WHAT IS BEAUTY? – HISTORY, EVOLUTION AND THEORY

The relevance of sublime and picturesque thought to the contemporary context

Brian Evans
Professor of Urbanism & Landscape
The Glasgow School of Art
Six qualities at the heart of good design for urban and rural development:

- Identity;
- Safe & pleasant spaces;
- Ease of Movement;
- A sense of welcome;
- Adaptability;
- Good use of resources.

There is one other quality that many other successful places have. **Beauty** … should be one of the objectives of (urban) design. It is less easy to plan for directly, but we may not need to. In a place that has the six qualities, **beauty** may well be the natural product of the patterns of human life and the skills of talented designers.

**DESIGNING PLACES**, Scottish Executive, 2001
(LANDSCAPE) AESTHETICS

Brian Evans
“We are Russian because we were born in Russia; from birth we have breathed Russian air and gazed upon Russia’s sad and desolate but sometimes beautiful nature”

Vladimir Korolenko
Isaac Levitan

Alexei Savrasov
“I love the Russian landscape. You feel the meaning of Russian life, the Russian soul, better and more clearly against its background.”

Mikhail Nesterov
Frederic Edwin Church: Cotopaxi
Albert Bierstadt: Looking up the Yosemite Valley
The Sublime: producing an overwhelming sense of awe or other high emotion through being vast or grand.

... having the quality of such greatness, magnitude or intensity, whether physical, metaphysical, moral, aesthetic or spiritual, that our ability to perceive or comprehend it is temporarily overwhelmed.
Picturesque (of a place or building): visually attractive, especially in a quaint or charming manner. Literally, a scene that would make a painting

... in common usage, a major influence on garden design, landscape fashions and ornamental walks ...

... think like artists, especially when planning ‘enhancements’ to the landscape on country estates.
Richard Wilson: Llyn Y Cau, Cader Idris
Caspar David Friedrich: Wanderer above the Sea of Fog
Caspar David Friedrich: Wanderer above the Sea of Fog
Edouard Manet: Déjeuner sur l'herbe
The Americans in Paris: Nelson Norris Bickford
Between the Sublime and the Picturesque
living with our landscape
Between the Sublime and the Picturesque
living with our landscape

Source: Colin Baxter
“Most of the geography of Scotland consists of mountains, grass, heather and Edinburgh”

Frank Muir

Source: Colin Baxter ©
AESTHETIC PRINCIPLES

FUNCTIONAL UNDERSTANDING

BEAUTY
Rewilding Europe
A new beginning. For wildlife. For us.

Bringing the variety of life back to Europe’s abandoned lands
SUBLIME

PICTURESQUE

Brian Evans
SUBLIME

PICTURESQUE

Rewilding Europe

Brian Evans

GS0fA
Ian McHarg opens the first copy of Design with Nature 1969
DESIGN WITH NATURE

ECOLOGICAL URBANISM

OUT OF PLACE
Restoring Identity to the Regional Landscape
MICHAEL HOUGH

CITIES & NATURAL PROCESS
BASIS FOR SUSTAINABILITY
SECOND EDITION
MICHAEL HOUGH

Natural Process
AESTHETIC PRINCIPLES

FUNCTIONAL UNDERSTANDING

BEAUTY

Brian Evans

GSA