

# บทความปริทรรศน์: แนวคิดทางสุนทรียศาสตร์ในศตวรรษที่ 18 และความสัมพันธ์กับภูมิสถาปัตยกรรมและศิลปะเพื่อสิ่งแวดล้อม

## Article Review: The 18<sup>th</sup> Century Aesthetics and Their Associations with Landscape Architecture and Environmental Art

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### บทคัดย่อ

แนวคิดทางสุนทรียศาสตร์ที่สำคัญสามประการที่เกิดขึ้นภายใต้บริบทของปรัชญาในช่วงศตวรรษที่ 18 คือ ความงามตามนุน ความตื่นตะลึงความงามดั่งภาพแนวคิดทั้งสามนี้บ่งบอกถึงประสบการณ์ที่มีความหมายเชิงสุนทรียภาพที่หลักหลาย บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อทบทวนที่มาทางประวัติศาสตร์ของสุนทรียภาพทั้งสามนี้และความเกี่ยวข้องกับภูมิสถาปัตยกรรมและศิลปะสิ่งแวดล้อม ซึ่งเป็นศาสตร์ที่เกี่ยวกับการกำหนดรูปแบบพื้นที่และสิ่งแวดล้อม นอกจากนี้ บทความยังอภิปรายถึงความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างการออกแบบทางภูมิสถาปัตยกรรมแบบอังกฤษซึ่งผลงานแนวคิดทางสุนทรียภาพทั้งสามในการออกแบบ และการออกแบบเชิงนิเวศน์ แนวคิดทางภูมิสถาปัตยกรรมสมัยใหม่นำโดย Ian McHarg ในศตวรรษที่ 1960 บทความวิพากษ์นี้สรุปความโดยการอภิปรายการเรียนรู้ในอดีตและแนวทางการออกแบบภูมิสถาปัตยกรรมที่ควรถูกพัฒนาในอนาคต

### คำสำคัญ

สุนทรียศาสตร์

ความงามตามนุน

ความตื่นตะลึง

ความงามดั่งภาพ

ภูมิสถาปัตยกรรม

ศิลปะเพื่อสิ่งแวดล้อม

## **Abstract**

The beautiful, the sublime, and the picturesque were three key concepts of aesthetics originated in philosophical context of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Together, they outlined the variety of aesthetically significant experiences. The article aims to review historical roots of the three aesthetics and how they were associated with landscape architecture and environmental art, both of which concerned with shaping the land and environment. Subsequently, the article discusses associations between the English Landscape School - landscape architecture embraced by the 18<sup>th</sup> century three aesthetics and the ecological design - modern landscape architectural design theme primarily dominated by Ian McHarg in the 1960s. Conclusively, the article critically discussed lessons learned from the associations and how landscape architecture should be shaped forward.

## **Keywords**

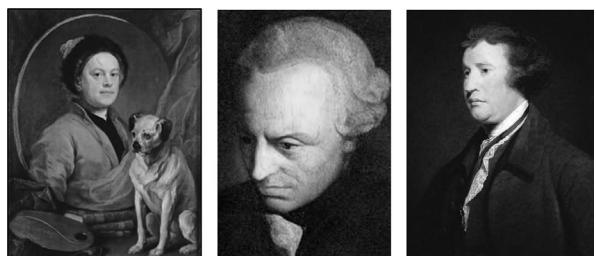
Aesthetics  
the Beautiful  
the Sublime  
the Picturesque  
Landscape Architecture  
Environmental Art

## 1. Historical Background

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ideas of nature and romantic attitudes had a profound influence across Europe. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, William Hogarth (1697–1764) an eminent English painter, differentiated the appreciation of beauty from rationality in his 1753 book *The Analysis of Beauty* (Thompson, 1999) (Figure 1). Latterly, two aesthetic categories received further analysis by Edmund Burke (1729–1797), a significant philosopher. In his famous essay, *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Burke examined how sensation, imagination and judgement are interrelated in the experience of art, and how pleasure and pain are represented by the aesthetic concepts of the sublime and the beautiful (Kelly, 1998). Burke described the sublime as being the cause of strong emotions such as pain, fear or terror, which the individual is capable of feeling (Moore, 1990). Therefore, for Burke, the sublime represents feelings of solitude, vastness, terror, or the power of the instinct of self-preservation (Strelow & David, 2004). The beautiful, on the other hand, is defined as a quality, which inspires the individual to feel affection towards it (Moore, 1990). For Burke, the beautiful may not be caused by symmetry, or by balanced scale and proportion. Any objects that differ in their degree of balance and proportion could also be described as beautiful. Thus, the beautiful aesthetic stands for the quality of smoothness, gentleness, and delicacy (Strelow & David, 2004).

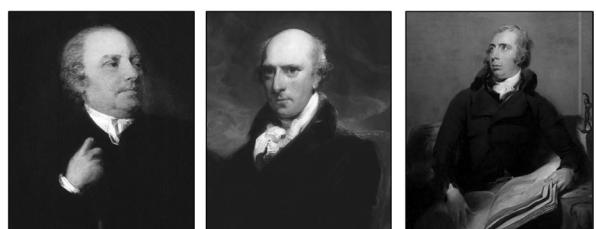
In his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), Immanuel Kant (1704–1824) an eminent German philosopher subsequently argued against Burke by identifying the differences between the sublime and the beautiful (Kelly, 1998). Kant's sublime was determined by a subjective judgment but removed the original intent of an author or artist as a factor in judging the aesthetic power or value of the object. However, Kant applied the sublime solely to nature because, in

hisview, there was no artist of nature. Therefore, the natural sublime provided a pure aesthetic judgment. As for the beautiful, Kant generally agreed with Burke's notion of truth, goodness and taste. The sublime and the beautiful were interpreted variously by several eighteenth-century thinkers. However, Burke's interpretation of the two aesthetic categories remains relevant in the 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophical currency (Litton, 1972).



Source: National Gallery, 2019

Figure 1. William Hogarth, Immanuel Kant & Edmund Burke



Source: National Gallery, 2019

Figure 2. Willima Gilpin, Uvedale Price, Richard Pyne Knight

The third aesthetic category, the picturesque – which is neither serene, like the beautiful, nor awe-inspiring, like the sublime was later introduced by English artist, and writer William Gilpin (1724–1804) to describe the missing characters of roughness and sudden variation joined to irregularity appearing in landscape paintings, especially those of landscape painters Jan van Goyen (1596–1656), Claude Lorrain (1600–1682), Salvator Rosa (1615–1673), Gaspard Dughet (1615–1675) and Jacob van Ruisdael (1629–1682) (Figure 3) (Thompson, 2014). The interpretation of picturesque was a major subject of debate among scholars, who were particularly interested in landscapes at that time (Batey, 1994). A renown British writer and land-owner Uvedale Price



Source: Web Gallery of Art (2019)

**Figure 3.** Paintings by Claude Lorrain. *Imaginary View of Delphi with a Procession* (1673) (left) *A Sunset or Landscape with ArgusGuarding Io* (C.17th) (middle) Nicolas Poussin's *Landscape with Diogenes* (1647) (right)

(1747–1829) literally described the picturesque as like a picture in his essay *The Picturesque* (1794). Price found a supporter in Richard Payne Knight (1750–1824), a significant scholar, who depicted a competing view of the Picturesque in *The Landscape: A Didactic Poem* (1794) and *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* (1805) (Strelow & David, 2004). Although he agreed with Price that it was largely aesthetic or objective qualities that created an effect of the picturesque, Knight pointed out that there were also contributions of non-aesthetic elements. These elements functioned psychologically, arousing multiple ideas and associations. The picturesque was later generally accepted as being essentially an aesthetic concerned with sensibility, linked to notions of pleasing the eyes with compositions reminiscent of those in paintings (Herrington, 2006). Both Price and Knight, however, excluded the philosophical psychology underlying Edmund Burke's the sublime and the beautiful, which is the relation of pleasure to fundamental individual and social human desires (Strelow & David, 2004).

## 2. Associations with Landscape Architecture

Origin of the English Landscape School was inseparably linked together with the three aesthetics. The English Landscape School developed in against to geometry and formality of French landscape were generally of naturalistic irregularity representing its creations as a close approximation to nature. The

two aesthetic categories, the Beautiful and the Picturesque, were related to widespread practice in landscape architectural design. The first practice was the 'Beautiful landscape', which is also known as 'Brownian landscape' in honour of its best-remembered practitioner, Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, who was praised for his great ability in reading and transforming the land. According to Birksted (2004). Brown was inspired by the Arcadian landscape paintings of Claude Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin. The naturalistic smoothness and gentleness of the Beautiful aesthetic were transformed into landscape design (Thompson, 2014). The Beautiful landscapes were presented in the form of a large smooth open grassy area with a small constructed river running through the landscapes, a river dam, and individual trees or clumps of trees scattered in the parkland. Brown was responsible for over 200 gardens surrounding the finest country estates in Britain (Birksted, 2004). Brown's landscapes were criticised, both for destroying formal gardens, and in other instances, for not going far enough towards nature. Picturesque theorists thought Brown's work was too smooth and vapid. Nevertheless, Brown was recognised as a genius of English garden design. Humphrey Repton was the last great English landscape designer of the eighteenth century and was often regarded as the successor to Brown (Sweeting, 1996). The Beautiful landscapes are as presented (Figure 4).



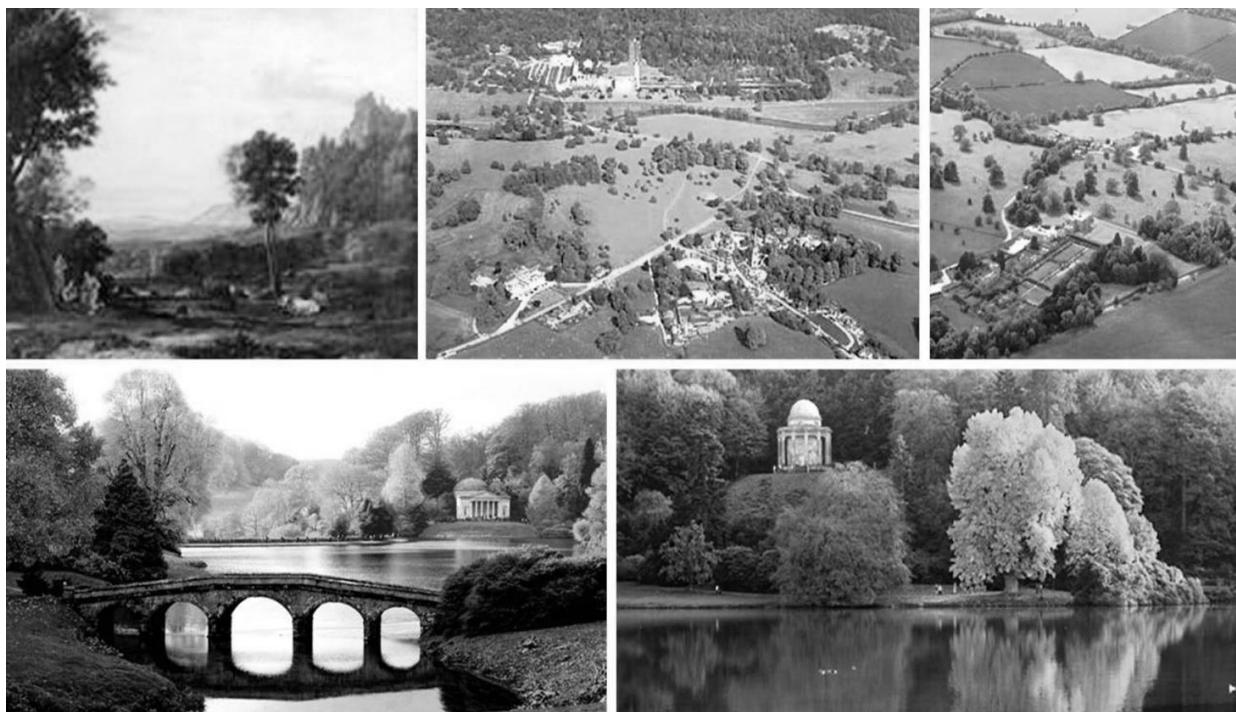
Source: Steenbergen and Reh (2003)

Figure 4. Castle Howard garden (1701-1853) and Castle Braham garden (around 1698)

The second practice is the Picturesque landscape, which was designed and constructed to look like Picturesque paintings and scenery (Tatum, 1951). In Picturesque paintings, certain views and landscape scenery must be viewed and observed from certain privileged vantage points. Comparable to Picturesque paintings, Picturesque landscapes were metaphorically constructed as a series of framed static compositions and scenery viewed from specific vantage points in the actual landscapes. The Picturesque designers composed elements in nature as if they were artworks (Birksted, 2004). As a final product, Picturesque landscapes usually look rough with an irregular resemblance to nature. Townsend (1997) noted that the distinction between the existing natural element and the designed landscape was blurry. Its signature includes the construction of amphitheatres, curving paths through grass hills, and the arrangement of trees into clumps to frame natural scenes (*ibid*). The artist-trained William Kent was among the first to practice Picturesque landscaping. Kent created gardens at Rousham Hall in Oxfordshire, and Stowe House in Buckinghamshire, where pathway opening vistas lead to small classical temples in informal wooded areas. However, the Stourhead garden in Wiltshire, which was considered as an icon

of the eighteenth- century Picturesque gardens, was designed by Henry Hoare. Picturesque paintings and landscapes in Figure 5.

Though the landscape design was English's creation, it became an international style, widely applied extensively in Europe. In the nineteenth century, the Beautiful and the Picturesque were conveyed to the United States, but with different manifestations and interpretations from those in the UK (Sweeting, 1996). Tatum (1951) noted that Robert Downing Jr. re-characterised the two British aesthetics as essentially the opposite of each other. Inspired by Greek architectural style, Downing redefined the Beautiful as symmetry, balance, and order. The Beautiful landscapes were thus expressed in perfection of form with balance or symmetrical groups of trees such as elm and ash. On the other hand, the Picturesque, usually represented as the British countryside, was replaced with the cultural pastoral view and American wilderness, which embodied national aspirations and represented democratic values in the United States. Thus, Picturesque landscapes were achieved through the use of groups of rock and a great variety of shapes and species of planted trees and pines (*ibid*). In this way, a Picturesque effect would be wilder, less well trimmed,



Source: Steenbergen and Reh (2003)

**Figure 5.** Claude Lorrain's *Pastoral Landscape* (1645), Chatsworth garden (around 1840), Rousham garden (1715-1726) and Stourhead Garden (around 1740)

and not as frequently maintained as in a Beautiful landscape. Pregill and Volkman (1993) noted that both the adapted English landscapes were carried through the works of Frederick Law Olmsted and his partner Calvert Vaux, including their masterpiece, Central Park, New York, which became the template for design in western culture. The traditions of the Beautiful and Picturesque landscape were hugely influential throughout Europe and North America in the 19 - 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (ibid) and recognized as 'the English Landscape School'.

### 3. Associations with Environmental Art

The three aesthetics of the beautiful, the sublime and the picturesque, reconnected with art again in the 1960s with works of environmental artists including Robert Smithson, James Pierce and Walter De Maria. According to Martin (2011), Robert Smithson was so deeply sympathetic to aesthetic investigation in the 18<sup>th</sup> century that he travelled to England in 1969 to visit the English landscape and make a study of the work of Price and Gilpin in Britain and the

extension of their ideas to Olmsted in America. In Smithson's article "*Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape*" (1979), Smithson placed environmental art in the context of eighteenth century English and French landscape. In Smithson's view, environmental art was a continuation of landscape design, which could act to resolve social conflict (Martin, 2011). His essay also discussed the notions of Price's idea of the picturesque, which accepted the ongoing changes of nature and attempted to develop pragmatic views of the landscapes based on actual experience and real land (Graziani, 2004). According to Martin (2011), Smithson saw Olmsted's Central Park as 'a product of phenomenological intervention on a site'. Olmsted cooperated with the natural processes of the centre of Manhattan Island, including its sedimentation, deposition and erosion, in his Central Park design (Martin, 2011). Smithson took Olmsted's phenomenological method further in his series of *Site and Non-Site* artworks. The art slipped into an undifferentiated state, which allows the materials of the site to structure the sensing experience of sight (Commandeur & Riemsdijk-



Source: Beardsley (1998)

Figure 6. Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty (1970)

Zandee, 2012). Kastner (1998) noted that Smithson also expanded on this idea in his masterpiece *Spiral Jetty* (1970), which is located in the Great Salt Lake. The *Spiral Jetty* is a 5-meter wide coil of black basalt rocks gathered from the site that stretches more than approximately 460 meters into the lake (ibid). Walking on the eroded path and physical disorder between the *Spiral Jetty* and the condensed saline water of the Great Salt Lake creates the experience of a collapse between subject and object consciousness (Martin 2011). The aspect of the picturesque which impels its audience to view the site from certain points of view is also included in the *Spiral Jetty* (ibid). Beardsley (1998) remarked that Smithson later recognized the limitations of the picturesque and replaced the idea with the post-industrial style, which accepted human disruption of the landscape and celebrated its renewal though reclamation works. Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* are as presented in Figure 6. Beardsley (1998) noted that the picturesque aesthetic finds its strongest expression in the works of environmental artist James Pierce, who attempted to combine the visual values of the picturesque with its associative elements. Between 1970 and 1982, James Pierce created *Pratt Farm* as a garden of history containing approximately twenty distinct pieces of environmental artworks on the seventeen acres of meadow and woodland in Central Maine (Center for Land Use Interpretation, 2015). The first piece was the triangular and circular turf mounds named 'the British' and 'the French', created in similar fashion to the crude fortifications used in North America by the

British and French in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Beardsley, 1998). *Pratt Farm* is referred to as a garden of history referenced in forms which range from the prehistoric, such as tombs and burial mounds, to more recent historical representations. Kastner (1998) noted that between 1976 and 1978, Pierce created *Earthwoman*, inspired by the prehistoric Venus of Willendorf, in the central area of the garden (Beardsley, 1998). The *Earthwoman*, lying face down and thirty feet long and five feet high, is orientated to the sunrise on the summer solstice, in such a way that the sun rises through her body in a symbolic fertilisation (ibid). Pierce's *Pratt Farm* and *Earthwoman* are as presented (Figure 7).

Manifestation of the sublime could be experienced in Walter De Maria's *the Lightning Field* (1977) (Figure 8), in New Mexico (Beardsley, 1998). The *Lightning Field* is composed of 400 stainless steel poles at a height of 20 feet, precisely arranged in a grid of 16 rows of 25 poles (ibid). Kastner (1998) remarked that it was originally built as a lightning conductor during storms, and audiences could capture and experience the feeling of the sublime, a heightened romantic perception of nature, when the natural lightning phenomenon appeared at the field of the *Lightning Field*. Beardsley (1998) commented that the *Lightning Field* is intended to be viewed by no more than six people at one time. Thus, few are fortunate to witness and experience the natural lightning phenomenon. In addition, James Pierce's *Pratt Farm* (1982) (Figure 7), in which the Picturesque idea was applied, its audiences need to view the



Source: The Center for Land Use Interpretation (2015)

Figure 7. James Pierce's *Pratt Farm* (1970-1982) and *Earthwoman* (1976-1978)



Source: Beardsley (1998)

Figure 8. Walter De Maria's *Lightning Field* (1977)



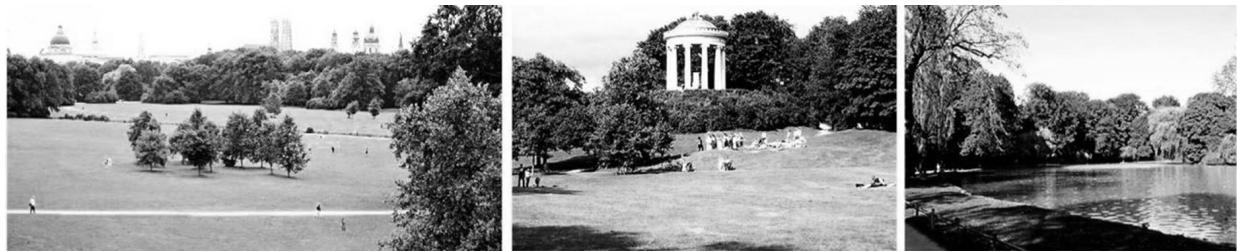
Source: Richard Long (2015)

Figure 9. Richard Long's *A Line Made by Walking* (1967)

artworks and the site from certain points of view same as guided in Picturesque landscape design. On the other hand, Joseph Beuys's *A Line Made by Walking* (1967) (Figure 9) was created by placing small stones or other ephemeral installations along arbitrarily formed straight lines across the landscape. Through the long length of the pathways, Long never made alterations on the landscapes that his art passed through (Tate, 2015). *A Line Made by Walking* as well as a number of environmental artists, encourage their audiences to reconsider the intrinsic values of the surrounding environments. Interpretations of nature are taken in many forms of environmental arts through study, observation and contemplation of natural phenomena.

#### 4. Criticism on the English Landscape School Combining with McHargian Landscapes

The 18<sup>th</sup> century English Landscape School was a popular trend and was applied vastly in the western world for a long period. However, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the style was no longer a new yet, it was repeatedly applied in different settings. As a result, the boredom issue has been raised and eventually received strong criticism in the past four decades. Adriaan Gueze, a prominent contemporary landscape architect, referred to the English landscape school as a 'worn-out cliché', burdening both in design expression and in the recreational functions of the park (Herrington, 2006). Its design style is criticised as 'the plain



Source: The Telegraph (2015)

Figure 10. The English Garden (Englischer Garten) (1789)



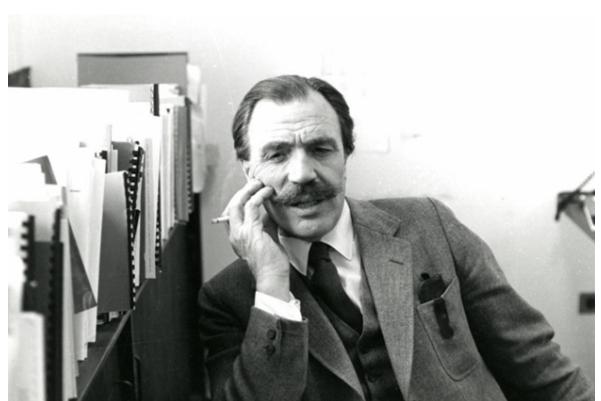
Source: Sasaki Associates (2015)

Figure 11. Frito Lay Headquarters at Legacy Park (1985) by Sasaki and Associates

landscape.' When entering a particular section of the English landscapes, it raises the question of whether it is intended landscape design or a natural setting. In other words, to distinguish between the original natural scenery and the intended designed landscape is difficult. Two examples of landscape designs which were influenced by the English Landscape School are illustrated (Figure 8). The first example is the English Garden or Englischer Garten (Figure 10), a large public park in Munich, Germany, first designed by Sir Benjamin Thompson in 1789 (Muenchen, 2015). The second is the Frito Lay Headquarters (Figure 11) at Legacy Park, Texas (1985) designed by Sasaki Associates. Their shaping of the designed landscape is romanticised and presents irregular forms with near resemblance to natural surroundings.

The principles of the English Landscape School are endlessly applied in park design throughout most Western countries without offering contemporary interpretations. With placing natural landscape elements repetitively in the same manners, the criticism of landscapes as being 'too boring' may not be exaggerated. Since 1960s, concerns for environment has gained significant attention in landscape architecture in the last five decades with eminent

pioneers such as Ian McHarg (Figure 12) and others. McHarg promoted the ecological view, in which the designer becomes congruent with the area through analysis of natural systems such as soil, climate, vegetation, hydrology, etc. His 1969 *Design with Nature* was the first work of its kind to define the problems of modern development and present a methodology or process prescribing compatible solutions (Spirn, 2000). The characteristics of McHargian landscapes were to not only look natural, but that the landscape also should function in a similar way to its original nature. Balmori, Sanders and Treib (2011) remarked that McHargian landscapes have no design any form of art was not considered.



Source: University of Pennsylvania School of Design (2015)

Figure 12. Ian McHarg

To McHarg, the English landscapes represent a revolutionary transformation in the human conception of and relationship to nature with humans and nature moving towards a more harmonious relationship. McHarg's thought can be considered a predecessor of one aspect of ecological design, land reclamation. In article '*The Suffocating Embrace of Landscape and the Picturesque Conditioning of Ecology*' (2013), a recent study of the relationship between the Picturesque and ecological science claimed that the rough, messy and less maintained Picturesque landscape was considered to have more ecological value than the neatly grazed pastures of a Brownian landscape (Figure 13) show two examples of landscape projects which combine principles of the English School with ecological design. The first is the Fish Creek Park (Figure 13), which provides a retrofit to treat water from a storm trunk discharging to the Fish Creek.



Source: Riparia (2015)

Figure 13. Fish Creek Park by Riparia

It attempts to balance between environmental and recreational functions (Riparia, 2015). The second is the Forest Lawn Creek Park (Figure 14), which aims to divert the storm water flowing down a canal traversing the landfill site to an ecologically sensitive facility. The park features a naturalised channel with meanders and a floodplain providing wildlife habitat while accommodating water conveyance (*ibid*). Both parks are located in Calgary, Canada and designed by Riparia. The specific years of design and construction of the landscapes of the two parks were not cited in the original source, the official Riparia landscape architectural company website. As the two parks were published in the recent portfolio web page, it might be possible to presume that the two parks were designed and constructed around 2010s. In more recent years, designing parks or recreational landscape design in the manner that combines principles of the Picturesque with ecological design can still be seen in various publications and professional institutions' websites such as those of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), the Landscape Institute (LI) and the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA) in more recent years. The impacts of the two schools remain firmly in contemporary landscape architecture.



Source: Riparia (2015)

Figure 14. Forest Lawn Creek Park (2006) by Riparia

According to the review above, the English landscape style aims towards a visual natural landscape McHargian design, on the other hand, emphasises making the landscape function as a part of nature and it also aims towards visual natural landscape. It is already difficult to distinguish between existing natural elements from intended landscape design in the English landscapes. When integrating the Picturesque landscapes with the McHarg's approach, it is very likely that landscape design becomes invisible and the line between the original and the intended landscape design is even more blurry. This approach to design seems to be common in park design and site planning. With the repetition of the approach of combining the English-style landscapes and McHarg's ecological design in a number of parks and site planning, landscape design can become quite dull as criticism.

## 5. Reflection from Art and Environmental Art and the Way Forward

Landscape architecture and art were intertwined at various points in history (Birksted, 2004). The 18<sup>th</sup> century landscape designers had paid close attention to works of art, drawing their ideas from paintings as reviewed above. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, landscape architecture was closely related with several genres of Modern Art, including Abstract Art (Tate, 2015). Cubism, Surrealism (Treib, 1994), and Minimalism (Walker, 1998). Creativity and experimental minds are essential qualities for artists in all fields of art, including environmental art. Any concepts including the English aesthetics and principles of ecological science applied in artworks were keenly explored in different aspects offered contemporary interpretations. As a result, works of arts have always ignited the innovative and experimental spirit.

Reflecting upon this, any concept applied in landscape design including the English Landscape aesthetics and ecological science, should be

encouraged to be explored in various angles with new interpretations instead of being repeated in any condition. In addition, landscape design may still be subtle and harmonise with the context; however, signifying a new engagement should also be apparent and artistic application could be helpful. The artistic application should be taken into consideration of landscape design along with scientific application and all other aspects.

In current context, several contemporary landscape architects such as Diana Balmori, who blends artistic aspects and ecological principles, seem to be a good sample in combining art and science, the two main principles of landscape architecture stated by Norman Newton in his *Design on the Land: Development of Landscape Architecture* (1971). Balmori uses the flow of nature and natural processes as McHarg, yet makes it distinctive from existing contexts with artistic landscape form creative landscape design. As a result, her design works do not disappear with the context. Some of her works are as presented (Figure 15). The approach of combining between art and science has been applied in landscape architectural design in the past decade. However, how art and science should be balanced in landscape architecture was not examined in current landscape research terrain and should be encouraged in the future.

## 6. Conclusion

It has been more than three centuries since aesthetic values of the three aesthetics; the beautiful, the sublime and the picturesque were discussed and linked with the discipline of landscape architecture. Looking back, it definitely is a unique landscape history. Nowadays, even though meanings of the three aesthetics are slippery and the terms are often used interchangeably in everyday language, their principles within realm of the English Landscape School remain substantial in contemporary landscape architectural design particularly for park and recreation

facilities throughout western culture. New thoughts and ideas will always be emerged in landscape architecture. We must make sure that persistence in formulating appropriate and inspiring design should

always be encouraged at the landscape design base so that landscape architecture is always vibrant and inspiring.



Source: Balmori Associates (2015)

Figure 15. Prairie Waterway Stormwater Park (1996) and The Garden That Climbs The Stairs (2009)

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