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SITELINES

Landscape Architecture in British Columbia

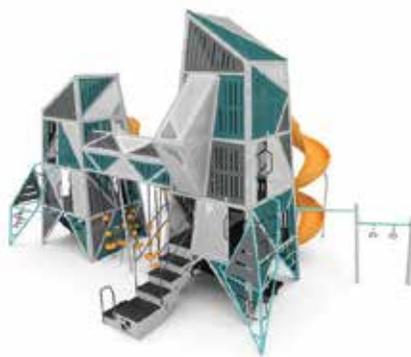


Public Art – Examples of Collaboration & Site Specific Art

Timekeepers Redux | Between the Everyday and the Extraordinary* | an undefined narrative | Evolution of Public Art Policy | Synoptic Overview | A Landscape of Broken Stones | CSLA Fellows Profile : Don Vaughan | Why is a Site?

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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.



INTRODUCTION:

Public Art – EXAMPLES OF COLLABORATION & SITE SPECIFIC ART

Don Vaughan, FCSLA, FASLA, LMBCSLA, Wa,RLA Photo: Don Vaughan

When I accepted being the Guest Editor for this issue of Sitelines I started by trying to define what is Public Art?

Google defines Public Art as “art in any media that has been planned and executed with the intention of being staged in the physical public domain, usually outside and accessible to all.”

This would include everything from a fireworks display to graffiti, from temporary to permanent and maybe it should. The artist work, in one way or another, is a reflection of the community and as the community will continue to change, so will public art.

My thoughts for this issue originated from my desire to discuss site-specific works of art – art that is integrated into the site as part of our history, reflects our cultural attitudes and adds meaning to our cities. The projects presented are a result of collaboration with the artist and the landscape architect or architect.

Throughout my career I have had the opportunities to provide the urban planning, develop the landscape architectural design and create the public art. In this I worked to blur the lines between these disciplines. As I look back on all of this, it is the Public Art and the collaboration with the Public Art Artist that was most satisfying as it gave the place its life and identity.

In the December Issue’s introduction, Larry and Derek ask the question, “what lies ahead for us artistically, as a profession.” Derek begins to answer the question in The Visual Arts in Landscape Architecture starting on page 10 of that in that same issue. We need to embrace the visual arts either as the artist or in collaboration with the Public Art artist in our projects. The landscape architect, architect and the artist should work together near the beginning of the project to reinforce the concept and make the art an intrinsic part of the design.

In this issue of Sitelines, artist, landscape architects and the City of Vancouver’s Public Art Planner will present their thoughts and examples of Public Art. [sl](#)



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Cover photo: Anthony Redpath

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Timekeepers, staircase installation, Jack Loucks Court, Elizabeth Roy, ©1999-2001 Photos: Paul Hess

Timekeepers REDUX

by Elizabeth Roy, MFA, Artist,
Assistant Professor, School of Art,
University of Manitoba

One of the key aspects of public art is the question of its longevity. What contributes to a public artwork being able to survive the test of time? What are the factors that will either insure that it hangs-in and continues

to receive positive accolades or contributes to indifference, disinterest, and neglect, or the worst outcome, an awkward desire to want it removed? When I was invited to join with Vaughan Landscape Planning and Design,

I was sure this would be an opportunity to create a piece that would hang-in and continue to receive positive accolades.

If I think back to the original idea for the work, I am reminded that, more than the basic desire to create an interesting physical object, I was curious about the site's proximity to an area that had a great deal of personal histories and strong relationships. The individuals that were transformed into the sculptural figures on the steps were real people—members of the community—and I knew I wanted to find a way to tell their stories. In a sense, I ended up putting them and their stories on public view, so that everyone in the community could both remember them and connect to their lived experience. I arranged meetings with each, listened while they recounted their histories, then photographed them. After those experiences, that was the moment when the work gelled in my mind. The community audience would continually revisit the work, stand in front of the “people” and create an engagement by reading their stories. I cut life size silhouettes of each, and placed ▶



images and text, composed and layered on the surface of each sculpture. Person and place were united together. The grand staircase would be the location where the figures would be arranged and the conversations would happen.

The best public art calls give the artist freedom to assess the site and envision an artwork. For an artist, pre-imposed themes and strict conditions completely narrow the concept. A good public artwork needs to give the community respect. Most artists will research the site, its history and the community where the work is being placed. Timekeepers is one of only two public works I have built where the artwork was executed in advance of the development of the site. The location of this work was ideal. The amount of creative control that the City of North Vancouver and Vaughan Landscape Planning and Design provided was just right to allow me to make crucial decisions about developing the creative idea for the project. The physical staircase creates a contained environment where each sculptural figure has a unique space and story to disclose. Being involved with the project early on gave me more time to interview residents of North Vancouver. I collected narratives visiting community centers, nursing homes, and libraries, listening to memories and reflections on the idea of place. Finally, it was up to me to then make choices of who would make it to the grand staircase. This provided so much for me as an artist—to piece together a past and present—and create a work that would be relevant to all members of the community. The project was named after a revered member of the community and it was important for the project to reflect that significance through the choice of narratives. [SL](#)



Image (right): Should I Be Worried
Photo Credit: Artist, Justin Langlois

Image (bottom left & bottom right): Playtime
Photo Credit: Scott Livingstone



Between the **Everyday** and the **Extraordinary***

Karen Henry, Senior Planner | City of Vancouver Public Art Program

While landscape architecture defines a territory through the plantings, surfaces, furniture and how people move through and gather, art may pursue just a single line of inquiry, explore an aspect of the physical, political, historic or social associations of a site. The results are often unexpected. Including an artwork in a project can add another layer of problems to be solved, but a successful collaboration

between landscape and art can be immensely satisfying to all involved as well as to the public who use and visit the site.

A few recent artworks from the City of Vancouver Public Art collection offer fine examples of landscape and art working together for very particular ends, addressing public space and place in unique and considered ways.

Myfanwy MacLeod and Shannon Oksanen's *Playtime* (2016) is a family of sculptures that invites children and adults alike to play. The nine whimsical hand-sculpted forms, ranging from two to twelve feet high, call out to be touched and climbed on. The artists worked with landscape architect Alyssa Senczyszyn of Jonathan Losee Landscape Architects to incorporate the sculptures into the Family Commons, a green park-like area of the 1.8 km Wellness Walkway that encircles the grounds of the BC Children's and BC Women's Hospitals. The sculptures are equally animated through their graphic black and white painted surfaces for those who may only be able to look from afar. They are a mix of playground furniture and modern sculpture and embody the charm of an earlier *PlayTime* – the 1967 nearly silent film featuring the comic antics of French filmmaker and actor Jacques Tati. The artists' speak about the work as "... focused on the idea that 'play-time' is itself a transition zone between the everyday and the extraordinary...."

In another area of town, forty cast bronze slugs of various sizes, from a modest four ►





A Long Conversation (for Oona) Image credit: Blaine Campbell

inches to ten-foot long giants, appear to be crawling all over the new campus of Columbia College on Terminal Avenue. The slugs are variously positioned on the open plaza, in the shade of the rich-toned corten steel planter boxes, under the benches, on the concrete columns. The organic-looking highly realistic detail of their bodies contrasts with the hard paved surfaces and steel edges. A Long Conversation (for Oona) (2017) by Peter Gazendam inhabits the site as a whole, bringing to mind at every turn the ancient creatures native to this place, whose slow persistence speaks of resilience. A number of conversations are evoked – the pace of movement, the time of evolution, urbanization and nature, human and animal associations, attraction and repulsion, materials and memory. What is more, there is a very fine conversation

between the sculptural forms and the elegant landscape plan by Mike Teed, MBCSLA of space2place design inc. Together they will continue to animate the life of the school.

These first two works imbue their landscapes with exceptional character. The third work is not situated in a newly designed and purposeful landscape, rather it contemplates landscape in the broad sense. Should I Be Worried? (2017) is a text work produced as part of the City's first Artist-in-Residence program. Justin Langlois worked with the Sustainability Group, learning about their environmental work on sea level rise and contributing to ideas and opportunities for greater citizen engagement. The artwork inspired by this work is a question, written as a neon sign placed on a historic wooden structure on the Southeast False Creek

shoreline. The structure frames the burgeoning downtown development and sits above the rising tides of False Creek itself. It sits beside the built environment, and reflects on landscape in the sense of the natural and constructed environment, prompting thoughts about the vulnerability of built forms, the erosion of both the stability of land and the economic and social wellbeing of the city.

These artworks sit in their sites in meaningful ways and offer a deep dive into place and context. The curious forms are inspired by and integrated into the landscape and are a nexus of materials and associations that add to and help define the experience of a place.

*from Myfanwy MacLeod and Shannon Oksanen's project description for Playtime. [sl](#)

Evolution of Public Art Policy:

SYNOPTIC OVERVIEW

Illarion Gallant BFA MBCSLA MCSLA

Public Art has been ubiquitous in manufactured landscapes for millennia. It has had a multitude of personas, meanings and roles ranging from the Obelisk to the individual on the horse, tributes to monarchies, authoritative regimes, religious deities and corporate kingdoms.

Contemporary Public Art in the public realm is now seen as a part of private development or public infrastructure projects. In the modern era, since WW2, international cities with the critical population, economic success, and cultural history, have created successful approaches to the integration of public art work into their urban fabric.

Since the 1970's, Public Art in Western Canada has changed significantly. Throughout the 1970's and 1980's a small group, primarily sculptors, considered themselves public artists. Since then the nature of public art has evolved and transformed. Once seen as an object of art set in a public space, public art is now one of infinite possibilities from ephemeral to permanent. It can be delivered by a broad definition of artists from the world of 'Culture'. The public art world has become a progressive arena of diversity and freedom of expression.

Prior to the 1990's, official Municipal Public Art Policy and protocol for the selection and placement of Public Art were non-existent on the Canadian West Coast. At this time both Portland, Oregon and Seattle, Washington had progressive

cultural policies in place which facilitated comprehensive and sophisticated public art inclusion for their public spaces. These were cited as foundational principals as public art policies for Canada's West Coast municipalities were developed. These new policies dovetailed with municipal planning and building initiatives to create a legitimate place and an official process for the integration of public art into new community development.

Public art policies and selection processes have been adapted to a variety of conditions and locales. Their success is evident through the proliferation of a broad scope of art work in the lower mainland over the last twenty years.

The most recognized and prevalent public art selection process is the three-tiered public art competition. This has proved successful in several ways. It has consistently provided physically safe artwork as well as providing an overview to controlled budgets. It has been pivotal in providing opportunities for the community to be included in different aspects of the decision making.

Examples of communities which have strived to reconsider Public Art Policy are The Cities of Vancouver, Victoria, Richmond, Surrey as well as North and West Vancouver to name but a few. They are all attempting to create more inspirational, thoughtful and well considered approaches to their respective Public Art Programs focused on enhancing their community's awareness and participation.

A weakness in the Public Art selection process is the composition of the selection committee or jury. Often a jury is composed of volunteers from the community which can place limitations on the expertise required to select public art. An ideal voting jury structure would be composed of allied design professionals, who are cognizant of structure, public safety, serviceability of fabrication and materials as well as an intimate understanding of buildings and their relationship to public open space. The artistic component should be led by an experienced, practicing, professional public artist supported by members of artistic and cultural communities. Members of the impacted Community Associations as well as engaged members of those communities are ideal candidates for a jury. Municipalities should include representatives from the Public Art/Cultural Branch, Engineering, Planning and Council. Additionally, the Jury would benefit from the expertise of a consulting Senior Planner.

The selection processes which have evolved to bring art into the public realm have had a strong and successful start to realizing their primary objectives. Reacting to the veracity of the evolving nature of public art, progressive municipalities have adapted their programs to harness this new potent energy. The will of the Municipalities must continue this adaptive change within their policies to continue to create successful Public Art in the ever changing Canadian Cultural Landscape. [51](#)



AN **undefined** NARRATIVE

3 Works of Site Specific Art in the Public Realm

Jacqueline Metz & Nancy Chew, Artists

We are visual artists and have worked collaboratively in the public realm since 1997. Our interest has always been in a place, its inhabitants and the choreography of the site. Our work is often an enigmatic assemblage of elements that reference the local landscape and the cultural history. We begin by thinking about the site, the natural environment, and the cultural landscape...interwoven with the sometimes almost invisible traces of a wild ecosystem.

Looking back at more than twenty years of our art practice we see this constant thread – a figure in the landscape. The figure may be present or implied. Sometimes that figure is a mythological figure or a totemic one, a representative of the natural world. Sometimes the figure is the viewer.

The installations are often an assemblage of various iconic or familiar elements, recontextualized, forming a still life through which the viewer moves. Such compositions of forms, fragments and allusions give the viewer the room to imagine, remember, explore....there is no need to

‘de- code’: it is the sense of openness that is important, the idea that there are many readings, histories, memories, experiences woven into a place. It is about how we frame or mythologize the world around us.

birds on a branch, 2017

This was a civic project with the City of New Westminster, working with Erika Mashig, a landscape architect and the City’s Parks and Open Space Planner, to re-vitalize the utilitarian parkade set along the edge of a lush new park lining the Fraser River.

Monumental fragments of the natural world are woven into the ‘fabric’ of the chainlink façade. The imagery of birds resting on branches introduces something light-hearted, colourful, gentle – and refers to the birds of the nearby forest and gardens. The artwork is a slightly surreal addition to the layering of verdant landscaping, heritage buildings, and working waterfront. As you move through this rich urban environment, the overscaled birds remind us of our relationship to the natural world – and the fragility of that relationship.

All images: Metz and Chew
Opposite page: birds on a branch
This Page Top: between earth and sky
Bottom: stillness and motion

between earth and sky, measuring the immeasurable 2004

This artwork involved the rejuvenation of a public plaza for Brookfield Bankers Hall in downtown Calgary. The plaza was developed with Scatliff Miller Murray Landscape Architects.

between earth and sky evokes the natural world through abstractions, placing an iconic figure within a mythological landscape. A janus figure looks to the past and the future. Cast bronze ammonites recall the hidden prehistoric landscapes of southern Alberta. Their spiraling forms are a natural expression of the Fibonacci series – which underlies many things, among them aesthetic ideas of proportion, financial theory, and the complex order inherent in nature.



stillness & motion, 2013

The artwork is integrated into a glazed pedestrian bridge above a landscaped residential courtyard. *stillness & motion* is a graphic and dynamic artwork through which you move. Working with the architect James Cheng, the artwork became a slice of nature floating above the landscape. There are two components. One is a monumental, translucent image that extends the length of the glazed bridge – you walk alongside the life-size herons nesting in a rookery, an intimate, almost domestic, view. The second component is seen at night – a heron slowly moving, beating the air, fluttering in a continuous loop of light. This bright, moving mythical presence – powerful yet gentle, can be seen from several blocks away in both directions. To see the video: <https://vimeo.com/77173437> **SLSL**



This article is adapted from “Landscape of Broken Stones” published in Landscape Architecture Magazine, October of 1989.

GRANITE ASSEMBLAGE:

A Landscape of Broken Stones

In a West Vancouver park, a minimalist project generates criticism and excitement.

Patrick Mooney, MBCSLA, FCSLA, FCELA

Already an accomplished landscape architect, Granite Assemblage, was Don Vaughan’s first artwork after graduating from Emily Carr School of Art, in 1989. The piece was funded by a donation from the Kay Meek Foundation and is located in Ambleside Landing, a West Vancouver park and plaza designed by Durante Kreuk Ltd. It is simultaneously an arresting and controversial environmental artwork, a fountain and a play structure.

The pedestrian walkway that lines the harbor’s edge in West Vancouver had been armored with broken granite rip-rap to protect the shore from 14-foot tides and winter storms, but local residents expressed a dislike for its rough character. In Granite Assemblage Vaughan sought to cause the public to examine the rip-rap and reassess its beauty.

The work is comprised of a series of granite cubes and rectangles set at the edge of the harbor in a man-made tide pool with the granite cubes posited as a transformation of the form and character of the rip-rap. Rough-edged blocks of split stone are placed along the water’s edge, in the tide pool and extend into the park. The angularity and rough surface texture of the stone cubes create a credible link with the broken pieces of rip-rap. By placing some of the granite cubes into the rip-rap the relationship is clearly established.

Two of the blocks are pierced with water jets, while two blocks juxtapose their partially polished surfaces with the rough texture of the other blocks. The placement of the cubes in the tidal pool and onto the shore suggests a movement away from the broken stone, reinforcing the transition effect. This is completed by having parts of the polished stones coated with a sheen of running water. The

transition from rip-rap, to rough cube, to polished block reveals the materiality locked within the stone. As the viewer’s attention becomes focused on the rip-rap’s material and surface texture, its quality and value become apparent.

In using cube forms to affect the transition, Vaughan acknowledged the influence of minimalist artists such as Tony Smith and



Sol LeWitt who believe that only by forgetting about art theory and the appearance of art can new forms be discovered. Granite Assemblage consciously ignores traditional design mores, which would have demanded a more conspicuous order and finished appearance, in an attempt to create a heightened awareness of the work. The simple forms and the texture of the material confront the viewer with their

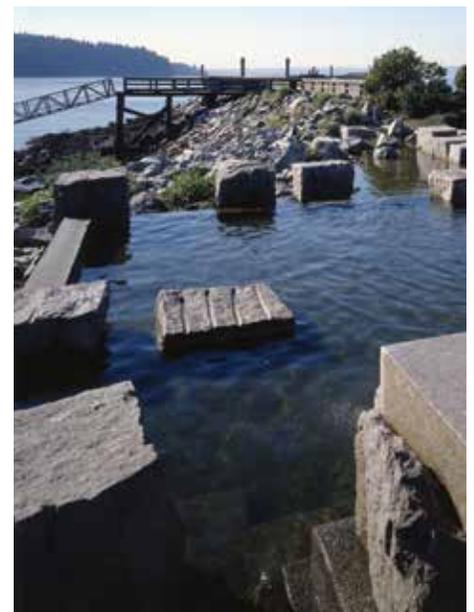
own identity, providing a rich source of examination and experience.

Like the minimalist artists, Vaughan chose to partially remove the design from his control. The quarry received instructions on the size of the blocks, but not on how the drill lines were to be directed or spaced so that the quarrying process and not the artist determined the blocks' surface

patterns. Similarly, the blocks were placed as they came off the truck; the order of each piece randomly determined. The last block is located not in any "designed" relation to the whole but at the farthest distance a crane could reach from the shore. Even the height and width of the water jets were fixed by the technician who adjusted the valves, rather than the artist. The process Vaughan used is avant garde in that it eschewed the conventional landscape design process and added an element of risk-taking that changed the aesthetics of work. Its rough appearance has been a source of controversy in both the public and design communities, yet it is only by following the precedent of these minimalist artists and breaking with landscape design conventions that a quality of unfinished spontaneity was achieved. [51](#)



Photo credits: All images by Anthony Redpath

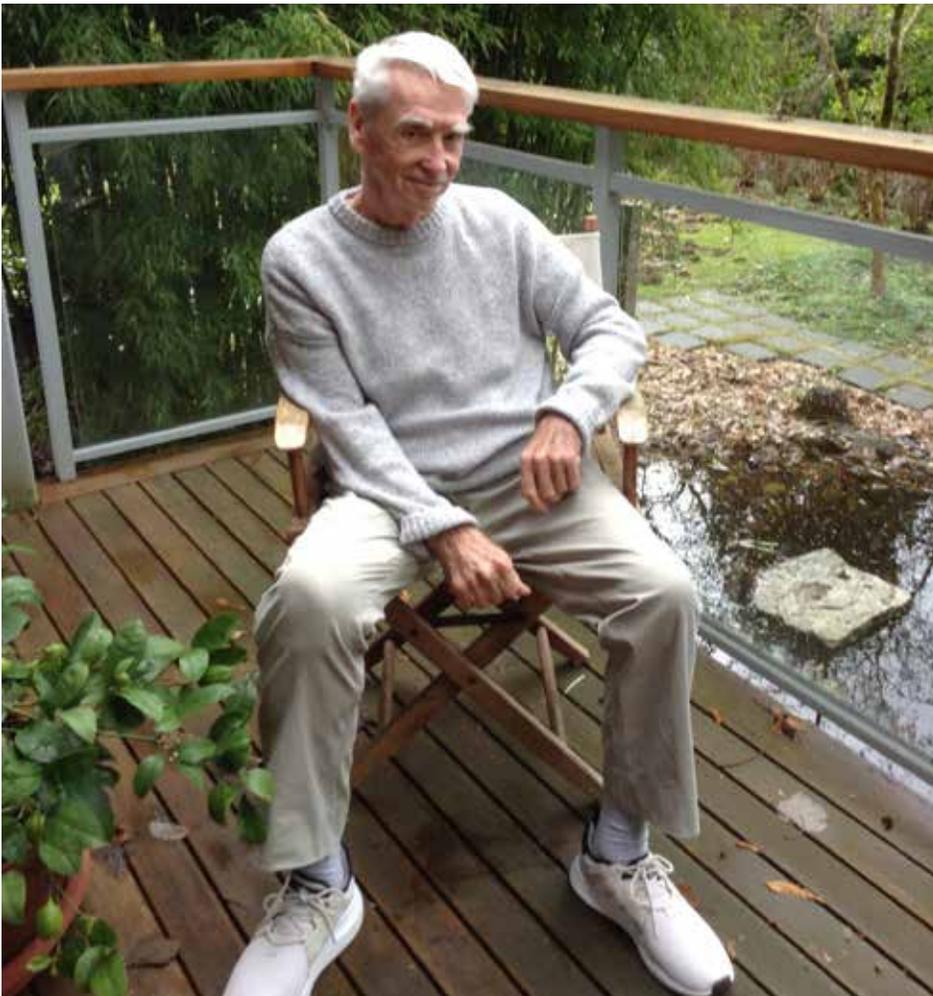


CSLA Fellows

PROFILE OF

Don Vaughan FCSLA, FASLA, LMBCSLA, Wa.RLA

Don Vaughan received his BLA from University of Oregon in 1965, a Diploma in Fine Arts from Emily Carr College of Art and Design in 1989 and an honorary PhD from the University of Victoria in 2007. He served two terms as President of the BCSLA and on the CSLA Board of Governors. He is a fellow of CSLA and ASLA and a member and past vice president of the Royal Canadian Academy of the Arts.



Don was a partner in Man, Taylor, Muret, (later, Lombard North Group), and principal of Don Vaughan & Associates, Vaughan, Durante, Perry and Vaughan Durante (now Durante Kreuk) and later Vaughan Landscape Design and Planning. Over the course of his long career he designed many regionally important landscapes and won numerous professional design awards.

Don began his career in Vancouver in 1965 – a period of time when this sleepy west coast city was beginning its transition to the major Pacific Rim urban center it is today. He was a pioneer who influenced the course of that transition and expanded the scope of work for landscape architects in the region. His completed body of work demonstrates how an exceptional landscape architect can enhance the quality of life for millions of people who live, work, study and pursue recreation and quiet contemplation in urban environments. As reported in the *Globe and Mail*,

“If you have strolled the plazas of Expo 86... tramped the winding waterfront walkways of David Lam Park on the same site...met a friend at the fountain at the University of Victoria...clumped in ski boots through Whistler Village...meditated at the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Chinese Garden... you have been touched by a creation of one of the nation’s most accomplished landscape architects.”

Hawthorn, Nov 14th, 2007

Don’s career has included working on both of Canada’s World Fairs. At Expo 67, he collaborated on the overall site design, including Moshe Safdie’s “Habitat” and Arthur Erickson’s “Man in the Community”

pavilion. In 1984, he formed The Landscape 86 Collaborative [with former partner Claude Muret, Engineer]. They and a team of 36 Landscape Architects from major firms in B.C. produced an “on time, under budget” site design and installation for the fair. Expo 86 introduced Vancouver to the world and was a major catalyst in the subsequent growth of the region. Part of the success of the Fair site was the plazas, which allowed people to enjoy themselves just being on the site, rather than having to stand in interminable lines to get into pavilions (Mackie 2011).

Following Expo 86, Don participated in the design and building of the most renowned traditional Chinese and Japanese gardens in Canada: The Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Garden in Vancouver [with Joe Wai, Architect], the restoration of the Nitobe Memorial Garden at UBC and the Japanese Garden at the National Museum of Civilization, Ottawa [with Shunmyo Masuno, Landscape Architect]. The design of Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Garden received an American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) Merit award in 1989 and the Nitobe Restoration was awarded the 1995 ASLA Honor Award for Restoration. These projects further enhanced Canada’s international image for cultural diversity.

The authenticity of the Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden and the Nitobe Memorial Garden is, in large part, the measure of their success. Don’s great skill as a “missing “people person” and his rigorous attention to detail enabled him to collaborate with the many artisans from China and Japan whose work produced that legitimacy. His attention to detailed design was also instrumental in earning him the first ASLA Historic Restoration Award in 1983 for Shannon Mews, a multi-family housing transformation of the Austin Taylor estate in Vancouver.

In the 70s and 80s, Don designed some of the first public plazas in downtown Vancouver. At the Sun Life Plaza, he placed seating “below street level, separating pedestrians from passing vehicles...creating an urban space in which crowds could gather, yet a solitary figure would feel

comfortable” (Hawthorne, 2007). His design of the Skytrain station at Discovery Square (Burrard & Melville Streets) refined this concept and was recognized with another ASLA Merit Award. In this same period, the West End Mini Parks he designed [in collaboration with Hotson Baker Architects] changed that densely populated, traffic-bound neighbourhood to one of public open spaces and sequestered retreats.

At the outset of his career, Don was the landscape architect for Simon Fraser University, as it rose atop Burnaby Mountain, as well as being part of team planning the University of Victoria. He continued on as the Coordinating Landscape Architect at UVic, and was recognized for his exceptional contributions in planning and design with an Honorary Doctorate in 2007. In that recognition, he was described as “nationally respected” in his field; his foresight and expertise having transformed that campus “from a barren former army camp and farmland” to a space of beauty. In executing his vision for a learning environment “distinguished by its natural surroundings” he “encouraged the development of ecological restoration areas...and outdoor gathering places” (University of Victoria 2007). One of the campus highlights is the fountain in front of McPherson Library — a gathering place where students meet in all seasons.

In 1973, when a local pier in the City of North Vancouver was to be leased to private interests, Don’s proposal to lease the pier himself, in order to maintain public access, captured media attention and led to the public backing the development of Bewicke Park, the first public waterfront access in the City. Its development opened the waterfront to one and all and led to the City’s subsequent decision to create a central waterfront park at the foot of Lonsdale Ave.

Many Vancouver area landmarks bear the imprint of Don’s design influence. His involvement in False Creek began with his work for Marathon Realty in 1971, to Expo in 1986 and culminated with Concord Pacific 20 years later where his “Bay” concept honoured the original shoreline and helped to repudiate years of urban planning that had restricted access to the water, by opening

the waterfront to the city and its people. A range of public amenities resulted from this concept, including the waterfront walkway/bikeway linking parks and street-ends, opening this dense urban environment to light, space and recreation and culminating in a prestigious Waterfront Centre Award.

But Don’s influence has not been limited to the city context. His impact is felt throughout B.C., first in the new town of Tumbler Ridge and later in Whistler Village where he was involved from site selection to the final design. Don worked with Eldon Beck, a landscape architect from California, to develop a pedestrian-oriented main street and an elevated covered walkway system. The success of Whistler Village is testament to his foresight.

“An artist of the natural world ... with ... granite sculptures, still ponds and cascading waters, Don Vaughan transforms the outdoors” (Hawthorn 2007). Art in the landscape has been an important part of Don’s life, both in civic duty and in his own works. After graduation from Emily Carr, he realized the Award-Winning Granite Assemblage at Ambleside Park in West Vancouver, and this was followed by Opus 1 at the Bayshore Gardens, and Marking High Tide and Waiting for Low Tide at David Lam Park in False Creek North. He believes that, in future, landscape architecture must progress from designing well-planned and highly functional landscapes to a return to artistic, experiential landscape design.

After retirement, Don began competitive weightlifting and has now received 6 Gold Metals and set the BC record and the Canadian Record for his age group (75-79) & (80+) and weight (69kg) in Olympic Weightlifting. He describes this as “the most fun I have ever had in my life”. [51](#)

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WHY IS A SITE?

By Bill Pechet, BA, BFA, B.Arch, Director, Pechet Studio
Lecturer in Practice, UBC School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture.
M Arch program
Interim Chair, Bachelor of Environmental Studies, UBC School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture



emptyful fog, water and lighting cycles cool summer evenings in Winnipeg Image by: Gerry Kopelow

Having worn a few different hats in the conceptualization of public projects, at scales that range from urban to diminutive, I have sometimes been called a public artist. And so, for the purposes of this issue of *SITELINES*, I will concentrate on that particular role and how the idea of a site influences the resultant work.

It's always about the site. When a project comes to the fore, my usual methodology is to ask why is this even considered a site? Why opens up multiple ways to think about the project. There are myriad social, economic, cultural, political, and historic decisions that have played a role in defining why this 'place' is significant enough to warrant some kind of marker or elucidation.

Much like monuments, an artwork tells us just as much about the values of a given culture as the things they represent. This means really asking who is the artwork for, and, in doing so, trying to empathize with their particular position relative to the

work. That position can be both spatial/phenomenological and cultural/ideological because we carry around multiple voices in our brains that are both common to each other and also personal. Sometimes these voices are lusciously contradictory. All of us in the professions of creating places understand how the multiple agenda of different stakeholders need to be understood. The difference here, however, is that art can open up a more critical discourse about the nature of a space.

I see the artwork as a (partial) portrait of a place. A reflection of those who commission it, those who will experience it, and their dimensional and cultural space. A beach, a street, a park, a plaza, a boulevard are those things but they mean much more than that, as constructs of culture and resultant effect... they are symbolic, political, and spatial wonderlands for experimentation.

Two recent artworks can illustrate this way of working:

Emptyful

Produced for the City of Winnipeg, this ultra-skinny site in a plaza behind the central library was earmarked as a locus for 'learning'... where story-times and readings could occur. Moreover, it was also required that, through the media of 'light, water and ice', that it help to re-energize this once-abject space.

So, we see a culture that values learning, trying to rebrand a space as 'healthy and enticing' and also wanting to create a spectacle that is reflective of its specific locale and prairie climate. This triad agenda, matched with the physical limitations of a very narrow space engendered a concept to produce an illusion of depth where there wasn't any actual depth. This led to creating a vessel that could hold states of water and light, and also to act as a symbolic container of knowledge and research.

The piece also pulls from the romantic notion that the prairie, with its vast open space, has been historically branded as a limitless plain of literal and metaphoric possibilities. This is delivered through utopian propaganda that entices hundreds of thousands of immigrants to the Canada. The mythology being that this new, and fertile land can provide both social and economic emancipation from their suffering lives abroad...from empty to full.

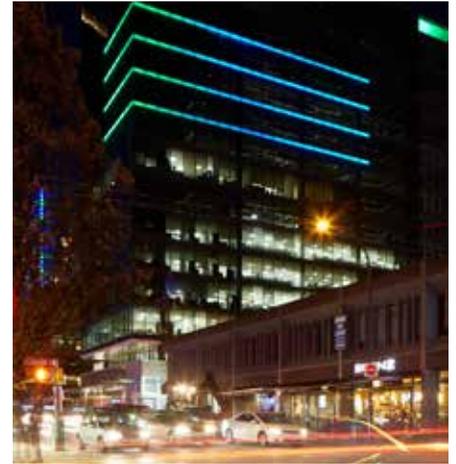
The empty and full part of the artwork, is, therefore, is both a reference to our collective obsession about whether we have enough in our lives, interlocked with the sculptural need to create a majestic art/spectacle. Like the prairies where the phenomena of weather and dreaming of a good life comes and goes, this artwork also produces variations of climates that fill and empty on random cycles of computer impulses.

So, the piece attempts to ground itself in a number of 'sites'; the real and measurable restrictions of its footprint, the cultural role that the library plaza needs to fulfill, the historical and larger cultural inheritance of our collective histories and then, and definitely not least, trying to simply produce a gorgeous set of pleasures for the viewer.

Dichroic Vancouver

This competition specifically gave a site that occupied the 7th to the 11th floors of the new office building; an irresistible location because this mammoth surface would be visible from Granville, a street that is itself dichroic (two-coloured) in its daytime and nighttime personas. The consequent social dichotomy of the day/night split meant that the piece would have different audiences. In both cases, pedestrians would see the building while on-foot. So this offered their motion/movement/position to become a key idea in the artwork.

The title, “Dichroic Vancouver’ also came from using a special dichroic glass that was embedded directly into the curtain-wall of the tower. During the day, this glass magically changes colour as one walks along. The strips can transition from a baby blue to a vibrant aquamarine and then into a hot acid green based solely on a person’s movement and the light quality of the day. At night things change in a number of ways: the glass deliver a shimmering aurora borealis of corporate green on ‘working weeknight’ and a



Left: glass strips vary in colour depending on position of viewer Image by: Martin Tessler

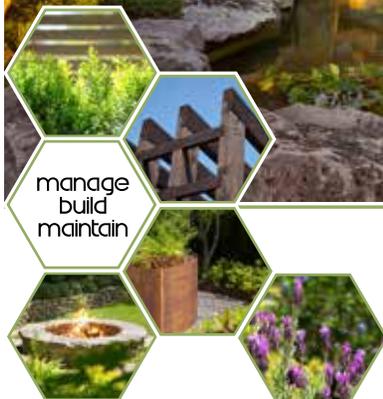
Right: glass strips produce lightshows that change from weeknight to weekend Image by: Martin Tessler

throbbing pulsing disco pattern for the ‘party weekend’ folks. This way all audiences get a chance to hallucinate in their own way.

On another level, though, this project suggests that Vancouver, is dichroic (or two-coloured)

in its many split personalities. So the ‘site’ in this project is not only the physical surface of the glass but also the social, legislative and temporal context within which the work sits. [SL](#)

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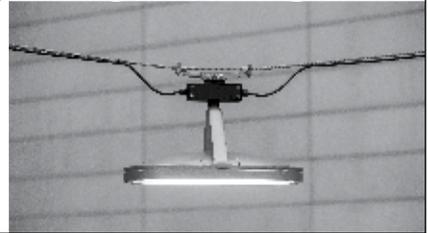
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