LANDSCAPES PAYSAGES

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04/ THE SNOW ACADEMY

DIETMAR STRAUB

PRELIMINARY COURSES AT the Bauhaus in the 1920s thoroughly prepared students for professional design careers. The teachers shared a desire to use pedagogical means and programs to encourage holistic and creative ways of thinking. Inventive experiments using a wide range of materials such as glass, wood, metals and ceramics were at the core of the Bauhaus education with its workshop-centred concept. However, snow was not included in their list of materials.

The concrete motive for an academy of the snow was a design studio taught in Winnipeg at the University of Manitoba during Winter Term, 2014. Winnipeg is a city where individuals' calendars are categorized into nine months of winter and three months of bad skating. Winnipeggers have to live with the climate even when it is 40 below! What could be more suitable than studying the snow and ice while developing a flair for the splendour of winter?

The work of landscape architects and urban designers largely takes place in the physical world, on the scale of 1:1. It is not only three-dimensional space that we move through but also a fourth dimensional experience that plays a vital role in day-to-day landscape design. "The physical substance of what is built has to resonate with the physical substance of the area…Material and construction have to relate to the place, and sometimes even come from it."[1]

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1 ON A RIPARIAN CLEARING **2** SNOW ACADEMY **3** THE SUN AS CO-DESIGNER **4** FIERY FAREWELL **5** NIGHT ACADEMY
PHOTOS 1, 3-5 DIETMAR STRAUB **2** DALE WIEBE

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The building material for this "cool" experiment was the snow that the prairie winter produced that year. The students carved stairs and rows of seating out of snow, levelled stages and ramps, sculpted snowbanks, walls and snow topographies. They monitored wind, weather and snow drifts. Therefore, they came into contact with tools such as shovels, wheelbarrows, rakes, measuring tapes, knives, fire and hammers.

Initially, the snow used was gathered from parking lots, mainly because this material is cheap and abundant. Tons of snow was poured on a riparian clearing on campus in an elliptical form. This classical shape acted as the white heart of the academy – radiating elegance and forming the centre for additional snow structures. A field of columns and a generous "dining room" complimented the peaceful setting. This spatial ensemble became the focus of attention for passers-by all winter long, a moment of diversion from everyday life, a slight flicker of interference in the landscape. During the wintertime, events were held in the various spaces of the Snow Academy to share the ephemeral beauty of the project with the public.

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The winter sun acted as a landscape painter, brushing the riparian clearing with light, casting shadows over the snowy white canvas. The night was illuminated with colourful shades, creating lasting memories and fiery discoveries.

With a heavy heart and the spark of 13 bonfires on a late April night, it was finally time to say goodbye to this fleeting landscape. Gone, never to return! Years after the experiment, people still refer to the Snow Academy, and this is perhaps the most significant sign of success: it is still alive in people's minds. **LP**

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***Dietmar Straub**, MALA, CSLA, ASLA, has had the opportunity of dealing with a diverse range of assignments in his career, in very different places, cultures, sites and countries – both as a teacher and as a landscape architect and urban designer. He has been tackling gardens and landscapes, squares and cities for more than 30 years and has gained a fundamental understanding and knowledge of design, urban nature and ecology. He believes that an intelligent cross-linking of ecology, design, art and engineering will provide sustainable solutions for humankind and nature.*

REFERENCE

1 Zumthor, Peter. *Thinking Architecture*. Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag GmbH, 2010.