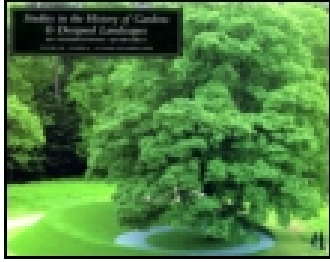


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'England in Germany' is honored in Italy: the 1997 Carlo Scarpa international prize for gardens

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'England in Germany' is honored in Italy: the 1997 Carlo Scarpa international prize for gardens

GEORGE DODDS

A small group of garden historians, landscape architects and journalists gathered in the historic grounds of the Villa Vigoni in Loveno di Menaggio (Lake Como) on April 21, 1997, for the formal announcement of this year's Premio Internazionale Carlo Scarpa per il Giardino. Since its inception in 1990, the Scarpa prize has been awarded annually by the Treviso-based Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche in recognition of outstanding examples of territorial stewardship and the restoration of culturally significant landscapes and gardens. This year's prize was presented to the Dessau-Wörlitzer Gartenreich.¹

The Benetton Foundation's Scarpa prize is important to the community of landscape architects and garden historians for a number of reasons. Unlike other design awards, which are typically given to the designers of recently realized projects, the Scarpa prize is bestowed jointly on a site and those who are responsible for physically and fiscally maintaining the vision of a unique cultural landscape. Moreover, the Scarpa prize not only honors an exemplar of landscape preservation, but through the contribution of 20 million lire, it directly assists in the continued maintenance and preservation of the site.

Beyond the financial implications of the prize (which are significant), through their public recognition of both the stewardship and inherent significance of a given site, the intention of the Benetton's Foundation's award is, in part, to draw public attention to sites such as Wörlitz, thereby underscoring both their continued viability as repositories of cultural memory, and the need for public- and private-sector assistance to assure their continued funding and maintenance. Lastly, through the Foundation's archival operations it has established itself, in a brief period of time, as a pre-eminent force in the relatively

new field of site documentation and conservation. The Foundation's library and archive includes extensive documentation of the sites honored by the Scarpa prize and also the landscape of Italy's Veneto region. Much of this documentation is made available to the public and the research community through a number of finely printed books and brochures published by the Foundation.

The logistical complexities of the Benetton Foundation's archival practices are considerable. While architectural archives are typically limited to the recording of discrete buildings and projects, and literary archives often work within the limits of collected papers and books, the Foundation's task is inherently more laborious and amorphous, often involving on-site documentation of landscapes as expansive as Wörlitz which, as fully realized by its originator, Prince Leopold Friedrich Franz van Anhalt-Dessau (1740–1817) covered an area of 300 square kilometers.

Begun in 1764 by Prince Franz following his first tour of England in 1763–4, the Dessau-Wörlitzer Gartenreich was continuously developed until his death in 1817 with the assistance of his friend and architect, Friedrich Wilhelm von Erdmannsdorff (1736–1800). As completed by the Prince in the early 19th century, the Dessau-Wörlitz 'Garden Kingdom' included an animal preserve, the city of Dessau and the estates of Georgengarten, Kühnau and Mosigkau in the west, and the estates of Krägen, Luisium (figure 1), Oranienbaum, Sieglitzer Berg and Wörlitz in the east. Modeled primarily after the best landscapes of the contemporary England of his day, Prince Franz made a total of 4 extensive trips to Britain, the last in 1785. As a direct result of the gardens



FIGURE 1. *Schloss Luisium (1774–7), Halle, part of the Dessau-Wörlitzer Gartenreich. Photo: Marie-Luise Werwick, 1995.*

he visited and the publications he assembled during and after these study trips, Prince Franz constructed a garden landscape that included a number of direct quotations from English models. Due largely to the conservation measures at Wörlitz that the Scarpa prize honors, it is still possible for visitors to the Gartenreich to encounter a quarter-scale reproduction of the bridge at Ironbridge, Coalbrookdale, a variation on Sir William Chamber's Chinese Pagoda Tower in Kew Gardens, and a copy of the 'Temple on the Terrace' at Stourhead, which stands today as one of the best preserved records of that now lost original building. As further testimony to the Prince's seemingly insatiable desire to reproduce the best of English landscape art in his small garden-state, at the time of its completion the garden landscape of Wörlitz also included, among its 24 buildings, a 'Pantheon' (1795–6). Situated on the northern tip of the larger of Wörlitz's two lakes and built during the third phase of the garden's original construction (1789–99), this Rotunda seems to be modeled not after the Pantheon in Rome, which the Prince knew from his travels to Italy, but rather, acting as a memory device, it is intended to

excite in the mind of the viewer images of similar rotundas at Stowe, West Wycombe and Stourhead.

Unfortunately, just prior to his death, the Prince destroyed all records of his exact itineraries along with his observations on the sites he visited and virtually all the documentation relating to Wörlitz. Ostensibly intended to conceal the vast sums of money he expended during his lifelong project, the Prince's act of erasure provides a curious note of irony to the continuing story of Wörlitz. In that one of the central goals of the Benetton Foundation's Carlo Scarpa Prize is preserving the documentation of sites such as Wörlitz, this year the prize is awarded to a site whose records were eradicated by the very hand that made it.

During his presentation of Wörlitz at the Villa Vigoni conference, the Benetton Foundation's Director, Domenico Luciani, observed that beyond the scope and quality of the design of the Dessau-Wörlitzer Gartenreich and the migration of cultural values across the abstract geo-political boundaries the Gartenreich represents, the jury also chose Wörlitz because it demonstrates a carefully considered and implemented plan of restoration. Begun in the early 1980s following its being named as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (1979), this restoration includes not only the reconstitution of such landscape artefacts as the banks of the garden's canals and lakes, but also includes the reconstruction of lost vistas and *fabriques* that have either decayed or been erased by neglect, modern interventions or the unchecked growth of vegetation. Consequently, the remaking of the Gartenreich has included both the addition of lost buildings and the subtraction of, for example, well-meaning but improperly managed tree growth, thereby re-establishing one of the salient features of the original landscape — large expanses of uninterrupted fields of green where farm animals once grazed.

Among the many sites restored during the past two decades of work conducted in the Gartenreich are the Rousseau Island and the unobstructed vistas to the Golden Urn and the Temple of Love at Wörlitz, the Chinese Garden and Pagoda Tower at Oranienbaum and the old tree-lined road that once connected the individual garden-estates. And while the natural settings of this extensive garden landscape can and continue to be restored, that which cannot be reconstituted is the nature of the culture out of which this garden originally grew. While Prince Franz still lived, the public was encouraged to visit Wörlitz. Indeed, it was not unusual for visitors to encounter the Prince as they strolled through his mansion and grounds. It may have been one of these chance

encounters that prompted the Prince to outline some basic rules of decorum for visitors, published in a guidebook for the garden: 'It is not allowed: to walk in the garden or the mansion in hob-nailed boots or with sticks; to walk on the lawns; to drink tea or coffee or to have meals or refreshments in the garden or the mansion; to cover the wall or statues with graffiti.'

Conceived as a living didactic instrument demonstrating Horace's advice on connecting 'the useful with the beautiful,' Wörlitz was intended as a garden of instruction in which the public could learn about advancements in agriculture and animal husbandry in a setting where cultivated fields of crops grown for harvest were presented alongside Arcadian fields constructed for pleasure. At the time of its inception, the Gartenreich was a place where some of the great technological advancements of the day could be viewed. Among these innovations were a system for supplying fresh water to the mansion, moving stairs, sash windows, retractable beds, sliding doors and dumb waiters. Today, however, the management of the Gartenreich finds itself in the double bind of defending itself against the same progress the garden once openly promoted. Dissected by the development of the A6 autobahn, squeezed by the sprawl of Dessau and, in 1990, nearly eviscerated by the construction of a new power station in Vockerode (located in the heart of the 'Garden Kingdom') the Dessau-Wörlitzer Gartenreich, like so many historically restored enclaves, now looks to the soft industry of tourism to bolster itself against the onslaught of more relentless, large-scale industrial development. The Director of the Gartenreich, Dr Thomas Weiss, recognizing the inherent complexity of vying for public revenue in a country where unemployment is high and the pressure for new jobs and development is great, hopes to augment the revenue base of the Gartenreich and to correspondingly create new jobs in the area through substantially increasing the number of paid admissions to the garden. Responding to questions raised during the Villa Vigoni conference regarding the effects of increased tourist traffic on both one's perception of the garden as well as the physical changes it will create, Weiss suggested that the restoration of other garden estates, such as Oranienbaum, would help to diffuse the total number of visitors among the various garden venues.

Yet, it is difficult to imagine how one will both promote the popularity of the garden at Wörlitz that is clearly the centerpiece of the Gartenreich and, at the same time, deflect public attention to other, secondary sites. Like the fictional Finzi-Contini family, who, confusing reality for the fable of its own constructed views, were doomed by their failure to recognize the changes in

the world beyond their garden walls, those responsible for the preservation of the Dessau-Wörlitzer Gartenreich similarly run the risk of falling victim to the meticulous image of perfected nature they have constructed. Instead of mounting a rearguard defensive strategy against industrial development in the hopes that increased tourism will save the garden with little or no impact on the site, the garden may be better served by attempting to find ways for it to develop in concert with the changing landscape around it. Rather than freezing time in 1817, the future of the garden may still have something to learn from its originator, who embraced the new landscapes of England and the advancements of technology that made them possible. Moreover, there may also be lessons to be learned from the gardens and buildings produced by the architect for whom the Benetton Foundation's prize is named.

Throughout his long and varied career Carlo Scarpa designed glassware, furniture, exhibitions, new buildings, and additions to buildings and gardens. But he may be best known for his museological work, which often involved both the reorganization of a museum's collection along with restorations and additions to the building's original fabric. In no small measure because of his work in such important museums as the Accademia in Venice, the Castelvecchio in Verona, and the Palazzo Abatellis in Palermo, Scarpa established a wholly original and provocative way of conceiving of the relationship of historic fabric and contemporary development. In his gardens at the Fondazione Querini-Stampalia in Venice and the Castelvecchio, Scarpa inserted landscapes that were clearly new into restored settings that combined original and restored fabric with overtly modern elements. Through creating a carefully balanced and erudite commentary on the old with new materials and forms, Scarpa created settings wherein the past and the present coalesced into a common vision that embraced difference with an understanding of history as an ongoing process that resists stasis as strongly as historical-review commissions typically resist change.

The aptness of the Villa Vigoni as the venue for the discussion of an English landscape transplanted to German soil is signified in both the German-Italian patrimony of the Villa and the design of its extensive hillside setting, which, like Wörlitz, was modeled after the English landscape garden type. Moreover, the Villa Vigoni was a logical choice for another, perhaps less obvious reason. Unlike many Villa sites in Italy where the building's exterior fabric as been assiduously maintained while the furniture, artworks, books and the various period objects of the original owners' quotidian life have long since vanished,

the Villa Vigoni has been scrupulously maintained, inside and out. This is evidenced by a small but valuable library that reflects both the culture of its owners and the larger cultures of Germany and Italy during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The artefacts on display in the Villa Vigoni are, in fact, the very same artefacts displayed in the same locations that the first owners of the villa chose for them. Included among these artworks are a number of sculptures by the Icelandic-born Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen, who spent much of his productive life working in Italy, and a fine collection of Wedgwood, some of which dates from the early 1800s. The pastel green and white china, displayed in the Villa's breakfast room, is to the interior of the Villa what the garden is to the exterior — a marker of both the commodification of cultural difference and the contradictory desire to obliterate that difference through assimilation.

Yet, the Villa Vigoni and the Dessau-Wörlitzer Gartenreich each stand as testaments to the impossibility of eradicating the very difference they celebrate through imitation. Just as the Wedgwood plates and vases, produced at Etruria in Staffordshire, in their attempt to reproduce antique Roman and Etruscan pottery were uniquely English, so too the Gartenreich of Wörlitz, in its attempt

to reconstruct the landscapes and buildings of England, tells us less about the models on which it was based than it does about the culture of Prince Franz's small German state as it embraced the ideals of the Enlightenment during an era of great political unrest. Like all garden stewards, the administrators of the Dessau-Wörlitzer Gartenreich must achieve a Scarpa-like balance between old and new, between the changes required by the forces of nature and the desire to maintain a coherent vision and sense of a particular place. Similarly, as they confront the many challenges presented by a fast-changing German economy and the reality of a unified European community, the administrators of the Gartenreich may find that through embracing the change that surrounds them, the future of Wörlitz and the other garden-estates may best be managed not as a collection of static views, but as a dynamic idea of landscape, built on a love of innovation and a desire to be new. It may be instructive to recall that in order for Prince Franz to build Wörlitz, he first had to demolish the existing Baroque castle and garden (1698). Prince Franz did not mistake the sunset for the dawn, and neither should we.

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NOTES

1. The first site to receive the Carlo Scarpa Prize was Santo Antonio da Bica designed by Roberto Burle Marx (awarded in 1990). Other landscapes honored by the Benetton Foundation are Stockholm's Woodland Cemetery by Asplund and Lewerentz (1995) and the Escorial's La Freseda (1996). The Scarpa prize was officially presented by the Benetton Foundation's Director, Domenico Luciani, on behalf of the Scarpa prize jury to Dr Thomas Weiss, Director of Kulturstiftung Dessau-Wörlitz, at public ceremon-

ies held in the Teatro Accademico of Castelfranco (Treviso) on May 10. The jury for the Benetton Foundation Scarpa prize consists of Domenico Luciani, Director, Benetton Foundation (Jury Coordinator); Carmen Añón Feliu, University of Madrid; Monique Mosser, CNRS, Paris; Lionello Puppi, University of Venice (Jury President), and Thomas Wright, University of London. Among the many sources on Wörlitz is a catalog and collected essays, *Welbild Wörlitz: Entwurf einer Kulturlandschaft*,

edited by FRANK-ANDREAS BECHTOLDT and THOMAS WEISS. Published in 1996, the catalog accompanied an exhibition of the Wörlitzer Gartenreich held at the German Architecture Museum in Frankfurt, 22 March to 2 June, 1996. The organizers of the exhibition were Frank-Andreas Bechtoldt, Kulturstiftung der Deutschen Bank, Wilfried Wang, Director, German Architecture Museum, Frankfurt, and Thomas Weiss, Director, Staatlichen Schlösser und Gärten Wörlitz, Oranienbaum, Luisium, Dessau.