



Jardin de la Connaissance

International Garden Festival
Métis (Quebec/CA), 2010

with Rodney Latourelle, Berlin

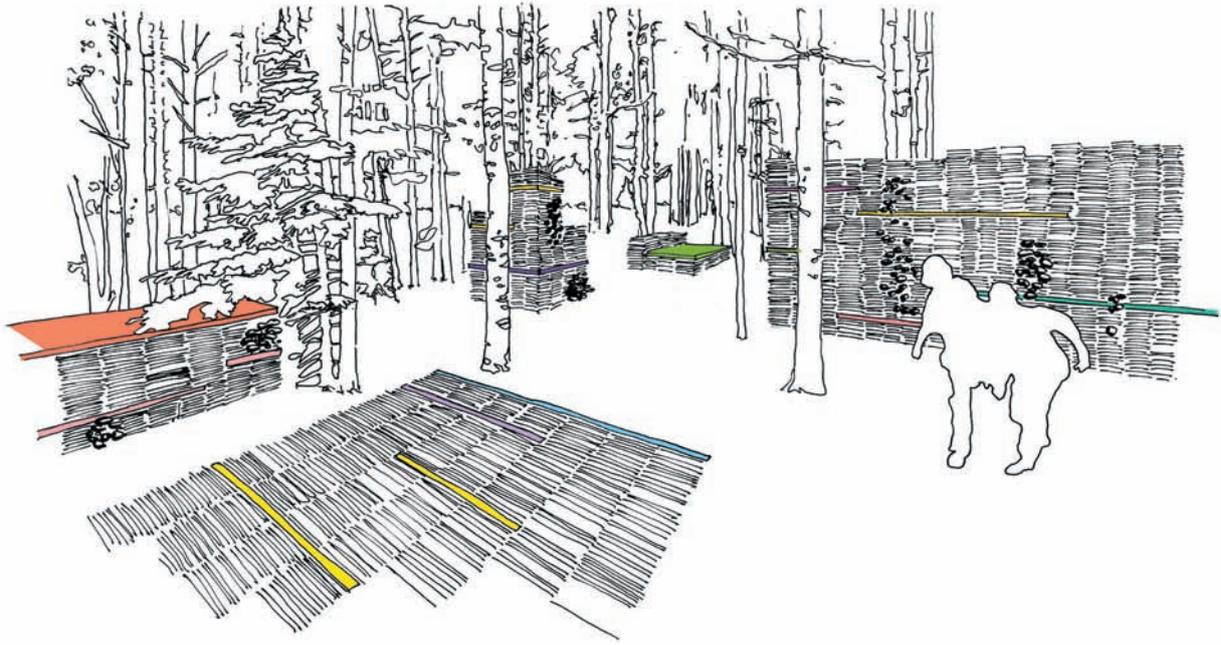
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Part of the 11th International Garden Festival at the Jardins de Métis in Quebec, Canada, the Jardin de la Connaissance is a temporary garden in a forested area involving approximately 40,000 books, multi-coloured wooden plates and several varieties of mushrooms.

In reference to the festival's theme of paradise, we expose the tree (of knowledge) as the central semiotic theme of the paradisiacal garden. Rather than reopening a way through the proverbial enclosures, we are interested in its manifold textures. From the single tree of knowledge we have gone to the many of the forest; from one truth to the plenitude of multimedia and the overwhelming world of information. The 'Garden of Cognition' does not illustrate a 'return to nature' or attempt a 'biblical' reconciliation, but its intention is to provide a platform to experience and frame the forest of the many in a unique and compelling way. The garden engages the mythical relation between knowledge and nature integral to the concept of 'paradise'. By using books as material in the construction of the garden, we confront these instruments of knowledge with the temporality of nature. And by exposing these fragile and supposedly timeless materials to transformation and disintegration, we invite an emotional involvement of the visitor. The book assemblages establish a framework amidst the forest that embodies a variety of experiential activities. The Jardin de la Connaissance becomes a sensual reading room, a library, an information platform, a dynamic realm of knowledge.

Books — The Jardin de la Connaissance is built from a large quantity of discarded books that form walls, benches, and carpets. Based on an open compositional principle, these elements are assembled to create a garden space, integrating it with the site and the structure of the forest. The orthogonal organization is reminiscent of a Neo-Plastic composition from the early 20th Century, invoking an optimistic orientation based on 'primary' elements. And yet, this 'utopian' notion is countered by the gradual decomposition of the paper material.



The forest setting allows for a unique articulation of the transformation between such states. Where decay is visualized as a segment of a lifecycle, the discarded books become the late off-springs of the tree of knowledge, while creating a seeding ground to generate a new, joyful knowledge: a paradise after the paradise.

The 'carpets' are made of books placed spine down into a shallow bed of sand. The walls and benches are stacked sideways and used as a building material, not unlike bricks. The structure is thus stable in itself. Vertical steel bars tie the elements together within the structure, invisibly. The steel bars are set in simple concrete foundations. The books used are surplus books, supplied by local public libraries and school institutions. There is a variety of size, format and content: romance and religion, science and education, thriller and encyclopedias. Most of the books have waited as recycling material in storage spaces for paper pulp prices to increase (which never happened). After the festival the books will be recycled or composted.

Bookmarks — The structure of the book-volumes is interspersed, marked and structurally supported by brightly coloured wood plates, which bind the individual book-stacks together. The bright, artificial colours of these elements complement the changing tones of the exposed paper in the books and the surrounding forest. The markers form a discrete linear composition suspended between the books. Thus they also create a luminous spatial signage, inviting visitors into the garden. Placed on the benches, some also serve as elements on which the visitor can sit.

Mushrooms — Extending the theme of transformation and providing an additional element in the semiotic field of cultural and natural knowledge, mushrooms add an additional materiality to the garden. Knowledge about the cultivation of mushrooms is – with the exception of the Japanese shiitake (ca.1000 years) and the button mushroom (ca.350 years) – rare and quite new. The cultivation of other mushroom varieties has begun only in recent decades. Eight different, edible mushroom varieties such as Winecap or Oyster mushrooms are cultivated within particular books and are nourished by the book walls. The mushrooms are pre-cultivated from spawn-sets and prepared for insertion in the book walls in well-watered book bundles. The mushrooms will be watered and humidified on a regular basis. The mushrooms enrich the theme of the post-paradise life cycle. This also responds to the temporal nature of the garden installation within the framework of a temporary garden festival.



