The Ornament – A Narrative Element and a Resource of Identity in Modern and Contemporary Landscape Architecture

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Abstract. The application of ornament in the city’s built and landscaped environment has been the subject of many debates and controversies during the modern and contemporary times. Fighting against academicism doctrines, modernist architects propose refining and purifying architectural and landscaping forms, by minimal usage of different and original means of expression. The postmodernism promoters have reinstated the use of ornament as a way of enriching the architectural and landscaping semantic field with signs and symbols appropriated to people’s common values. In contemporary globalized culture, decoration remains one of the few elements of local identity that preserves cultural signs and symbols. The ornament brings a contribution of symbolic meanings in landscape architecture, submits additional information that landscaping itself cannot transmit and has the role of underlining certain concepts and ideas. Either used as a decorative element on build and landscaped forms, or as a structural or detailing element with an esthetic role, the ornament is meant to beautify and enrich the world of meanings of the parks and gardens. It represents a redundant element of landscape design and architectural communication, which has the purpose of underlining symbolic meanings and facilitating their transmitting.

Keywords: identity, ornament as decoration, ornament as detail, ornament as structural element, significance, symbol

INTRODUCTION

The ornament, a decorative accessory that brings a contribution of symbolic meanings in landscape architecture of parks and gardens, submits additional information that landscaping itself cannot transmit and has the role of underlining certain concepts and ideas.

Within contemporary development and globalization of means and methods of construction, the ornament remains one of the few elements of identity that reveals cultural signs and symbols.

According to Augustin Ioan, “the ornament is a cultural indicator of spirituality able to reflect specific characteristics of human communities, whether of local, regional, national or wide geographical areas coverage and indicate also historical periods to their development" (Ioan, 2006).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The theoretical and visual documentation and research accomplished for this article have discovered different approaches of using ornamentation in landscaped environment of parks and gardens. The ornament is used in the landscape art in three main states: as the decorative accessory, as element of construction detail and as structural element. In all these aspects, the ornament creates originality and identity. It has the role to beautify and to enrich the world of symbolic meanings of parks and gardens. It reveals additional information that landscaping itself cannot transmit and has the role of underlining certain concepts and ideas.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The allegories and symbols contained by ornaments have often educational purposes and work out as elements of identity. For example, the ornamentation of outstanding originality and imagination by which Antoni Gaudi adorns his creations renders local flora and fauna, creates symbols and tell stories of Catholic and Catalan tradition.

Fig. 1. The Roof Terrace of Casa Mila, Barcelona, Spain, 1907, architect Antoni Gaudi - fantasy and originality of the ornament -

Fig. 2. The Guell Park, Barcelona, Spain, architect Antoni Gaudi - Natural and artificial landscaped elements are merged together by using of decoration
The chimneys that decorate the terrace of Casa Milla was transformed into mysterious silhouettes with helmets (Fig. 1), the winding bench that resembles with a giant reptile, the dragons and the decorative medallions form the ceiling of the Hypostyle Hall of Park Guell (Fig. 3), all fruit of rich imagination of Gaudi, form a fascinating, fairy tale like world.

The decorations that dress up the columns in the Hypostyle Hall adopted a new original style, reminiscent of ancient times, while the columns of the Promenade appear to be carved by vagaries of nature. The polychrome and the variety of forms and materials create a great visual richness. Through the decoration, Gaudi made a fusion of natural and artificial elements of landscaped designed space; the materials get lost in landscape through color and irregular texture (Fig. 2).

In contrast with the ornamental and chromatic exuberance of Gaudi, the court of Salk Institute designed Louis Kahn is characterized by austerity and solemnity and consists of simple volumes, purged of any decorative element. Stairs and wells have a strong presence, being structural elements of space, the only objects that adorn the courtyard assembly (Fig. 4).
Applying ornaments on the landscaped and built environment of cities was the subject of many controversial debates during the modern and contemporary times. "The evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament from everyday objects" “ornament is a crime”, decreed Adolf Loos, "a symbol of primitive cultures", "immoral", "degenerate", "wasted labor and wasted health" (Sarnitz, 2003). In fighting academicism doctrines, modernist architects suggest purifying volumes and forms of urban landscaped environment, minimal use of means of expression.

Following these principles, the small square marking the Seagram Building access is solved with great sophistication and minimum means of expression (Fig. 5) - a pool water animates and individualizes space, functioning as a link between the high-tech glass and steel building and the dynamic atmosphere of New York. The transition area gets magnetism and the mirroring effects of water and glass create the illusion of infinite space.

To "Less is more" dictum of the German architect Mies van der Rohe, Frank Lloyd Wright replied firm: "less is more only when more is of poor quality" and proposed instead the organic use of ornament, integrated throughout the part "like efflorescence of a tree or plant for its structure" (Pfeiffer, 2006).

Later, Robert Venturi stated a response to modernist motto - "Less is a bore" - and comment: "Modern architects abandoned tradition of iconology in which painting, sculpture and graphics were combined with architecture. Modern architecture advocate for integrating..."
arts in architecture. But nobody ever painted on a Mies…” (Venturi et al., 1977). Postmodernism promoters have reinstated the use of ornaments as a way of enriching the semantic field of architectural and landscaped environment with signs and symbols close to people's common values.

Thus, Robert Venturi decorated the courtyard Anylan Center with "artificial trees" inspired by pop culture in order to create a link with the surrounding wooded area, but also with the contemporary artistic trends and the general public with attractive and unique (Fig. 6). Piazza d'Italia in New Orleans created by Charles Moore includes decoration elements of postmodern spirit, illusionistic effects and different historical tablets combined with modern elements, inserted with humour and fantasy (Fig. 7).

Fig. 6. Anlyan Center for Medical Research and Education, Yale University, Connecticut, 1998-2003, architects Venturi & Denise Scott Brown & Associate - decorative trees inspired by pop culture

Fig. 7. Piazza d'Italia, New Orleans, 1978, architect Charles Moore - decoration items in postmodern spirit

Minimalist aesthetics and purified ornamentation return in architecture and landscape design with the brutalist movement. Landscape architects Gonçalo Ribeiro Telles and António
Barreto Viana designed the Garden of Museum Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, using simple geometric, austere and monochromatic shapes completed by the contrasting texture of a green oasis in which there are implanted. This landscape creation recovered the aesthetic means of the brutalism movement: pure repetitive geometric forms, the plastic image of raw, unfinished concrete revealing the wood texture used in encasements (Fig. 8).

Cleaning artistic language of creation of contemporary landscape and architectural by eliminating ornaments with symbolic role causes impoverishment of the semantic landscaped environment of cities, as Tadao Ando says with regret: "ornaments and symbols are removed, people are losing the joy of living their lives" (Ando, 1988).

In planning the recreational area Yumebutai Awaji, Tadao Ando used as decorations water and ornamental plants, shells extracted from the site, elements of local identity composed in a minimalist and geometric way (Fig. 9). If, in general, landscape constitutes the "ornaments" that adorn the negative space of architectural objects, for Yumebutai Awaji, this relationship is reversed, the architectural volumes itself becoming ornament of natural landscape (Fig. 10).
Through ingenious details with aesthetic role, Ando generates a sophisticated, modern image, capable of caring symbols. There is a minimalist trend in contemporary landscape architecture of using decoration, as means of beauty and approval, not as decoration, but in these new situations, as architectural detail or architectural volume, as structural element with a specific aesthetic role.

In City Square Developing from Luxembourg (Fig. 11), designed by landscape architects AllesWirdGut, and Canadas Park, from Murcia, Spain (Fig. 12) with its design signed by Abis Architecture, special original combinations of materials, shapes, plants and colors generate aesthetic effects. Particularly by the way, the joints and connections between the surfaces and materials are designed and manufactured denoting great sensitivity and skill.

As Kenzo Tange revealed, ornamental details - are "an expression of human sensitivity, proper care of human emotions and spirituality" (Kenzo, 1985). However, refined and well-executed details are ornaments in parks, gardens or buildings. They emphasize the meanings and ideas that led to the creation, as Peter Zumthor opines, "helps to understand all parts of the whole assembly, express the main idea of the concept of the relevant points of construction: belonging or separation, voltage or lightness, strength, fragility, separation and difference" (Zumthor, 2006).
Fig. 11. Canadas Park, Murcia, Spain, 2010, landscape architects Abis Architecture
Ingenious details having an ornamental role

Fig. 12. City Square Developing, Luxembourg, 2011, landscape architects AllesWirdGut
Ingenious details having an ornamental role
Ornaments-as-structure outlining protected areas with specific identity

The other aspect, ornament-as-structure, in other words, structural elements with aesthetic function, are often meant to mark and individualize the landscaped space of parks and gardens, and to shape protected areas with specific identity (Fig. 13). The design project for the Bird Observatory in Logrono Park, Spain (Fig. 14), signed by the landscape architect Manuel Fonseca Gallego, the bridge structure has also the role of ornamentation and alludes to the functional theme of the assembly.

Fig. 13. Terrace with covered pool in Wien, architects Heri & Salli
Ornaments-as-structure outlining protected areas with specific identity

Fig. 14. The Bird Observatory in Logrono Park, Spain, 2009, landscape architect Manuel Fonseca Gallego - ornament - structure that alludes to the functional theme
The constructive composition is made from wooden boards placed irregularly, partly covering the surface like a shell, creating the appearance of nest protection, forming inside a unique atmosphere composed of light and shadow.

CONCLUSION

The ornament represents an element of identity. Used as a decorative element on build and landscaped forms, or as a structural or detailing element with an esthetic role, the ornament is meant to beautify and enrich the world of parks and gardens with many hidden metaphorical meanings.

It constitutes a redundant element of landscape design and architectural communication, with the purpose of facilitating their transmitting and underlining symbolic meanings.

REFERENCES


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