

Dumbarton Oaks

Mellon Program in Urban Landscape Studies

Grant number 11400622

Narrative Report, 2014-15

In the 2014-15 academic year, the Garden and Landscape Studies program at Dumbarton Oaks launched an ambitious new program in urban landscape studies funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation through their initiative in “Architecture, Urbanism, and the Humanities.” Aimed to foster collaborations among the humanities and the design and planning disciplines, the program is bringing designers and historians together at Dumbarton Oaks over the next three years (2015–2018) to address the landscape consequences of advancing urbanization. This year was devoted to planning the program and hosting its initial activities.

The program at Dumbarton Oaks will involve four principal components: new semester-long fellowships to be shared among designers and academics; shorter-term invitational residencies for senior practitioners; a series of academic events that will create a framework for interactions among these scholars and practitioners, along with other humanities scholars at Dumbarton Oaks and neighboring academic institutions; and a series of public programs including lectures, colloquia, workshops, and publications, all aimed at disseminating the initiative’s work nationally and internationally. The program will also include outreach to area high school students. Dumbarton Oaks remains one of the few institutions in the world with a program devoted to garden and landscape studies that is targeted at both humanities scholars and landscape practitioners. This grant will significantly expand the institution’s opportunities for both of these groups, fostering constructive dialogue between them about the history and future of urban landscapes, and encouraging them to bridge the gap between their professional modes of thinking.

The Garden and Landscape Studies program's annual symposium, organized by senior fellow Thaisa Way and held May 8–9, 2015, was the inaugural event of the new Mellon program in urban landscape studies. Titled "River Cities: Historical and Contemporary," the symposium presented urban rivers as city-making landscapes deserving of careful reading and analysis. Examining the dynamic relationships between cities and their rivers—notably, the adaptations required by too much or too little water or from changes in river courses—the symposium probed historical and contemporary perspectives on resilience, one of the key elements of viable urbanism. To further the aims of the Mellon program, the symposium brought together the work of contemporary designers with the historical perspectives of scholars—some in collaborative presentations on the same river—encouraging practitioners and historians to bridge the gaps between their professional modes of thinking. Presentations ranged in topic from ancient Rome and the fourteenth-century Yellow River basin to contemporary New Orleans and Los Angeles, and presented both cultural adaptations and design responses to river systems. In a sign of the expanding reach of our program and the burgeoning interest in urban landscape studies, we received over 180 abstracts in response to a call for papers; of the sixteen speakers ultimately selected for the symposium, all but three were new to Dumbarton Oaks. A complete list of speakers and their topics is attached.

The Mellon initiative was inaugurated with the "River Cities" symposium, but many other aspects of the program have been launched or significantly advanced. Following a global call for applications for the new fellowship program, the first Mellon fellows have been selected and will be in residence at Dumbarton Oaks next year, two each in the Fall and Spring terms. Three come from the design disciplines; one is an environmental historian. Interestingly, they are all working on topics related to urban hydrological management: water supply, flood control, and sewage. The list of fellows and their topics is attached.

The first Mellon practitioner was in residence at Dumbarton Oaks in April and May: Anthony Wain, landscape director at Planning Partners International, Cape Town, South Africa. A horticultural scientist and landscape architect trained in the United Kingdom, Wain has been in public and private practice for thirty years in South Africa, including urban landscape preservation work at Stone Town, Zanzibar, and in Bamako, Mali, for the Historic Cities Program of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture. We also initiated a program of travel stipends for graduate students to attend our academic events. Three landscape architecture students from the University of Toronto, Cornell University, and Louisiana State University were selected from among many applicants to attend the “River Cities” symposium.

Meanwhile, outreach to neighboring institutions is beginning to bear fruit in academic exchanges: for instance, Dumbarton Oaks will cooperate with Georgetown University to enhance the landscape content in a course on modern urban history to be offered in the Fall term of 2015. Planning is also underway for high school programs to engage students with contemporary urban landscape history, issues, and management. We have met with public school teachers and administrators and representatives of non-for-profit organizations who work with high school students. Still to be determined is whether these programs ought to be exclusively educational, promoting environmental literacy, or if they ought to take a pre-professional approach—or some combination of both. Also under discussion is whether we ought to launch our own seminars, tours, and activities, or if we should collaborate with existing groups who already work with high school students.

Two public events are in the planning stages for next academic year. One is a session devoted to research in the urban humanities at the centennial meeting of the Ecological Society of America in Baltimore in August. Planned in collaboration with Alex Felson at Yale University, the session is an element of the “Earth Stewardship Initiative,” which brings design students as “ESI Fellows” to the ESA meeting to interact with ecologists and community design professionals in a series of seminars and design charrettes that address the future of specific sites in the host city. The Dumbarton Oaks/Mellon

component is meant to affirm the importance of research in design practice, reminding ESI Fellows that understanding the historical dimensions of both design and ecology is crucial to sustainable urbanism. The seminar will be followed by a design charrette in which the humanities scholars will participate.

Plans are also being finalized for a graduate workshop at Dumbarton Oaks in the autumn. Titled “Frontiers in Urban Landscape Research” the workshop will be held on November 20, 2015, and is being organized by John Beardsley and Thaisa Way. Among the many submissions received for the “River Cities” symposium were several intriguing ones from graduate students; we were especially impressed with the range of topics and the compelling urban landscape research questions being explored across a range of disciplines. To build on the momentum evident among emerging scholars in the field we have invited doctoral candidates in advanced stages of writing dissertations on topics in the history and design of urban landscapes to share selected aspects of their work with each other and with senior designers and scholars in the field. We are particularly interested in presenting new methods or approaches to the study of urban landscapes, and topics that have proved especially challenging or difficult to address. This is an opportunity to bring together early-career scholars pursuing transdisciplinary work and shaping new approaches to the urban environment. The colloquium is intended to generate greater awareness of the urban humanities, while helping a new generation of scholars advance their work across a range of relevant fields. The day will conclude with a discussion among Dumbarton Oaks Senior Fellows and other senior scholars in the field who are in attendance about the future trajectories of urban landscape studies. A list of invited participants is attached.

Finally, a search is underway for a postdoctoral fellow who can help develop the future trajectories of this new program as well as participate in its organization and management.

Garden and Landscape Studies Symposium

River Cities: Historical and Contemporary

Organized by Thaisa Way, University of Washington

May 8–9, 2015

Speakers

Anthony Acciavatti (Somatic Collaborative), “Dynamic Agropolis: The Case of Allahabad, India”

Brian Davis and Amelia Jensen (Cornell University), “Rivers as Urban Borderlands: A Thousand Years in São Paulo”

Ray Gastil (City of Pittsburgh), “Rethinking Urban Performance: Pittsburgh’s Rivers”

Edith Katz (Martha Schwartz Partners), “DON’T GO NEAR THE WATER! Re-Imagining China’s Urban Waterfronts”

David Malda (Gustafson Guthrie Nichol), “Landscape Narratives and the San Antonio River”

Michael Miller (University of Miami), “Lyon: The Meaning of a River City”

Elizabeth Mossop (Louisiana State University) and Carol McMichael Reese (Tulane University), “New Orleans, Its River, and Its River’s Delta”

Alexander Robinson and Vittoria Di Palma (University of Southern California), “Willful Waters: Negotiating a Contested Course for an Arid River and City”

Pieter Schengenga (H+N+S Landscape Architects), “New Landscapes for Dutch River Cities—From Climate Change and Room for the River to Environmental Quality”

Jyoti Pandey Sharma (Deenbandhu Chhotu Ram University of Science and Technology), “Revisiting the *Darya* (River) Urbanism in the Delhi Triangle: The Urbanization of the Yamuna in the *Badshahi Shahar*, Shahjahanabad”

Rabun Taylor (University of Texas at Austin), “The Soft-Core City: Ancient Rome and the Wandering Tiber”

Kimberly Thornton (Universität für Bodenkultur Wien), “Responsive Tributary: The Changing Spaces of a Tertiary Waterway in Vienna’s Urban Periphery”

Lei Zhang (Tianjin University), “Traditional Flood Adaptive Landscapes of Cities in the Lower Yellow River Floodplain of China”

Dumbarton Oaks Mellon Fellows in Urban Landscape Studies, 2015-2016

Christina Milos (University of Hannover, Fall), “Anticipatory Urbanization Strategies for In-Situ Oil Sands Extraction in Nigeria”

Alpa Nawre (Kansas State University, Spring), "Adaptive Land-Water Edges in Indian Cities"

Kara Schlichting (Queens College, City of New York, Spring), "The Nature of Urban Coastal Resiliency: Twentieth-Century Governance, Environmental Management, and Design"

David Wooden (District Department of the Environment, Fall), "Washington's Sewer History: Ideological, Technological, and Environmental Evolution"

Frontiers in Urban Landscape Research

Graduate Workshop, November 20, 2015

Molly Briggs (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, PhD Candidate, Landscape Architecture), "Seeing Through Chicago's West Parks: Landscape Performance and the Panoramic Uncanny"

Dwight Carey (University of California, Los Angeles, PhD Candidate, Art History), "Controlling Waterways in Revolutionary Time: The Political History of French Imperialism in a Senegal River Town, 1791-1803"

Carlos Gomez Florentin (Stony Brook University, PhD Candidate, History), "From Garden City to Dammed City: Ciudad del Este, the Parana River, and the Itaipu Dam (1957-1991)"

Eyun Jennifer Kim (University of Washington, PhD Candidate, Built Environment), "Cheonggyecheon River Restoration, Seoul, South Korea"

Margot Lystra (Cornell University, PhD Candidate, History of Architecture and Urban Development), "Urban Highways as 'Situated Design Events'"

Abbey Stockstill (Harvard University, PhD Candidate, History of Art & Architecture), “The Desert, the Mountains and the Red City: Locality in 12th-Century Marrakech”

Stephanie Strauss (University of Texas, Austin, PhD Candidate, Art History), “Betwixt and Between the Great Yax Ha’: Yaxchilan and the Usumacinta River”

Submitted by John Beardsley

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