

Reconfiguring Natures
Modern Architecture and the Picturesque
Exhibition Guide

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Salk Institute, La Jolla, California, 1965
Louis Kahn, architect

The negative monumentality of the ocean view in the canonical image of the Salk Institute is suggestive of a Baroque garden, where the visitor's experience is abstractly governed by the plan and its relation to the palace, whose role is being played in this case by a vast empty space. Belying this connection to the Baroque, the photograph captures a transitory geometry through effects of lighting and framing.



Ube Public Hall, Ube, Japan 1937
Togo Murano, architect

Erected as a memorial to Sukesaku Watanabe, the visionary founder of a company which transformed Ube into an industrial city, this auditorium building embodied the pride of the inhabitants in the town's progress and their aspiration to create a civic society. During this period Japanese architects were avidly exploring the idea of modernism, and the overall design of the hall clearly evokes Le Corbusier's proposal for the Palace of the Soviets. At the same time, Murano employed local ceramic techniques to produce salt-glazed tiles with variable sheen. These techniques do not meet today's environmental standards, and the tiles had to be replaced by close approximations during later renovations. The violinist Yehudi Menuhin is said to have praised the acoustics of the auditorium when he visited the city to give a concert in 1951.



Stowe Landscape Garden, Stowe, UK, 18th century

Stowe is generally regarded as a basic prototype of the picturesque landscape garden. It was developed over the course of the 18th century through the efforts of several designers including William Kent and Capability Brown. The photograph exposes the programmed nature of the stroller's experience of the garden, which is configured as a network of linear axes connecting various pavilions whose relationships are revealed through discrete moments of "discovery."



Fort Worth, Texas

Here the recently built Omni Hotel is juxtaposed with the intricately detailed Texas & Pacific Warehouse from 1931. The brashly contemporary hotel tower looms over the Moderne-style brick structure, which because of foreshortening appears to recede, despite being three blocks closer.



Yokosuka Museum of Art, Yokosuka, Japan, 2007
Riken Yamamoto, architect

Yamamoto created an outdoor promenade that takes the visitors to the back of the building and up onto a rooftop lookout with a spectacular view of the ocean. The outer glass encasing protects the inner steel structure from salt erosion and at the same time provides a spectacle for the strollers.



Sujiaba Interchange, Chongqing, China

Located in Southwest China at the confluence of the Yangtze and Jialing rivers, Chongqing is one of the fastest growing cities in the world with a metropolitan population of over 18 million. Two decades of frenetic construction have produced a forest of skyscrapers and contributed to the growing problem of air pollution, but pockets of bucolic landscape still remain within the urban fabric.



Yamanashi Press and Broadcasting Building, Kofu, Japan, 1966
Kenzo Tange, architect

Kenzo Tange was a father figure to the Metabolist movement in Japan, which understood human society as a kind of biological process in a constant state of flux. With future expansions in mind, Tange designed the building with empty voids between clusters of solid volumes. Some of the voids were subsequently filled in during a major renovation in 1974, making this a rare occasion in which Metabolist ideals were at least modestly realized. Clearly visible from the train station, the massiveness of the building still commands attention even amidst the scattering of taller buildings that have since cropped up across the city.



Resurrection Chapel, Stockholm, Sweden, 1925
Sigurd Lewerentz, architect

The chapel is situated within the Woodland Cemetery designed by Lewerentz in collaboration with Gunnar Asplund. While the cemetery can be viewed as a modern variation on the picturesque landscape garden, Lewerentz also aimed to instill the discipline of a formal garden by positioning the chapel's classical portico at the end of a tree-lined path so as to create a major axis connecting it to the apogee of the cemetery, a hilltop elm grove that commands a panoramic view of the property.



NOA Building, Tokyo, 1974
Seiichi Shirai, architect

The photograph shows part of a dramatic Fallopiian passageway that connects the exterior to the interior of the NOA building. Here Shirai frustrates the distinction between inside and outside through the use of rusticated stone cladding, dim lighting, and plush white carpet in a space that is sheltered from the elements but precedes the actual entrance doors.



Serizawa Keisuke Museum, Shizuoka, Japan, 1981
Seiichi Shirai, architect

The design of the museum combines the idea of a stroll in a picturesque landscape garden with the rituals of the Japanese tea ceremony, both of which integrate movement and symbolic interaction. This uneasy fusion is negotiated through references to architectural elements such as pavilions and tokonomas, as well as through spatial and psychological maneuvers that in some cases threaten to subvert it. The photograph depicts the perimeter wall of the museum, whose fortress-like presence rejects the picturesque landscape garden practice of incorporating uninterrupted and expansive views beyond the property itself, as typically accomplished by means of a ha-ha, and instead conforms to the architectural conventions of the tea house, whose outer garden is surrounded by a fence in order to enclose the world of the ritual.



Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, 1968
Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, architect

The New National Gallery was conceived as part of the Kulturforum, a campus of cultural institutions erected close to the wall that was intended to display the West's cultural resilience and provided a counterpart to the 19th century Museum Island, which fell within the jurisdiction of East Berlin. The open space of the 50 m x 50 m hall on the upper floor naturally solicits the curation of a picturesque art-viewing experience and at the same time challenges artists to create new kinds of works. In the photograph a complex play of reflections dramatizes the materiality of glass, an aspect of design that had preoccupied the architect already in his 1921 skyscraper project but is often repressed in modernist discourses on transparency.



Eames House, Los Angeles, 1949
Charles and Ray Eames, architects

In the original design, the house projected out on pilotis over the meadow in the centre of the property. As they waited for the prefabricated construction material to arrive, however, the Eameses decided to reconfigure their design so as to keep the meadow undisturbed. In the end they nestled two simple rectangular volumes into a slope at the edge of property, merging house and landscape.



Markuskirken, Stockholm, 1960
Sigurd Lewerentz, architect

Markuskirken (St. Mark's Church) was built to serve a newly established community in a suburb of Stockholm. Lewerentz used rustically textured brick walls to create sculptural forms with strong visual and tactile qualities. The low-rise church complex and the forest of birch trees that surrounds it combine to create a picturesque landscape that acts as an antidote to the harshness of modern life.



La Tourette, Éveux, France, 1960
Le Corbusier, architect

Considered one of the masterpieces of Le Corbusier, this convent influenced the design of many institutional buildings in North America, including Boston City Hall and the Langford Architecture Center at Texas A&M University. The architect animated the complex through the use of geometric volumes in the inner courtyard, which create a kind of cityscape that can be viewed from the corridors on each level.



Santa Chiara, Hitachi, Japan, 1974
Seiichi Shirai, architect

This upper hallway, with its relative darkness, circular opening to the ground floor, and tightly bound leather railing, seems to demand a psychological interpretation associated with the anal anatomy.



Castle Howard, Yorkshire, UK, 18th century
Nicholas Hawksmoor and John Vanbrugh, architects

The architectural historian Neil Levine offers an interpretation of three of the structures in this landscape garden—a pyramid, a temple, and a mausoleum—as forming an autonomous system that differentiates its elements through geometry, history, and use. The pyramid, which represents an Egyptian tomb, is situated far off in a neighbouring field, and, with its remoteness exaggerated by its relatively diminutive size, acts as a point at infinity which appears stationary as the observer roams around.



Babelsberg Landscape Garden, Potsdam, Germany, 19th century

The multistage project of designing and realizing the Babelsberg summer palace and landscape garden for Crown Prince Wilhelm (later to become Emperor Wilhelm I) was intricately intertwined with the 19th century efforts to construct a unified German identity. No longer referencing classical architecture, the garden expresses Wilhelm and his wife Augusta's taste for the gothic, which in the initial phases was channeled through the Tudor manor style but was later inflected by the Romantic spirit that their visit to Rheinstein Castle had impressed upon them.



Cubbon Park, Bangalore, India, 19th century

Established by a British acting Commissioner of Mysore, this picturesque park in the heart of Bangalore boasts a rich biodiversity that gives it a distinct character and atmosphere. Its role as a public park has been in constant negotiation with the needs and desires of the local inhabitants, and the grounds have been variously used as a site of protest, a source of timber, and a place to let cattle graze.