

A Book of Gardens

Lee Kelly

Introductions by
Randal Davis & Kassandra Kelly

LEE KELLY



Nepal I & II (2011)
Cor-ten steel, 93 x 48 x 40 inches, 99 x 43 x 37 inches.
Collection of the artist, installed at Leland Iron Works.

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This facsimile edition of *A Book of Gardens* was designed and printed by Leland Iron Works, December 2013.

A Book of Gardens originally copyright Lee Kelly, 1987.

Artist statement ("I envision my work...") copyright Lee Kelly, 1997.

"...looking in, looking out..." copyright Randal Davis, 2013.

"Borrowed Landscape" copyright Kassandra Kelly, 2013

I envision my work bridging the gap between individuals and the environment. It creates a context, whether physical, political or spiritual, in which it is possible for the viewer to re-examine his or her world. Perhaps for a few seconds, an individual may feel that this place, this time, these people are part of a whole, and find a small piece of truth in our shared world.

Lee Kelly 1997

A garden recreates nature and spirit in an image of the ideal.

Lee Kelly 1987

Randal Davis

"...looking in, looking out..."

Lee Kelly's *A Book of Gardens*, self-published in 1987, occupies an interesting position in his body of work. As his career entered its third decade in the latter half of the 1970's and early 1980's, he had become widely known throughout the Northwest for highly visible public works in both Cor-ten and stainless steel. Such projects included monumental *Gate F* (1972) for San Francisco's Candlestick Park and *Leland I*, in collaboration with Bonnie Bronson, for Portland Center Park and the *Frank L Beach Memorial Fountain* in Portland's International Rose Test Garden (both 1975). This reputation was further secured by long-term outdoor exhibitions of major works at both Reed College (1976) and The Art Gym at Marylhurst College (1983).

By the early 1970's, Kelly's work had moved from the gestural vocabulary of Abstract Expressionism to a harder and reductive set of formal devices, a repertoire closer to the examples of David Smith and Anthony Caro. This transformation was largely complete by the end of the decade with works like *East of Riggins* (1978), *Nash* (1979) and *Manang* (1983), articulating qualities that would become salient features of his sculpture, explicitly architectural forms (albeit not necessarily "functional," in the strict sense) with an almost uncanny feeling of being at once artifacts of ancient past and a yet only glimpsed future.



Left: Detail of *Nash* (1979). Stainless steel, 192 inches high.

Collection National Builders Hardware, Portland OR.

Right: *Manang* (1983). Corten steel, 90 x 120 x 40 inches. Private collection.

With his first trek to Nepal in 1979, Kelly became, and remains, an inveterate traveler – India, Mexico, Viet Nam, Turkey, Burma...it might be more surprising if these journeys had no perceptible impact on his art, but that is hardly the case. Yet his work did not become some sort of transcultural pastiche, and that is what makes *A Book of Gardens* so interesting.

Surely most conspicuous is its breadth of reference. The first section of the book is a survey, in six pages, of the social function of the garden in Egypt, Persia, India, China and Japan. The remaining five pages are a summation and projection; notes and aphorisms mingle with suggestions of garden projects, some quite detailed, others better understood as proofs of concept.

In fact, a very large number of these speculations came to inform finished works. The arch forms of “pavillion: a <gathering> place” [sic] found expression, at monumental scale, in the *Arch With Oaks* (1989), a commission for the Cornell Oaks Corporate Center, and at more intimate scale in *Akbar’s Gate* (1988) and *Patan* (1996) [p. 35]. The ground spirals (or “serpent waterways”) have been a feature of many of Kelly’s works, perhaps nowhere more explicitly than the *Interlocking Serpents* (1999) [p. 5]. And when, on the final page of *A Book of Gardens*, Kelly writes of “symbols or devices to make connections...counterpoints to plant materials,” we see the continuation of his fascination with the Yucatan ruins introduced to him in the early 1970’s by architect, engineer and art dealer, John Bolles, and later brought to complete realization in, for example, *Icarus at Yucatan* (2005) [p. 5].

So it’s not hard to see that *A Book of Gardens* is important for its connections to Kelly’s body of work. And you can glimpse that broader scope in his 1997 artist statement where “bridging the gap between individuals and the environment” requires “the viewer to re-examine his or her world.” Put differently, it’s been a commonplace of architectural history and theory since Vitruvius to speculate on the primal dwelling, the first principles of building. The most familiar form of this inquiry is Gottfried Semper’s postulation of the four fundamentals of architecture: hearth, roof, wall and mound. He was, as Jonathan Hale has observed, “determined to go further back into the mists of pre-history if necessary, in his search for the ultimate forming principles in architecture.”

In other words, it's archaeology and mythography at once. A thorough telling of Kelly's architectural tropes is another subject, one only hinted at here, but there is one sense in which the fact that the ruminations of *A Book of Gardens* subsequently found substantial form may not be its most interesting aspect. *A Book of Gardens* is finally about first principles, less perhaps specifically architectural than purely phenomenological.



Tom Turner has suggested that the first garden was a barrier placed in front of a cave, proof against “marauding beasts and brutes.” The barriers pushed out, he suggests, protecting domestic animals and crops, finally becoming a site “to relax in the glorious sunshine of a Neolithic evening.” You might read that as merely fuddled gentility, but there’s something else there: the way in which one engages in the world, the necessity of boundaries between self and other, inner and outer, the expansion of that domain, and a final transformation to reflexivity.

What makes *A Book of Gardens* so interesting, then, is that its last words, “looking down into – looking out of” are not really the last. They were the first.

Left & center: Two views of *Icarus at Yucatan* (2005). Stainless steel, 252 x 36 x 24 inches.
Collection of the artist, installed at Leland Iron Works.

Right: *Interlocking Serpents* (1999). Cor-ten steel. Collection Susan Hammer, Portland OR.



Tibet Guest House I & II (1985)

Stainless steel, 82 x 18 x 18 inches, 74 x 18 x 18 inches.
Collection of the artist, installed at Leland Iron Works

Kassandra Kelly ***Borrowed Landscape***

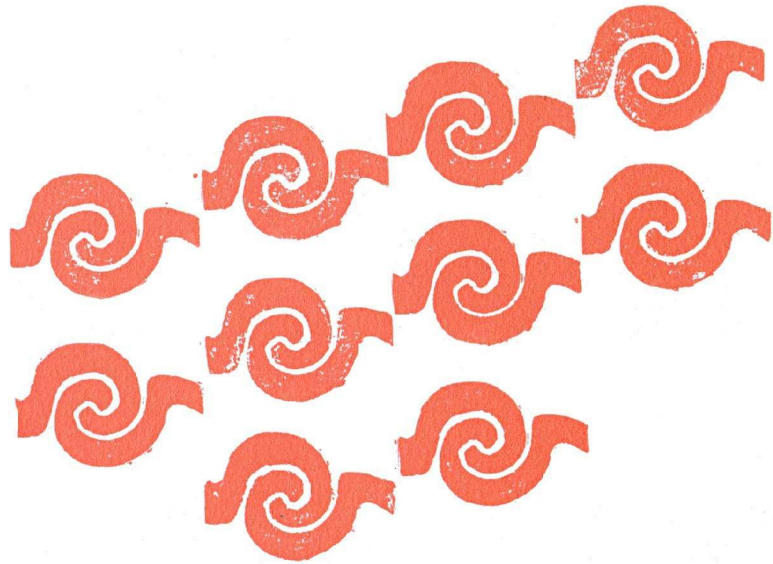
When Lee Kelly and Bonnie Bronson's garden book was made in 1987, they were exploring new sculptural environments. Making a living is always an up and down proposition for artists, but for Lee and Bonnie the down cycle often gave rise to innovation and new direction. In the mid 1980's they began composing gardens for other people, practicing what they'd learned on their own property.

One of the ideas expressed in their garden is the principle of borrowed landscape, a tradition of Chinese design that incorporates background scenery into a garden composition. Lee's property, south of Oregon City, is a narrow slice of land bordered on the east and west by open pasture. Although you can stand on the east edge and see open pasture on the west, it is not easy to walk from one side to the other, even at the narrowest point. Bonnie and Lee expected that neighbors would build houses in the pastures, and so planted dense conifers along the fence lines, less to prevent others looking in but to keep us from having to look out at our neighbors. Some landscapes they did *not* want to borrow.

When Lee bought his first crane truck in 1972, parts of the property were suddenly available for siting large sculptures. Bonnie and Lee began to consider the relationships between sculptures as well as to the spaces within the garden. These were exterior living areas that encouraged a daily ritual of having coffee breaks and cocktail hour outside, looking at sculpture, tossing a ball for the dog, and watching the seasons change.

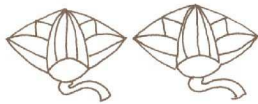
It sounds simple—a bottle of wine in the garden with sculpture—but it engendered an attitude toward garden spaces that we continue to honor today. The property has islands of seating areas connected by walkways. The best seating areas provide a view further into the property, revealing spaces yet to be explored. Each site is better at certain times of day or year. Good for two people, four, or many. Some areas are intensely focused around the barn's work space—perfect for midday breaks when you want to keep looking. Others are high summer look-outs, hidden under a vaulted evergreen canopy; others take the full blast of sun. One place is for contemplation of winter where a reflecting pool brings light into the darkened landscape.

None are gardens for the sunset, which is to the west behind the hills rimming the valley. Late afternoons we watch sculptures catch the last light, holding the warmth of the day. Sculpture itself becomes a borrowed landscape, providing another view in exchange for what the garden must, by its very nature, wall out.



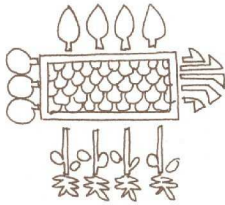
western tradition has it that man's first home
was a garden → east of eden ←
and we have tried to return ever since.

W Kelly · ©1987

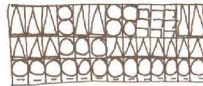


early garden : egypt

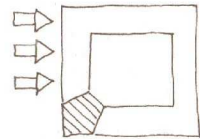
"praise to you Nile
that comes from earth
to nourish Egypt...
that waters the gardens...
she that re-created to
nourish all cattle..."



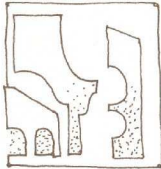
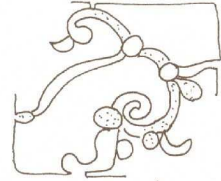
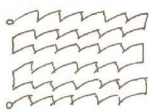
symmetrical plan, trees in rows
around water : oasis



escape from summer heat - glare of cloudless
sky - garden as retreat - pool of water,
leafy trees.



persia → paradise = garden, a concept universal to human experience, paradise as a garden.

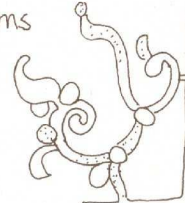
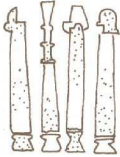


reverence for water, mystical feeling for trees, ordering of nature

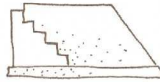
to transform desert to represent the architecture of paradise

invention of garden objects: structures, columned halls, pavilions, water ways:

pools, basins
irrigation systems



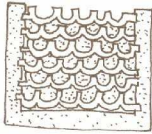
waterchute - steps



→ to change levels between terraces.

india - pre mughal

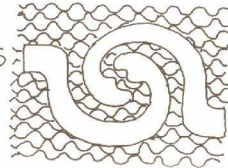
rivers: ganga, yamuna holy waters
bringing water from the himalaya,
house of the gods.



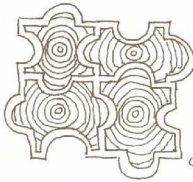
buddha attained perfect knowledge
under a tree.

water - serpent kings (nagas), guardians
of springs and holy tanks.

water - serpent device ≈ spiral
ancient symbol.



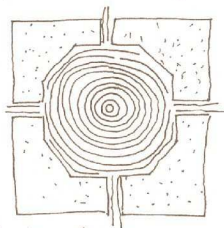
garden at night light / water
flicker of light - sound of water



curbing@anguri bagh

mughal-india

babur: soldier, garden-maker
"I laid out the four gardens (bagh-i-wafa)
on a rising ground, facing south,
there oranges, citrons, and pomegranates
grow in abundance"
"in order to bring water I had a large
channel dug!"

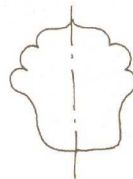


four gardens (charbagh) meeting,
baths, mosque.

"the best of young trees must be planted there,
lawns arranged, borders set with sweet-herbs."

water dominated, a place to be
alone or with family and friends.

pavilions to carry on life in a garden



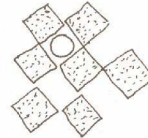
China
from vast nature preserves or hunting parks
to intimate family garden retreats from
the outside world, privacy behind a wall-
spaces recalling nature at its most wild and scenic



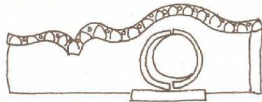
to make nature over a piece of the wilds with architecture

covered passages
zig-zag path

bridge
paving patterns
varied openings-doors-windows.
all weather experience of garden.



never going directly, always mystery of the unknown,
the garden slowly reveals itself.

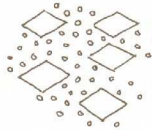


" a chinese garden is to be experienced,
one must physically move through the spaces,
only a hint of what lies around the corner
is revealed from any one point."

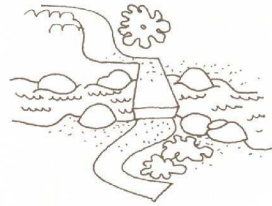
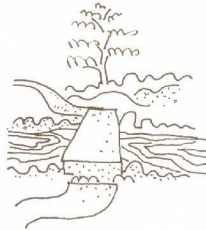
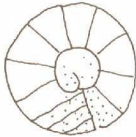
(david h engel- creating a chinese garden)

Japan

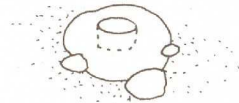
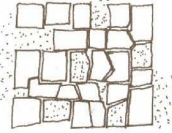
to capture a landscape : space , illusion



balance between nature and man



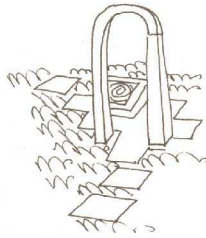
shakkei = borrowed scenery • landscape captured alive
example • framing a distant view to make it part
of the garden.



to choose a site w/ great natural beauty and
place something in it is not "borrowing scenery!"

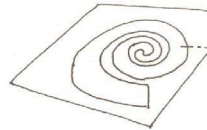
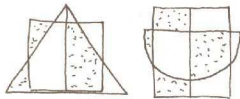
garden as a meeting place → between man and nature.

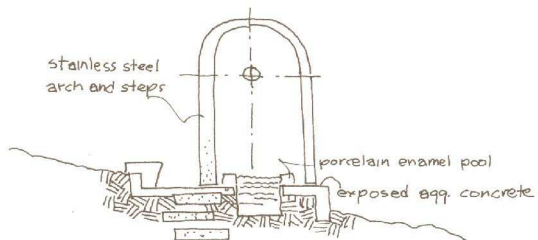
sculpture should
be human scale,
colors, textures
balance the natural
materials.



sculptural elements which
emphasize human presence.
leaves, water, bark, sky
all these things make
the surroundings.

the working relationship between people
becomes critical to successfully making
sculpture for a garden

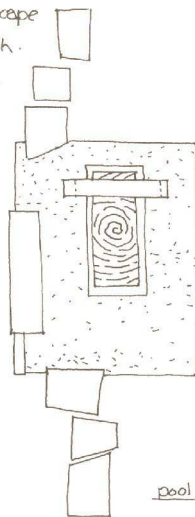




arch: "borrows" adj. landscape

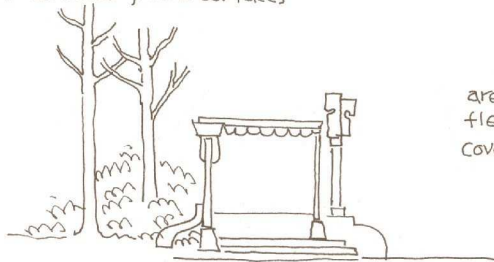
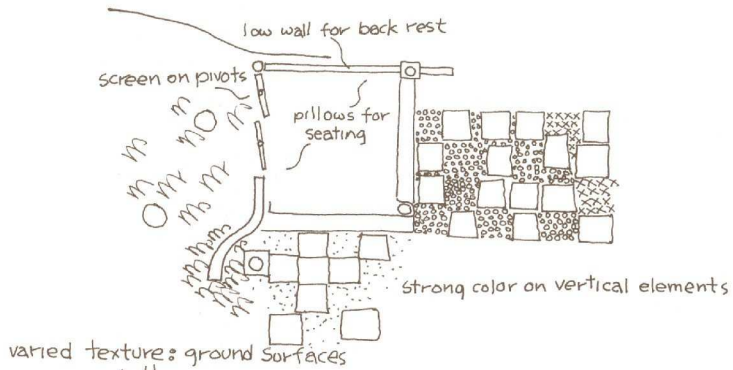
pool: "borrows" sky and arch.

Stainless surface ground
to reflect only color
not specific images.



pool w/ bench and arch

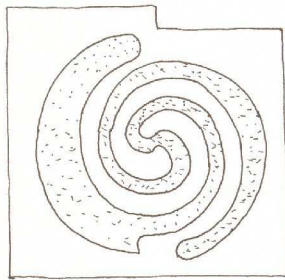
gathering pavilion: a place



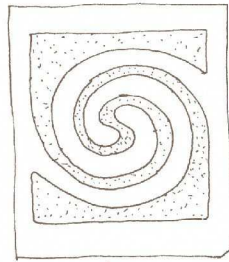
area for dinner, seating 14-16
flexible lighting -
covered platform.

serpent waterway

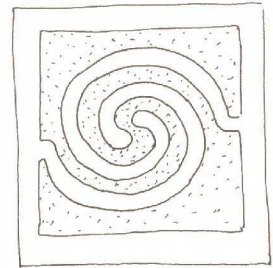
naga: benevolent snake-king,
guardian spirit of water places



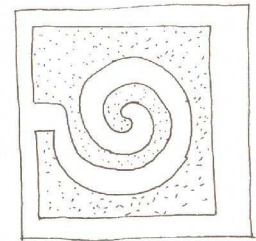
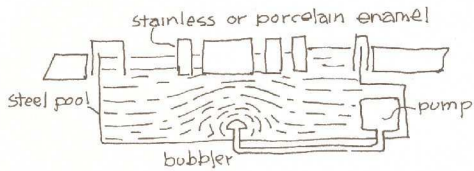
a



b

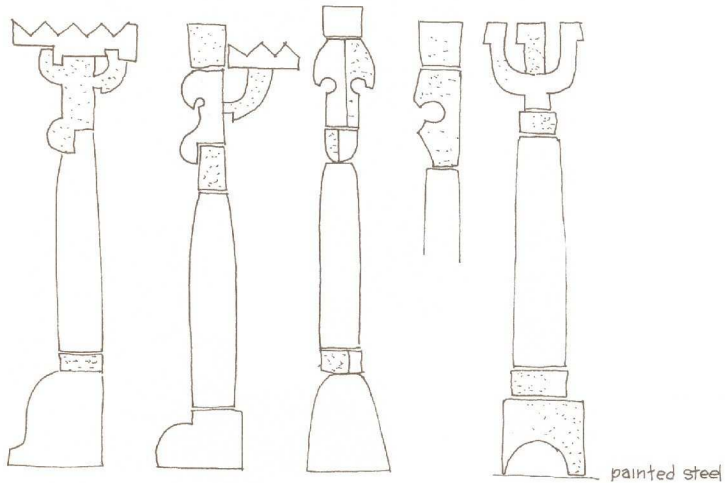


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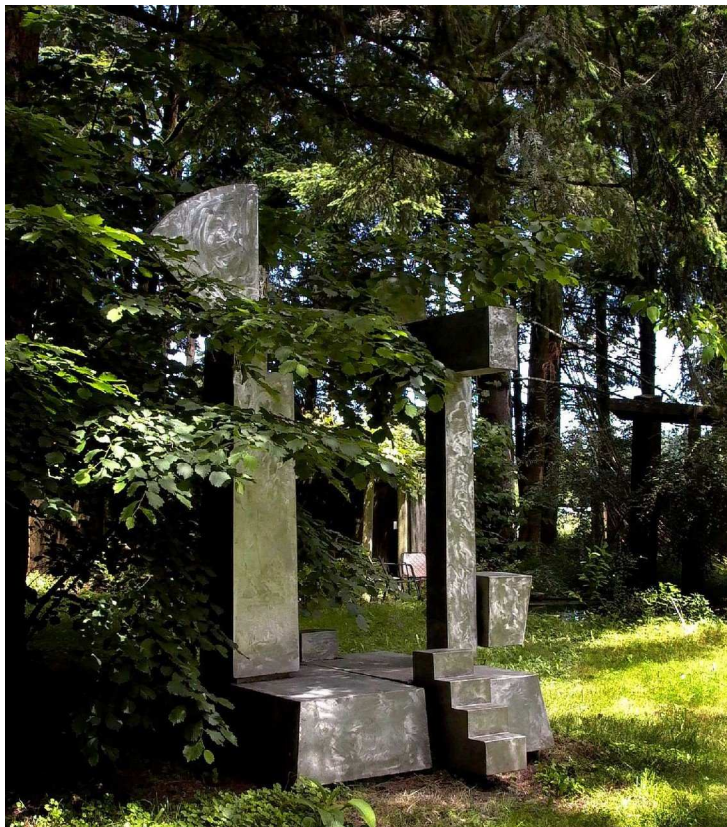


d

a way to understand ourselves with nature
sculpture symbols or devices to make connections,
as counter point to plant materials.



garden at night and all seasons,
place for gathering, special events,
as well as daily life.
⇒ looking down into- looking out of.



Patan (1996)
Stainless steel, 138 x 84 x 100 inches.
Collection of the artist, installed at Leland Iron Works.

