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ABOVE
Carlos Garaicoa,
No Way Out.
Photo: Art Evans.

Invisible Cities

Mass MoCA
North Adams, Massachusetts

April 14, 2012–March 1, 2013

Italo Calvino's novel, *Invisible Cities*, has captured my imagination since my student studio days. The stories of his eloquent traveling character, Marco Polo, invite readers to think about seeing what we can't see. More than the stone beside us and beneath our feet, the architecture of cities is also built of less tangible notions of memory, culture, anticipation, and movement. The 10 artists in Mass MoCA's *Invisible Cities* exhibition

also explore those ephemeral concepts.

Some installations look like model cities, using materiality to elicit ideas. Sopheap Pich's Phnom Penh-inspired cityscape, crafted of woven rattan and bamboo vessels that evoke buildings under scaffolding or bombs or fishing baskets, is one such project.

Other artists focus on the experience of place by capturing movement or sound. The hanging, Lebbeus Woods–like structures of Lee Bul are an example, reflecting sunlight, the gallery, and viewers themselves.

The most effective installations are the most site specific. Miha Strukelj uses charcoal to draw on the walls and wires to extend the lines of perspective and structure into the space of the gallery. Kim Faler literally strips away the plaster walls of the museum to expose the brick behind and then builds it up again with studs fashioned from an intensely perfumed soap, warping under their own weight.

Whether Calvino's Polo told stories of far-away cities or simply reimagined his own Venice home, *Invisible Cities* encouraged readers to consider the relationships of people, places, and ideas like no other text. The installations of Mass MoCA's exhibition were inspired by the artists' home cities as far flung as Rome, Havana, Lagos, and Detroit, and like the book, cause us to rethink our own landscape.

Susannah Drake AIA, ASLA is the principal of dlandstudio and professor at the Cooper Union, where she also serves on the CU Institute for Sustainable Design.

RIGHT
Yuan Jiang, detail,
The Palace of Nine Perfections, 1691.
Courtesy the
Metropolitan Museum
of Art.

Chinese Gardens: Pavilions, Studios, Retreats

Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York City

August 18, 2012–January 6, 2013

Is Petrarch really the father of perspective drawing? One may wonder after viewing these 80 works on Chinese gardens. Extraordinary landscapes that recede into space in atmospheric haze, discrete details painted with masterful command of foreshortening, and theatrical compositions of color characterize many of the works painted over a 1,000-year period. The exhibition starts out

strong with Yuan Jiang's *Palace of Nine Perfections*—an extraordinary landscape painted on 12 hanging silk scrolls showing saturated colorful pavilions, courts, and terraces set in a sublime and powerful but generally monochrome Chinese landscape.

The show does not document gardens in a traditional sense and is not organized chronologically. Instead, the works suggest a poetic reading: Landscape and discrete elements created by natural and human means form a pathway to enlightenment. Fragments such as a rock, twisted branch, or plum blossom are equally carefully considered, each resonating with a larger metaphysical meaning.





Seen

Piscinas das Marés Leça Da Palmeira, Portugal

Ann Pitt is an associate professor at Wentworth Institute of Technology and an architect in Boston.

ABOVE
Leça swimming pools, with the ocean in the background. Photo: Juan Seguí Moreno.

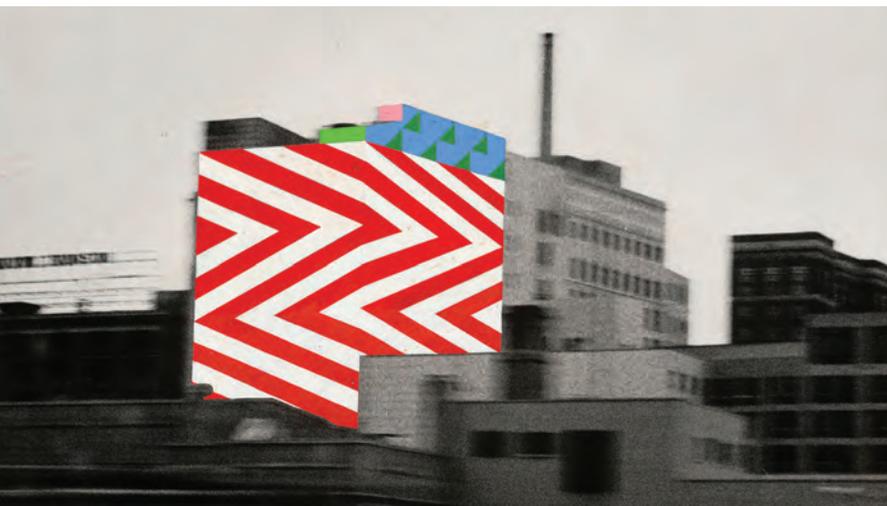
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See a slideshow at architectureboston.com

In September, 10 graduate students and I visited the Leça swimming pools, designed by Alvaro Siza. We traveled to the pools during our trip to Lisbon and Porto, Portugal, as part of a special topics studio at Boston's Wentworth Institute of Technology. Walking along the edge between the city and the sea, we caught glimpses of the pools and their relationship to the ocean. It was not until we moved along the sequence the architect had intended that we were able to understand and perceive the whole.

We descended down and entered the changing rooms, compressed and dark with low ceilings and tight walls. Suddenly the city was left behind, and we had no view of what was to come. As we continued along this

compressed threshold, the sky opened overhead. We followed a wall that blocked our view; only at its end did it open to reveal the pools set into the natural rock formations. The pools seemed to blend with the ocean as the water levels were at the same height. The pools and the ocean appeared as one, their boundaries blurred.

The fog lifted, the surf became higher, and waves began to break over the pools, mixing the manmade with the natural force of the ocean. We sat perched on the rocks, mesmerized by the waves crashing into the pools. We could imagine Siza walking along, surveying the rocks himself to decide which ones to use as defining moments and where to place his walls. His insight and nature's force were working as one.



ABOVE
The Museum of Modern Art, Jason Crum, *Project for a Painted Wall*, 1969.

Go See

Platforms of Power

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
September 29, 2012–March 31, 2013

9+1 Ways of Being Political: 50 Years of Political Stances in Architecture and Urban Design

Museum of Modern Art, New York City
September 12, 2012–March 25, 2013

In case the presidential election wasn't enough, a pair of politically inspired exhibitions is sure to satisfy the inner partisan in you. At the MFA, Daniel Rich explores the "link between architecture, nationalism, and political power" in a series of richly detailed paintings. MoMA tackles similar themes in an exhibition mounted from materials in its collection from the past 50 years. Is the political potential of architecture in reflecting the existing power structure or in challenging it? It's a question for discussion; no voting required.

Paved With Imagination

Preview by Ann Sussman

Ann Sussman is an architect and the ArtScape coordinator at the Bradford Mill, an artist and entrepreneurial zone in West Concord, Massachusetts.

RIGHT

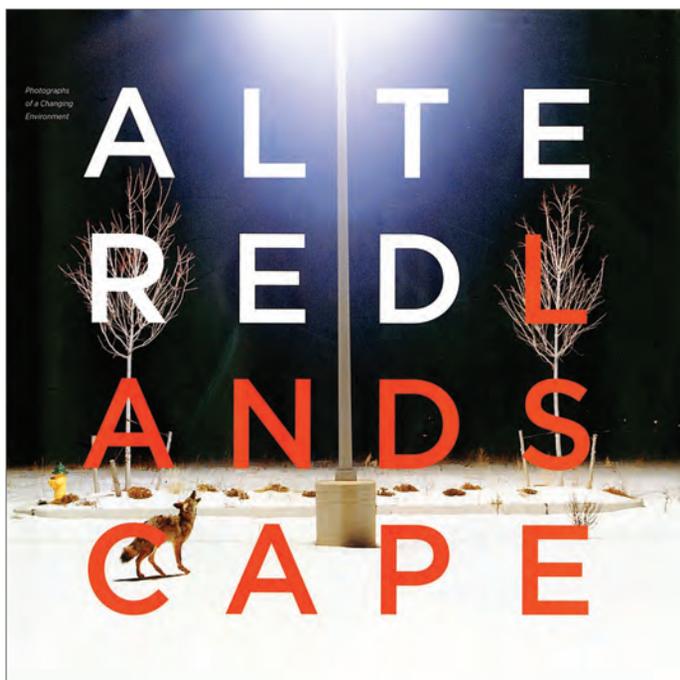
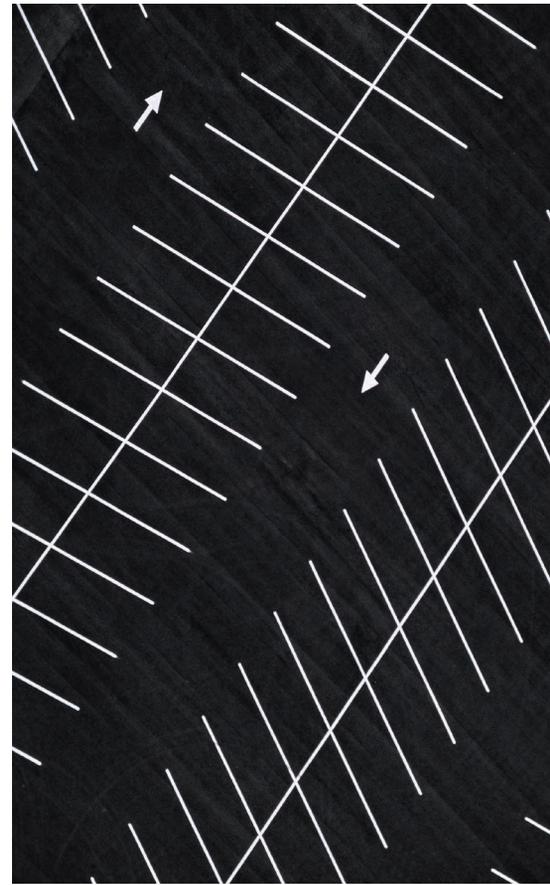
Parking Lot Markings, Taunton, Massachusetts (detail).
© 2012 Alex S. MacLean/Landslides.
www.alexmaclean.com

Julius Caesar created the first off-street parking laws to deal with congestion in Rome, and parking solutions have been paved with unintended consequences ever since. It's about time architects and developers were reminded that parking lots are not just for cars, they are for people, and worthy of more respect and design effort. Ubiquitous in our postwar landscape as ugly swaths of asphalt, surface parking lots in America today serve social and civic functions, too. Here you will find farmers markets, basketball games, teen parties, and even church services.

So believes Eran Ben-Joseph, professor of landscape architecture and planning at MIT, in *Rethinking a Lot: The Design and Culture of Parking*, with a certain urgency. There are, after all, an estimated 500 million surface parking spaces in the US—twice the number of vehicles—

and we keep building more of them, mostly of the uninspired variety. The hope is that with encouragement and raised awareness, more project proponents will push for lots that are integrated into a greater design scheme from the start and enhance the landscape as well as our lives.

Ben-Joseph presents many different ways to build lots. Many of the more progressive methods, with shade trees and grass pavers, are in Europe. He also offers a great deal of parking and zoning history to digest, which puts our current predicament in new light. Modern rules of thumb for determining parking ratios lead to parking oversupply by a factor of almost two, one study says. At root, the best lots require us to overcome ourselves and our split personality: at once mild-mannered pedestrians and power-obsessed drivers. Though still rare, peaceful coexistence is possible.



Focus: 50 Books, 50 Covers

These books are judged by their covers. Design Observer has joined forces with AIGA and Designers & Books in continuing one of the longest-running awards in graphic design. A panel of 35 design and publishing luminaries—along with the general public—submitted hundreds of nominations to this year's competition. Intriguing, inspiring, and chock-full of graphic elegance (and occasional wit), the books submitted provide evidence of how compelling the visual presentation of information can be.

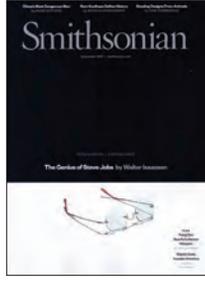
MORE ONLINE

See an online slideshow of selected architecture and design-related covers at architectureboston.com.

For more on 50 Books, 50 Covers, visit designobserver.com/50Books50Covers.

LEFT

The Altered Landscape: Photographs of a Changing Environment, edited by Ann M. Wolfe. Skira Rizzoli, 2011.



Covering the Issues

Gretchen Schneider AIA is the executive director of the Community Design Resource Center and the deputy editor of *ArchitectureBoston*.

Reduce, reuse, recycle... In this *Science* (August 10, 2012) issue on “working with waste,” a special collection of articles addresses where it comes from (construction is a top contributor), where it goes, how it differs by country, and how it might be reduced or redirected. Other pieces discuss new technologies that offer means to reuse waste materials, such as toilets that treat sewage at the source or concrete manufactured with carbon dioxide and seawater. From mapping strategies for household and municipal water reduction to the chemistry of metal recycling, there’s lots of fodder for the curious layperson and the well-versed researcher alike.

In praise of great design... As the Smithsonian’s Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum undergoes a complete renovation, *Smithsonian* magazine (September 2012) focuses attention on three leading figures in product design, art, and architecture. Steve Jobs, Ai Weiwei, and Rem Koolhaas all question how we use, think about, and navigate our environment. Biographer Walter Isaacson writes that Jobs was inspired by the architect Eichler and the inexpensive, modern tract houses of his youth. Mark Stevens suggests that Ai’s art works and collaborations challenge the design of China itself, and former *New York Times* architecture critic Nicolai Ouroussoff argues that Koolhaas, known for his provocative commentary on urbanism and preservation (and now the countryside), focuses where others haven’t yet, at once challenging and embracing the status quo. Lest that all get too heady, complementary pieces on pogo sticks, pink flamingos, and biomimicry suggest that there’s still lots of design fun to be had.

The end of the world as we know it?... We’ve been freaking out over end-times scenarios since 1843, and, well, we’re still standing. Things aren’t so bad, either. That’s Matt Ridley’s opening message in “Apocalypse Not,” the cover story for *Wired* (September 2012). Ridley organizes his crash course in doom predictions

into broad categories: chemicals, disease, population, and resources. As he addresses each in turn, Ridley provides a reality check. Neither 1960s DDT scares nor 1970s population doom scenarios panned out, just as air pollution didn’t kill urban dwellers, and acid rain hasn’t destroyed everything else. So should we disregard today’s tough talk on climate change? It’s too simple to ignore the debate, concludes Ridley, but solutions will come from innovation, not fear.

School daze... *Newsweek*’s cover story (September 17, 2012) questions the familiar four-year college experience: with rising costs, fewer jobs, and bigger loans, what is the value? For strong students, higher education ultimately still pays off. But for the average or almost average, it’s not clear. Are our increasingly luxurious campuses graduating too many unemployable kids? Meanwhile, *Boston* magazine (September 2012) provides an alternative future: knowledge matters more than a diploma. In “School’s Out, Forever,” Chris Vogel profiles the recent online-education efforts of Harvard and MIT to educate a billion people globally via the Internet, suggesting that higher education is on the cusp of massive change. Many Boston-area architects work in higher education—either as teachers in the numerous design programs or as designers of academic spaces across the world. Maybe it’s time for us all to go back to school.

Art and space... *ArtForum* (October 2012) offers a thought-provoking discussion on the interaction between art and architecture. Critics Hal Foster and Sylvia Lavin; artists Thomas Demand, Hilary Lloyd, and Dorit Margreiter; architects Steven Holl and Philippe Rahm; and curator Hans Ulrich Obrist all weigh in. This wide-ranging conversation touches on the various ways that museums and galleries support and inspire art, models of collaboration between artists and architects, the exploration of materials, the prospect of spectacle, and the role of public sentiment. Beautiful.

Love Podium

Dan Peterman, PLATFORM 10

deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum
Lincoln, Massachusetts

Inaugural event, September 15, 2012

Installation on view September 2, 2012–October 1, 2013

During election season, candidates speak and analysts give insights. As shortcomings and triumphs of political opponents are revealed, it often becomes difficult to sort through the abundance of information. Perhaps nothing encapsulates this situation better than Dan Peterman's latest art work, *Love Podium*, inspired by the recent presidential election season.

The installation is one piece of the PLATFORM series of shows at the deCordova in which artists are asked to present work that responds to the museum's spaces. Peterman's sculpture is a gray platform made from reused plastic, and on it are two podiums facing outward, in opposite directions. Perfectly situated on the entrance plaza of the museum, it becomes a stand for visitor debates, transforming the plaza into a powerful theater filled with intense social interaction.

The deCordova inaugurated the sculpture on September 15 with help from members of the local community, who were invited to step onto the podium and read aloud their opposing views on a topic. Lexington High School debate-team members were some of the first to engage in lively performance. Two senior debaters—Jerry Chen and Adam Hoffman—stood back to back on the platform and simultaneously read opposing speeches on the subject "Resolved: The United States ought to extend to noncitizens accused of terrorism the same constitutional due-process protections it grants to citizens."

Experiencing *Love Podium* during one of these opening debates is revelatory for speakers and listeners alike. As onlookers walk around the sculpture, listening becomes crucial in order to discern between the two speeches. For participants, the performance becomes practice in learning how to remain focused during times of distraction.

Love Podium is a successful platform for engagement and community building. More important, Peterman's piece is a perfect commentary on the latest political discourse. As visitors recite a variety of texts and struggle to listen, they come away from the experience more aware of the range of perspectives and values that make up this country. They are also encouraged to truly consider a dark side—what it means to speak without being heard and the problems that can arise from a deeply divided public.

Melissa A. Simonetti is a Master of Design Studies candidate at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design.

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