

Martha Schwartz Landscapes 1979-1998

Photographs by Alan Ward 1979-1998

Notes on the Making of the Photographs

The role of photography is underappreciated in terms of what is known and understood about significant works of landscape architecture. How many designed landscapes are actually experienced versus being known through photography? In this era dominated by images, designs such as Martha Schwartz's Bagel Garden (1-3), a temporary landscape, become visible through the worldwide publication of photographs. Through repeated appearances in magazines, journals and on-line, certain works attain significance and may rise to become canonized as influential works of landscape architecture. The images shown here are case studies in this phenomenon.

Martha Schwartz was a classmate of mine studying landscape architecture at Harvard when she became familiar with my photographic work. She asked me to photograph her Bagel Garden installation at the front of a Boston Back Bay townhouse in 1979 (1-3). Photographs of other temporary landscapes followed with designs that were a collaborative effort by Martha Schwartz and Peter Walker. The Marlborough Street roof garden design was at the same Back Bay townhouse (4-7); and the Necco Garden (8-11) was a larger scale installation for one day on the MIT campus to celebrate May Day and the dedication of a Michael Heizer sculpture. As temporary landscapes, few people saw these initial experiments, however a photograph of the Bagel Garden was featured on the cover of *Landscape Architecture* magazine. The Marlborough Street roof garden and Necco Garden were also published in *Landscape Architecture* magazine and

other journals, so they became known and endure through the images. These initial installations by Martha and Pete were followed by the photography of more lasting designs by Martha Schwartz for a small courtyard at The Whitehead Institute in Cambridge (12-15), along with major civic plazas at the Jacob Javits Center in New York (16-22) and the HUD Building in Washington, DC. (23-27).

These projects have been extensively studied, reviewed and analyzed, but few writers discuss the role that photography plays in what we know about these works on the border between landscape architecture and art. With a background in fine arts, Martha's work has consistently featured bold colors, which of course had to be rendered with color photography. We inhabit a world of light and color; and she approaches landscape architecture as an opportunity to bring vivid colors forward in the urban environment. How do you best depict these colors in the landscape? The intensity of colors is enhanced in less than full sun conditions, but a certain brightness in the sky with light overcast causes a deeper saturation of hues. In addition, a rainfall in New York just before the photography of the Jacob Javits Center further enhanced the surfaces to make the colors more vibrant. Mist and low-lying cloud cover were advantageous in the photographs of the Necco Garden. Some imagination is required to realize that good photographs can be seized from different climactic conditions including rain, fog, mist and snow. These conditions may appear unexpectedly, so chance plays a part, however the photographer

requires the experience and skill to exploit these conditions to capitalize on the opportunities in suboptimal conditions.

The recurrent publication of the images of the Bagel Garden internationally has played a key role in the canonization of this design as a significant and influential work of landscape architecture. The Barcelona Pavilion by Mies van der Rohe is a comparable architectural example. It was a temporary pavilion at the Barcelona International Exhibition, however the frequently reproduced photographs led to it becoming a highly influential example of modern architecture. The contributing role of photography in making landscapes known and in valuing certain landscapes over others raises an intriguing question: do some designs more than others have a greater affinity for being revealed or enhanced through photography? Depicting the relative size and scale of designed landscapes in photography can be a challenge. Small sites, particularly when organized along geometric lines are empathetic to depiction within the camera's frame. Each single image illustrating distance and perspective can be a geometric composition within the rectangular frame that amplifies the composition. Revealing the scale and character of large sites comprised of picturesque compositions can be more elusive. A flowing spatial design without geometric reference points and spatial closure may elude the camera's fixed frame.

Editors are inevitably drawn to designs revealed by one or two beautiful color pictures for the economy of page layouts and pure impact of

color. This reinforces the tendency in publications to promote a simple, beautifully colored geometric composition, that is also an evocative design that can be distilled into a single overhead view. These are sometimes, but not necessarily, accompanied by eye-level experiential photographs. The same color images are, of course, equally compelling to design juries, who typically adjudicate largely based on photographs. The colors, linear geometries, and repetition of elements in the designs by Martha Schwartz are well suited to be depicted in overhead views that make strong graphic patterns. However, in Martha Schwartz's work colorful photographs are typically accompanied by a compelling story placing her work as an innovative reinterpretation of historical precedents. For example, Martha's article in *Landscape Architecture* magazine was titled "Back Bay Bagel Garden: Le Petit Parterre Embroiderie". The Whitehead Institute courtyard, also known as the Splice Garden, juxtaposes two distinct historical traditions of landscape architecture as emblematic of the research in genomics by the institute.

The frequent publication of the same few photographs of the Bagel Garden, the Whitehead Institute courtyard and others, along with stories of experimenting with new materials and historical precedents, has helped make these projects celebrated examples of garden design that pushes the boundaries of the profession. However, the quality or beauty of the photographs as symbols of the projects still have their own presence, and benefit these projects in attaining such recognition.

List of Photographs

1. Sidewalk view, Bagel Garden, 1979
2. View through gate, Bagel Garden, 1979
3. Overhead view, Bagel Garden, 1979
4. View from entrance stair, Marlborough Street roof garden, 1979
5. Mirrors in gravel, Marlborough Street roof garden, 1979
6. Pots and framing, Marlborough Street roof garden, 1979
7. Overhead view, Marlborough Street roof garden, 1979
8. View toward Great Dome, Necco Garden, 1980
9. View toward Charles River, Necco Garden, 1980
10. Overhead view with Boston skyline, Necco Garden, 1980
11. Overhead view, Necco Garden, 1980
12. Overhead view, Whitehead Institute, 1986
13. Oblique eye level view, Whitehead Institute, 1986
14. Eye level view, Whitehead Institute, 1986
15. Detail, Whitehead Institute, 1986
16. Plaza in context, Jacob Javits Plaza, 1996
17. View toward the entry, Jacob Javits Plaza, 1996
18. Benches and mounds, Jacob Javits Plaza, 1996
19. Benches and entry, Jacob Javits Plaza, 1996
20. Drinking fountain, Jacob Javits Plaza, 1996
21. Overhead view of plaza and streets, Jacob Javits Plaza, 1996
22. Overhead view, Jacob Javits Plaza, 1996
23. View from arcade, HUD Plaza, 1998
24. Canopies, HUD Plaza, 1998
25. Canopy at night, 1998
26. Metal screen and canopies, HUD Plaza, 1998
27. Overhead view of plaza and street, HUD Plaza, 1998
28. Overhead view, HUD Plaza, 1998

















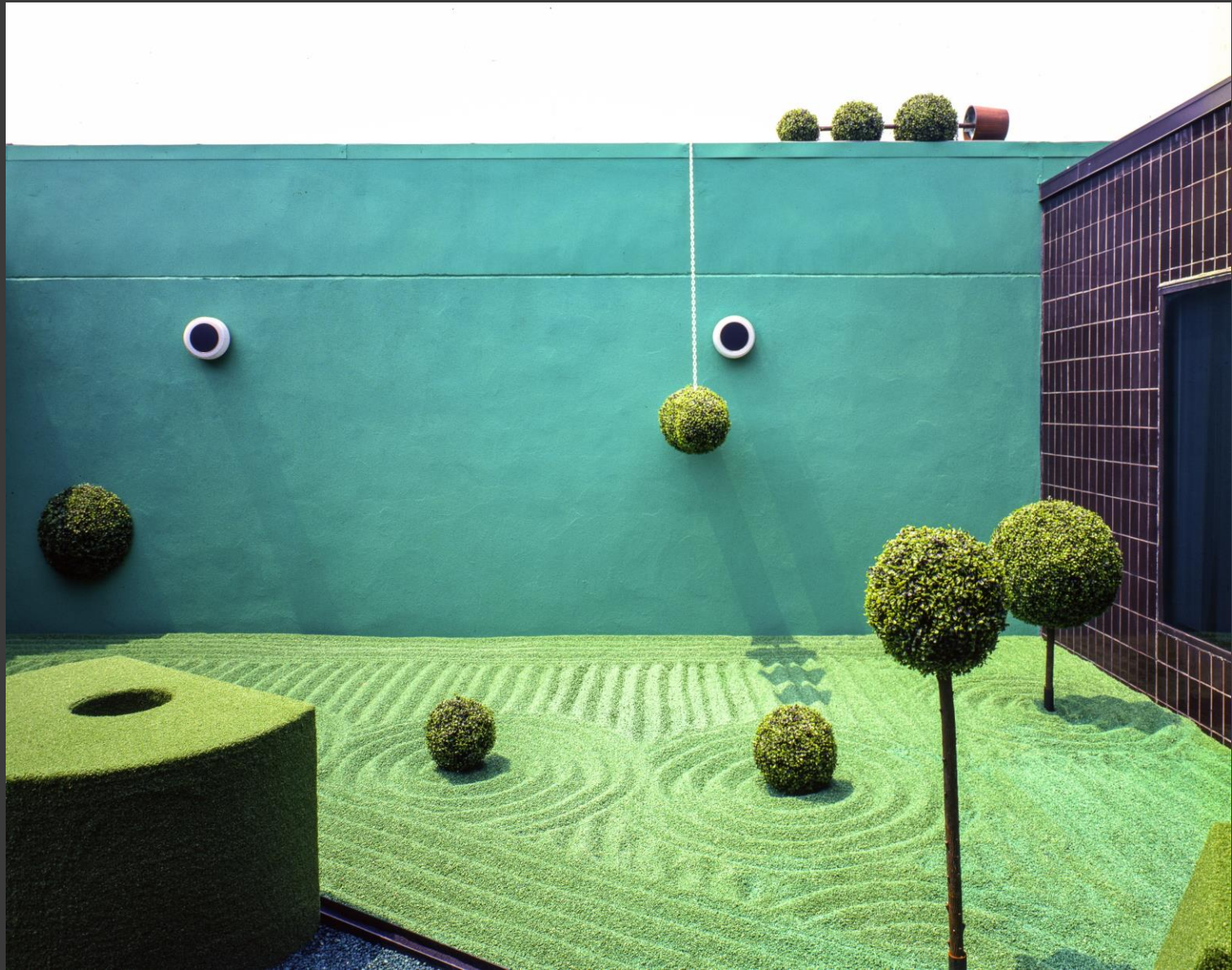


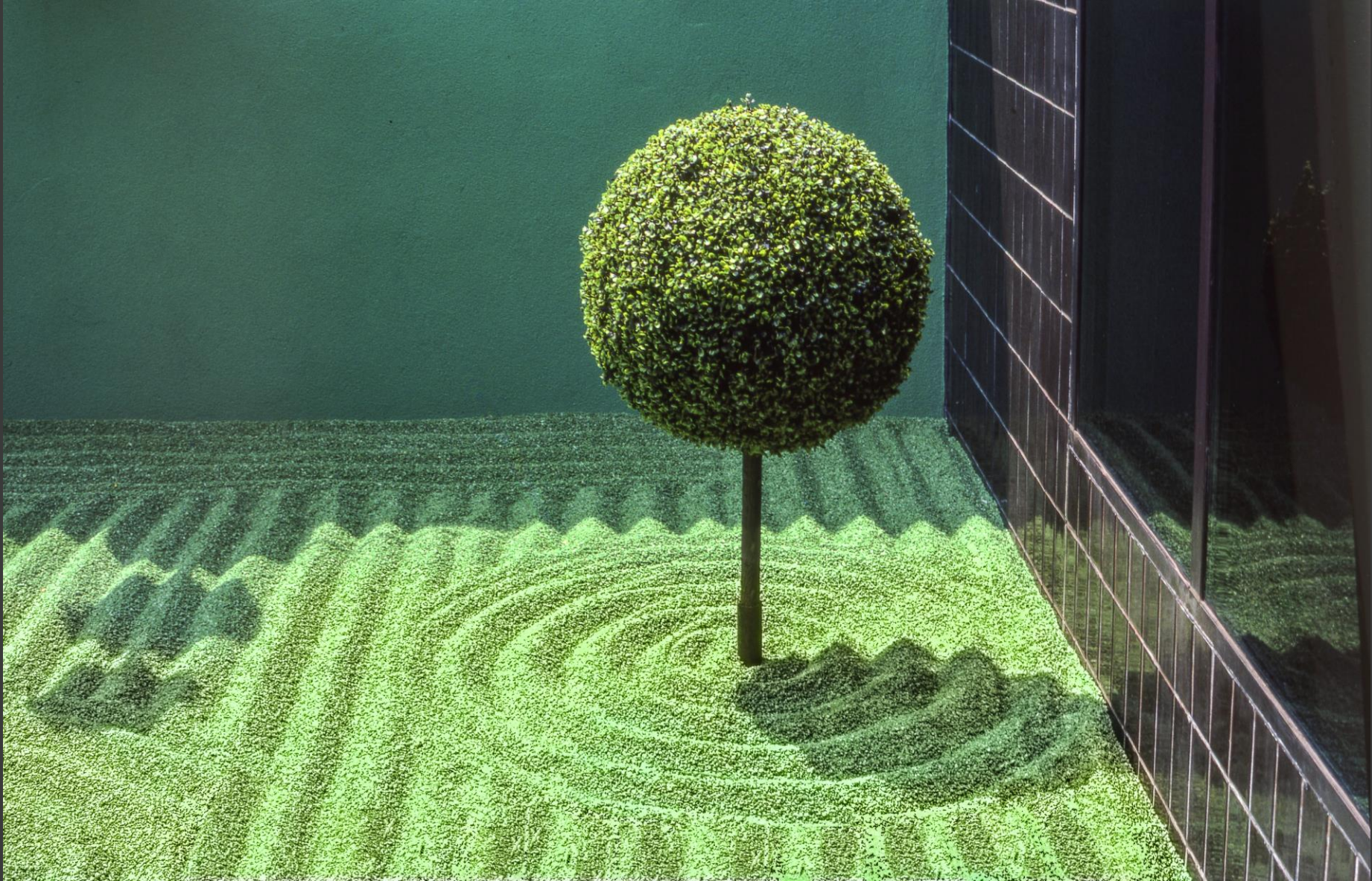






































Notes

Selected Publication of the Photographs:

Schwartz, Martha, "Back Bay Bagel Garden: Le Petit Parterre Embroiderie", *Landscape Architecture*, January, 1980

Goldberger, Paul, "Design Notebook", *New York Times*, May 1, 1980

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Schwartz, Martha, "Jacob Javitts Plaza", *Wimmer*, Spring 1997

Widder, Lynnette, "The Grove as Pop Art: Martha Schwartz", *Daidolos: Architektur Kunst Kultur*, September, 1997

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Crandall, Gina, "Zwei Plazas von Martha Schwartz", *Garten + Landschaft*, May, 1999

Meyer, Elizabeth K., *Martha Schwartz: Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Spacemaker Press, 1999

Justewicz, Rafael, "Elements: Plastic", *Land Forum 03*, 1999

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Mays, Vernon, "A Well Bleached Solution", *Landscape Architecture*, July 2001

Yong, Chris, "Designer Profile: Martha Schwartz", *Garden Design Journal*, February/March 2002

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