



Landscape sketches: traditional and innovative approach in developing freehand drawing in landscape architecture studies

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Abstract: At Corvinus University Budapest, Department of Garden Art a new approach in the landscape drawing was developed within the last two years. Despite the traditional, academic drawing, we (authors) emphasize more landscape-related topics, as well as new, intuitive approach in artistic representation. This methodological work will be published soon in a bilingual self-study booklet, called "Landscape Sketches". As landscape architecture is related to various linking fields, the booklet (with 77 exercises) seeks to combine visual education with phenomenology, aesthetics, poetry, calligraphy, illustration-techniques, contemporary map-art and land-art. This article summarizes our main pedagogical aims, methods and approach.

Keywords: sketching, art-education, land art, representation, teaching methodology

1. Introduction

The learning of freehand drawing is exceptionally important in the study of landscape architecture since the observation of landscape, its linkage to nature, and garden history represent the most important tool in the formation of creative ideas and the system of thinking. In his book entitled *The Language of Drawing*, Edward Hill writes the following:

“Drawing reveals and throws light upon the functioning of the creative intellect. Drawing opens up the heart to visual thoughts, melts together the spirit with observation, conjures up imagination; drawing is a form of meditation which is the whirlpool of banning the confused mess, of aspiring towards artistic ideas, and above all of landscape-forms and artistic susceptibility.”

For the landscape designer preoccupied with human environment visual expression is as important as it is in any architectural, industrial, or artistic training. But the themes of landscape architecture are essentially more complex than the envisioning of a building or an everyday object. The atmosphere, the weather, the open spaces, the transitory spacial adventures, the space barriers, the transparencies, the cloaking offered by the vegetation, the view of panoramas, the graphic world of maps, the details of environmental architecture, the designing conception, and the emotional reflection of the scenes transmit to us very complex sight relationships and thoughts. With a view to recording all this, freehand drawing, sketching, and drafting offer a much simpler and more aesthetic possibility than the written text, virtual representation, or the now fashionable photography. Beyond this the personality and character of the designer is much better reflected through the personal universe of drawing.

We believe that drawing can be taught and learned and the road to this leads through individual experiences! One cannot develop these skills only by contemplating, reading, or looking at drawings. Our own drawing personality can improve only if it receives tasks, if it is confronted with obstacle solving problems, and if it has to sort them out with its existing drawing skills.

2. Materials and Methods

The methodology of “landscape sketches” follow the creative process as well as the order of art-education beginning with first endeavors, giving new material experiences towards conscious composition.

In the first stage of education process we suggest light and easy drawing tasks, right-side-brain exercises, free expression forms (automatic handwriting, doodling, 2 minuets sketches), which bring success and attention towards students’ “visual experiences and observation-techniques”. In the second phrase more attention is paid on observation smaller details (plants, stone, buds, detail), with giving possibility for experiences new material techniques (lead pencils, few color pencils, graphite blocks, versatile pencil with different graphite refills, sharpener, black pens, tulle felt, ceramic pointed felt, thick felt, grey brush felt, cane, penholder, pen nib, oil pastel, charcoal, gioconda, pitt chalks, pastels, or charcoal). The third stage

emphasizes the depicting plants: from the realistic perennial-bed, tree-branch-gestures, foliage and canopy, until a more abstract, associative metamorphosis-interpretation. The fourth stage deals with landscape architectural analysis-sketches, open-air views, light and shade, perspective with atmosphere, and unusual spatial situation which requires more complex attention and visual vocabulary. Finally in the last stage panorama opens up, and a global view will be the target of visual representation: old maps, Google Earth images, landforms, larger views related more with landscape planning and nature protection. In this stage map and vistas can be combined with information.

3. Results and discussions

Through developing our skills of freehand drawing we can picture our environment graphically and understand it visually

Through drawing we can study the sprouting of buds, the development of twigs, the growth structure of branches, the shade of leafy crowns, the movement of a shadow on a nearby bench, the behavior of those sitting on it, and finally the role of the resting place within the composition. There is hardly any task of landscape architecture that could not be rendered graphically: the combination of sights with maps, the fitting of the details into the whole, the denomination of the treasures of a panorama, the linking of engravings with spacial structures, the association of forests with thoughts—all of them are possible. It is this multilateral approach that urged us to elaborate “interdisciplinary” tasks.

Drawings can redefine us again and again and create a personal image about reality

Whenever the pencil or the pen leaves a mark on the paper a “new road” begins there. This is the movement that begins a conversation with the landscape; we ask questions and the landscape answers, it draws our attention to one of its features and conceals others. Drawing is as much about us as it is about the scene we are about to draw. The more diverse the theme of our drawing, the more natural this way of expression will become. The beauty, refinement, and strength of our drawings depend on our eye and hand, therefore, if we develop our drawing skills, the consequences will be visible not only in our sketches but also in other activities. Drawing can sometimes be annoying, failure can depress us, but let us not forget that each line is the beginning of a new experiment, of a new adventure.

Drawing is a meditation through which we can reach another dimension

When we are involved in a conscious process of creation it is important to establish a peaceful atmosphere. Let us empty our minds of any disturbing thoughts

or problems. Let us slow down and concentrate on what we see, on what we are going to create. Let us contemplate and analyze our creative attitude and objectives. Our receptiveness and frame of mind influences what we notice each time in the same tree trunk or rock fissure—similar to Chinese scholars pondering the Taihu stones in their gardens day after day. Their aim was the same: the inspiration from reality was a way to reach another dimension, transubstantiation and detachment being essential for creation. Several of our tasks require such a detached immersion into the process of creation. We get the feeling of new experiences if we transpose ourselves into the theme of our drawing, into the atmosphere of the space, and avoid chatting with our friends, listening to music, or eating. An absorbing task requires individual work!

Creative thoughts derived from drawing later on can become an inspiration for our landscape designs

Many people feel that the aim of their creative work is to draw the visible elements accurately. The aim of drawing, however, is not only the reflection of the objective world. People think they are deprived of creativity, yet this impression is contradicted by the fact that during boring telephone conversations their randomly moving pencil can create unique fanciful images! When we try to transpose our thoughts into sketches, new shapes and associations are revealed to us which can germinate new ideas. The ones who are brave enough to draw a life map based on the lines of their own palm will not find it difficult later on to attach a shape, a sketch, or scene to a certain concept.

The facsimile sketchbooks of famous architects prove that the frequently redrawn shapes and sketches receive an impetus at a certain moment and find their place in the design. The depicted stray thoughts, details, and elements of space placed in a new combination help the process of designing and contribute to revealing new ideas and problems. A new impetus can be given to our activity by leafing through the drawings of our old travel diary.

Drawing must become the mother tongue of the landscape architecture student

Expression through drawing must become automatic for the student, just like the knowledge of synonyms is indispensable for a poet, or the combination of tunes and dance steps is essential for a choreographer. Our drawing skills need not be developed for the sake of creating an independent work of art, but rather to make other people understand our ideas—everything we do should have an artistic quality. Such an interpretation of drawing does not take into account the students' speciality orientation since, as would-be designers who help the related professions with their ideas and plans, they will need to process and present their

landscape/space/garden experiences. This is why the leading European training courses for landscape architects deliberately include freehand drawing tasks in almost all the modules thereby contributing to the development of professional visual communication.

Concerning the importance of sketchbooks, diaries, and the drawing lifestyle

We know from experience that a drawing pad or a sketchbook is an indispensably important tool for our visual development. When photography was still unknown A. Dürer and J. W. Turner took the “Grand Tour” across Southern Europe with a remarkable thirst for drawing. The landscape architect must be accompanied by the same kind of impetus when he gets to know his environment. These artists filled their sketchbooks not only to record the hitherto unknown world (archeological finds, buildings, landscape details), but also in order to transfer the experience and memory of the moment into their studio. When I look at my own finished sketches I remember beyond the appearance of the scene the moment of drawing, the weather, the season, and the effects of the surroundings as well. I could speak for a long time about why I stopped at that point, what caught my eye, what impression I experienced while drawing. We should observe the sketchbooks and drawing pads of famous architects and discover what experiences they went through during the process of creation. Sketchbooks can be filled not only with exotic travels but also with the everyday experiences of landscape design. We can take our small-sized sketchbook with us every day, and we may introduce into it book titles, stray thoughts, detail drawings, names of plants, ideas, views, and traveler’s adventures—this is the way to get ourselves transferred into the drawing lifestyle.

About the importance of getting the thoughts and concepts transposed into pictures

Who would want to write a diary in this world of blogs? Who would use expensive slides instead of digital photography? When each shot was the result of careful consideration and composition it was the eye that had to think first and only after did the clicking follow. Today we try to cut pictures out of several shots only after taking them and we remain with nothing about the impression given by the scene or about the perception of the space. We do not keep in mind what aroused our interest during the survey of the space. The thoughts created by the view and the recording of the pictures generated by our thoughts are equally important in this profession. There must be a direct, quick, automatic connection between these two. Such a connection can be ensured by quick gesture sketches, problem drawings, and tasks that are built in sections based on drawings. This automatism cannot be acquired through concrete tasks, it can be obtained only after multifold experiences in drawing. The architect and the landscape architect offer explanations through drawing, they talk to figures and chat through pictures. A number of tasks in this guidebook (10–12) lay the stress on the skill of forging close mutual links between

the text and the picture. This approach evinces the remarkable importance of the aesthetics of handwriting, the illustration of pictures, and the strength of words.

About testing new materials, the new possibilities resulting from the multiple use of materials, and the errors caused by rigid, over-repeated techniques

The aim of this guidebook is the formation of independent graphic expression which indispensably involves familiarization with new techniques. Many artists stick to over-repeated materials and techniques and do not dare to experiment with methods that have been hitherto unknown to them. Our unvarying techniques do not allow us to break away from usual solutions, thus we repeat our own mistakes unconsciously. The major part of the tasks included in the guidebook and especially the second chapter aim to bring new experiences into this field. A new way of using materials does not lead to immediate success, however, the graphic mechanisms that are experienced can give a new impetus even to the old-fashioned methods. The playfulness and spontaneity derived from materials can often be included in the composition and can lend a remarkably important plasticity to details and brushwork. The exact denomination of the usage of material and dimension category described in each task aims at helping to gain new experience and this is why the above-mentioned aspects are to be observed and followed.

The role of sketches, speed, spontaneity, the advantage of small dimensions, and the essences of views

The quick drawings of the above-mentioned traveling artists had several advantages. To begin with, the spontaneous, gesture-like sketch can much better serve the essence of thought (similar to the synthesis of an article written in a few sentences). The reduced discussion and the observed time limit of some of the tasks contribute to making quick drawings which later on can be used as sketches or snapshots of experience. “Good work necessitates time, for the bad one even more time is necessary,” says the proverb. The speed and the narrow time limit are to be observed not because we want our drawings to remain unfinished, but because we want them to preserve their freshness, impetus, and spontaneity—the epitomizing, summarizing way of expression. When we attempt the above tasks, we will be inclined to spend more time and to elaborate on them. The predetermined shortness of the time limit may seem frightening in the beginning, but it is only through this exercise that we can reach the pedagogical objectives. This is why the observation of the time limit is of paramount importance. Another advantage of the reduced dimensions is that several quick compositions can be made. We may make several trials and in this way better train our eye to analyze views and structure compositions.

The strength of a plein air work of art

The continental climate of Hungary with its hot summers, and long cold winters, the amount of daylight, and the traditional educational schedule regrettably shorten the training of landscape design into a 12-week cycle. The unpredictable weather of the teaching period in October and November and February through April makes outdoor work unpredictable. The aim of our guidebook is to create methods to counteract this inconvenience. The ensuing descriptions instruct anyone on how to carry out tasks on their own from the beginning of summer to its end. The most suitable period for outdoor drawing is May through June and September since the balanced temperature is most suitable. In spite of this we urge everyone to work outdoors whenever they can. Let us avoid substituting the open air with “life-like” photos. Let us not reduce the experience of drawing since in the open our senses are sharper and our empirical impressions are more intense! It is no mere chance that the impressionists passionately worked out in the open in spite of fog, frost, and hot weather! The experience of plein air helps us to encounter the adventure of space, depth, atmosphere, weather, and perspective such that we get closer to the essential questions of landscape architecture.

Examples of student works with short description



Figure 1: Three series of “2 minutes, walking sketches” on the Hero’s square Budapest, as a warming-up exercise (STAGE I)

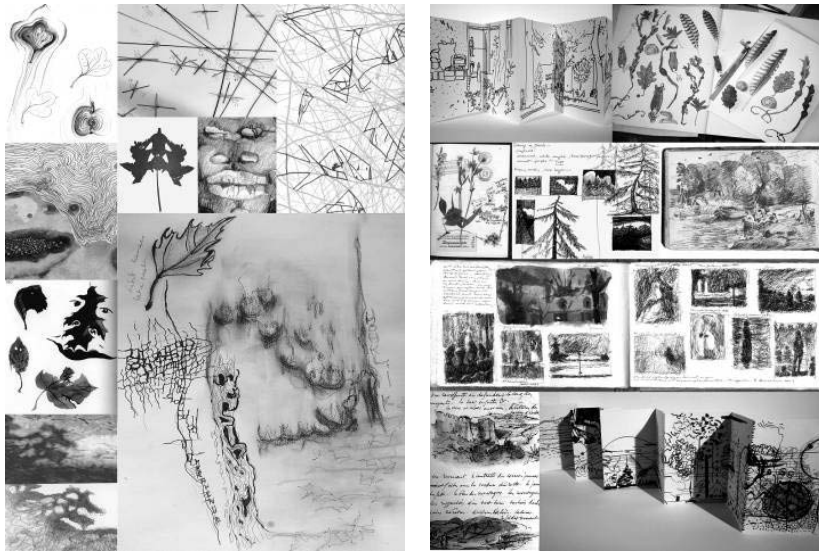


Figure 2-3: Imaginative drawing, collecting inspiration from natural details and examples for using a “Landscape sketchbook-journal” and collecting visual ideas (STAGE II)

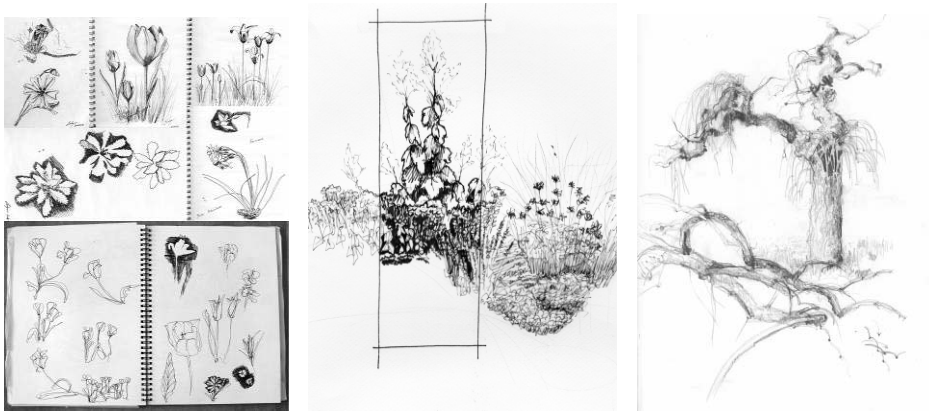


Figure 4-5-6: Examples for different scale of plant drawings: flower details with various techniques, perennial borders with characteristic plant forms and the rhythm of trench-branch systems (STAGE III)

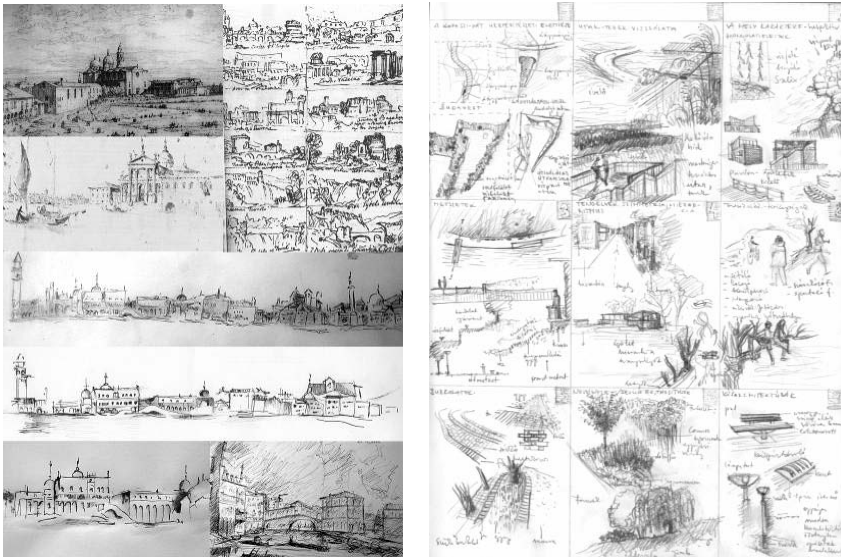


Figure 7-8: Examples for small size traditional “Vedutes”- Cityscapes from art history with student’s copies, and contemporary landscape architectural sketches in parks (STAGE IV)

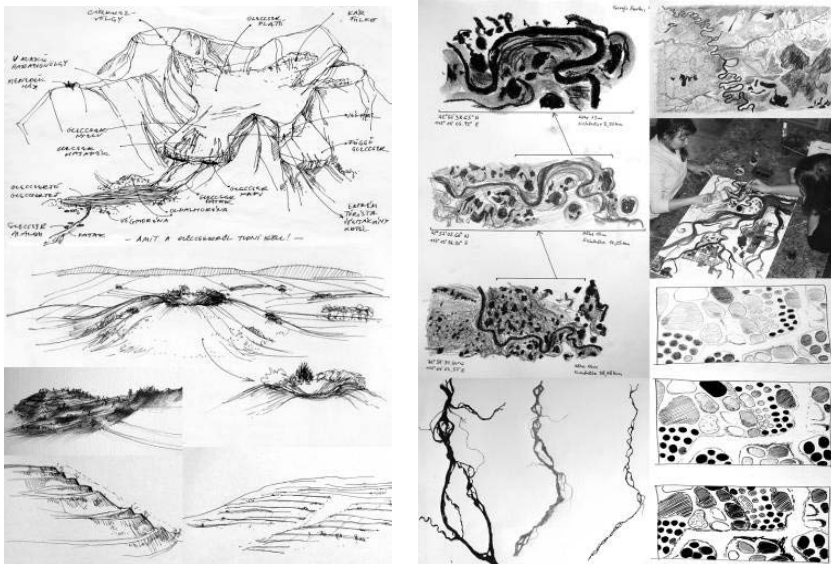


Figure 9-10: Examples for landform-drawings, which is a useful tool in expressing landscape interpretation and topographic interventions, and Google Earth form and pattern analyses for water-landscapes and traditional as well as agricultural land-use (STAGE V)



Figure 11-12: Landform, landscape silhouette drawings emphasizing foreground and background with various ink techniques, and weather-sketches as an important part of our landscape perceptions (STAGE V)



Figure 13-14: Imaginative sketches where detail of the “real” view interweave with ideas, fantasies, thoughts

4. Conclusion

Finally we can conclude that drawing is a basic expression tool not only for designers, but for everyone who is interested in “environment studies” and wish to get a global understanding of the surrounding settings. Sketching is not only important for its artistic values, but serves a tool of “thinking – understanding and evaluating” – process. This visual learning process can be supported with good, various exercises, proper visual questions and accurate pedagogic-modules as well as open-minded relation with linking art subjects. Aerial photograph, traditional and contemporary maps, landforms, art-historical examples, landscape painting, land art, weather sources as well as spontaneous, automatic methods can help to expand the field of representation and visual expression.

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