practice of making beyond a rigid, mechanistic view where the relationship between ideas and execution, text and image, and even maker and viewer are too narrowly conceived."⁷³ Rather, the hand and the mind can work together to reconcile "the space between knowledge and experience providing a continuous reservoir of possibilities...a bridging of the rational to the sensory."⁷⁴

Describing the difference between *sense* and *making sense*, Berding explains:

To make sense of the world is to make an idea palpable and the sensate intelligible, closing the gap between our being in the world and our imaging of it. In this shortening of distance, we must look at something; we must in part look away. This is not a call for the denial of sensory perception, but rather for the combining of experiences- the aesthetic memory, personal recollection, and the present corporal condition- into the creation of a new, more memorable image.⁷⁵

In other words, Berding suggests that the division of the senses and intelligence inhibits the realization of new perspectives and connections.

Making distinctions that separate our aesthetic faculties from intelligence, Moore suggests, "has little to do with how we actually experience the world, worse still, it

⁷¹ Ibid.: 24.

⁷² Berding, "The Sense of the Senses and the Ethos of an Aesthetic Pursuit."

⁷³ Ibid., 137.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 149.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 141-42.

separates us from the world, and in particular separates art and experience from everyday life.”⁷⁶ There is clearly a call within the profession to reconsider the sensory qualities of design in an informed and educated manner. Thus, embracing the value of visual dimensions and a cultivated visual skill returns design to consciousness.

Conclusion

Practicing landscape architects are under constant pressure to fulfill a wide variety of demands, ecological to political, and because of this pressure have often relied upon various design theories and methodology over the history of the profession.⁷⁷ By leaning on outdated or unexamined ideologies there is a dangerous tendency to overlook important elements of design. Blindly searching for the hidden meaning or using a highly systematic, and supposedly objectively neutral and scientific process, are both single-minded approaches that miss the aesthetics of the everyday. The “gradual distancing of the theoretical from the sensory and the realm of action from the realm of thought” moves us away from the “world of engagement.”⁷⁸ The disengagement from the physical realities of the landscape, what we actually see and touch, creates potential problems within the professional and practical discipline of landscape architecture.

A separated “rational” approach, one that breaks down the holistic connections between our senses and intelligence, reflects the problem of the detachment of visual skill from daily life. Visual dimensions play more than a contributing role to knowledge

⁷⁶ Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*, 64.

⁷⁷ Joern Langhorst and Kathleen Kambic, "Massive Change, Required: Nine Axioms for the Future of Landscape (Architecture)" (paper presented at the X-LArch III: Landscape--great idea! , Vienna, April 29th-May 1st 2009).

⁷⁸ Berding, "The Sense of the Senses and the Ethos of an Aesthetic Pursuit," 135.

production. It has the power to transform knowledge construction.⁷⁹ There is validity in possessing visual skill, so, where has it gone?

Describing a situation during which landscape architecture students were asked to interpret and critically analyze their responses to a work of abstract art, Moore realizes “that this sort of analysis is un-charted territory for many and that learning to look carefully is not as easy as it seems...that for all but a few, the visual world is a closed book.”⁸⁰ Following the belief that there is more than meets the eye, or trying to sense *without* thinking, works against the development of critical faculties. The critical faculties explore, challenge and embrace ambiguity within the artistic discipline of landscape architecture. Gaining a better understanding of a design problem should not be a scary or mysterious process. Rather the process should be more of an “intelligent, analytical and investigative endeavor.”⁸¹

Awareness of our surroundings and responses to a space, place, or thing is a useful learned skill for any, but integral, of course, to those working in a spatial and visual medium such as landscape architecture. Ignoring concepts such as artistic sensibility and design expertise because they are too subjective deeply underestimates the value a designer has in creating responsive, beautiful environments.⁸²

Moore reminds us that once we understand that every element of the design process is entirely based on knowledge, we are ready for a “fresh artistic and conceptual approach to design.”⁸³ But what is this artistic approach? Certainly, there is no one specific approach, but rather a fresh perspective. Habitually falling back on the “familiar and

⁷⁹ Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts*, 180.

⁸⁰ Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*, 127.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 9.

predetermined solutions...rather than looking for new methods of investigations and interpretation” represents a thoughtless and even lazy approach to design.⁸⁴ An approach that is all too mechanical and uninspired.

In an aim to bring a fresh artistic perspective to landscape architecture, a perspective that embraces a holistic approach and the concepts of artistic sensibility and design expertise, it is valuable to examine other artistic disciplines. The making of “profound art of the landscape is an ethical responsibility.”⁸⁵ Exploring outside the boundaries of the discipline provides an encouraging juxtaposition to the sometimes narrow-minded approach of many landscape architects.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 162.

⁸⁵ Dee, "Form, Utility, and the Aesthetics of Thrift in Design Education," 33-34.

CHAPTER 3

TRANSCENDING THE NARROW-MINDED

An Artistic Practice

Landscape architecture is an artistic practice. It is the “elegant, expressive, and imaginative transformation of ideas of a particular medium.”⁸⁶ As discussed in the previous chapter, the recovery of the intellectual dimension of the visual justifies the value of the *art* of design. Discussions about the nuts and bolts of the design process, as Moore states, are “the only truly effective way to achieve design excellence.”⁸⁷ An artistic practice should be seen in how it enriches the imagination and intellect. How it forms new ways of viewing and thus conceiving the world.⁸⁸

With these concepts in mind, two recent publications discussing the relationship between art and architecture, and artists and architects, inspired the next part of this thesis.

Jane Rendell’s book, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between*, compellingly explores the patterns and intersections of the two disciplines. She highlights the need for a specific type of practice, one that is both critical and spatial. Rendell calls this a “critical spatial practice.”⁸⁹ Her research examines a wide variety of recent artwork and architectural projects while also drawing “on a range of theoretical ideas from a number of

⁸⁶ Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*, 9.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Berding, “The Sense of the Senses and the Ethos of an Aesthetic Pursuit,” 146.

⁸⁹ Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2006), 1.

disciplines.”⁹⁰ Her conceptual framework splits the book into three sections: spatial, temporal and the social. This framework emphasizes “a place between” art and architecture. Finding that examples of this sort of “critical spatial practice” occur more often in the domain of fine art, Rendell suggests that in order to look towards future possibilities “architecture must look to art.”⁹¹

Rendell’s explanation of the “function” of the two disciplines provides an intriguing comparison. Landscape architecture is considered a form of practice conducted *in reaction* to a set of requirements. It plays a cultural and functional role in that it responds to social needs by planning for and creating tangible places. In contrast, fine art is “defined by its *independence* from such controls.” Art is a mode of cultural production which maintains a greater degree of separation from economic and social concerns.⁹² Rendell explains that “art may not be functional in traditional terms...but we could say that art is functional in providing certain kinds of tools for self-reflection, critical thinking, and social change.”⁹³ Once this expanded version of the term function is considered, “we realize that architecture is seldom given the opportunity to have no function or to consider the construction of critical components as its most important purpose.”⁹⁴

The second publication, *Two Minds: Artist and Architects in Collaboration*, edited by Jes Fernie, catalogues 18 recent cross-disciplinary projects.⁹⁵ Grouped as “Groundscapes,” “Buildings” and “Things,” the projects cover an interesting variety of

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 191.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., 3.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁵ Fernie, ed. *Two Minds: Artists and Architects in Collaboration*.

sites and topics both urban and rural, public and private. The editor's intention was to provide good examples of current collaborative practice, thus triggering open-ended dialogue of creative potentials for the future. As part of each project's narrative, interviews with the participating artists and designers were included. Surprisingly, or rather, curiously, when questioned, many architects adopted "society's tendency to romanticize the role of the artist as an outsider with a hot-line to authenticity."⁹⁶ This "surprising" finding aligns neatly within Moore's call for the demystifying of design. Why do, as a number of the architects in the book allude, "artists have a greater understanding of the world around them?"⁹⁷

The arguments raised by Rendell and Fernie highlight the capacity of *artists* to develop visionary, challenging, and sensitive design, while at the same time question the ability of landscape architects to do the same. Therefore, in conjunction with and responding to Moore's call to dispense with the speculative dimension of perception and to have "sensible discussions" about the making of informed and imaginative design decisions, this thesis looks directly to the methodology used by contemporary artists to cultivate an artistic sensibility.

Fundamentals of Design

The differentiation between art and architecture is relatively recent. In fact, the familiar division occurred only during the eighteenth century.⁹⁸ From antiquity until the Enlightenment (and subsequently, rationalism) *all* landscapes, buildings, sculpture, paintings were appreciated for defining, revealing and changing the world around us.

⁹⁶ Jes Fernie, "Introduction," in *Two Minds: Artists and Architects in Collaboration* (London: Black Dog, 2006), 13.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 9.

Artistic skills and disciplines can be interchangeable. For example, during the Renaissance period “artists such as Bernini and Michaelangelo referred to themselves as architects as well as sculptors and painters.”⁹⁹ Leonardo da Vinci’s work, as well, easily crosses the disciplines of science, art, and architecture (figs 3.1 and 3.2).



Figure 3.1. Leonardo da Vinci, *Town plan of Imola* (1502).
Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Leonardo_da_vinci,_Town_plan_of_Imola.jpg

⁹⁹ Ibid.

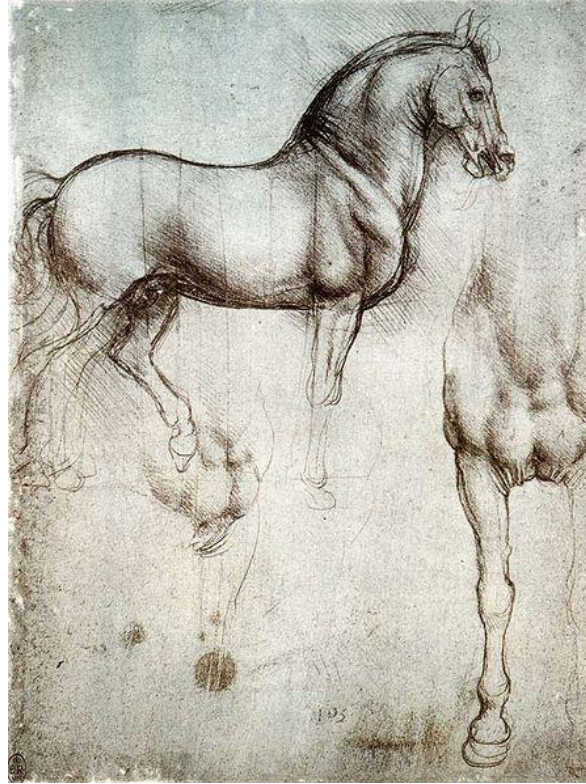


Figure 3.2. Leonardo da Vinci, *Study of a Horse* (1490).
Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Study_of_horse.jpg

All design disciplines work with the same basic elements in their own way, exploring the fundamentals of form, line, color, rhythm, texture, and composition. Undoubtedly, learning these elements, inside and out, is an important part of any design education. Rigorous practice of these fundamentals can lead the way to a more conscious recognition of order and structure.

Johannes Itten, taught the *Vorkurs* or Basic Course at the Bauhaus.¹⁰⁰ His teaching is considered to have inspired the foundations of many basic design courses taught at architecture and design schools around the world.¹⁰¹ Itten explains that his teaching did

¹⁰⁰ Johannes Itten, *Design and Form: The Basic Course at the Bauhaus* (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1964), 9.

¹⁰¹ William J. R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*, 3rd ed. ed. (Phaidon Press: London, 1996), 309-16. The Bauhaus (1919-33), developed by architect Walter Gropius in Weimar, Germany was a school dedicated to the unification of art, craft and technology. Its teachings had a major impact on art and

not always represent something new, “it was also a revival of what had been the fundamentals for artists in the past.”¹⁰² Studying the old masters provided one approach to a visual and spatial analysis. Itten explains:

This study can be hindering and harmful only when we do not control ourselves carefully and fall into academic imitation. After working with form, rhythm, and color fundamentals, I always made the students analyze corresponding works of the old masters to show how they had solved the problems.¹⁰³

Moore describes a similar project to sharpen and develop artistic sensibility in *Overlooking the Visual*. She describes a “directed, intellectual, and artistic activity involving the analysis of commonly used images such as advertisements, abstract paintings, and iconic landscapes.”¹⁰⁴ This activity is more than simply describing an emotion or feeling that the image evokes, but rather it articulates:

...why, in drawings and words, based on an image’s composition and the memories it evokes, together with theoretical investigations. It is a case of transforming an image into spatial principles that have the potential to act as a conceptual basis of a design, in response to a site and brief.¹⁰⁵

Both Itten and Moore’s projects connect “intelligence and the emotions, visual information with verbal information, theory to practice and intellectual criticism to formal expression.”¹⁰⁶ The hope is to teach students how to design with confidence rather than “just plonking things down,” hoping that everything will work itself out in the end.¹⁰⁷ There is more than a casual relationship between the viewer and what is being viewed. It is a vital and dynamic interaction.

architecture trends across the world. Political pressure leading up to WWII caused the closing of the Bauhaus. At this time, Gropius left Germany and continued to Harvard where he went on to influence students such as I.M. Pei and Lawrence Halprin.

¹⁰² Itten, *Design and Form: The Basic Course at the Bauhaus*, 7.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰⁴ Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*, 105.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 126.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 105.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 126.

Understanding the process of working in a visual/spatial medium is much like any intelligent endeavor. Understanding involves research, analysis and conclusions. A rigorous practice of the fundamentals of design is an important component, necessary to develop an artistic sensibility. The fundamentals provide the first step to a conscious recognition of visual dimensions and the subsequent cultivation of visual skill.

Illustrating Artistic Sensibility

The next discussions challenge current issues within the landscape architecture discourse which further devalue visual skill and information. Two contemporary artists selected based on Moore's criteria that their work aligns with a return of consciousness to the visual in design, Mark Dion and Jessica Stockholder; both exemplify an appreciation of visual dimensions and skill through the use, transformation and manipulation of everyday objects. This thesis attempts to challenge and rise above narrow-minded and uncritical design by understanding the landscape in relation to a wider cultural context and move towards a *conscious recognition* of the physical world around us. *Openness* and the value of *materiality* are two ways in which fine artists both develop and illustrate artistic sensibility.

Openness: Mark Dion

In an essay titled "On Visibility," John Berger writes:

To look:
at everything which overflows the outline, the contour, the category, the name of what it is.¹⁰⁸

Berger is a highly regarded novelist, art critic, and author of *Ways of Seeing*, an influential collection of essays that revolutionized the way fine art was read and

¹⁰⁸ John Berger, *The Sense of Sight: Writings*, 1st American ed. (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 221.

understood.¹⁰⁹ His quotation captures the sense of purpose and discovery involved in seeing. Seeing everything based on a series of limitation and definitions, with a set of preconceived notions, according to Berger, is not really seeing. It is about being open to the possibility of a new set of ideas, feelings, and senses.

This observation may be “careful or careless, cursory or sustained, methodical or haphazard, accurate or inaccurate, expert or amateurish,” but it is all done with awareness and intelligence.¹¹⁰ A purposeful observation reminds us that “seeing is indivisible from thinking.”¹¹¹ The ability to remain open to serendipity and improvisation can unlock possibilities. Remaining open, artists have the sensibility of finding the lyrical in the everyday. A contemporary artist who exemplifies the ability to observe and critique the everyday in a new light is Mark Dion.

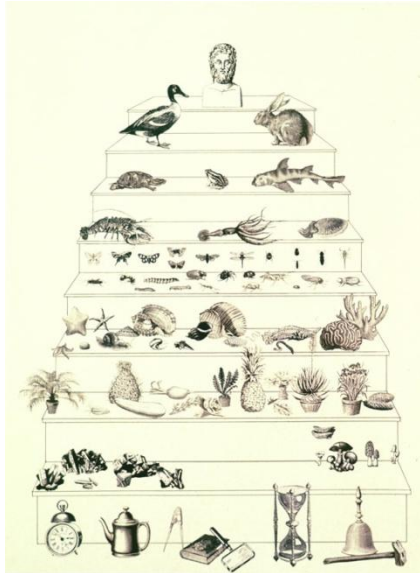


Figure 3.3. Mark Dion, *Scala Naturae* (1994), Tanaya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, NY.
Source: <http://www.pbs.org/art21/slideshow/?slide=1396&showindex=349>

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ As cited in, Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*, 27-28.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 28.



Figure 3.4. Mark Dion, *Scala Naturae* (1994), installation Tanaya Bonakdar Gallery, NY.
 Source: <http://www.pbs.org/art21/slideshow/?slide=1396&showindex=349>

Dion, based in rural Pennsylvania, has an international reputation for gathering and collecting modest facts, objects, and materials. Once these items (often specimens from natural history and artifacts from history) are collected, Dion rearranges, classifies, catalogs and puts these found objects on display in an alternate order creating his signature installations that are unexpectedly meaningful (figs. 3.3- 3.5). Dion's "restless spirit of inquiry," persistent questioning of assumptions and subsequent artwork draws critical attention to the ways in which museums present and interpret artifacts.¹¹²

¹¹² Benjamin Genocchio, "Envisioning an Order Never Seen in Nature," in *The New York Times* (New York: The New York Times Company, 2003).

Interestingly paralleling Moore's evaluation of the Enlightenment and Rationality, Dion's work criticizes the contemporary Western museum practice of classification and display as "overly restrictive" and questions the distinctions between "objective" (rational) scientific methods and "subjective" (irrational) influences.¹¹³ Dion's research and created exhibitions question the ability of a viewer to fashion his or her own opinions about what he or she sees when everything is already laid out in pre-determined categories.



Figure 3.5. Mark Dion, *Rescue Archeology: A Project for the Museum of Modern Art* (2004), New York City, NY.

Source: [http://www.tanyabonakdargallery.com/artist.php?art_name=Mark Dion](http://www.tanyabonakdargallery.com/artist.php?art_name=Mark%20Dion)

¹¹³ Fernie, ed. *Two Minds: Artists and Architects in Collaboration*, 66.

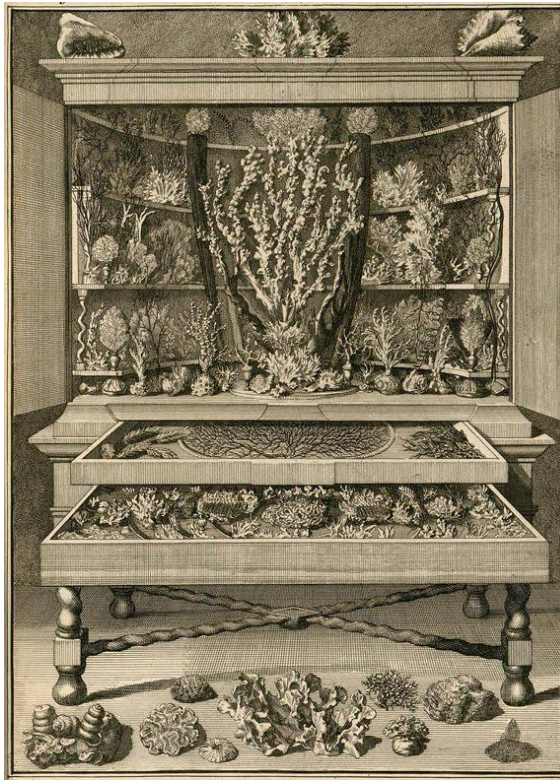


Figure 3.6. *Wunderkammer* engraving.
 Source: http://morbidanatomy.blogspot.com/2010_12_01_archive.html

Recalling the popular 16th and 17th century (pre-Enlightenment) *wunderkammers*, or curiosity cabinets (fig. 3.6), Dion’s work brings together objects that “over the course of the centuries, [have] been divorced from each other in museum collections and displays through disciplinary practices and specialization.”¹¹⁴ The passion for curiosity drives Dion. His unique manner of displaying found materials prompts “questions about the logic of its order and also encourage[s] viewers to see the objects as abstract forms,

¹¹⁴ Colleen J. Sheehy, "A Walrus Head in the Art Museum: Mark Dion Digs into the University of Minnesota," in *Cabinet of Curiosities: Mark Dion and the University as Installation*, ed. Colleen J. Sheehy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: Published in cooperation with the Weisman Art Museum, 2006), 3. Curiosity cabinets were private collections, mostly held by the very wealthy and elite, and became the basis for the modern museum. The lack of order reflected nature as they saw it; since god did not impose order over nature, neither did they.

appreciated for color, patina, shape, and texture as much as for their sources or functions.”¹¹⁵ The element of the unknown and uncertainty plays an important role. This uncertainty not only results in high expectations and anticipation, but also provides “a time of great creativity, as months of research, reflection, discussion, and planning finally come to fruition.”¹¹⁶



Figure 3.7. Mark Dion, *Cabinet of Curiosities* (2001), University of Minnesota.
Source: <http://nevolution.typepad.com/theories/2010/06/mark-dion.html>

An example of his collaborative work, *Cabinet of Curiosities* (figs. 3.7- 3.9), brought together 701 objects found in various disciplinary collections at the University of Minnesota. Working with an interdisciplinary group of students and staff of the University’s own Weisman Art Museum during the 2000-01 academic school year, the group arranged nine Renaissance-style curiosity cabinets. Using their own found objects,

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 8.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 22.

the University of Minnesota would now have their own version of a *wunderakammer*.

Scouring the university's collections for months before the exhibition, the group collected taxidermic birds, illuminated illustrations, plaster busts, glass jars of fish, a meteorite, and paintings, to name a few. For the viewer's pleasure and wonderment, the physical objects were formally (consciously) arranged within the nine cabinets for maximum visual impact.¹¹⁷ The cabinets, like their 16th and 17th century predecessors, had no fixed meaning. There were rather offered as infinite readings that could be made by the viewers, "depending on how they interpreted individual objects and what connecting threads they made from one object to the next."¹¹⁸

Dion's *Cabinet of Curiosities* illustrates openness by stimulating connections among physical, visual things not usually considered together. Depending on the viewer's "knowledge, interests, and inclinations," each visitor's experience was uniquely their own. The work also embraces processes of uncertainty while simultaneously critiquing classification systems and separations.



Figure 3.8. *Cabinet of Curiosities* by Mark Dion (2001), University of Minnesota.

Source:

http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/1999/muse/artist_pages/dion_greatestchaim.html

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 23.



Figure 3.9. *Cabinet of Curiosities* by Mark Dion (2001), University of Minnesota.
Source: <http://nevolution.typepad.com/theories/2010/06/mark-dion.html>

Openness within Landscape Architecture

When approaching a design, it is not possible to control and predict every element of a landscape. Unfortunately, this is often one of landscape architecture's key assumptions.¹¹⁹ Landscapes are interconnected layers of natural and cultural systems that are continually evolving. Landscapes are a process rather than a product. Without open ended observation and experimentation within the discipline, visual dimensions can be overlooked and old habits and ideologies are less likely to be critically challenged. Designers should be investigating the physical world around them, moving across defined discipline parameters for inspiration and understanding. During this process, Rendell proposes that designers should be guided by *questions* rather than answers.¹²⁰

Within landscape architecture, the regularly used SAD methodology (survey, analysis, design) exemplifies the opposite of openness in observation and experimentation. SAD is a conforming and prescriptive approach. Leading to the misconception that "the survey is a detached stage in a linear and sequential process" again illustrates the negative effects of separating intelligence from the senses.¹²¹ This linear design approach is solution based and technical. It leads to the misconception that the survey is mechanistic work and should come before considering "the more subjective value-laden elements."¹²² Moore explains that you cannot collapse the physical and cultural qualities of a design problem into neutrally objective components.¹²³ Splitting all site elements into neat categories in a systematic way is an insufficient approach to the dynamic nature of landscape

¹¹⁹ Langhorst and Kambic, "Massive Change, Required: Nine Axioms for the Future of Landscape (Architecture)", 62.

¹²⁰ Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between*, xiii.

¹²¹ Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*, 76.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid., 71-103. See Chapter Five, *Objectivity without Neutrality*.

architecture design problems. It also devalues the possibility of finding new relationships and discourages lines of any good inquiry, to “be open, experimental, observant and analytical.”¹²⁴

The chance of discovery and finding new relationships often drives an artist. Constantly asking questions similar to, “how will this blue line of paint look next to this red one?” or “what happens to the room when this steel box is twisted to the right?”, artists critically engage uncertainty and experimentation. With this approach the problem becomes part of the pleasure of its own solving. When interviewed for Fernie’s *Two Minds*, architect Jacques Herzog of the architecture firm Herzog & de Meuron states, “The artist places contemporary problems at the heart of his activity, whereas the architect tends to find these embarrassing, inconvenient, undesirable, even.”¹²⁵ The artist’s perspective of openness contrasts sharply with the convenience of overly programmatic, inflexible and specialized approaches within landscape architecture. This inflexible methodology all too often leads to uncritical, banal and homogenous designs.¹²⁶ Taking a cue from the visual and critical work of Dion, landscape architects should accept uncertainty and work with, not against, the dynamic visual dimensions of the landscape.

Materiality: Jessica Stockholder

Good design, whatever the scale, “is founded on craftsmanship, technology, and the physical possibilities of the medium.”¹²⁷ A familiarity with the physical things of the earth provides a strong foundation for artists and designers. Through observation and

¹²⁴ Ibid., 103.

¹²⁵ As cited in Fernie, ed. *Two Minds: Artists and Architects in Collaboration*, 110.

¹²⁶ Thomas Fisher, *In the Scheme of Things: Alternative Thinking on the Practice of Architecture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 44.

¹²⁷ Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*, 181.

experimentation with the materials, whatever those may be, the resulting knowledge of the physical craft builds confidence and highlights new possibilities.

Often referred to as an artist's material sensibility, the mastery of the medium is built upon learning, practicing, and exploring techniques and processes. In addition, a large library of visual information, understandably, opens the door to a wider variety of design potentials. Martha Schwartz reflects, "In language, one's lack of vocabulary limits what one can think, in the same way, the lack of material possibilities limits conceptual thinking in landscape architecture."¹²⁸ Since we "respond to the world through intelligence and that response is informed by education," building up a strong material vocabulary enhances possibilities within the medium.¹²⁹ Examining the work of artist Jessica Stockholder illustrates the value of a well-researched material knowledge.



Figure 3.10. Jessica Stockholder, *Detail of lamp, plywood, lamp shade, plastic bowl, mask made in Ghana sold at TJ Max for \$14.95, pot lid, hardware, acrylic and oil paint, lexal caulking adhesive, copper sheeting*, (2008), site installation exhibited at Art 39 Basel.
Source: <http://www.jessicastockholder.info/albums?album=111>

¹²⁸ As cited in, Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 33.

Like Dion, artist Jessica Stockholder also works and engages with found objects (figs. 3.10- 3.13). However, Stockholder's work strongly exemplifies the visual aspect of materiality. Described as an "Object Conscious Artist," the particular qualities of the found materials give rise to her work.¹³⁰

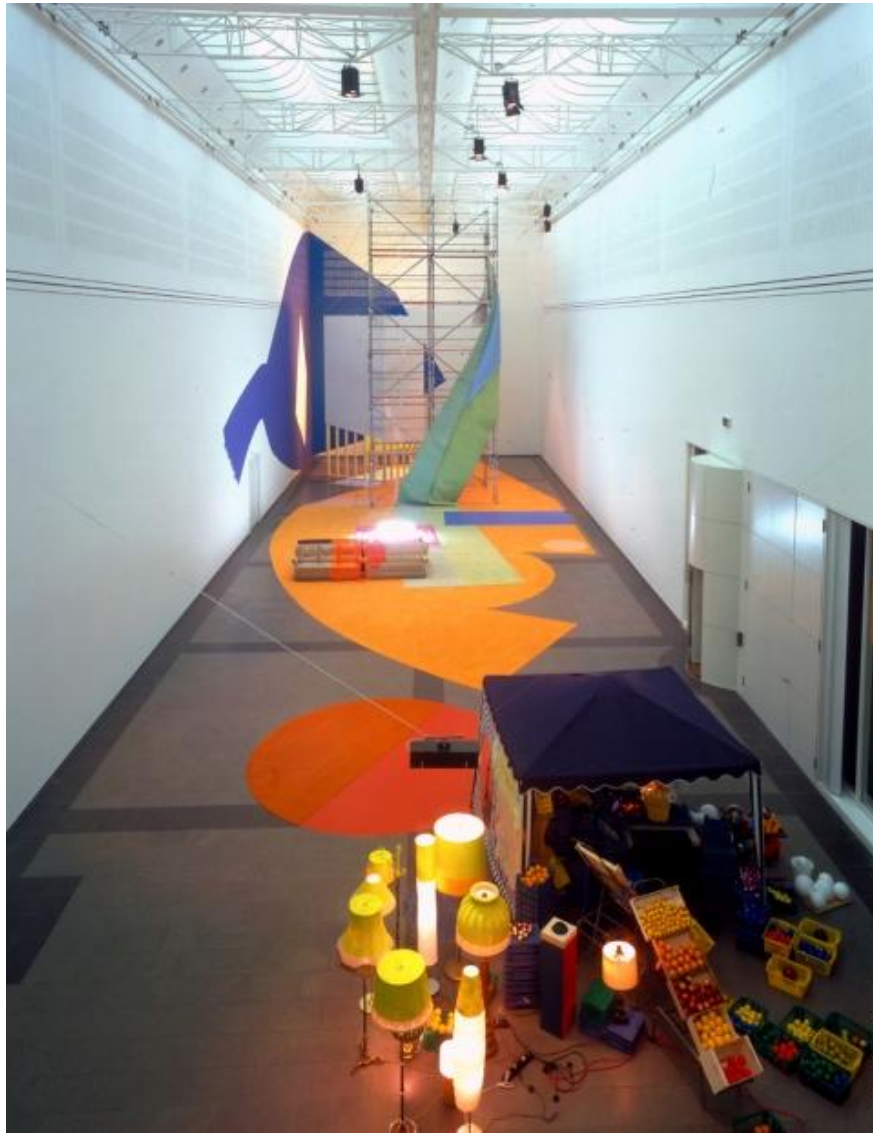


Figure 3.11. Jessica Stockholder, *carpet, scaffolding, paint, linoleum, lights, 4 couches, tent, plastic fruit, real oranges and lemons, Christmas baubles, balls, boxes, tables, building materials*, (2002), site installation exhibited at K20 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Germany.

Source: <http://www.jessicastockholder.info/albums?album=100>

¹³⁰ Barry Schwabsky, Lynne Tillman, and Cooke Lynne, eds., *Jessica Stockholder*, Contemporary Artists (London: Phaidon, 1995), 110.

In combination with found objects, Stockholder pays homage to the tradition of art with the thoughtful addition of painterly color and constructed form.¹³¹ Included in *Material Matters*, a catalog for the 2005 exhibition of the same name that focuses on the work of twenty contemporary artists known for exploring “the relationship between art and life by advocating complete openness toward materials and processes,”¹³² Stockholder applies a painters sense of form, pattern, texture, and color to three dimensional spaces through the use of an astonishing array of media.



Figure 3.12. Jessica Stockholder, Detail of *furniture, plastic ties, typewriter, 6 3lb weights, expanding foam, TJ Max oil painting, oil and acrylic paint, plastic parts, casters, fabric, folding canvas chair, clear plastic shower curtain. wooden brackets, light fixture, yellow low wattage bulb, metal hardware and braided metal cable, fluorescent light fixture and power bar.* (2006), site installation exhibited at Mitchell-Innes & Nash Gallery, New York, NY.

Source: <http://www.jessicastockholder.info/albums?album=111>

¹³¹ Andrea Inselmann, *Material Matters* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, 2005), 11.

¹³² Ibid. The *Material Matters* exhibition was held at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University.

Born of an experiential approach to making art, Stockholder “was trained as both a painter and sculptor, and her eye for color favors an exuberant expressionism that contrasts splotches of white and black with deep oranges, bright yellows, sexy pinks, and Mediterranean blues.”¹³³ Her sculptures and installation work often fill entire rooms. The work relates to the architecture of the space using things from daily life resulting in a very physical and engaging experience.¹³⁴ The materialist understanding of Stockholder’s work as colorful, bold, sharp, soft, bright, orderly, messy, is real and present. On her website, Stockholder explains, “Working with materials involves intelligence and thoughts that are rich in ways quite different from the thoughts that are generated while seated at a desk.”¹³⁵

At first Stockholder’s work seems fantastical and outrageous, but with closer analysis, “it is acutely observant; it is a deep attentiveness that allows for the effortlessness.”¹³⁶ The effortlessness is actually a learned and practiced ability to use a cacophonous amount of material in a painterly manner. In addition to experimentation within the materials, Stockholder applies a strong knowledge of the discipline’s history to all of her work. When asked in an interview about the whereabouts of her painting tradition, Stockholder includes a wide range of 20th century art:

I relate to an American tradition, though probably to both [American and European]. Matisse, Cezanne and the Cubists certainly are important to me. I also feel a strong affinity to Clyfford Still, Frank Stella, the New York School hard-edge painting and Minimalism, as well as Richard Serra.¹³⁷

¹³³ Mitchell-Inness & Nash Gallery, "Jessica Stockholder," Mitchell-Inness & Nash Gallery, <http://www.miandn.com/#/artists/jessicastockholder/>.

¹³⁴ David Ryan, "Jessica Stockholder in Conversation with David Ryan," in *Talking Painting: Dialogues with Twelve Contemporary Abstract Painters*, ed. David Ryan (London: Routledge, 2002), 244.

¹³⁵ Jessica Stockholder, "Jessica Stockholder - Site Related Installations, Sculpture, Writing + Video," Mutasis, <http://www.jessicastockholder.info/index.php>.

¹³⁶ Barry Schwabsky, "The Magic of Sobriety," in *Jessica Stockholder*, ed. Barry Schwabsky, Lynne Tillman, and Cooke Lynne, *Contemporary Artists* (London: Phaidon, 1995), 44.

¹³⁷ As cited in *Ibid.*, 49.



Figure 3.13. Jessica Stockholder, *Detail of lamp, plywood, lamp shade, plastic bowl, mask made in Ghana sold at TJ Max for \$14.95, pot lid, hardware, acrylic and oil paint, lexal caulking adhesive, copper sheeting*, (2008), exhibited at Art 39 Basel.
 Source: <http://www.jessicastockholder.info/albums?album=111>

A 2008 site specific installation by Stockholder (figs. 3.10 & 3.13) included in Art 39 Basel is an example of her “intensely visual essays.”¹³⁸ The work, representative of her smaller installations, emphasizes her familiarity and playful exploration with materials. Stockholder’s talents lie in the ability to transform “diverse materials and visual languages into a coherent compositional whole.”¹³⁹ Stockholder does not give her work titles, but rather identifies them by the materials she uses. Materials of this artwork

¹³⁸ Nancy Doll and Terrie Sultan, *Jessica Stockholder: Kissing the Wall: Works, 1988-2003* (New York: D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2004), 8.

Art 39 Basel is the 39th year of Art Basel, “the world’s premier art show for contemporary and modern works.” (<http://www.artbasel.com/go/id/ss/>)

¹³⁹ Miwon Kwon, "Promiscuity of Space: Some Thoughts on Jessica Stockholder's Scenographic Compositions," in *Jessica Stockholder: Kissing the Wall: Works, 1988-2003*, ed. Nancy Doll and Terrie Sultan (New York: D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2004), 33.

include: “lamp, plywood, lamp shade, plastic bowl, mask made in Ghana sold at TJ Max for \$14.95, pot lid, hardware, acrylic and oil paint, lexal caulking adhesive, copper sheeting.”¹⁴⁰ Indeed, there is more to Stockholder’s work than the material aspect. Her work is based on theoretical concepts that question and challenge, among other things, the idea of boundaries, framing and commodities which tests perception and notions of space.¹⁴¹ These concepts are all highlighted and explored through her knowledgeable responses to the weight, color, texture, and sizes of the found objects.

Materiality within Landscape Architecture:

Noting the wide variety and complex nature of materials used within the discipline of landscape architecture, Moore explains that “It takes real skill to avoid creating a compromised mishmash given all the demands made by various stakeholders, accommodating the many different expectations and using them to strengthen rather than dilute the concept.”¹⁴²

The physical craft of the discipline is an important and complex component. Landscape architects are designers of the *built environment*. However in the digital age, are the visual aspects of the material world being left behind? Moore believes that in shifting design away from the “pedantic preoccupation with technology, the process begins to inhabit the more appropriate realm of ideas, judgment, and artistry,” exposing the true nature of design expertise.¹⁴³ Perhaps rather than obsessing about becoming masters of the latest technological tool, a more relevant quest would be to intelligently

¹⁴⁰ Stockholder, “Jessica Stockholder - Site Related Installations, Sculpture, Writing + Video.”

¹⁴¹ Kwon, “Promiscuity of Space: Some Thoughts on Jessica Stockholder’s Scenographic Compositions.”

¹⁴² Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*, 184.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 153.

determine how to use technology to better realize the “true expression of a particular idea.”¹⁴⁴

Dee also reminds us that since “the day-to-day experience of the landscape” happens at the material scale, knowledge of the physical and material is vital.¹⁴⁵ An undeveloped knowledge of physical materials has the potential to lead to aesthetically moribund and poorly functioning designs. Dee notes that “the practice of craft and the physical arts is also increasingly looked down upon as landscape architecture courses and educator academize and promote written theory and hypothetical projects over action with and in landscapes.”¹⁴⁶

Stockholder’s work emphasizes the meeting and relationships between a wide range of materials (light bulbs, carpets, electrical cords, chairs, newspaper, glass, etc.). Learning and exploring the physical properties of material in an aesthetic and artistic way is a visual skill valuable to landscape architects.

Conclusion

Influenced by Rendell and Fernie’s publications discussing the capacity of artists and landscape architects to develop visionary, challenging, and sensitive design while responding to Moore’s plea to dispense of the speculative dimension of perception and to have “sensible discussions” about the making of informed and imaginative design decisions, the examination of recent work and methodology of artists Mark Dion and Jessica Stockholder challenge current methods within landscape architecture. Looking through the lenses of *openness* and *materiality*, this chapter attempts to reclaim the value

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 181. Moore states that there are some professional Landscape Architects realizing the expressive potential of technology: Gustafson Porter, Grant Associates, Gross Max, Camlin Lonsdale, and Martha Schwartz Inc, to name a few.

¹⁴⁵ Dee, "Form, Utility, and the Aesthetics of Thrift in Design Education," 22.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

of developing an artistic sensibility. In other words, using *openness* and *materiality* help heighten the value of the visual.

Upon receiving any design problem, there is such an overwhelming amount of information to consider that the obvious, such as the way a material feels and looks, has the potential to be overlooked. Dion and Stockholder's thoughtful and artistic rearrangement of mundane objects comment on the way we view the world and change how we see the common. They challenge how we see the aesthetics of the everyday. Investigating the conscious working methods of these two visual artists loosens structuring devices that may do more harm than good and challenges stale perceptions.

CHAPTER 4

BREAKING OLD HABITS: VISUALIZING A FRAMEWORK

Since this thesis expounds upon the value of the visual and is written for and with the designer in mind, it only makes sense to summarize the previous two chapters into a more visual format. The next two figures and brief explanatory text attempt to better illustrate the major points of Chapter 2 and 3.

Reconnecting the Senses and Intelligence (Chapter 2)

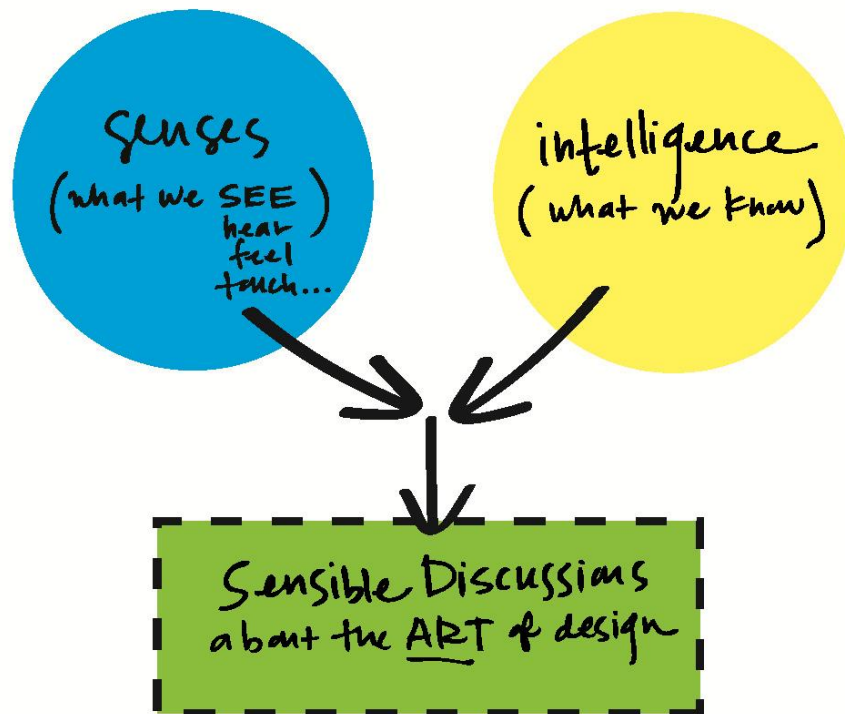


Figure 4.1. Diagram illustrating reconnection of the senses and intelligence.

In a hope to develop more imaginative and responsive design approaches within landscape architecture, it is important to “ditch the metaphysical baggage”¹⁴⁷ and recover the art of design and the value of the visual. Moore’s in-depth research and findings calls for outward directed attentiveness- *of consciousness*- in creativity and design.

Overlooking the Visual acknowledges that visual skill is comprised of observations, experimentation within the traditions, materials, and ideas of a particular medium.¹⁴⁸

Visual skill is *not* “the ability to switch on a different cognitive mode of thinking”.

Therefore, it challenges the mysterious and subconscious air that surrounds the design disciplines.¹⁴⁹ Since resourcefulness and inventiveness arise from an explicit material

knowledge and understanding, we need no longer afford the detached acceptance of

information.¹⁵⁰ More importantly, Moore states, “what we see cannot be separated from

what we know.”¹⁵¹ What we see is interpretive based on our own knowledge and experiences.

Reconnecting intelligence and the senses (fig. 4.1), and consequently abandoning a strictly rational, linear thought process reinvigorates the possibilities of finding new relationships and connections within every design problem. Reconciling the sensory qualities of a design with intelligence, knowledge, material understanding and experience allows the designer to move outside the narrow constraints of the rationalist paradigm.¹⁵²

Within the visual and spatial medium of landscape architecture, there is practical value in learning the art of design.

¹⁴⁷ Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*. The phrase “metaphysical baggage” is used to describe speculative and uncritical methods within the design process.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 13.

¹⁵⁰ Dee, “Form, Utility, and the Aesthetics of Thrift in Design Education,” 32.

¹⁵¹ Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*, 12.

¹⁵² Ibid.

Imaginative Investigating (Chapter 3)

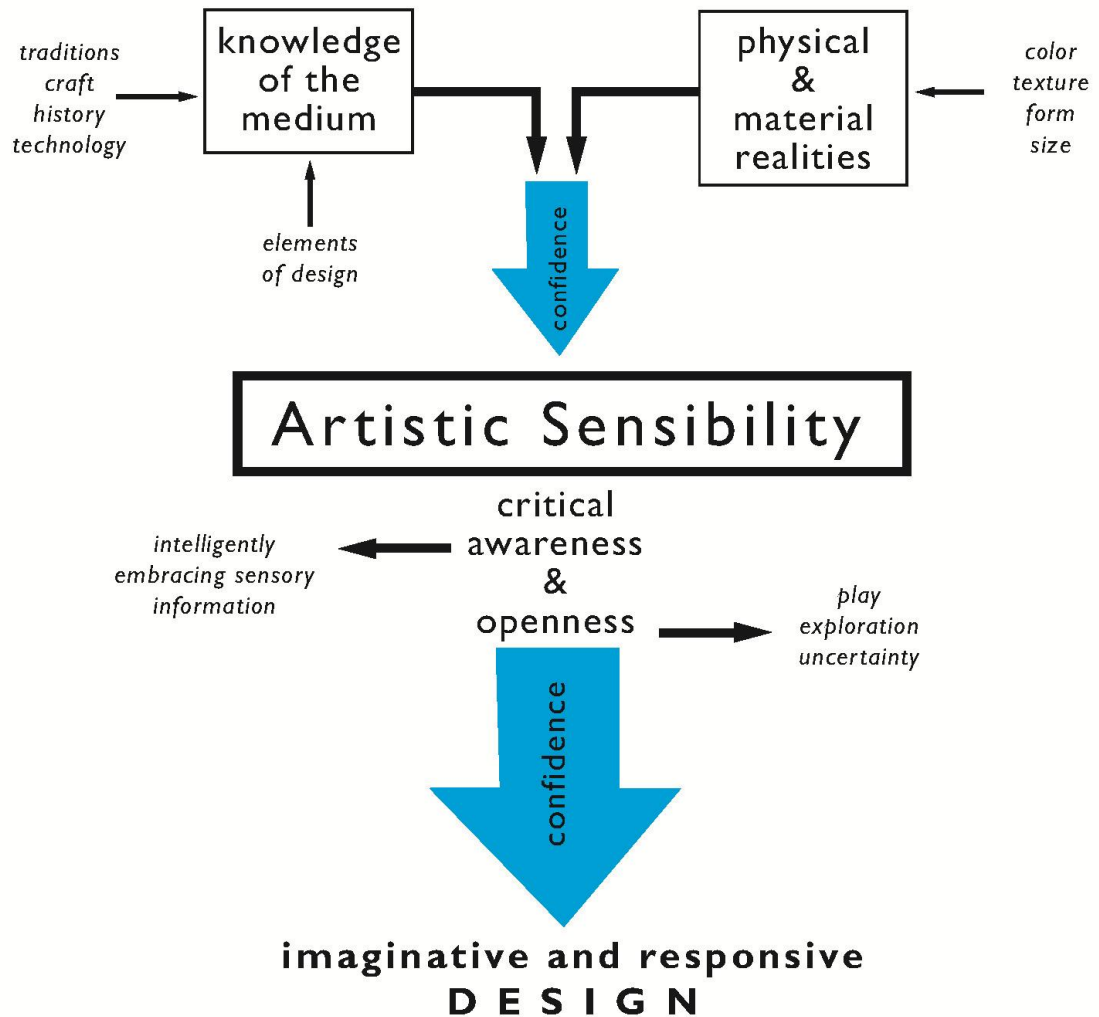


Figure 4.2: Diagram illustrating artistic sensibility.

Chapter 3 responds to Moore's research in conjunction with two recent publications discussing art and landscape architecture.¹⁵³ The examination of *openness* and *materiality* through the perspective of artists enhances the significance of visual information revealing aspects that are too often overlooked in the landscape architecture discipline. Dion and Stockholder's deep, open, curious, and knowledgeable observations and explorations with materials create artworks that at once display expert aesthetic understanding *and* challenge traditional ways of thinking and seeing the world around us. Their work is an intellectual artistic endeavor. It requires rigorous and critical skill, technique and practice with the media.

Acknowledging the connections between the senses and intelligence encourages fostering a serious interest in the rigorous development of an *artistic sensibility* (fig. 4.2). This, in turn, demands explicit knowledge and understanding: mastering the craft, techniques, materials and learning the history of the medium. Embracing visual information and learning the elements of design (form, line, composition, color, etc.) and how they interact to make you react the way you do demands purposeful engagement. The cultivation of these skills and talents builds the necessary foundation for imaginative and responsive design.

The repeated practice and accurate knowledge of the tools used with a medium builds familiarity. Armed with the expertise and wherewithal of their media, artists develop the skill and "confidence to make judgments in a spatial, conceptual medium."¹⁵⁴ This is a vital step on the road to design expertise. Confidence leads to play and exploration. Rather than remain within defined and fixed parameters, artists are "imaginative

¹⁵³ Fernie, ed. *Two Minds: Artists and Architects in Collaboration*; Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between*.

¹⁵⁴ Moore, *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design*, 15.

investigators... [and] are guided by questions, issues, and abstractions where new knowledge is seen as a function of creating and critiquing human experience.”¹⁵⁵

Avoiding mechanized responses and embracing serendipitous uncertainty challenges banal and homogenous ideas and enables expanded discourse about space, architecture and materials.

Practical Applications

Researching beyond the boundaries of landscape architecture has practical applications within the discipline. By reconsidering the importance of artistic sensibilities, the landscape architect is reminded of her responsibility to intelligently consider the sensory dimensions, particularly the visual, in the landscape.

The natural, dynamic effects of wind, water, sunlight, plants, animals, and people free landscapes from fitting into a fixed set of parameters. The landscape is realized as a fluid and evolving entity which necessitates a non-linear design approach. Developing the expertise required to approach complex design problems requires the conscious engagement with all of the sensory qualities of the site. Recent research by landscape architects and architects (such as Moore, Dee, and Silvetti) requests a renewed sensory understanding of the physical qualities of a site.

Facing the reality of the present digital age, the physical characteristics of a site have the possibility of being overlooked. Should the profession be concerned with how much landscape architecture students and practitioners actually spend outdoors in the field? Since the outdoor environment *is* the medium of landscape architecture, what happens when landscape architects complete an entire design from the brief to construction completely via an off-site computer?

¹⁵⁵ Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts*, 181.

If the designer is experienced and skilled with addressing the physical characteristics of a site, and digital tools become more powerful and useful, perhaps off-site design and management will become the norm in the future. But is this “virtual” design education and practice something that we should even be interested in creating? The everyday users of the built environment experience the designs outdoors. As Hale writes, “the biggest mistake designers make in our time is to think that design is outside the everyday, normal life. Even greatness is not outside of daily life.”¹⁵⁶ It doesn’t make sense to cut off the designer from the everyday realities of the landscape architecture discipline.

The work of artists Mark Dion and Jessica Stockholder examined in the preceding chapter is a testament to the inventiveness and skill that are a result of a more flexible and physical approach to design. The success of these artists and their work is proof that an intelligent artistic sensibility allows unforeseen relationships and possibilities to emerge.¹⁵⁷ Studying the methodology of artists provides a means of developing a deeper understanding of the visual dimensions of any medium.

So, how do we ensure an explicit understanding of the visual dimensions within landscape architecture education and practice? An explicit understanding of the physical world around us promotes a number of practical applications within landscape architecture.

¹⁵⁶ Hale, *The Old Way of Seeing*, 4.

¹⁵⁷ Art in the Twenty-First Century, “Art21 ” PBS <http://www.pbs.org/art21/index.html>.

As explained in the biography section of PBS’s Art21 website, both Dion and Stockholder have exhibited internationally and are included in the permanent collections of well respected art institutions (Dion: Tate Gallery, Museum of Modern Art, NY. Stockholder: Whitney Museum of American Art, Museum of Modern Art, NY.) In addition, Dion is an adjunct professor at Columbia University School of the Arts and Stockholder is the Director of Graduate Studies in sculpture at Yale University.

Practical applications could include re-evaluating and updating how to teach the fundamentals of design. How are current programs addressing the complex needs and challenges of contemporary design problems?

Learning across design disciplines has the potential to build a more complete understanding of design excellence. Understanding the varied skill of Renaissance masters da Vinci and Michelangelo, as illustrated in Chapter 3, is an example of an intelligent artistic approach. Appreciating the techniques and skill involved in one of Italian painter Giorgio Morandi's deceptively simple still lives (fig. 4.3) could lead to a deeper understanding of composition and form. Morandi, a master of gradations of color, hue and tone, completed paintings that were complex in organization and subtle in execution.¹⁵⁸ This brief example demonstrates how a design education across art history could help familiarize students with a wider understanding of design excellence. Imagine the possibilities of including all design disciplines within this conversation.



Figure 4.3. *Still Life (Natura Morta)* by Giorgio Morandi (1956), oil on canvas. Yale Art Gallery.
Source: http://www.metmuseum.org/special/giorgio_morandi/view_1.asp?item=12&view=1

¹⁵⁸ Janet Morandi Giorgio Abramowicz, *Giorgio Morandi: The Art of Silence* (London, 2004).

One new example of a design program created to undertake complex contemporary design problems is the *Art Space and Nature Programme* at the Edinburgh College of Art that was developed in 2003. The program is described as a two year MFA program, with one year MA option, that offers “a framework of advanced study for individuals to develop practical and academic interest in the visual arts, architectural and environmental practice.”¹⁵⁹ It is as important to review past successful design programs as it is to follow emerging trends in design education in order to determine the effectiveness of this kind of holistic and interdisciplinary graduate design program.

Respecting the professional history of landscape architecture, it is essential to understand how materials physically relate to one another in the field. Part of this understanding involves continuously asking questions and experimenting with the shape, color, feel, function, and look of materials. Additionally, keeping up with the latest technologies and materials appreciates a sustainable future for the profession.

Contrasting current design approaches that center on formless methodology to those that bring visual dimensions and qualities back into critical discourse focuses on the material realities of a well designed and functional landscape.¹⁶⁰ According to practitioners and educators Moore, Dee and Silvetti, learning how to explicitly and inventively manipulate physical form is a valuable skill to cultivate. Imaginative forms, from both natural and man-made materials, prevent homogenous landscapes, inspire users and respect the artistic practice within landscape architecture.

¹⁵⁹ Edinburgh College of Art., "Art, Space & Nature Programme," Edinburgh College of Art, <http://www.asnse.eca.ac.uk/index2.htm>.

¹⁶⁰ Dee, "Form, Utility, and the Aesthetics of Thrift in Design Education." Formless approaches such as text based narrative (genus loci) and process based design.

The practical applications of reaching beyond the boundaries of landscape architecture into the area of fine arts encourage fresh, artistic design perspectives. Re-evaluating how to teach the fundamentals of design, exploring and experiencing the material qualities of the medium, and mastering the manipulation of form all help move the discipline towards the goal of imaginative and responsive designs. Most importantly, the cultivation of an artistic sensibility aids in the development of *design expertise*. This understanding reasonably explains the usefulness of fostering an artistic sensibility. Design expertise leads to thoughtfully considered and well-crafted spaces while also encouraging the enduring human impulse of *craftsmanship*, the desire to do a job well done purely for its own sake.¹⁶¹

Dee's writings on the development of a new educational model within landscape architecture are partly inspired by Richard Sennett's book, *The Craftsman*.¹⁶² Sennett's research illustrates the value of a skillful practice involving distinctive, yet often undervalued, types of knowledge. Using case studies that explore a wide range of learned skills (i.e. doctors, artists, and chefs) Sennett explains, "there is nothing inevitable about becoming skilled, just as there is nothing mindlessly mechanical about technique itself."¹⁶³ Learning the fundamentals of craftsmanship within landscape architecture includes considering the visual dimensions and encourages an artistic sensibility.

¹⁶¹ Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2008), 9.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Not restricted by the same economic and functional constraints of landscape architects (multiple stakeholders, public safety, and environmental health), contemporary artists such as Mark Dion and Jessica Stockholder have the opportunity to purposefully explore and engage with visual dimensions. They are free to develop the critical skills and techniques necessary to create visionary artworks within their selected media. Both are visionary in their artistic sensibility and in their ability to challenge conventions. Their approach to their art clarifies misconceptions about the division of the senses and intelligence and suggests how the art of design can be returned to intellectual and critical discourse. Their practical applications of artistic sensibilities value design expertise, and so have the potential to vitally reinvigorate the profession of landscape architecture.

In the quest to make better, more responsive places, professional landscape architects have a dedicated responsibility to challenge single-minded ways of thinking. To this end, examining the methodology of contemporary artists suggests examples of intelligent artistic endeavor. Meaningful exposure to the fine arts opens eyes and expands the sense of aesthetic possibilities. It keeps us moving and looking for the next idea, rather than immediately looking for answers with an implicit reliance on one-size-fits-all design approaches. Landscape architects, like artists, should explore with openness and embrace uncertainty at all points of the design process.

A recent exhibition at The Hayward, *Psycho Buildings: Artists Take on Architecture*, invited ten artists from around the world to each bring a new transformative perspective to one of London's most iconic contemporary art galleries.¹⁶⁴ Sculptures and installations within and around the Hayward were intensely varied, including a Buckminster Fuller-inspired steel-framed clear PVC geodesic dome on the gallery's roof and a pond created by flooding a sculpture terrace.¹⁶⁵ The goal of this recent exhibit bridges the space between art and architecture, reactivating and re-examining the conventional notions about our relationships to space, "calling to attention what must be experienced rather than merely seen."¹⁶⁶ Since, as Moore explains, we are limited *only* by the breadth of our own knowledge and experience, building skills, competency and literacy is essential. These current dialogues between the artistic and intelligent discipline have encouraging results. It will be exciting to see how both landscape architects and artists develop new and inventive ways to reconcile ideals and reality in the future.¹⁶⁷

Acknowledging the importance of an informed artistic sensibility has significant implications for the future of landscape architecture. Supporting the basis of design with metaphysical rationale, blindly searching for the "essence" of a place, devalues informed design and prevents sensible discussions of the functionality in the landscape. Just as the senses and intelligence should remain connected, emphasis needs to be placed on the importance of the visual *and* textual, never one without the other.

Although the value of open-ended exploration and mastery of materials seems like common sense (observe more, sketch more, build more, draw more = better design), there

¹⁶⁴ Rugoff, "Preface," 8.

¹⁶⁵ Ralph Rugoff, Brian Dillon, and Jane Rendell, eds., *Psycho Buildings: Artists Take on Architecture* (London: Hayward Publishing, 2008).

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 19. The exhibition took place during the summer of 2008 at The Hayward, London, UK.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

is more to a beautifully executed design than the sum of its parts. Breaking the design process down to an orderly system seems like a logical approach, but once again, the rationalist paradigm, inadvertently perhaps, diminishes the holistic approach so necessary within the discipline.

Looking back to José Rafeal Moneo's interdisciplinary science building at Columbia University in New York City that momentarily pulled us out of our fast-paced lives to look at the world around us, we are reminded of the purpose of a skillful and imaginative handling of materials: to express a learned expertise that fulfills the needs and desires of the everyday user. This thesis suggests a way by which landscape architects can begin to develop an artistic sensibility. These proposed ideas, perhaps, suggest the connection of an intelligent artistic practice with an imaginative approach to design.

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