Nature, Form, and Meaning: Guest Editor's Introduction

We are surrounded with things which we have not made and which have a life and structure different from our own: trees, flowers, grasses, rivers, hills, clouds. For centuries they have inspired us with curiosity and awe. They have been objects of delight. We have recreated them in our imaginations to reflect our moods. And we have come to think of them as contributing to an idea which we have called nature . . . (Clark 1963, p. 1).

Whether "the sense of relation between nature and man in some form has always been the actuating spirit of art," as John Dewey (1958, p. 339) asserted in *Art as Experience,* it is certainly at the heart of the art of landscape design. Landscape design expresses our conception of nature and the place of humans within nature. This issue of nature is fundamental to landscape design theory.

The artful shaping of the landscape to serve human purposes at whatever scale, from the garden to the region, entails an understanding of the human and the natural worlds, in both an empirical and a metaphysical sense. Landscape architects must confront nature as discrete elements of rocks and trees and nature as Idea (nature/Nature). In designing the landscape we extract natural features from their context and reorder them to serve human purposes. At times we attempt to imitate or reproduce natural processes and forms, at times we abstract or echo those processes and forms, and at times we superimpose a sharply contrasting order. This we do to express meaning.

The concern for nature that is at the core of landscape architecture yields a sense for temporal and spatial scales that distinguishes it from related fields. The landscape comprises a spectrum of scales; it is rarely as enclosed and self-contained as a building, but is continuous, linked to other distant landscapes by the movement of air, earth, water, and living organisms, including humans. The landscape is also dynamic, evolving continually in time. Unless a landscape design is comprised of inert materials, it is thus never complete, but continues to change perceptibly month by month, year by year.

This special issue of *Landscape Journal* focuses on the theme "Nature, Form, and Meaning." It consists of nine articles whose authors represent a range of disciplines, including landscape architecture, architecture, geology, geography, and anthropology. Each author approached the topic from a different perspective; some focused on landscapes formed primarily by natural processes with little evidence of human intervention, others on the vernacular landscape, while others concentrated on landscapes designed by professionals. Several themes emerge from this diversity that pose a challenge to contemporary landscape design. Where do landscape forms come from, both those of the natural, as well as the cultural landscape? How can those forms be employed in the designed landscape? What sorts of meanings do these forms embody and how do these meanings come to stand for the views and values of a group or a society as a whole? Why do we value what we value from the past? And finally, how can this understanding be applied to designing landscapes and to judging their quality? The issue of authenticity also

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looms large. Can the appearance of the landscape be different from its reality? In landscape design one must choose whether to abstract from nature or to imitate the appearance of nature. Is one approach more valid than the other? One also senses a new aesthetic emerging from many of these papers, an aesthetic that involves movement as well as rest, sound and other sensual qualities as well as vision, that recognizes the evolutionary character of the landscape, and that provides a new appreciation of works of the past.

This issue of the *Journal* raises as many questions as it answers, and that was the intention. It is hoped that the issue might engender debate which will continue in forthcoming issues. In one case, Denis Wood's critique of visual resource management, the debate started prior to publication, and a number of authors were invited to respond. Two responses are included here. Reactions to this and other articles are welcomed in forthcoming issues of the *Journal.*

The idea for this special edition grew out of a panel at the CELA conference at the University of Illinois in 1985, presented by Arnold Alanen, Kenneth Helphand, Robert Riley, and Ervin Zube. A lively discussion between panelists and audience ensued, spilled out over the remainder of the conference to include others, and culminated in the decision to sponsor this special issue. This would not have been possible without a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and I would like to thank Catherine Brown, Robert Riley, Darrel Morrison, and Arnold Alanen for their advice on the proposal to NEA. Members of the guest editorial board provided important ideas, counsel, and support throughout the preparation of the issue, and helped greatly with the difficult task of reviewing papers. I also would like to thank all of those who submitted articles, some of which will appear in subsequent issues of the *Journal.* In accordance with the policy of *Landscape Journal* all submitted articles received blind review by at least two referees. I would like to thank Arnold Alanen, not only for organizing the blind review of my own article, but also for sustained support, advice, for managing the production and for serving as liaison with the University of Wisconsin Press. Having seen from the inside the enormous amount of work entailed in a single issue, much of it unnoticed and invisible to readers and even to authors, I believe that the field owes a great debt to Arnold Alanen and Darrel Morrison for their energy, selfless devotion, and good judgment in launching *Landscape Journal* and in serving as editors for its first seven years.

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Guest Editor

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References

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