Gardening as Landscape Painting: Toward a New Naturalism

ALL GARDENING IS LANDSCAPE PAINTING
The principles of art

"COMPOSITION IS THE ART OF ARRANGING IN A DECORATIVE MANNER THE DIVERSE ELEMENTS AT THE PAINTER’S COMMAND TO EXPRESS HIS FEELINGS”
MATISSE

The principles of art deal with COMPOSITION and the elements of art deal with mood. The generally accepted principles include PROPORTION, FOCUS, BALANCE, RHYTHM and UNITY. All of these principles deal with the PLACEMENT of elements within an artwork. Added to this are other factors such as SYMBOLISM. In terms of garden design, we can also add CONTEXT, ie the location.

“WITHOUT MATHEMATICS THERE IS NO ART”
Luca Pacioli

The FIBONACCI SEQUENCE is a set of numbers that starts with a one or a zero, followed by a one, and proceeds based on the rule that each number is equal to the sum of the two preceding numbers ie 1+1=2; 1+2=3; 2+3=5; 3+5=8; 5+8=13; 8+13=21 giving the sequence 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21 and so on. If sequence is depicted visually then it becomes clear that the sequence describes a growth pattern commonly found in nature.

This sequence, along with the Golden Rectangle (also known as the Golden Ratio), has been known and used since classical times (and revived in the Renaissance) in the design of buildings. The Golden Ratio is a special number found by dividing a line into two parts so that the longer part divided by the smaller part is also equal to the whole length divided by the longer part.

“A MAN PAINTS WITH HIS BRAINS AND NOT WITH HIS HANDS”
Michelangelo

The elements of art
“COLOUR IS A MEANS OF EXERTING DIRECT INFLUENCE ON THE SOUL”
KANDINSKY

The Elements of art are the ‘ingredients’ with which you can make your composition.

It is in the way that you use the elements that you will be able to create mood and atmosphere.

The Elements of art are LINE, FORM, COLOUR, VALUE and TEXTURE plus SHAPE and SPACE.

Because gardens are 3-dimensional, we will just be exploring the first five of these.
“ART IS NOT WHAT YOU SEE, IT IS WHAT YOU MAKE OTHERS SEE”
Degas

“THERE IS ONLY ONE ROAD TO FOLLOW, THAT OF ANALYSIS OF THE BASIC ELEMENTS IN ORDER TO ARRIVE ULTIMELY AT AN ADEQUATE GRAPHIC EXPRESSION”
Wassily Kandinsky

A NEW NATURALISM
THE BLANK CANVAS

“ALL MY WORK IS RELATED TO TRYING TO RECREATE THE SPONTANEOUS FEELING OF PLANTS IN NATURE”
PIET OUDOLF

WHY CREATE A NATURAL GARDEN?
Create gardens ‘of our time’
Environmentally beneficial
Requires less labour to maintain
Longevity of seasonal interest
Creation of beauty
Sense of place through local flora

“SUSTAINABILITY CAN BE DEFINED AS MEETING PRESENT NEEDS WITHOUT COMPROMISING THE ABILITY OF FUTURE GENERATIONS TO MEET THEIRS”
UN Brundtland Commission

LAWNS
Gasoline - the amount of gasoline burnt every weekend mowing lawns could fuel 1.16 million cars for a full year of driving
Air pollution - garden equipment contributes 5% of the USA’s air pollution
Water - nationwide, 30% of water used by residential customers goes to irrigation
Sense of place?
Lawns are what make all US states look the same

THE MORE A GARDEN IMMITATES THE PROCESSES AND FUNCTIONS OF NATURAL ECOSYSTEMS THE MORE SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT IT BECOMES”
David Deardorff and Kathryn Wadsworth

A new naturalism
PALETTE

“THE GREATEST MASTERPIECES WERE ONCE ONLY PIGMENTS ON A PALETTE”
HENRY S. HOSKINS

Piet Oudolf’s planting:
MATRIX PLANTS (70%)
Mainly grasses
PRIMARY PLANTS (30%)
High impact plants chosen for strong colour or structure – good foliage and seedheads that remain through winter
SCATTER PLANTS
Randomly placed plants (sometimes seed) that introduce spontaneity and wildness
4 INDICATORS OF LONG TERM PERFORMANCE

INHERENT LONGEVITY
Genetic programming
Some plants are programmed to grow rapidly, seed then lose vigour, some develop slowly and have long life

ABILITY TO SPREAD
Through vegetative growth not seeding
May or may not be a problem depending on competitiveness
Ability to recover from damage and good weed suppressors

PERSISTENCE
Stays in one place
High persistence plants eg false indigo (Baptisia), form a RELIABLE part of long term planting

ABILITY TO SEED
Effectively reproducing itself
Moderate self-sowing of short lived perennials can be a boon but usually needs management and editing

“I HAVE A RULE IN PLANTING DESIGN USING BIENNIALS AND VIGOROUS SELF-SEEDERS. I HARDLY USE THEM AND IF I USE IT IS AS AN EXTRA IN GARDENS THAT ARE ESTABLISHED SO THAT THERE IS LIMITED SPACE AND ENOUGH COMPETITION TO LIMIT THEIR NUMBERS”
Piet Oudolf

Rotterdam –
OFFICE BUILDINGS CREATE NORTHERLY ASPECT
MULTI-STEMMED RIVER BIRCH
Intermingled with tree-root tolerant plants
MATRIX PLANTS (70%)
Molinia Moorhexe (moorgrass) +
Tellima grandiflora
PRIMARY PLANTS (30%)
Umbrella plant (Darmera peltata)
White snakeroot (Eupatorium altissima)
Japanese anemone (Anemone Hadspen Abundance)
Hardy geraniums (Geranium Sue Crug)
Blue star (Amsonia Blue Ice)
Tatarian aster (Aster tataricus)
Hair grass (Deschampsia cespitosa)
Quaking grass (Briza media)

PLANT SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

CSR MODEL:
COMPETITOR
Grow fast, spread quickly
STRESS
Tolerant of poor conditions
RUDERAL
Loves bare soil, opportunists – short lived
SHRUB/TREE LAYER
Provides permanent structure and FORM and allows planting beneath
BULBS
Most die back by the time the perennials get going ie they share the space with no competition
Bulbs with leafy foliage require more space (eg daffodils), where small bulbs such as crocus, scilla and
snowdrops have an earlier period of active growth than surrounding perennials
SUMMER DORMANT PERENNIALS
Can be planted close to summer perennials
Includes many woodland edge perennials eg lungwort (Pulmonaria) and primrose (Primula vulgaris) and
columbines (Aquilegia)

USE PLANT SPECIES WHICH ARE RECOGNISABLY NATIVE LOCALLY

USE A GREATER DENSITY OF PLANTS THROUGH LAYERING AND UNDERPLANTING

USE PLANTS OF A RECOGNISABLE HABITAT
EG OPEN SPACES OR WOODLAND

ALLOW AN ELEMENT OF SPONTANEITY – SELF SEEDING AND A SENSE THAT PLANTS ARE IN CONTROL

IF POSSIBLE HAVE A WILD OR SEMI-WILD BACKGROUND TO CREATE A SEAMLESS TRANSITION

BOOKS
The American Meadow Garden – John Greenlee
Planting, a New Perspective Noel Kingsbury and Piet Oudolf
The New American Landscape: Leading Voices on the Future of Sustainable Gardening – Thomas
Christopher

TOWARDS A NEW NATURALISM: ALL GARDENING IS LANDSCAPE PAINTING
Lecture 1: the principles of art
Lecture 2: the elements of Art
Lecture 3: the blank canvas
Lecture 4: palette

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