



## Streamline Garden and Open Space Design

Imre JÁMBOR, Gyöngyvér SZABÓ

Department of Garden- and Open Space Design  
Faculty of Landscape Architecture  
Corvinus University of Budapest

e-mail: imre.jambor@uni-corvinus.hu, gyongyver.szabo@uni-corvinus.hu

Manuscript received April 2011; revised October 2011, accepted October 2011

**Abstract:** While analysing the works of landscape design in the past 30 years, there are 3 mainstreams to be defined. One of them is the geometric garden type with well- defined forms and practical implements. The second line: the free-form gardens are created with natural landscape forms and character; they have strong emotional effects and try to create an idyllic landscape. The third distinct trend is the attractive or scenery gardens with strange, amazing or surprising formal world, tools and materials. Geometrical gardens belong typically to urban built environment; the other two trends absolutely deny this order.

**Keywords:** geometrical gardens, free-form gardens, attractive gardens

### 1. Introduction

Artworks of present times are what we can consider as a contemporary creation. This present is obviously not just a moment, a given day, not even the present year, or the past decade. We can only schematize how long the contemporary period lasts and where it had started in the past. The period of contemporary arts in fine arts or in music lasts from the 19-20<sup>th</sup> century until today, and this era is considered as a block. What in Hungarian music starts with Bartók, it starts with Rerrich in Hungarian garden arts. Both names both epochs mark a significant turning point

and take an immense step forward. What starts beyond this point, has a crucial effect on the present, this is where the roots of today's art are indeed to be sought.

Today's art works are primarily shaped by generations living and creating together and influencing each other – masters and disciples, so in a narrow sense, we can consider contemporary, or even more as contemporary present, the works born during one generation's time, through common interaction. The artistic experiences, aspirations and works of these approximately 25-30 years deeply influence each other and determine the new works. This time of a generation is at the same time an effervescent, moving period of contemporary arts. Thus, if we were to picture the presence in motion of garden arts, we should be looking at the creations of the past 25-30 years. This starts around the eighties, and lasts until today.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

The examination material is composed of realized and significant creations of European garden and open space design, about 350-380 works altogether. The choice of works is based on the number and quality of publications treating them. By the formal and content analysis and comparison of the creations, we can reveal their identical or very similar characteristics, which can serve as a basis to set up a typological order. The parameters of the comparison: the adequacy of form and function, the primacy of purpose or form, the intellectual and conceptual content, the shaping of the layout plan, the space composition, the application of plants, the architecture of pavement and water, characteristics of material use and unique characteristics.

## **3. Results and discussions**

As a result of the examination and the comparative analysis we can establish that the style trends of contemporary garden arts and open space design show a quite complex picture. Even at the level of the simple observer, we can discover a number of trends and there are groups of quite resembling characteristics and similar nature to discern amongst the multitude of artworks. Three, strongly distinguishable groups of creations with similar ambitions are certainly to be discerned.

### 3.1. Geometrical gardens

The notion geometrical garden is a still free umbrella notion in the literature of landscape architecture. Besides architectonic garden, as a general denomination for a garden type, which gives the primacy to the form, the expression planimetric garden is used for labeling the style in garden arts evolved after the turn of the century. Though the word *geometrical* is a synonym of the latter, their meanings do not coincide completely, this is why this word is apt to epitomize contemporary gardens of such character. The word *planimetric* refers to the regular, structured nature of the garden as a whole; however, the expression *geometrical* puts a stress on the geometry itself, so it might designate gardens where the complex of the structure of the layout plan, the geometrical forms and geometrical elements become per se esthetical values, which gives the main core of the garden composition [1].

A common characteristic to geometrical gardens is that they are conceived in terms of a simple and decorative geometric order of the layout plan. They have an aversion to any kind of complicated, complex form and mass. Squares, rectangles and triangles dominate them. Circles, if at all, appear very seldom and at the most as an inner figure. A generally used instrument to highlight planimetric surfaces and layout forms is repetition. Surfaces of the same layout shape and material align in a regular rhythm and a picturesque lineup beyond numbers, usually along a straight line or in a zigzag, but never in a bow. Energetic structural lines, as well as circles, are strange to this world, appearing only as ornaments.

To create this planimetric world, planes are necessary. Contemporary geometrical gardens typically use the horizontal level; bodies, masses only play a secondary role in the composition. Amongst geometrical gardens, there are three subgroups with different characteristics to distinguish as follows:

#### 3.1.1 Minimalist geometrical gardens

The expression “Minimal Art” was introduced by R. Wollheim to designate the sculptural and painting trends born in the 1960’s in the USA (1965). The representatives of this trend strive, scientifically and with mathematical precision, to elaborate plastic structures, while they consciously exclude personal and emotional content. The artworks are usually created mechanically, often based on mathematical formulas. The structure is reduced to abstract, geometrical elements, and made up by groups of smooth, homogeneous surfaces and shapes, with repetitions and variations.

We can consider minimalist gardens those creations of garden arts, referring to their spiritual kinship with the trend of fine arts called “Minimal Art” and born in the 1960’s, where geometry appears in its simplest and clearest form, at a minimal

level, adding nothing to the layout form and the arrangement itself. Here, the theme and subject of the creation is the simple geometrical form itself. The composition is aligned on a completely flat surface, along straight lines, just like a set of equally important elements, randomly appearing in the network of a Cartesian coordinate system. Although in Europe already earlier, in Hungary, the first significant gardens of minimalist geometry appeared in 2000. One of the most important creations representing this trend is the public park and square ensemble of Elisabeth Square in Budapest. The entire layout-plan is composed of ensembles of regular square and rectangular shapes. The single layout shapes are in themselves homogeneous and material. There is no partition, no further decoration, or, at the most, sporadically, a pattern of the material itself. The single layout shapes are reiterated in a regular rhythm in random quantities, but always following the main spatial lines of the garden.



*Figure 1: Landscape architectural idea plan of Elisabeth Square in Budapest by Péter István Balogh, Zsuzsa Bogner and Tamás Sándor*

The reconstructed main square in Salgótarján is of a similar minimalist geometry (fig. 2). The rehabilitation plan, keeping the values of classic modern

square design, sought a solution in accordance with today's space-forming principles and space-usage demands. The Main Square of nearly 1, 3 ha catches one's attention by its lean orthogonal architecture.

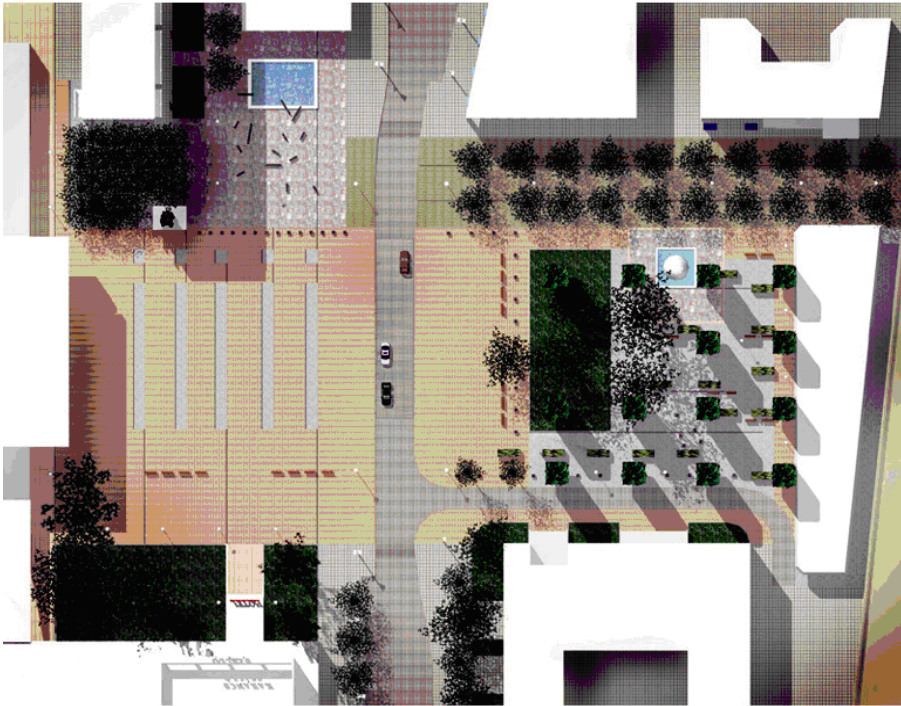


Figure 2: Salgótarján. Main Square. Design: Balázs Almási, 2005

### 3.1.2. Chaotic geometrical gardens

Chaotic geometrical gardens show features related to minimalist gardens, but they deny their clear structure; their intention is almost the creation of opposites. These gardens too, make use of simple geometrical elements, but what they create is a perturbed set full of surprises and unusual associations, which sometimes lack close formal relations and have a rather complicated layout. Instead of the orthogonal order of minimalist gardens, here, a special disorganization prevails, and the lack of order gets in a way exalted and illustrated. These chaotic square compositions usually quit regular, organized structures, at the same time remaining clearly geometrical; and due to this contradictory dichotomy, surprising, interesting effects and gestures arise.



A nice and typical example of chaotic geometrical gardens is the Interpolis Garden in Tillburg, the Netherlands designed by Abe Bonnema, 1998. The garden – like other minimalist gardens – makes use of a few simple basic elements: homogeneous lawn, reddish crashed stone and grey carved slate paving, water surfaces emerging from the plane with scattered tree groups. The special character results from the applied basic shapes and the geometry of the arrangement. There are no squares or rectangles, trapezoids and triangles dominate the picture. There are no parallel lines, everything is diverging and converging. Sporadically, oblique surfaces step out from the plane, the pool frames diverge, lines commence and remain incomplete, and all is overwritten by the spontaneously and randomly appearing ensemble of trees. Still, the picture is organic and definite, through the consistency of the composition's chaotic geometry.

Another creation that we can mention as a garden of chaotic geometry is the ensemble of the Millenarian Park in Budapest (fig. 3.). The core of the composition is here once again the decoration in plane, only, instead of squares and rectangles as usual basic elements, triangles and trapezoids are on the carpet. Although the partition of the layout plan follows broken lines and zigzag edges, as if it were consciously avoiding parallels, this perturbation is just what that lends uniformity to this capricious view.



*Figure 3:* Millenarian Park in Budapest. Fragmented shapes. Design: Új Irány Landscape Architects – Dominika Tihanyi and Co.

### 3.1.3. Nostalgic (historicizing) geometrical gardens

The third group of geometrical gardens ornaments the base plane's geometrical structure and metric shapes, striving to create a variety of forms. A certain part of these gardens are historicizing, they revoke historical shapes and patterns from the times of Renaissance or even Moorish gardens. What creates a relation and makes up a common group is exactly this nostalgic decorating mood, which tries to fill up the planimetric level repeatedly with exciting and attractive content. Amongst contemporary European gardens, we can find many creations with such a nostalgic geometry. A typical example is for instance the DNA- and healing garden in Dumfriesshire, Southern Scotland (Charles Jencks, 2000) with symbolic references.

Budapest's example for nostalgic geometrical gardens is the Infopark in Lágymányos district. This is a public park, which presents the typical characteristics of this trend. In the case of this garden, we are likely to discover the strongest influence of Renaissance design. The garden is composed of several square or rectangular units arranged side by side. The single garden parts are visibly detached from each other; there is no organic relation between them regarding neither their shapes, nor their functions. Therefore, the units appear independently, forming a closed inner system of shapes. They are exchangeable and interchangeable without harming the composition as a whole, just like the elements of a Renaissance parterre. The dominant basic shape is the square, which appears in numerous varieties, as well as an incorporating layout-shape, as well as a planting order, an ornament or pavement-pattern (fig. 4).



Figure 4: Infopark, Budapest. Garden details. Design: Gábor Karádi.

### 3.2. Free-form gardens

Amongst contemporary gardens, there is a range of landscape gardens, which are marked by an unbound and loose form and a natural, diversified application of plants. Unlike geometrical gardens, in these free-form gardens, plant facades take over a major role. The goal is not the perspicuity of the surfaces, but spatial partition and the creation of visual axis' or space-ensembles structured in depth according to the given function. The essence of the garden, here too, is the creation of an effective and attractive view, although not in the plane, but by the usage of vertical masses and facades.

Another essential difference vis-à-vis geometrical gardens is that free-form gardens lack all kind of geometry in the layout plan and even its tools: repetition, or regular rhythm. Here, all is unique and unrepeatable; the plant groups appear not as a uniform mass or as a homogeneous surface but as sets of individuals with character. While every form of geometrical gardens adapts in its character to the urban environment, completes and reinforces it, the group of free-form gardens creates some kind of contrast in an urban environment by establishing free natural forms [2]. We can distinguish between two groups of free-form gardens:

#### 3.2.1. Romanticizing gardens

The denomination "romanticizing" reflects the spiritual kinship of these gardens with the gardens of the romantic era, though it does not mean that they historicize, that is, bring back the forms of romantic gardens. In many periods of garden history – from ancient Persians through the picturesque gardens of the 18<sup>th</sup> century until our days – there had always been an intention to create some kind of an idyll in the garden, to create an environment or milieu for the solitary observer, which revokes life in Paradise, sometimes in philosophical depth, sometimes in a playful way.

The formal design and the plant application always follow in these gardens the models in nature, but in a clear, stylized or concentrated manner. Thus, the formed and designed character is always detectable in the garden view and there is no intention to hide it either.

Such a romanticizing structure is seen in the Jubilee Garden in Siófok's town center. This public garden is characterized by a carefully elaborated, perspicuous terrain structure; it is composed, besides the vegetation planted in picturesque groups along the facades, of trees and shrubs, of loose groups of perennial beds. The idyllic atmosphere of a garden separated from urban environment is reinforced



by the nostalgic open music pavilion, whose major value consists of its statuesque appearance, but it also serves as a meeting point (fig. 5).



*Figure 5: Siófok, Jubilee Park. Terrain structure. Design: Imre Jámboor and Co.*

### **3.2.2. Naturalistic gardens**

The other group of free-form contemporary gardens, although they take into account the function of use, they subordinate it to the garden's natural development, its spatial-temporal transformations and spontaneity. With naturalistic gardens, the main composer is nature itself. The designer, considering the properties of the area, only carries out the most necessary interventions, in a way preparing the creation of the garden. He counts on the fact that as a result of the succession development starting in the abandoned area, gradually various plant ensembles will appear, grow up, become strong and consequently a dynamically changing spatial structure and vista will appear on the area, for which the elapsed time plays an especially important role (fig. 6).



*Figure 6: Wienerberg Park, Wien. Naturalistic garden in the heart of the city.  
Design: Wilfried Kirchner, Maja Kirchner, 1996*

### **3.3. Attractive, scenery-gardens**

The gardens of the third group of contemporary gardens have in common that, although with different tools, materials and forms, on areas with different functions, but they always aim at creating special, attractive or exciting, unusual sceneries:

#### **3.3.1. Artistic gardens**

Artistic gardens undertake the presentation of artistic content using the tools of garden design. They are spatial compositions created with an artwork's ambitiousness. They make use of sculptural tools and reveal a certain visual sensitivity. In every case, there is a symbolic content or idea hidden behind them. They typically turn to contrasts and opposites, a powerful imaging and Land-Art (fig. 7).



*Figure 7: Garden of the Exxon Mobil Headquarters in Paris, France.  
Design: Kathryn Gustafson*

### 3.3.2. The “bizarre”

These compositions usually strive to exert an effect of surprise, even astonishment on the observer. Their toolkit is similar to that of the artistic gardens’ group, but they use it in a more extreme and exaggerated manner. Capricious and surprising forms characterize them, as well as the enhanced usage of contrasts and opposites. They employ particular materials, shapes and associations, for example the sculpture of Gabriele G. Kiefer in Wolfsburg, Germany or the Superficial reflecting mirror sculpture by Michel de Broin (fig. 8)



*Figure 8: Superficial, sculpture in Vosges, Alsace, France. Design: Michel de Broin*

#### 4. Conclusion

Geometrical gardens belong typically to urban built environment with their rational, strictly defined structure and forms. They represent the abstraction of nature, even in the case of chaotic geometric gardens. The other two trends absolutely deny this order. The ecological garden concept is based directly on the rules of ecology, while romanticized gardens are emotionally bound up with Nature and try to recall the Elysium or Paradise. These naturally formed gardens seem either to deny the strict urban structure or to counterpoint the built environment. Attractive gardens have no ideological meaning, they are for themselves – mere attractions, sceneries or gags.

#### Acknowledgements

The research was sponsored by the following projects: OM-00042/2008, OM-00265/2008, OM-00270/2008, TÁMOP 4.2.1.B-09/1/KMR-2010-0005.

#### References

- [1] Jámber, I. (2007), Kortárs kertépítészet – Geometrikus kertek , ‘4D’ Tájépítészeti és Kertművészeti Folyóirat, 6, pp. 5-15.
- [2] Jámber, I. (2007), Kortárs kertépítészet – Szabad formálású és attraktív kertek , ‘4D’ Tájépítészeti és Kertművészeti Folyóirat, 7, pp. 2-7.