

ROSA BARBA PRIZE 2014

Selection, discussions and choice of the jury

Introduction of the jury

We, members of this international jury, feel very honored to have been invited to participate in this jury for such a prestigious prize in the realm of landscape architecture which this time has gone global after 7 editions being an solely European Prize.

We had, I must say, a very cooperative jury that listened to each others arguments and emotions tentatively and sensitively for which I am very grateful.

May I briefly introduce them, so the finalist know who evaluated their projects and the public knows who is responsible for the final choice:

Desirée Martinez, Mexican, landscape architect, living and working in Mexico City, educated in Munich and former president of IFLA.

Sue Anne Ware , American, landscape architect, living and working in Melbourne, Australia

Ricard Pié Ninot, Spanish, maybe i should say Catalan, Urban planner, living and working in Barcelona and husband of the late Rosa Barba whose name is connected with this prestigious prize.

Manel Colominas, Spanish, agronomist, living and teaching at the UPC in Barcelona,

Martí Franch Batillori, landscape architect, living and working in Girona and the winner of the Rosa Barba Prize 2012 with the exceptional project of Cap Cruz both from a landscape architectural as commissioners point of view.

I am Michael van Gessel, Dutch, landscape architect and urban planner, living and working in the Amsterdam

Selection of the 11 finalist from 427 submissions

In June the jury deliberated for 5 hours by Skype to select 11 finalist from the 427 entries. From all over the world and mostly of good quality. It is very positive to see that the profession is developing so well, world wide.

We did not look at who made the projects, neither from which country they came, but solely at the projects themselves.

What we thought was important was:

- the sort of commission. Was it exceptional? Did it give a new direction in our profession? Was it a high profile commission or a humble grassroots project? We had a great sympathy for low key, bottom up, low cost interventions. They are often the most difficult to achieve.
- We looked at differences in scale and intricacy
- At a strong identity and powerful design, which often means restraint in design

- And at projects that were humble and fitting

With these criteria in mind we chose the most exceptional ones.

Presentations

Those eleven were presented yesterday. A marathon of information. Strangely enough not always completely comprehensible. It seems somehow difficult to just analyze the commission, show the previous situation and the result of the intervention and to simply show the plan and explain it in comprehensive diagrams before elaborating on all sorts of theories and philosophies. Only few did that. For these, mostly very experienced landscape architects, that was quite amazing to notice.

Procedure within the jury

To be able to focus the discussions as quickly as possible I started our deliberations by asking every individual member of the jury to choose three finalists that they thought merited the prize.

From this exercise six projects surfaced as possible candidates in the chronology of their presentation:

Qunli stormwater park, Harbin, China by Kongjian Yu

Thermas Geométricas, Parque nacional Villarrica, Chile, by Germán del Sol Guzman

Making Space in Dalston, London, United Kingdom, by Jo Gibbons and Liza Fior

Auckland Waterfront, New Zealand, by Perry Lethlean

Landscape restoration of the Vall d'en Joan landfill, Garraf, Spain by Enric Batlle

Highline, New York, USA, by James Corner, Diller, Scofidio + Renfro and Piet Oudolf.

I am sorry, the rest, the other five, failed to get in and were not any more discussed.

The 6 selected

I will elaborate on the pro and con's of these six candidates for the prize taken from the presentations and the discussion in the jury.

Qunli Stormwater Park

A powerful idea and a holistic way to solve floodproblems in cities. A 33 hectare large green sponge with a perific park that takes in the stormwater to avoid floods in the surrounding densily populated city.

The concept is strong.

Not an ornamental park that occasionally can be flooded, but a natural marshland for everybody to enjoy from an intricating network of paths and pavillions at different levels around the edge. In that way balancing the city and the original landscape.

What the jury wonders about is how people get there. All images show a very small amount of people and an edge surrounded by broad for pedestrians uncrossible avenues. How do all these inhabitants in these highrises around the park get there?

The designer does not give a clue.

The fact that the designer advocates to copy this concept of floodmanagement anywhere and everywhere is new in landscape architecture and gives it a breath of

air. It is replicable and simple. Like repeating globally the well thought through concept of a shopping mall.

Thermas Geometricas.

Two jury members have been there one of them me. The images shown in the presentation are exactly how it is: a very spiritual place, a refined and seductive canyon with an environment of water in all forms and temperatures. Not a new sort of assignment but excellently designed and very simply made. A very poetic intervention in nature that is enhanced by the development of the lush vegetation and the cultural interventions into nature.

Truly giving splendor to pleasure.

Making Place in Dalston

From the beginning of the selection process the jury was very sympathetic towards this exceptional project where landscape architects shaped their own assignment by convincing the authorities of the values and qualities of the existing neighborhood, of the effectiveness of nurturing these qualities and possibilities and of defining what was missing. This project is very good at combining politics with people and the profession. This low key, low cost project with an enormous effect on a socially and economically deprived area is of great value for our profession that should not only be answering to prestigious projects with high investments or to desires of embellishing our environment but should also sensitively be of service to those who need improvement in their environment most.

Auckland Waterfront

The jury was surprised by the clear and insightful presentation of this modest project and impressed by what the landscape architects had achieved seeing the urban Masterplan that was the starting point of their assignment. To convince politicians not to demolish derelict industrial artefacts is one thing, but to convince them also to keep the fishtrawlers and other harbor uses in place instead of pushing them elsewhere for the benefit of a touristic waterfront is something else. That would have taken away the very life out the harbor. In most of these developments around the world the soul and very essence of the harbor is lost to avoid frictions with the present use and give room to a fake commercial and touristic world that has little to do with the maritime site they landed in.

Not here. The life, tradition and essence of the harbor, its function as a working harbor, is kept and it that way the project is very site specific and effective.

Smaller and larger interventions end up contributing to a whole that is more than the some of its parts.

The elaboration and detailing of certain parts of this project is however somewhat overdesigned, somewhat 'perfumed' and unnecessary in this conceptually strong strategy for a robust, no nonsense and masculin world.

Landscape restoration of the Vall d'en Joan Landfill.

A beautiful and convincing project were the valley is returned to some form of agriculture system of farming. It is due to these landscape architects that the filled up valley is not embellished and 'softened' by false landscaping but by well defined and functional terracing reminiscent of a previous landscape but obviously not a copy of

it. It is a pity that in the end these unnecessary gabions of rubbish were added in a very designed manner. Suddenly it becomes parkish instead of landscape.

The Highline in New York

The jury acknowledges the enormous impact this project has on the profession and its visibility as a profession. This transformation of the risen and derelict railroad track to a promenade for its citizens and visitors is breathtaking and a real victory for 'The friends of the Highline'.

The beauty of the original intervention, the combelike paving pattern and the planting by Piet Oudolf is brilliant. It is simple, strong and it works. The highline is undoubtedly a great success.

From the point of view of the profession it also has its weaker points.

James Corner pointed them out in his presentation. His project promises melancholia, a sense of nature in the city, nurturing rather than erasing the existing and in that way a subtle transformation, but ends up being extremely sophisticated in design and maintenance and all about a high urban profile, a huge investment and hard core real estate business.

The project surely did not keep to his original intention of being simple and wild. In that way it did not fulfill its promise.

The original idea of a promenade with an identity close to that of the existing romantic derelict and overgrown railroad track has been weakened by the introduction of an 'episodic journey' with amphitheaters, pine tree groves in planters, water

features, raised meadows, etc The promendae becomes a park and loses its original simplicity and authenticity.

No wonder the last bit of the track is so popular: a simple path along the original tracks with unsophisticated natural vegetation.

The 4 selected

After hearing and intensive discussion with all jury members exchanging arguments pro and contra the selected six projects, every individual jury member had to select two possible candidates for the Prize. From this evolved four remaining projects, again in chronology of their presentation:

- Qunli Stormwater Park
- Auckland Waterfront
- Garraf landfill
- and the Highline

The discussions started all over again. In this episode the Auckland Waterfront emerged as a just as successful transformation as the Highline but at a much more human scale both from the point of view of use as from the point of view of investment and maintenance.

Qunli Stormwater Park emerged as clever, both in design and function and as a good example not of 'what' we make but 'how' we make it as Germán del Sol pointed out in his presentation yesterday.

The discussion now really concentrated around these two projects as Qunli Stormwater Park and the Auckland Waterfront clearly had most votes. So we had a winner and a runner up. We then decided that each jury member had to choose one of the two.

I will come to the long awaited result in a short while, but not before elaborating on what message the jury wanted to convey to the outer world.

The choice and message the jury wants to convey

The jury wanted to convey a message of landscape architecture as a strategic discipline. A discipline that should question the demands and questions put to them. A profession that needs to be strong and robust but at the same time humble and sensitive.

The jury also wanted a winner that fit the chosen theme for this 2014 biennale 'A landscape for you'.

And as it is the first time the Rosa Barba Prize goes global the jury would prefer a non European project. But both candidates that were left were non European so that was not any more an issue.

The jury finally choose for the Auckland Waterfront as the project deserving this prestigious prize.

But I must stress that that decision was not made unanimously but by majority of four against two. Nevertheless I congratulate the Auckland Waterfront Projectteam with winning the Rosa Barba Prize.

We, as the jury, thank all finalist for their efforts to come and present their projects and in that way highlighting our profession in such a passionate way.

We really appreciated that effort and thank everybody for their attention.

Thank you and good evening.

Barcelona, Friday September 26th, 2014

Michael van Gessel, President of the Rosa Barba Jury