
Patricia Johanson and the Re-invention of Public Environmental Art, 1958-2010 examines the transformation of Johanson’s career from painter and sculptor to public garden and environmental artist whose designs invite viewers to consider larger issues within contemporary art and landscape aesthetics. This book does not serve as a biography but rather seeks to interpret the artist’s foray into landscape creation. Wu’s work relies upon previous scholarship and primary materials while asking the reader to focus on Johanson’s public artistic responses to changes in the world at large rather than her personal life.

Each chapter explores Johanson’s transition and increasingly complex garden design methodology and inspiration. Influenced by Native American and Chinese art, the artist incorporates elements that reflect a non-Western harmony and dynamism into her garden designs. Though they were not physically realized at first, her work evolved and was later able to be translated from page to landscape.

Wu’s book is intended for readers with a knowledge or interest of garden history, modern garden aesthetics, and large-scale environmental landscape works. The volume is laid out in chronological order following Johanson’s development of her garden design skills and projects. The writing style is smooth and easy to read. While it does not demand an advanced knowledge of garden or landscape terminology, having a background knowledge of contemporary urban garden design certainly does help gain a deeper understanding of Wu’s exploration of Johanson’s work. The book is well-illustrated with more than 100 photographs, sketches, blueprints, and other reproductions, with sixty-four plates produced in color.

Copious notes are provided throughout the text. The bibliography details primary sources belonging to the artist, both published and unpublished, as well as other primary and secondary research sources. In addition, the bibliography lists books used from Johanson’s personal library indicating the author’s intimate working relationship with the artist. A rather comprehensive and detailed index is also provided. The quality of the paper and binding appear to be standard and adequately durable.

Wu’s book is certainly not meant as an introduction to Johanson’s wide-ranging body of work, but it is a meaningful contribution to the artist’s oeuvre that provides insight into her creative impact on public environmental art. This work would make a great addition to academic libraries that collect materials related to garden history, earthworks, or Johanson’s work as an artist.

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