

JURY REPORT

ROSA BARBA PRIZE, BARCELONA, 2016

JAMES CORNER, JURY PRESIDENT

On behalf of the Jury, if not everybody here, I would first like to thank the Conference organizers, in particular, Marina Cervera Alonso de Medina. The Barcelona Biennial has grown to become one of the fields most prestigious and important conferences; it is extremely well organized, with an exciting agenda and distinguished roster of speakers and events; all set within a gorgeous city. So, well done Marina and team – this has been an extraordinary and inspiring event. Thank you very much for hosting us.

Second, I would like to thank the Rosa Barba jury members who joined me this year: Kathryn Moore; Anuradha Mathur; Manuel Ruisanchez, and Eduardo Cadaval. It has been a privilege and an honor to serve with such distinguished colleagues, each of whom brought incredible seriousness, commitment, intelligence and professionalism to the task of jurying the Rosa Barba Award this year. We stayed up very late last night, discussing and deliberating, as making this decision was not at all easy. We have some amazing finalists, many of whom are close friends and colleagues, and to whom we may have to explain our decision in great detail, not matter how unsatisfactory that may be to some of them! Nonetheless, a big thank you to my fellow jury members for your great thoughtfulness and care in deliberating this.

And third, I would like to thank the finalists who presented their projects yesterday. These are some of the field's most important and visible practitioners, from all around the world, who are each leading and advancing the field in various, new and exciting directions. This is truly a world-class short-list. I found yesterday's presentations to be particularly inspiring – it made me proud to be a landscape architect, seeing such compelling projects described with great clarity and conviction by the designers.

On behalf of all of us here, I am sincerely grateful to all ten presenters yesterday, and wish to congratulate each of them on their exemplary work. Deepest thanks to each of you, and congratulations on being a Finalist.

II.

When the jury reviewed the more than 300 projects that were submitted this year, we decided to nominate only those projects that we thought could actually win the Rosa Barba Prize. We did not look to create a comprehensive range or representative sampling, but rather nominated projects that stood on their own merit and could easily be the winner because of their content and excellence. And after yesterday's presentations, we feel that we have, in fact, ten winners. We found it very difficult to even begin to parse out and rank the projects, for each project is excellent on its own terms – that is to say, that given the specificity of each site, client, program, brief, budget and scope, each project responds with creativity and inventiveness to their own particular situation. It is therefore not easy to criticize or find weaknesses in the projects, because each is so bound up into its own specific set of circumstances.

One of the recurrent themes that the ten projects so compellingly conveys is the capacity for landscape architecture to transform derelict, challenging and degraded sites into radically revitalized places -- revitalized in terms both ecological and social. The transformation is powerful and real. New life, energy, vitality, beauty and potential are brought to previously hopeless situations. In the case of the ten projects we saw yesterday, these transformations work on so many different levels: environmental, cultural, experiential, economic and political. They demonstrate design less as stylization and excess, and more as a smart economy of means to achieve maximum effect. There is a simplicity, authenticity and deep intelligence as work, mediating many complex issues simultaneously. The designers make

the projects look easy and simple, whereas in reality there is much complexity to be overcome to achieve such seamlessly flawless results.

So, with so much excellence in front of us, the jury had to work through a set of criteria in order to decide a winner. First, of course, beauty, imagination and design. Well, in different ways we saw this in all of the projects – perhaps more obviously in projects like HNS’s very powerfully beautiful and intelligent LandArtPark, or SWA’s richly textured River Forest Island, for example, but frankly all the projects showed incredibly beautiful design, albeit of varied character and style, specific to their situation.

We could add conceptual depth, poetics and philosophy to the beauty criteria, and George Descombes River Aire project in Geneva, dealing with memory, site, hydrological process and the passage of time would clearly be deserving; or Catherine Mosbach’s Parc Louvre Lens, with its evolutionary structure, micro-organisms, drips and blobs upon a hauntingly stark surface -- both stand out as extraordinarily provocative, thoughtful and compelling projects.

Add cultural and social dimensions, and perhaps Topotek’s Superkilen project would rise to the fore, with its focus upon cultural identity, immigration politics and social pluralism in cities, designed with fun, humor and intelligence; or Peter Walker’s Barangaroo Reserve, with its focus upon native peoples, historical origins and natural features, beautifully detailed

and built; or Sacha Cole's Goods Line, bringing renewed vitality to an abandoned area in Sydney, with bold design, care and attention.

Add ecological performance and environmental significance and of course Kongjian Yu's amazing Yanweizhou Park impresses, along with his audaciousness of scale, transformation, ambition and achievement; or LAB's visionary Bangkok Urban reforestation project; or Hargreaves transformational Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in East London. These are three projects that foreground the transformative capacity of landscape architecture to work at large scales with complex multi-disciplinary situations, producing design that is both fixed and specific yet at the same time evolving resiliently and adaptively. These are obviously projects that go beyond traditional notions of landscape as aesthetic medium and point toward engaging with bigger issues of urbanism, environment, remediation and infrastructure.

At this point it became clear to the jury that scope and range might perhaps be a distinguishing characteristic of great importance. Which project dealt with the greatest scope and complexity, and resolved all of this with intelligent and beautiful design prowess? Which project showed the greatest range in terms of scope, deftly orchestrating engineering, horticulture, ecology, economics, programming and place-making? Which project was the most transformative of its broader context?

Based on our discussions around these criteria, the jury unanimously elected to award this year's Rosa Barba prize to Hargreaves Associates Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in East London.

This 274-acre project reflects landscape architecture at its highest level of professionalism. It shows landscape architecture in its fullest range and breadth of scope:

--it is masterfully designed, culturally specific and beautiful, delivered on a very fast-track schedule and limited budget;

--it is technically proficient, innovative in terms of technology and detail, and built for both adaptive resilience and durability over time;

--it demonstrates landscape architects "leading the way" in a multi-disciplinary and complex project, where the new park is the center-piece;

--it showcases the design of the park as a complex urban system; a system of pathways, hydrologies, habitats, programs and public places, with great variety and range;

--it shows broad yet precise and expert range in terms of infrastructure, engineering, hydrology, earthwork shaping, horticulture, ecology, place-making, form-giving, detailing, programming and social engagement;

--but most importantly, it is massively transformative, taking a huge segment of east London that was seriously contaminated, economically in decline and socially marginalized, and remediating the land, creating a vibrant new public realm as the main focus of renewal. This project is less about the design of a park for the Olympic games and more about the design of a park for

transforming its broader urban context over time. Designed as a system, it is the DNA behind transformation; it is a design strategy to spawn, sponsor and support future emergent programs, activities and ecologies.

--It is not just a landscape project, working with earth, water, plants and ecosystems, but also an urbanistic project, with landscape engaging with urbanism, transportation, infrastructure and development. It is strategic, holistic, catalytic and intelligent. It remediates, transforms and activates. It is a remarkable achievement given the challenging constraints and forces at work across that huge site.

For these reasons, the jury voted unanimously to recognize, showcase and premiate the Queen Elizabeth Park project for its design excellence in the context of larger urbanistic ambitions. It points to prioritizing well-designed public realm parkland and environmental remediation as the primary center-pieces for urban re-development, and is an example of landscape architects “leading the way” through complex multi-disciplinary projects.

On behalf of the Jury, I am delighted to award the 2016 Rosa Barba Prize to Hargreaves Associates for their Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park project. Congratulations!

James Corner

Rosa Barba Prize Jury President, 2016

Notes:

1. The Client for the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park was the London Olympic Delivery Authority. The Park design began in 2008 and opened in 2012. The 274-acre site is the largest new park created in Europe since the 1860's.
2. The Park was designed to be spectacular on opening day of the Games, but also for its after-life as a transformative feature catalyzing new urban development and the regeneration of surrounding communities.
3. Hargreaves Associates collaborators included LDA Design; Sarah Price; Dr Peter Shepard; Dr Nigel Dunnett and James Hitchmough.
4. After the Games were completed in 2012, the Queen Elizabeth Park transformation master-plan is being developed by the Legacy Development Corporation through open competitions for different areas within and beyond the park.