

Extract of a translation by Barbara Lang

## NEW GROUND Symposium 2006

### Art and Landscape Architecture as an Impulse Generator for Contemporary Cultural Landscapes

International symposium in the context of the  
Landscape Art Prize NEW GROUND 2005

#### Concept

##### Landscape Art Prize NEW GROUND

The Landscape Art Prize NEW GROUND of the Foundation of Lower Saxony was established in the year 2005 on the initiative of the Art Association and Foundation Springhornhof in Neuenkirchen. Offered every other year, the prize provides fresh impetus for the development of cultural landscapes in selected regions of Lower Saxony, which are representative for problem regions in all of Europe. An international symposium, which will take place each following year respectively, will serve as a platform for the theoretical reflection and discussion of current trends of landscape-related art.

One of the main objectives of the prize is to focus on specific existing problem areas that are of overall relevance and thus point beyond the borders of Lower Saxony. The awarding of the prize is connected with the proposal of a practicable, future-oriented project in the realm of the visual arts and/or landscape architecture, which is selected in a competition process. In October 2005, the prize was split and granted for the first time to two internationally renowned artist and landscape architect teams, who with their interventions at a neuralgic spot in a cultural landscape – this time in the surface-mining area of the town of Schöningen – want to provide a trend-setting impulse for an incisive change of perspective in the contemporary cultural landscape development. The intention is to “revalue” destroyed landscape in the abstract and real sense of the word.

#### Motive

Cultural landscapes not only are witnesses of the past, but they are still developing in the present: Infrastructural channels such as canals, highways, airports and agricultural grasslands within urban sprawl zones, former military training camps and opencast mines are shaping the morphology of contemporary landscapes. Man-made landscapes and natural sceneries, which were produced by the industrial age and are still being shaped by the information age, are often undervalued and are therefore disqualified as “non-places”. This

degradation bears serious and generally harsh consequences for the development of the regions concerned. On the other hand, art and landscape architecture interventions may set a signal for enhanced recognition and esteem by society.

The basis of today's value assessment of landscape is closely connected with the tradition of a classical-aesthetical concept of nature and cultural landscape – a concept that is both implanted in society and fixed in the Federal Nature Conservation Act. As an integral part of the landscape, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, “nature” still serves as a conceptual benchmark, an influential moral entity of social and political action. Nature, however, does not exist “in itself” but is a scheme by which human society conceives its outside world.

In the past centuries, the comprehension of nature has been drastically altered by the rapid increase in scientific knowledge. A clear definition of the boundaries between naturalness and artificiality is no longer given. Yet it seems that society's relating to the aesthetical concept of nature and landscape prevails and dwells unchangingly in the dialectic between the traditional ideal of nature as a product (*natura naturata*) and a process of growth and creation (*natura naturans*). Today's scope of problems within the field of cultural landscape development cannot, however, be properly researched and solved on the basis of outdated and abstract concepts of nature. What is missing are innovative planning concepts and design strategies and adequate aesthetical responses capable of measuring up to the increased complexity and dynamics of present-day life environments.

Artistic approaches often combine sociological, ecological, economical and aesthetic aspects in an unusual way, thereby opening up new perspectives. This is why landscape art is more and more headed towards the center of attention of the professionals involved - as an impulse generator and indicator of landscape development today.

## Objective of the symposium

In the context of the planned symposium, which is closely linked to the awarding of the Landscape Art Prize NEW GROUND 2005, experimental and innovative artistic planning strategies dealing with the current problem areas in cultural landscape development are to be examined from a trans-disciplinary point of view and discussed in terms of their content and aesthetically future-oriented potential.

By evaluating the results of the specific example of Schöningen and at the same time leading a theoretical debate with the generic questioning of the current trends in landscape art and architecture, the potential for future developments of contemporary cultural landscapes shall be revealed, and sustainable development impulses for the theory and practice of landscape development shall be produced.

The public presentation of the competition results and the discussion of unresolved questions and scientific debates on the subject of landscape art are integral parts of the program and concept of NEW GROUND 2005. The symposium has the principle task of leading a debate on the relevance of the visual arts and landscape architecture for the present and future development of cultural landscapes and raising public awareness for the subject. The main focus will lie on discussing up-to-date and innovative approaches to planning and revealing their future potential. For the promotion of the social and political assertiveness, the new planning and development strategies should be fortified by theoretical argumentation.

## Topics and questioning

Based on the first experiences with the awarding of the Landscape Art Prize NEW GROUND 2005 and against the background of internationally researched, ongoing scientific activities regarding new planning concepts and interdisciplinary design methods, the following principal theses will be discussed during the symposium with international experts of most varied disciplines:

**Thesis A:** The development of future-oriented strategies in dealing with current problem areas of the cultural landscape development is being massively blocked by a classical-aesthetic concept of nature and landscape that is persistently and deeply rooted in society. This rigid way of thinking in traditional concepts entails an equally conservative approach to current problems, thus obstructing the implementation of modern and trend-setting solutions.

**Thesis B:** Environmental planners have so far not made enough use of the potential of experimental, environment-related work coming from the field of the visual arts and landscape architecture. Numerous contemporary artistic works comprise a broad scope of innovative development strategies for a modern approach to the most volatile problem areas pertaining to nature, environment and cultural landscapes.

**Thesis C:** Planners and landscape architects usually work on a solution-oriented basis, while artists are free to approach and unfold a subject independently of a possible tangible benefit. The special quality of artistic expression lies in the exemplary trial and testing of individual perceptions of the world and the communication of these personal views. This dissimilarity in perception results in problems on the practical level, as it makes collaboration between the disciplines difficult. The danger exists that the arts are exploited for planning purposes and thus lose their intellectual independence. This would mean that they could not fulfill their intrinsic obligation – to be autonomous and authentic.

This brings up the question of how a productive collaboration between the arts and land use planning disciplines is possible, and which commonly shared interest in cultural landscape development can bring these fields together.