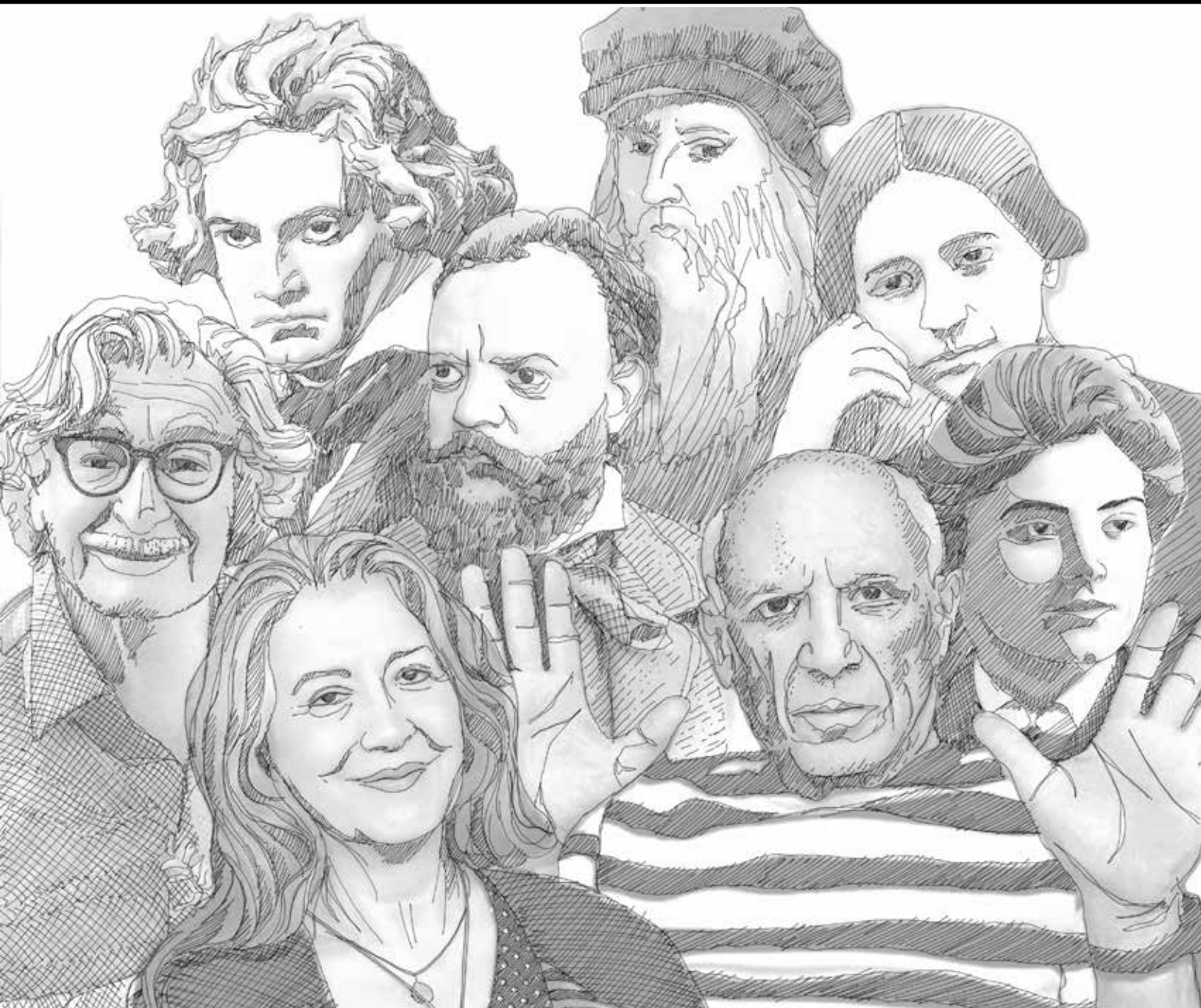


DECEMBER 2017

# SITELINES

Landscape Architecture in British Columbia



## The Arts and Landscape Architecture

Classical Music and Landscape Architecture | The Visual Arts in Landscape Architecture |  
The Written Words: Canadian Authors and the Landscape



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The purpose of Sitelines is to provide an open forum for the exchange of ideas and information pertaining to the profession of landscape architecture. Individual opinions expressed are those of the writers and not necessarily of those of the BCSLA.

# THE ARTS and Landscape Architecture

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**Landscape architecture draws** upon environmental and human science, economics, technology and art. In this issue of SITELINES we ask the question: how is our field linked to other forms of artistic expression and what can we learn from them? Can the arts enrich our understanding of the design process and inspire us to further think outside the proverbial box?

Great composers, including Handel, Beethoven, Dvorak, Wagner and Debussy were deeply inspired by land and water. Landscape is also fundamental to visual art. Throughout history, depictions of the land and sea as both background and primary subject has been integral to painting, sculpture and public art. Landscape also plays a vital role in literature, theatre, cinema and dance in all their dimensions.

These articles explore our profession's relationship to three artistic endeavors: classical music, visual art and Canadian literature. Is there a connection between musical expression, composition, structure and landscape design? What were the advances, over time, in drawing, painting and sculpture that permitted artists to interpret and highlight the landscape? What are some exciting contributions of Da Vinci, Picasso and Burle Marx; what can we absorb from them and apply? Are there messages for us from Canadian writers, both Indigenous and non-Aboriginal? And finally, what are the artistic components of landscape architecture, how can we unleash new creativity and what lies ahead for us artistically, as a profession?

In future issues of SITELINES, the relationship of our field to other artistic endeavors may be explored. Hopefully, we offer a few answers, provoke greater curiosity and encourage animated discussion through this collaborative effort. **SL**

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DESIGN. CULTURE. CRAFT.

# Classical Music

## and Landscape Architecture

— Is there a connection? —



**A long-time enthusiast** of classical music and an avid concert goer, I've recently pondered whether there is a plausible link between this wonderful art form and landscape architecture. Both disciplines require unstinting commitment, astute creative interpretation and fastidious attention to technical detail. Yet one could argue that any similarity ends there, given the constraints of deadlines, client programs and a slew of regulatory obligations that landscape architects must constantly satisfy which ostensibly, composers and musicians don't have to grapple with (they face other daunting challenges). However, I feel differently, so bear with me while I advance my thoughts.

### Great Composers: Inspired by Land and Water

Historically, many celebrated classical composers have experienced an intimate connection with land and water that has influenced their works. Some examples:

Italian Baroque's Antonio Vivaldi expressed his love of earth and its annual climatic variations in "The Four Seasons" while German born English composer George Frederick

Handel, renowned for his "Messiah", composed "Water Music" for King George I, to celebrate the River Thames (originally performed on a barge with the Royal Family). Meanwhile, Franz Schubert's much loved "Trout Quintet" found its inspiration in part, from the streams of alpine Austria.

Straddling the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries, the prolific musical legend Ludwig von Beethoven composed among his numerous outpourings the beautiful "Pastoral Symphony" (# 6) which transports us into the rural realm, including peasant dances, birdcalls and a thunder storm. A rhythmically brilliant Felix Mendelssohn (who allegedly was a poor traveler), journeyed to Italy and Scotland for musical inspiration, resulting in the rousing "Italian Symphony", the "Scottish Symphony" and the overture, "Fingal's Cave", all three inspired by the people, landforms and coastlines he encountered.

Romantic composer Johannes Brahms sought the calm of an alpine lakeshore to produce his melodic 2nd Symphony while Russian Pytor Tchaikovski's 1st Symphony, "Winter Dreams" conjures up images of sledged troikas, ice skaters and snow swept

lands. A cheerful "Spring Symphony" (# 1) by Robert Schumann celebrated the bursting forth of buds and flowers (and love for his young wife, Clara).

Profoundly influenced by the landscape of his native Czechoslovakia, Antonin Dvorak infused rural folk tunes and dances into many of his works. His overture "In Nature's Realm" is but one of many examples. Awed by his sojourn to America, Dvorak evolved his 9th Symphony, "From the New World" to celebrate the vastness of the plains, cities teeming with immigrants and the drama of its geography. In contrast to his exuberant offerings, a comparatively dour Jean Sibelius reflected the dark forests and brooding lakes of his native Finland through his symphonies, while Norwegian Edvard Grieg drew upon fjords, waterfalls and peaks to help inspire pieces such as the "Peer Gynt" and "Holberg" suites.

France's Claude Debussy parted company with the more structured form of Romantic 19th Century music. In "La Mer", he utilized an impressionist style to express the ocean's various moods while the English 20th Century composer Benjamin Britten in his "Sea Interludes" (from the opera "Peter Grimes") ►

conveys a sense of foreboding, tracing the sea's unpredictability from calm to savage storm. Italy's Ottorino Respighi created the "Pines of Rome" to depict the ubiquitous conifers at different locations throughout the day, including the Villa Borghese gardens, the Catacombs and the Appian Way.

In North America, both rural and urban landscape settings inspired 20th Century composers. George Gershwin created a vivid musical landscape portrait through his opera, "Porgy and Bess". Aaron Copland's popular "Rodeo" and "Appalachian Spring" respectfully reflect the ranchland west and the eastern American hilly countryside. His contemporary, the energetic, multi-talented Leonard Bernstein places us in the gritty streets of 1950's Harlem through his suite for "West Side Story".

Canadian composers have also been profoundly influenced by our terrain and water. Godfrey Ridout's "Fall Fair" conjures images of flame colored hardwoods and farmer's markets brimming with bounty. Alexina Louie's "Music for a Thousand Autumns" and Jean Coulthard's "Vision of the North: Symphonic Images" express dramatic aspects of our vast land through music.

## Elements found in both Classical Music and Landscape Architecture that Create and Shape Three-Dimensional Space

Music envelops us three dimensionally through variations in sound while landscape architecture utilizes both hard and soft materials to create and shape outdoor spaces. There are elements found in classical music compositions that have counterparts in landscape design that help us craft three dimensional experiences. Here's a sampling.

Rhythm is the beat or time signature of music. It is the first dimension or building block from which sound is organized. Measure (or beat) refers to the pulse around which melody and harmony are constructed. In essence, rhythm is the skeleton beneath music's skin.

Similarly, a landscape design requires a rhythm (or bones) around which spatial definition is constructed, utilizing elements such as grading, circulation, planting and site amenities. Without a signature or framework, the design collapses. As in music, the scheme's rhythm can be complex or subtle, but it must be clearly established to move forward.

### Themes

In classical music, a theme is a recognizable melody upon which all or part of a composition is based. Simple early pieces were often monothematic while later offerings are more complex and poly-thematic, a principal melody with introduction of a secondary one and even a third one. For example, in an orchestral work, the strings could carry one theme while woodwinds introduce a secondary melody.

In landscape architecture, a theme may evolve from a client directive: the desire to achieve a specific marketing image for a private initiative or often in the public realm, a theme that evolves from a site's context. A greenway may reflect a waterfront industrial vernacular as its principal theme through its design language and choice of materials that embrace surfaces, illumination, viewpoints, enclosures and seating. A secondary theme may be introduced through plant selection, interpretive elements or public art that contrast with or support the principal theme, perhaps inspired by the history or ethnicity of an adjacent community. As in a good musical composition, the subtlety of how themes weave their way through a landscape design distinguishes one that is notable from one that is clumsy.

### Color

The warmth or coolness expressed in a musical composition (or in different movements within the same piece) convey a sense of color and are directly linked to people's emotions. Research at the University of California, Berkeley, indicates that test subjects affiliated bright colors (particularly yellow and orange) with sparkling compositions such as Mozart's First Flute Concerto while deep blues or purples were often associated with "darker" music such as certain pieces by Rachmaninov or Tchaikovsky. However, in many classical offerings, quieter passages

and slower movements contrast with vivid, even explosive ones. In a single piece, one can therefore experience a wide spectrum of color, from solemn to joyful.

It is the judicious use of compatible and at times, contrasting color that can make a landscape design either successful or mediocre. Desirable results are often achieved through the creative use of vegetation, choice and tone of materials (and elements such as water) that offer a variety of color and spatial reinforcement, encouraging a range of experiences and emotional expression; contemplative or celebratory. Like a beautiful nocturne or etude, a landscape space needn't be of grand scale to utilize color successfully, thus potentially engaging our senses and emotions whether in an intimate garden or in a public plaza.

Repetition helps unify a piece of music and makes it memorable. In the days before recordings, classical composers used repetition as a means of getting melodies to "sink in". Repeating themes and melodies carry through to current compositions. Therefore, it is not unusual to hear an opening passage in an orchestral work repeated, whether they are a 19th Century Romantic piece such as Brahms 3rd Symphony, 20th Century composer Bela Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra or a composition by the contemporary minimalist Philip Glass. In essence, melodic repetition leads the listener through the experience, inviting greater participation in the music (two notable examples where repetition is highly prominent are Serge Rachmaninov's "Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini" and Maurice Ravel's "La Valse").

Similarly, the skillful repetition of landscape components provides way finding through an open space. Paving patterns, surface treatments, choice and location of site amenities and furnishings are a some frequently used repetitive tools. In New York's Central Park, Frederick Olmsted and Calvin Vaux utilized granite outcroppings to help lead visitors through this natural (and in many ways Romantic) oasis. These and other natural elements helped their team manipulate perspective to create the illusion of wilderness in the city.





### *Texture and Layering*

In music, texture refers to how the melodic, rhythmic and harmonic elements are combined in a composition, thus determining the overall quality of sound in a piece. Texture is also described as the thickness and range between lowest and highest pitches as well as the number of parts or “voices” and the relationship among them. For example, a thick texture could contain several instruments interacting: strings, woodwinds and brass. Musical artists and conductors also often refer to the layering of instrumental passages which can be relatively subdued or extremely complex.

In our field, texture too often connotes only the tactile smoothness or roughness of surfaces, not the layering or overall interaction of the various elements of site composition and in turn, their relationship to surrounding context. As in classical music, texture embodies the way all the components interact, for example, water, planting, pavement, amenities, and spaces that rewardingly accommodate a range of human activities. Two Vancouver examples: Emory Barnes Park successfully layers spaces and amenities for families, children, seniors, pet owners and nearby office workers where a water cascade becomes a unifying component. At the Van Dusen Garden Visitor Centre, landscape design integrates a unique, environmentally responsive building into the surrounding realm. While architecture performs the prominent role, it is skillfully supported by a landscape that reinforces and showcases the theme of sustainability, just as the strings, woodwinds and brass might support and cradle a prominent solo passage in a concerto.

### Addressing Challenges and Opportunities

Over time, composers, musicians and landscape architects have faced some similar challenges, among them:

#### *Finding a Patron or Client*

In classical music, composers have always needed someone to fund and promote their efforts. As with early painting, either the Catholic or Protestant church was a primary patron, as an example, for J.S. Bach. Gradually, music became less ecclesiastical, with nobility often becoming the funder, commissioning works that celebrated their importance. Such music was initially performed for royal families or wealthy bankers and traders. Over time, concerts were presented to public audiences who paid modest admission. Of note, Beethoven often performed for all members of society, from the well off to those with very limited means.

Some important European patrons include the 18th Century socialite Baron von SWEITEN who supported Mozart as well as Beethoven while the Hungarian Esterhazy family employed Haydn for much of his career. In the mid 1800’s the Finnish government was one of the first to establish public financing for composers with Jean Sibelius a beneficiary.

The generous funding of Jeanette Thurber helped bring Antonin Dvorak to America while the 20th Century Elizabeth Coolidge Foundation commissioned works by Benjamin Britten, Maurice Ravel, Igor Stravinski, Bela Bartok as well as Aaron Copland. Many symphony foundations now have artist in residence programs with a mixture of government, audience and private donor support that promote new compositions so that classical music can continue to evolve and flourish.

Likewise, landscape architects have had the challenge of achieving recognition and securing financing. Historically, practitioners during the Renaissance were employed by popes, cardinals and merchants. Both Andre Le Notre and Capability Brown were dependent upon nobility. It wasn’t until the Industrial Revolution, with its overcrowded cities, lack of sanitation and outbreaks of disease that the need for public open spaces was acknowledged, resulting in parks and greenways established in both Europe and North America.

Whether one works in the private sector or public realm, as landscape architects we know it is vital to convince someone to employ us. Developers, industrialists, home ►

owners, Indigenous communities and governments are some of the potential clients consulting firms can engage with. Public sector landscape architects must often convince city managers, mayors and council members that parks, streetscapes and playgrounds are essential for healthy living, requiring ongoing financial commitment. For us, building consensus with stakeholders (the equivalent of musical communication with an audience) is essential to achieving a successful project result.

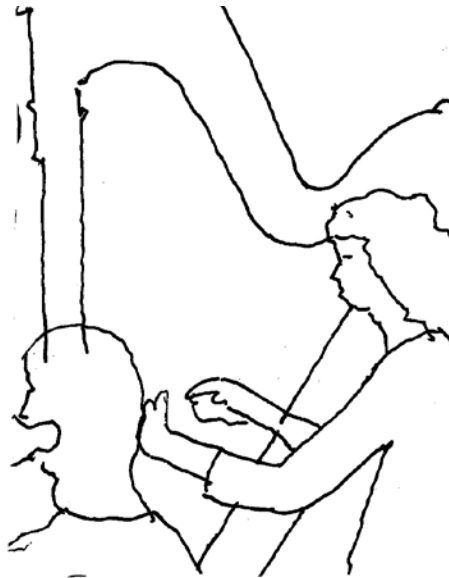
### *Collaboration*

Much of classical music is a collaborative effort, whether its expression be an orchestral or choral piece, a chamber work or recital. Precise coordination is required among different instruments and in a symphonic work or concerto, the conductor must thoroughly know all parts of the music. Chamber playing has the challenge of responding to musical cues where each instrumentalist contributes exactly at the correct moment. In a solo performance, rapport among the soloist, the composition and the audience is essential. In all of these examples, it is the interpretation of the composer's intent and the communication of it that makes for a gratifying experience.

Similarly, landscape architecture requires astute collaboration with other project team players that can include architects, a range of engineers, environmental scientists, project managers, client representatives and approval agencies. Thus, the synergy one finds in classical music performance applies as well to landscape architecture.

### *Staying Relevant*

Today, there is substantial effort by orchestras and individual musicians to reach out to the greater community by moving from the auditorium into local venues. School programs and small ensembles can be found across the country. Free summer concerts are performed throughout our land. Classical music is attracting millennial audiences owing to a wave of brilliant young musicians, many of them women, who are achieving international recognition and critical acclaim, including conductors



such as America's Marin Alsop, Finland's Susanna Malkki and Canada's Tanya Miller.

Also, the nature of classical musical composition is constantly evolving. For example, in the 1920's, Vienna based Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg and Anton Webern challenged the format of more traditional structure through atonality, a musical expression somewhat akin to abstraction in the visual arts. Championing new music has not been easy but it is gradually gaining a devoted audience.

In the same way, landscape architecture initially struggled to gain broad acceptance and to establish a distinct identity. Our field was once relegated to an ancillary role, design straight jacketed into formality, instructions dictated by architects and engineers. The Olmsted brothers courageously brought nature into cities and in more recent times, practitioners such as Ian McHarg, Lawrence Halprin and Canada's Cornelia Oberlander broke through neo-classical formality to design with nature, whereby understanding ecological systems became a guiding basis for forging more responsive and creative solutions. Working with users has now become a normal part of establishing a site program and assuring that people's needs are successfully accommodated. Taking a leadership role in achieving sustainable results has become our profession's ultimate strength, with increasing community

awareness and support. However, like classical music, to remain relevant, we must continue to perform flawlessly what we do well while exploring and pushing boundaries to seek new directions.

### *The Lives of Composers*

Volumes have been written about the struggles, dalliances and "demons" which many legendary classical composers have faced. Some examples: Beethoven was deaf for much of his adult life, Robert Schumann endured acute depression, Chopin battled tuberculosis, Tchaikovsky experienced Czarist homophobia, Shostakovich dodged Stalin's threats and Bartok fled for his life from the Nazis.

While many of us may not have confronted such dire challenges, landscape architects can encounter headwinds in championing socially and environmentally beneficial choices over those of entrenched convention or short term economic expediency. We still shoulder the task of better informing the public about what we do and how it plays a vital role in its daily life.





## Conclusion: How Classical Music Can Help Us

Both classical music and landscape architecture share creative roots, lending beauty, emotional sustenance and greater meaning to our lives. While technical excellence is essential to both, it is the artistic interpretation of a site program and in the case of music, a composer's idea or vision, in audible three dimension, that provides memorable richness. It is also important to acknowledge that classical is but one form of musical meaning. Folk, jazz and popular (including rock) music are equally expressive of our emotions and can also spur our design energies. The overall structure, complexity of rhythms and layering of melodies found in classical music can help guide us toward achieving designs that offer greater user satisfaction on many levels.

Gustavo Dudamel, the stellar conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic recently observed that while some nations are busy reinforcing borders and certain politicians propose building walls, music establishes a bridge to people's better selves and greater instincts. Taking a cue from classical music, let landscape architecture provide the creative, functional and inspirational link to the land and water where people dwell, learn, work and recreate. 51

## Some Places in B.C. to Experience and Enjoy Classical Music

### VANCOUVER/LOWER MAINLAND

*Vancouver Symphony Orchestra* performs at the Orpheum downtown, at the UBC Chan Centre, in North Vancouver and Surrey as well as at summer venues in Whistler and Burnaby;

*Vancouver Recital Society* presents renowned and emerging artists at the Playhouse downtown and at the UBC Chan Centre;

*Vancouver Opera* now a festival format, at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre;

*Vancouver Academy of Music* "Music in the Morning" program presents soloists and chamber works;

*Vancouver Chamber Society* presents chamber music performances downtown.

*Vetta Chamber Players* perform chamber works at the Pt. Grey United Church and downtown.

*Handel Society*, Surrey

*Valley Symphony Orchestra*, based in Abbotsford

### VICTORIA AND VANCOUVER ISLAND

*Victoria Symphony Orchestra* in downtown Victoria;

*Pacific Opera* in downtown Victoria;

*U of Victoria Music Faculty Chamber Music Series*, U of Victoria;

*Vancouver Island Symphony* performs in Nanaimo and in other Island locations;

*Oceanside Classical Concerts* in Parksville and Qualicum Beach.

### B.C. INTERIOR

*Chamber Music Kelowna* performs in Kelowna and other venues;

*Okanagan Symphony Orchestra* performs in Kelowna, Penticton and Vernon;

*Kamloops Symphony Orchestra*;

*Prince George Symphony Orchestra*;

*Alban Classical Music Society* of Prince George.

*Symphony of the Kootenays* performs in Cranbrook and Trail.

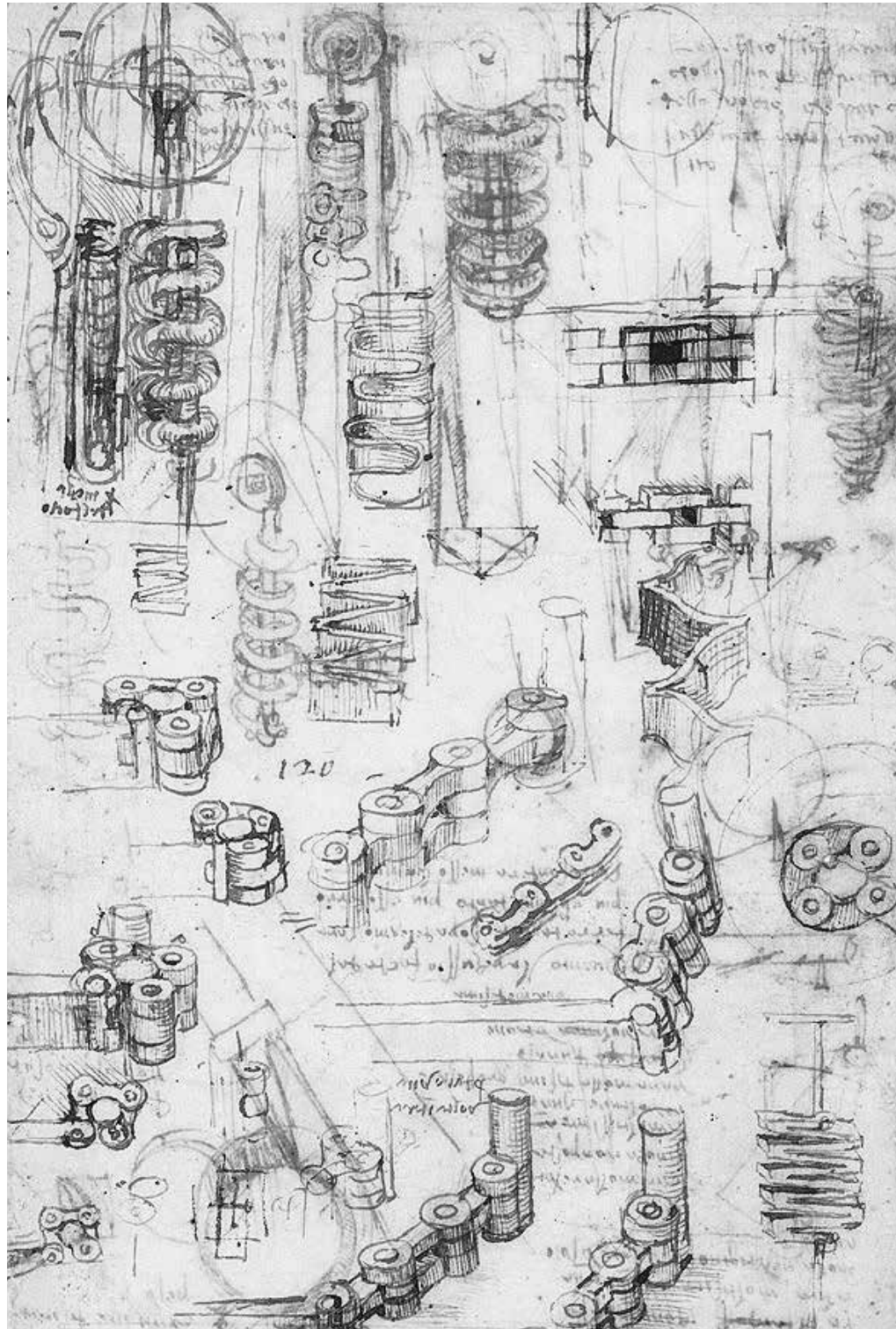


# The Visual Arts in Landscape Architecture

**Landscape architects have a unique place** in the design community. We have been trained to impart a holistic understanding of landscape as interpreted through cultural meaning and sense of place. This is a cornerstone of our profession and our role as agents in creating engaging public spaces.

We are at a point of unprecedented change. For example, global warming is bringing environmental pressure on our urban environments, requiring us as designers to utilize evidence-based research to address today's challenges. In response, there is no question that our profession is transforming at very rapid pace. In this regard, we are adopting an ever-increasing range of specializations, while balancing our critical role as a generalist; as the composer and custodian of a vision or narrative of a place.

To this end, it begs the question as to the role that we as a profession play in reconciling our responsiveness to design with the cultural and technical importance of the visual arts. It is often said that design is creative problem-solving, and without the problem it would merely be art – unbridled creative expression free of constraint. Artistic expression in and of itself thrives within a constructed environment whether physically, emotionally or figuratively. Whether it be the drawings of Leonardo Da Vinci, the cubist works of Pablo Picasso, or the iconic gardens of Landscape Architect and artist Roberto Burle Marx, the visual arts play a vital role as an expression, critique or celebration of our cultural context. At the same time, visual art operates within a set of defined parameters that has perfected each of these artists' works. As designers, we should not underestimate the importance of these artistic masters and the parallel techniques we can employ to visually communicate both our concepts and the physical outcomes of the designs themselves.



Preparatory studies of Leonardo da Vinci were essential to his design explorations.





Leonardo da Vinci, drainage basin

### Leonardo Da Vinci:

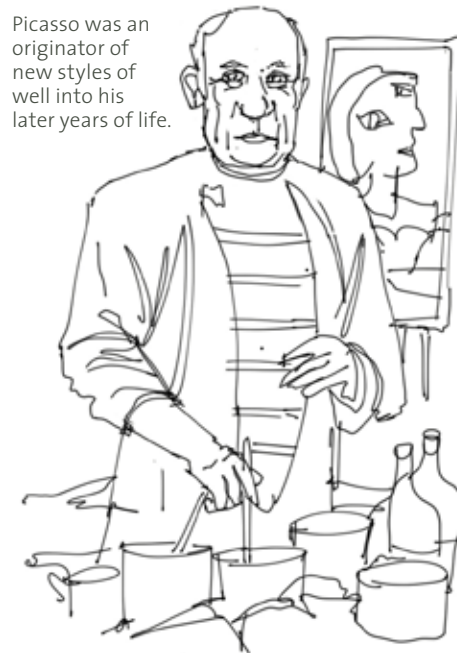
*Technical mastery of representation is fundamental to conveying convincing ideas*

One's ability to fully comprehend the environment and explore its possibilities begins with an astute observation and experimentation with its morphology and processes. Our desire to model our environment begins before adolescence. It is not unusual to see a child drawing a sketch as a means to capture a recent experience they had, exploring the relationship of structures and gravity with wooden blocks, or digging channels on the beach to manipulate water flow. Whether we are drawing, modeling or sculpting it is this playful exploration that can unlock our understanding of how we can shape our environment. Our hands-on connection to physical mediums is essential to enabling our understanding of the physical world through direct manipulation. In my practice, I often suggest to my colleagues that the simple act of sketching ideas forces us to "see" our environment. In contrast to digital cut and paste methods of representation, each pen stroke requires a conscious effort to capture every detail, and by this process we are observing, processing, and interpreting the subject at hand.

Leonardo Da Vinci, in spite of his many great works of art, was not a prolific painter so much as a productive draftsman. He was known to keep a journal of small sketches with him at all times, capturing all manner of things that took his attention. The requisite of his great paintings, whether

they be "The Adoration of the Magi", "The Virgin of the Rocks" and "The Last Supper", started with a series of preparatory studies as drawings. As many great artists, Leonardo thrived on the desire to practice his craft, to the point where his ability to observe, interpret and apply occurred simultaneously like a motion picture camera. His understanding of how to manipulate and adapt the subject to

the space at hand demonstrated not only an understanding of lighting, perspective and anatomy but a masterful application of it. His ability to draw from his mind came after many years of practice in copying images over and over again. As with many Renaissance artists, Leonardo was able to internalize the visual alphabet and learnt how to paint stories with it. The better artists transcended copying and became creators. These foundational skills that underpinned Da Vinci's work are applicable to our ability to understand and interpret our environment as landscape architects, through exceptional, convincing accuracy that can only be achieved through rigorous practice and perfection of skill.

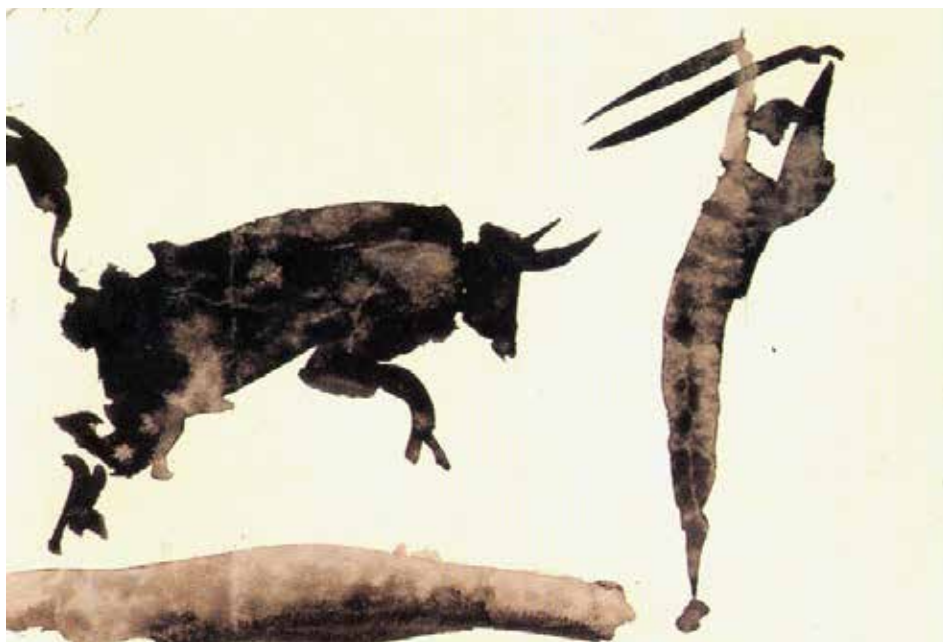


Picasso was an originator of new styles of well into his later years of life.

### Learning from Picasso:

*Pushing the boundaries starts with a grounded understanding of the human experience*

One of the key things that is worth considering is shaping the environment from an experiential perspective. As professionals, we have the ability to see space and the means to manipulate it in order to elicit emotional responses. When we think about our role in designing a public plaza or garden much of what we do involves the finer grain sensory ►



Picasso's first oil painting, Picador, 1889



aspects of how people behave, orient themselves, and navigate through space. From the selection of trees to the texture of pavement to the seasonal changes within the space, we have the ability to be the narrators of the user experience. It is just as critical for the practitioner to sketch the architectural form and texture



Picasso drawing with his son, Claude and daughter, Paloma, 1953

of a tree in terms of its scale and the shape of space it creates as it is to select a tree based simply on drought tolerance, hardiness and pest resistance. It is the accurate visual representation of such elements that will help both the designer and the client fully understand their importance in shaping the user's experience. This mastery of accurate visual representation becomes the essential foundation for new concepts and ideas to be explored. To approach a project purely from an esoteric level (i.e. from 5000 feet altitude) without the practical underpinnings of scale, space and experience through accurate visual representation, inevitably leads to failure in achieving the anticipated human experience.

Even Pablo Picasso's abstraction of the world through cubism could not exist without a fundamental ability to portray accurate representations of the subject. During his early years, Pablo Picasso like Da Vinci was a skilled draftsman and painter. His first oil painting "Picador" (1889) was created at the age of eight and he kept it throughout his life. He drew all the time; a great number of sketches dedicated to bullfights as well as studies of local people's life remained. Pablo's father started to involve him in interior decorative painting where he had to paint pigeon's legs. It was his father who insisted on Pablo's entering Barcelona Academy of Art "La Concha". For the 13-year old, an examination drawing of a naked model was executed in a day while a month was allowed for the final product.

In 1901, he went to Paris, which he found as the ideal place to explore new styles, and experiment with a variety of art forms. It was during these initial visits that he began his work in surrealism and cubism, which he was the originator of, creating many distinct pieces which were influenced by these two artistic forms of expression.

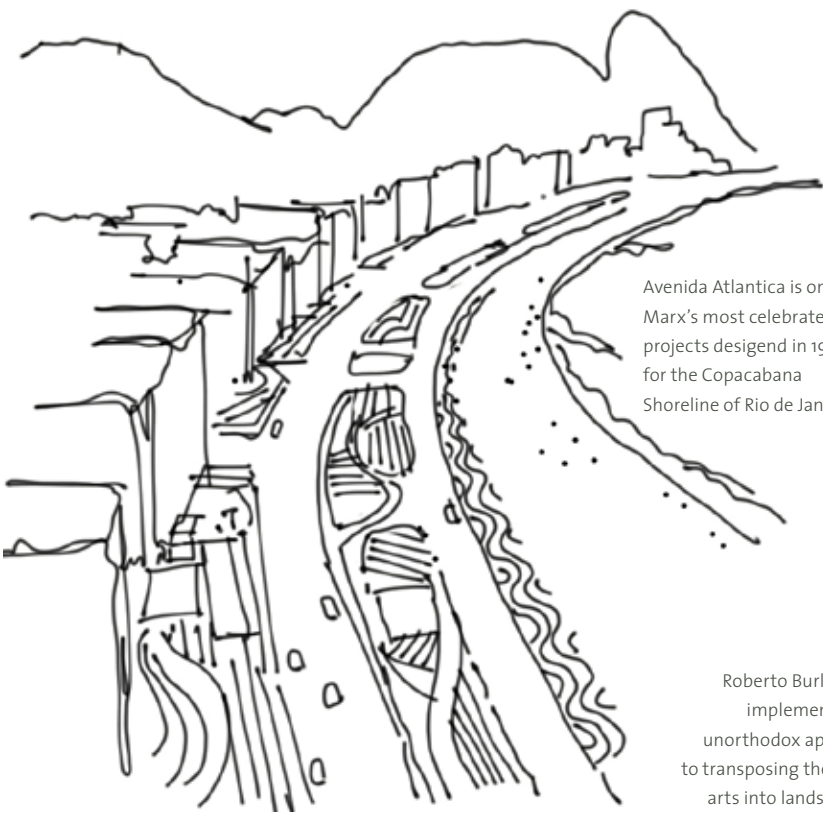
Cubism impacted the consistency of modern art by producing something outrageously different. The freedom, which was created, meant that new and expressed movements could be taken seriously. The ability for cubism to break ranks from representational art marked a turning point in a new method of manipulating experience. However, it could be argued that Picasso's early explorations of people's behavior through accurate representation provided the many years of robust analysis that equipped him to venture into uncharted territory.

**Roberto Burle Marx:**  
*Transforming the surreal into the real and "imageable"*



Designers often grapple with the challenge of reconciling the functional aspects of our work with visual and experiential clarity. There is a fine balance to achieving landscapes that serve to address a multitude of interests often competing as well as a wide range of program and functional objectives. As the same time, we aspire to create a cohesive narrative that will unify the project. The "imageability" of a place, a term coined by Kevin Lynch, speaks to the mental images held by people of a particular environment. He created diagrammatic representations of places that are broken down into five elements; "paths", "edges", "districts", "nodes" and "landmarks". These terms have become fundamental to the language of planning and design and still endure today. In his work, Lynch defines the physical characteristics of these five components using diagrammatic representations of them labelled "form" "simplicity", "continuity", "dominance", "clarity of joint", "directional differentiation", "visual scope", and "motion awareness". Interestingly, these visual and experiential characteristics are also basic aspects of the visual arts, and provides a bridge for the application of visual arts to landscape architecture. The work of Roberto Burle Marx provides a good example of this application of imageability through both the clarity and boldness of design, so powerful that it became an iconic statement of modern Brazil.

An icon of 20th Century art and design, Roberto Burle Marx implemented an unorthodox approach to transposing the visual arts into landscape expression. Half-German and half-Brazilian, Marx lived and worked in Brazil until his death in 1994. He produced in graphic design, tapestry, line and shape and was able to transfer his work from paper, jewelry, sculpture and fabric onto the ground. Marx's unique and timeless artistic style had influences of modernism, cubism and abstractionism in addition to Brazilian folk art.

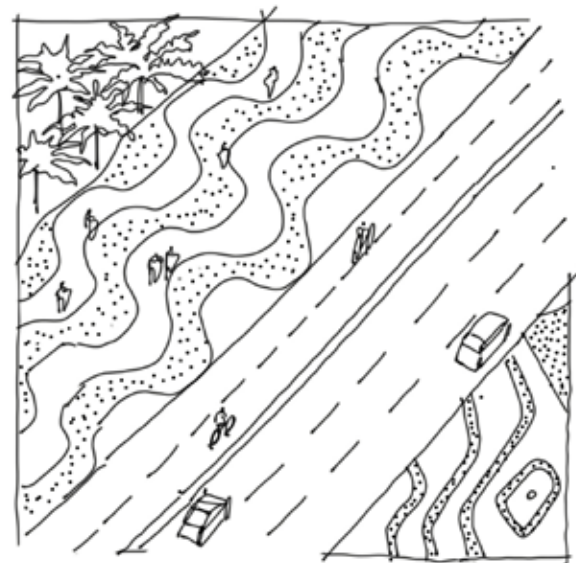


Avenida Atlantica is one of Marx's most celebrated projects designed in 1970 for the Copacabana Shoreline of Rio de Janeiro



Roberto Burle Marx gardens at the Ministry of the Army

Roberto Burle Marx implemented an unorthodox approach to transposing the visual arts into landscape ►



While he was a virtuoso visual artist and designer, Marx was also an avid botanist and had a tremendous appreciation for conservation and application of native species. He was one of the first people to call for the preservation of Brazil's rainforests with over 50 plants bearing his name. Marx is perhaps one of the greatest examples of a landscape architect who has been able to apply visual art to create culturally relevant and experiential landscapes that have a strong national identity. His graphic boldness was coupled with a depth of understanding of form, texture, structure and scale achieved through the application of native plants. He comprehended how certain animals interacted with plants, vegetation's blooming patterns and sculptural characteristics, utilizing them to create exciting interaction for users. Movement was a key component of his work, in terms of shifting perspective, and the interplay of scale, light shadow and reflection of water as fundamental design elements in his palette.

His level of abstractionism created surreal environments that were unique, and as compelling to experience from above as they are on the ground. Burle Marx's work reinforces the elements coined by Kevin

Lynch in defining "imageability" within our environment. "Form simplicity" is expressed in the bold cubist forms each with continuous blocks of colour, form and texture. "Continuity" is embodied in the characteristic graphic composition of each plan. "Dominance" can be seen in the contrast of his landscape approach in iconic scale. "Clarity of joint" is expressed in the stark contrast in materials, color and texture often defined by hard lines. "Directional differentiation" is expressed in the clear organization of forms. "Visual scope" is within the revealing and concealing of elements and the playfulness in visually sequencing a variety of different spaces; and "motion awareness" with the frequently playful application of patterning such as undulation along the Copacabana Promenade. You don't walk in the promenade, you "dance Samba" through it!

These elements are etched into the graphic and spatial components of his landscapes with clear definition and are a reminder of the importance of image laden landscapes that are bold, legible and provide a sense of

contrast to the surrounding context yet exude cultural meaning.

### Conclusion

The visual arts are fundamental to our craft as landscape architects. As much as the projects that we design need to respond to environmental and functional requirements, they risk being relegated to "the spaces in between" if they do not communicate cultural meaning with a particular boldness and clarity both within the process of design and execution of built work. The cornerstone of landscape architecture is to shape the human experience. Our success in achieving this goal requires us to embrace the creative fundamentals of the many great visual artists of the past and of our time. **51**

# The Written Word:

## Canadian Authors and the Landscape: What they Tell Us

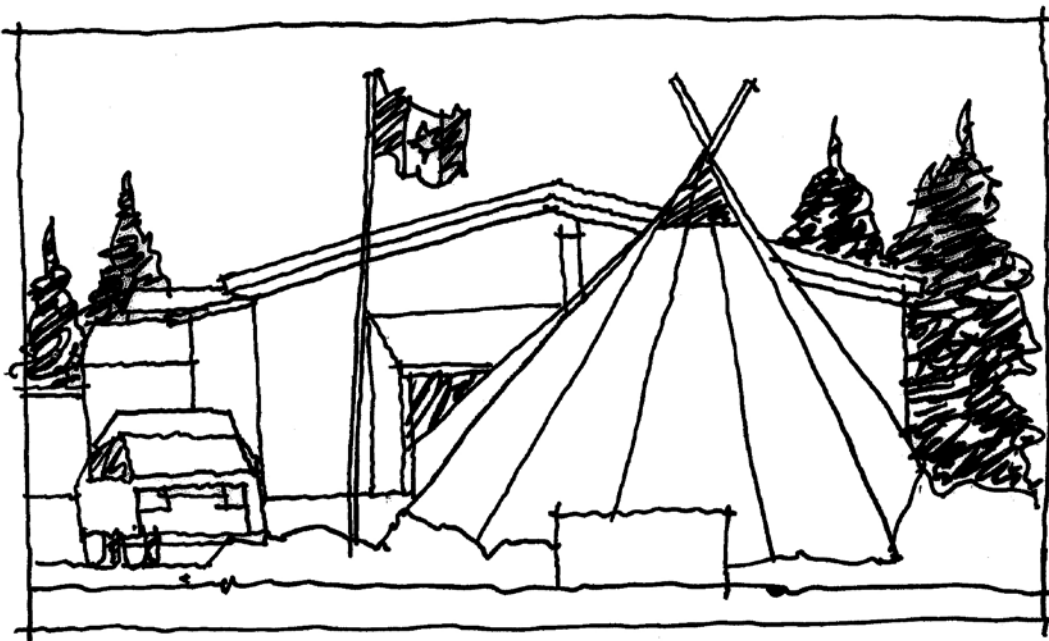
### *Beginnings*

To reflect on writing in Canada and its implications for landscape architecture, we start with early Indigenous impressions, most of them recorded through oral history. Many of these legends focus on the sacred circle of life, where First Nations stories explore the origins of earth, its animals and its people. Within these messages are references to specific landmarks such as mountains, lakes and rivers. These oral records provide a credible time line of

where people lived, how they existed, routes of migration as well as the role of real and imaginary beings in their lives.

These stories have been handed down through generations and these oral records have been recorded in into written format, despite deliberate attempts at obliteration through the horrific residential school system. Recently, a host of Aboriginal writers including Thomas King, Joanne Arnett, Tracey Lindberg and Tomson Highway have woven their rich cultural tapestry into novels,

poems and plays that address challenges facing their communities. The Canadian landscape context is often defined as spiritual but as well, unforgiving for those unaware of its potential hazards. Today, writers such as Lee Maracle not only address the close ties with the land but also the continuing social and economic struggles of Indigenous people. Another outstanding author, Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas intertwines graphics and writing in in some exciting books such as "Flight of the Hummingbird: A Parable for the Environment".



As well as expressing reverence for land and water, indigenous authors focus on the challenges facing their communities.



Through diaries and journals, European settlers also recorded images of the Canadian landscapes they explored or where they laid down roots. Early examples include the documentations of 17th Century French explorers Jacques Cartier and Samuel de Champlain as well as Pierre Radisson and Medard des Groseilliers who founded the Hudson Bay Company. Alexander Mackenzie who in the late 18th Century reached the Pacific coast and the Arctic, recorded his challenging travels in 1801. Of note are the records of Daniel Harmon who contributed the experience of living in trading posts on the prairies and those of Paul Kane, one of the first explorers to spend time living with First Nations and detail their reverence for the places where they dwell. (published 1832-39).

By the mid 1800's, poets also began to extol the beauty and vividness of the Canadian land and seascape. Examples include Charles Sangster's "St. Lawrence and the Saguenay" and Charles Mair's "Tecumseh". Later that century, Archibald Lampman drew heavily upon nature in his "Lyrics of the Earth" and "Alcyone", while Pauline Johnson (1861 – 1913) emerged as a noted Aboriginal writer and performer. Of part Mohawk heritage, Johnson, who confronted some daunting health and financial obstacles, eventually settled in Vancouver. Works such as "Flint and Feather", "The Moccasin Maker" and "Squamish Legends" received wide acclaim. Regretfully, her scripts were ignored in the decades after her death, but happily, she has received recent recognition as an important contributor to Canadian writing, with powerful links to land and water.

### *Francophone Examples*

Despite facing some unique challenges, Quebecois literature eventually flourished to explore both the rural and urban landscape. Following the Treaty of Paris in 1763, French Canada found itself in economic and political disarray. During this period,

following the defeat by British forces, the need to survive often exceeded the desire to write. There is also evidence that some manuscripts by early Quebec scribes were destroyed in the fire that swept through Ottawa's Parliament buildings in 1916. Moreover, the Church in Quebec often took a dim view of secular compositions, including those about nature.

The Lower Canada Rebellion of 1837 and the eventual union between Upper and Lower Canada led to better schools, improved literacy and a movement toward a form of Francophone literature that predominantly explored rural life style, social history and descriptions of both natural and inhabited contexts where such events occurred. Some notable examples include a "History of Canada" with relevant descriptions of landscape by Francois Garneau, poems by Joseph Lenoir and Octave Cremaize that celebrate nature and a volume by Charles Gill celebrating the St. Lawrence River as a focus of "all things glorious and natural". By the mid 20th Century, a further break out of writings about life events and their locales emerged. Books by Quebec based authors Gabrielle Roy (who focused on working class Montreal neighborhoods as well as rural Manitoba where she spent time as a child) and Anne Hebert (including her work, "The First Garden") brought international acclaim.

### *Following Confederation*

Meanwhile, other writings about Canada's natural attributes accelerated in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. Sir Charles Roberts fascination with Canadian wildlife expressed in books such as "Earth's Enigmas" (1896), "The Kindred of the Wild" (1902) and "Wisdom of the Wilderness" (1922) are important inspirations. His writings ask us to understand the life of animals in their environmental context and on their terms while Earnest Thompson Seton approached nature in a more scientific

manner, with drawings as well as text. "Wild Animals I Have Known" (1898) and "The Biography of a Grizzly" (1900) vividly portray the wild landscapes as well as the beasts themselves. Another naturalist, Arthur Henning, was also both an illustrator and writer, producing "The Drama of the Forests" (1921), "Spirit Lake" (1907) and "The Living Forest" (1925). These outpourings are rich in detail about boreal forest ecology.

Of note, the influence of books by 19th Century naturalists from outside Canada upon our environmental literature bears mention, for example, those of James Audubon, Henry David Thoreau and John Muir. Indirectly, they served as an inspiration to champion the protection of significant Canadian landscapes and their wildlife through the start of a national park system.

Vital too, are geographical travel diaries written early last century about Canada's vastness and ecological diversity. A beautiful and richly illustrated diary is that of the young English woman, Hope Hook "Crossing Canada, 1907". It vividly depicts the landscape diversity from the Gaspé in Quebec to Vancouver Island. Rip tides, sightings of orcas and sea otters bring our west coast natural environment to life while intriguing descriptions of the then youthful cities of Vancouver, Victoria and Nanaimo abound.

By the 1920's, the Canadian Author's Association was formed that included Stephen Leacock, Bliss Carman and Lucy Maud Montgomery all drawing from the Canadian landscape in their works. Leacock, primarily a humorist and political commentator, spent part of his life on the shores of Ontario's Lake Couchiching where the surrounding land, water and seasonal changes influenced him. "Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town" inspired by Orillia, is one of his best-known works. Carman, a poet raised in New Brunswick (but spending much of his life in New England), extolled ►

the Maritime landscape in creations such as “Low Tide at Grand Pre” and “Songs of Vagabondia”. Montgomery who hailed from Prince Edward Island but later settled in Ontario, is best known for “Anne of Green Gables” with its rich contextual background descriptions of the local terrain and seascape. Other examples include “Rainbow Valley” and “Pat of Silverbush”. Her prolific outpourings are in part attributed to an unhappy marriage from which she needed an avenue of escape.

Of particular relevance to us in this province are the texts of the artistic icon, Emily Carr, born in 1871 (the same year B.C. joined Canada). “Klee Wyck” (published 1941) and “Growing Pains” (published 1944) exemplify the experience of her sojourns among coastal First Nations people and her upbringing in Victoria with ample descriptions of pertinent land features, community settings and characters. Meanwhile, U.K. raised Roderick Haig-Brown found his way to Campbell River, B.C. where he and his family settled beside the river. Brown became almost obsessed with aquatic ecology, churning out volumes of books and stories about streams, salmon migration as well as the natural systems required for maintaining environmental health. He was prolific until his death in 1976. Examples of his work include “Pool and Rapid” (1932), “A River Never Sleeps” (1946) and “The Living Land” (1961).

### *The Contributions of Mowat, Atwood and Munro*

Forwarding to the latter half of the 20th Century and our current millennium, we briefly review three prominent non-Indigenous authors, each of whom have achieved international recognition and who have forged significant links to our land and water through their writings and outspoken positions on environmental and social concerns.

#### **Farley Mowat**

Serving with the Canadian Wildlife Service in the Arctic after WW 2, Farley Mowat (1921 – 2014) documented life among northern wolves, refuting the conventional

wisdom that these animals were ruthless annihilators of caribou and needed to be rigorously culled. “Never Cry Wolf” was one of his greatest books (film adaptation 1983), despite facing fierce criticism from agency bureaucrats, some government scientists and certain literary reviewers. Another triumph, “People of the Deer” documented life in the Arctic with abundant descriptions of the tundra and the deplorable living conditions in many Inuit communities. This tale met with vociferous denial and condemnation from the governments of the day (an unwillingness to confront reality). “A Whale for

the Killing” records the tormenting and eventual death of a cetacean entrapped in a Newfoundland harbor and Mowat’s fruitless efforts to intervene. Challenging hidebound authorities, advocating for change in attitude toward our natural environment and Aboriginal communities were hallmarks of Mowat’s prolific literary life.

#### **Margaret Atwood**

Daughter of a noted Ontario forest entomologist, Margaret Atwood has emerged as one of Canada’s greatest authors, her literary masterpieces renowned worldwide (in 1960, it was my humble experience



Landscape becomes metaphor in some Canadian writers' tales.

to work as a junior counsellor with Ms. Atwood where she headed the camp's nature program). Her father's research traversed the Canadian Shield and portions of the Arctic, providing her with the opportunity to experience these environments first hand. Landscape weaves its way into her work both realistically and metaphorically. Culled from her copious offerings are two examples: her novel "Surfacing" and the short story "Death by Landscape".

In the novel "Surfacing", an island on a Quebec lake becomes the setting for a woman who, accompanied by her lover and some companions, is in search of her father. She and the other characters delve into the complex realms of eco-feminism, sexuality and power politics. Land and water become both tangible and symbolic elements in this chilling tale, also expressed in a 1981 film.

The short story "Death by Landscape", focusses on the contemplations of an older widow, Lois, who is still troubled by a

harrowing incident when she was a young summer camper. On an Ontario shield canoe trip, her best bunk mate, Lucy, disappears and the camp director insinuates that she is to blame. The memory of this tragic incident still haunts her as she views landscape paintings in her Toronto lakeshore apartment and gazes out over a grey, windswept harbor. In this story, the landscape also serves as a metaphor for events in Lois's life. Atwood's skillful juxtaposition of imagination and reality highlighting the protagonist's struggle to come to terms with her own fragility and strength, makes for thrilling reading.

### Alice Munro

Winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, many of Alice Munro's short stories are based in small town Ontario where she grew up. Vivid references to the rural landscape abound as supporting settings for her characters and the events of their lives. However, one of her books, "The

View from Castle Rock", a collection of short stories, partially occurs in Scotland, where the Laidlaw family contemplates its impending emigration to Canada. Parallels are drawn between land forms such as drumlins and glacial retreats and the stolid qualities of Presbyterianism. What the landscape in their new world will look like is imagined, including its appearance, sound and odor. "Lands are described as harsh yet beautiful, strange yet familiar". Munro explores physical and environmental changes to the landscape in this and other compositions. In some works, she contrasts the concept of nature for those who work the land all day with the romanticized image of the country perceived by the city dweller (perhaps drawing on her farm upbringing). Each character has a unique image of and response to the same place. Thus, thinking about how different individuals perceive and respond to a landscape has important implications for us, as designers. ►

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## *Messages for our Profession*

Canadian authors (particularly Aboriginal writers) offer important observations about our landscape that can, like classical music and visual art, help guide us toward more imaginative planning and design. Some of these are:

- Much recent literature takes a somewhat pessimistic view of our current (and historical) attitudes toward the natural environment, contending that the land is a precious resource to be protected and revered, not just exploited. As landscape architects, we can play an important role in its stewardship through a science supported, balanced approach toward urban and rural land utilization. We are in a unique position to work constructively with a broad range of stakeholders to help assure sustainable outcomes for key land and water use decisions.
- We could do more perceptual imaging and role playing as open space designers. For example, when evolving an open space, what is it like to be a child, a senior or Elder, a person with a disability or a newcomer to Canada using that place? Outstanding writers such as Atwood, Munro, Ondaatje, Arnott and Maracle are masterful at creating characters and getting inside their minds. Imagining how different people would perceive and utilize a particular space (or sequence of open spaces) would lead to more creative, responsive and durable solutions.
- There is the opportunity for greater interaction with Indigenous communities. With our skill sets, including our open-minded ability to work effectively with people of all backgrounds, we can offer more responsive and sympathetic site planning with a focus on improving quality of life. This includes practical measures such as flood and fire protection, safe sewage treatment and potable water access. There is also the chance to encourage young people to pursue landscape architecture as a career.
- Landscape is perceived on both a literal and metaphorical level in Canadian novels and poetry. While we are obliged to place the practical realities of budgets, approvals, health, safety and welfare front and center in our projects, greater time should be allowed for imaginative creativity. The number of bland, look-alike results in certain types of development is a testament to the need for inspiration. As well, bringing more appropriate local plant material and other natural landscape elements into the urban realm should also receive priority.

In this brief essay, we've only scratched the surface of Canadian literature. With many writings on line as well as in hard copy and with such a rich diversity of truly talented authors both present and past, Aboriginal and non-Indigenous, let the reading begin! Hopefully it enriches us and inspires new ways to approach our work. 51

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