be something like D9+R’s High Line in NYC of course. The reuse of an old elevated train line, which had been abandoned for decades, and turning it into something that is so intertwined with the daily lives of New Yorkers is very impressive. The Good LIne in Melbourne shares many similarities I feel, and it is also a remarkable project. The Vietnam War Memorial remains as one of the greatest works of landscape architecture in the world.

LR: How does Poppy Plaza connect the landscape to the heritage site?

MB: The project has a “built-in” cultural component. Following the First World War, the City of Calgary wanted to honor those from the region who had fallen in battle. So they created Memorial Drive, a long avenue along the banks of the Bow River. Along these banks, one poplar tree was planted for each of the fallen soldiers. After 100 years, the trees have started to pass away and the collective memory of our soldiers has been integrated into the landscape to the heritage site?

LR: Does Poppy Plaza connect the landscape to the heritage site?

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LR: What are the challenges you faced during the design and realization of your concepts?

MB: Too many to mention! Take Poppy Plaza for example. Primarily, there are a lot of regulatory bodies that need to be consulted at the municipal, provincial and federal level because of our proximity to the river. So coordinating with the environmental stakeholders takes quite a bit of time and expertise. Outside of that, the design challenges usually go back to those that are intrinsically faced by all designers: the shift from schematic to construction and the challenges that come up if budgets are an issue… how to modify or simplify the design without losing the design aspirations and intentions.

LR: Are there some principles or strategies in the design of landscape architecture with regard to its culture layer in your country?

MB: No, not specifically. It is really dependent on the site itself and the ideas of the design team… in terms of the cultural layer in our country, I don’t think there is any overarching ideas that transmit themselves across all regions. Canada is both vast, but also pretty young as a nation; I don’t think that part of our history is written.

LR: In landscape design for museums, theaters, libraries or historical heritages, how does a landscape architect accomplish to embed nature in architecture?

MB: I think that landscape architects can play a fundamental role in providing the “canvas” for these buildings. Buildings, by nature, tend to be more specific in terms of their programming, whereas landscaping can be much more open ended. In this sense, the landscaping can act as part of a “journey” of that experience… or it can act as a kind of decompression space after leaving the building. The notion of nature is again really dependent on a lot of variables. The Palace of Versailles, for example, has very structured gardens, which are not “natural” even though they are organic. I think that landscaping outside of buildings should be somehow connected thematically in order to “extend” that experience.

LR: What in your opinion is cultural landscape design? What qualities should cultural landscape design possess?

FV&CM: Landscape design needs to find references to give a sense to the project. These references may be found in the local culture, both in the available materials and indigenous vegetation, and the history of use, relationship and human management of this landscape.

LR: Creating a Genius Loci that Dialogues with a Place
- An Interview with Fernando Vegas and Camilla Mileto

Fernando Vegas & Camilla Mileto (FV&CM): A cultural landscape reflects the relationship between the territory and man, understood as carrier of his history, culture, idiosyncrasy, etc. It is a symbiosis between use, management and life of man with the territory that surrounds him. The design of a cultural landscape should take into account these human traces, both visible and invisible, and try to bring them into light and promote them in a natural way, without forcing them.
In our projects, we have especially worked in the relationship between history of the place and the forms of use of the territory, in order to help our project to root itself in the place and the local tradition, in order to create a kind of genius loci which dialogues with the place.

LR: How do you balance the desire to design or structure a site while preserving its existing historical fabric?

FV&CM: Frequently, it happens that, trying to preserve the existing historical fabric in a place and aiming to make our intervention as invisible as possible implies an enormous creative effort. In these cases, creativity is not so to be found easily; it does not appear so evident, as it has to be looked in the details. It should be also remembered that the most creative architecture is generally born from the existence of constraints.

LR: What are the challenges you faced during the design and realization of your concepts?

FV&CM: We wanted to keep the spirit of the place and, therefore, it was necessary to maintain the ruins as unaltered as possible, as well as to search for a direct relationship between natural vegetation of the garden and the archaeological ruins, as we knew this relationship would have helped both.

LR: Is there any project you designed (or any other projects which impressed you most) which has made best use of its cultural context?

FV&CM: Some years ago, we designed a garden for the quarter of velvet producers at Valencia (Spain), where we designed the urban furniture perfectly integrated in the history of the quarter and reflected its culture and way of living during the last six centuries.

LR: What is the relationship between cultural landsCape design and landscape design? What qualities should cultural landscape design possess?

Shauna Gillies-Smith (SGS): I think this first question is a little bit tricky, because I believe any designed landscape is cultural. The American non-profit organization, The Cultural Landscape Foundation, defines a cultural landscape as one that’s been impacted by human involvement. They discuss four different types of cultural landscapes, and only one of them is designed landscape. In general I would say that any landscape design is a product of the culture. You can’t help but be impacted by the context of the project, and you are working in culture that you’ve developed in, and through which you’ve learned to think.

LR: What is the relationship between cultural context and landscape design?

SGS: We can use landscape design to consciously make culture more visible. There’s always a subconscious component of design that you can’t really help because you’ve been so completely shaped by your particular culture. But there are other aspects – whether it’s the history, the industry of the place or the people – that present opportunities to bring a narrative forward within the design. That’s something we like to do in a lot of our projects at Ground. We want to bring that extra layer of narrative – not in an overtly explicit way, but in a way where people can dig a little deeper and understand another layer of stories in their experience of the landscape.

LR: What in your opinion is cultural landscape design? What qualities

Shona Gillies-Smith is the principal of GROUND, a landscape architecture practice focusing on the creation of artful and sustainable landscapes in urban settings. Trained first as an architect and urban designer, Shauna’s shift to landscape practice was motivated by the desire to reveal the potentials of surprise and pleasure in the urban realm.

GROUND’s landscapes play a protagonist role in the experience of the city – creating unexpected moments of joy and engagement that craft the stage for the drama of urban life. The work strives to balance exceptional detailing and execution with comfort and openness in use, fully believing that urban landscapes need the dynamic (and unpredictable) participation of the public to be successful. GROUND has been recognized with numerous awards, most recently an ASLA award for the Treehouse Residence at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design.

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LR: How do you balance the desire to design or structure a site while preserving its existing historical fabric? Any new techniques or concepts?

FV&CM: We are interested in landscape architecture that dialogues with the existing nature without imposing itself to it. We are also interested in the introduction of the Time factor in the design of landscape architecture, the Time of seasons, the Time of growing vegetal species, the Time of blooming, the Time of aging, the Time of leaves falling, the Time of the shadow of a tree working as a sundial, the Time of the patina growing on the urban furniture, etc.

LR: What is the relationship between cultural landsCape design and landscape design? What qualities should cultural landscape design possess?

LR: Is there any project you designed (or any other projects which impressed you most) which has made best use of its cultural context?

FV&CM: Some years ago, we designed a garden for the quarter of velvet producers at Valencia (Spain), where we designed the urban furniture perfectly integrated in the history of the quarter and reflected its culture and way of living during the last six centuries.