

SYLLABUS - SUMMER 2019
GARDENS AND LANDSCAPES

Instructor Details: TBA

New York University - Villa La Pietra Florence

Monday – Wednesday 9-12

Class lectures take place at New York University_Villa La Pietra.

Field trips take place from meeting points to pre-established sites and all visits will be guided, detailed information regarding the meeting points, timetables, means of transport, will be confirmed and communicated the week prior to the excursion.

DESCRIPTION:

Since the period of the Grand Tour Italy has been defined as the “the Garden of Europe” and up to present day it has still maintained in the contours of its own landscapes the anthropic activity of the past. Combined with its natural beauty which through the passing centuries has softened its contours, designing agricultural texture and street mapping while placing amongst the predominant urban and architectural landscapes a variety of gardens as a testimonial of a culture that since antiquity has associated nature to the design of places for intellectual, contemplative activities of man.

Placed in the vicinity of eminent architectures which had both an aesthetic as well as a productive aim these gardens are an ideological translation of an earthy metaphysical vision of the world in addition to providing a formal and privileged model within the sector of technical experimentation. The garden after all also represents the place where the relationship between man and nature takes place, of which it is the image of the history of the gardens, as defined by Massimo Venturi Ferriolo as “aesthetics gardens within the aesthetic range of the landscape”, can be generally summarized as the history of the creation of environments emulating the Paradise, the Elysium, and the Myth in lay culture, the Eden for the Christian Jewish, and, even more, an environment suitable for competing and emulating extreme detailed research, offering wonder and a variety of repetition of gestures and the structural effect of the first one, both paradigmatic and exemplary at the same time.

It is precisely the emulative creative act of the first type of garden which established for the numerous examples of historical gardens the primary symbolic dimension of the location as paradise and sovereignty giving them privileged interpretation and declination, in the formalisms of its designs, in the cultural, political, economic and social structure that generates them, as well as being symbolic and formal models themselves, these gardens in fact become an ideological support of the rhetoric of power in the function of stage and within the celebratory representativeness of the ruling authorities.

Being able to understand and construe the garden requires being able to convert and interpret its structure, formalisms and symbolism, to be able to read the landscaping agricultural productive connections, its territorial and strategic positions, its natural, anthropic, humanistic background (in particular the relationship between the work carried out and the professional figures here employed), but also the perceptions, the cultural substrata (literary, artistic and scientific aspects) as well as the political, economic and social dimensions that have generated it.

If paradise has always had features of the garden and the garden was built according to the Eden model, in the literary and symbolic world of both holy and lay Western Medieval culture, it is the monastic hortus conclusus that has symbolized its designation par excellence as the translation in terms of physical and spiritual Terrestrial Paradise, a privileged location of encounter between man and the divine, a manifestation of the sacred and domain of man over a tamed nature, which had found its place in the friendly four-sided square cloister. Florence has a numerous list of monastic gardens, important monuments and formal transposition of the Eden principle.

It was always in Florence and in its neighbouring surroundings that, in the ideological novelty which accompanied the birth of the garden they shed light, beyond the urban gardens, the Medici's villas, examples of suburban gentry dwellings which had a double role of productive agricultural units and of aristocratic leisurely residences. Such gardens marked from their origins an excellent example of the connection between architecture, garden, and landscape contextually in the new aesthetics sensibility tied

to the humanistic ideal and later linked to the Renaissance ideals and to the rich artistic Florentine production of the time. They became recreational places, leisure and relaxation areas, contemplation of the splendid landscapes, where one could study, converse, as well as places for philosophical, literary and poetic reflections. These became places for artistic, applied architecture, engineering, technological, scientific ideas suited to the formalisms of the gardens.

For the above mentioned reasons the understanding of the geometric and of the features of the Italian gardens is inseparable from the architectural characteristics of the artistic, pictorial, sculptural, iconographic arts. At the same time in these peculiarities there is a cultural depth and such correspondence constitutes an important reflection on proposing again the Renaissance formalisms in that wide phenomenon of reconstitution of the formal design of the garden that saw owners and collectors, often foreigners, employed in the in the Tuscan villas between the 800s and the first half of the 900s. Such a reflection constitutes also an inseparable support in the delicate choices that undergo each restoration procedure of historical gardens.

OBJECTIVES:

Students are stimulated by understanding the cultural, analytical, perceptive instruments, finalized to the visual, formal, volumetric, interpretational reading of the garden, a dimensional circumscribed space connected to the surrounding landscape and for its critical and ideological interpretation.

They will be supported by a critical dimension in the historical, political, economic, cultural and artistic reading at the origins of the idea of a Tuscan garden and of its iconographic and objective translation in the real transposition in the multiple formal variety within the landscape. Students will acquire the instruments for an accurate reading and interpretation of such gardens.

METHODS AND FIELD TRIPS:

Attendance is mandatory. Lessons will take place both in class (with frontal lessons and power point projections), and mainly outside, during visits to places, architectural environment and the gardens of Florence and surrounding areas. Both didactic moments are considered very important, in particular the group visits with the professor are highly recommended for the parallel educational activities while at the same time visits to the sites. At some site visit, as previously advised, a worksheet on the visited villa will be distributed to be filled at home and returned at the next class. These worksheets will be evaluated as participation and considered in the final evaluation.

It is advisable to wear appropriate clothes for the excursions with comfortable footwear, notepad for jotting down notes and eventually a camera for the visual documentation, comfort items such as: drinks, hats, sunglasses, fans, insect repellent, since these visits take place during late spring-beginning summer.

EVALUATION SYSTEM:

The evaluation of the work carried out together will be roughly as follows:

20% Attendance and Participation

20% Midterm Exam (a short evaluation on landscape and gardens on a 30-40 questions test)

20% Final Group (max 6) Exam to be carried out at home (La Pietra Garden: historical/iconographical research, formal, sensitive, structural and visual analysis, (5-6 pages, 1600-1800 words (photos and drawings/hand field sketches, etc. are eventually welcome, final bibliography)

20% Final Single Personal Exam to be carried out at home (historical/iconographical research, , formal, sensitive, structural and visual analysis on a student chosen garden (3-4 pages, (photos and drawings/hand field sketches, etc. are eventually welcome, final bibliography) plus a single description of 'your garden' as a personal creative writing exercise also inspired by the course program.

10% Single personal worksheets assignments on some the visited villas.

10% Oral Presentation (a five minute presentation to the class on a topic related to the work done during the course agreed and discussed with the teacher)

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Georgina Masson, *Italian Gardens*, (1961) new edition with an introduction by Margherita Azzi Visentini, Garden Art Press, Woodbridge, 2011.

Elisabeth B. MacDougall, *Medieval gardens*, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington D.C., 1986.

James Ackerman, *The Villa, form and ideology of country houses*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1990.
Claudia Lazzaro Lieberman Ralph, *The Italian Renaissance garden: from conventions of planting, design and ornamento to the grand gardens of sixteen century central Italy*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1990.
Daniela Mignani, *The Medicean Villas by Giusto Utens*, Florence, 1991.
John Dixon Hunt, *The Italian Garden. Art, design and culture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996.
Amanda Lillie, *Florentine villas in the fifteenth-century. An architectural and social history*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005
Monique Mosser, Georges Teyssot, *The Architecture of Western Gardens: A Design History from the Renaissance to the present day*, the MIT Press, Cambridge Mass., 1991.

Course Pack available in pdf.

SAMPLE