

## Design With Nature Now Conference and Exhibition Opening, Philadelphia, USA

June 21-23, 2019

University of Pennsylvania Stuart  
Weitzman School of Design,  
Philadelphia, USA

### Erica Yudelman

Department of Landscape Architecture and  
Regional Planning, Stuart Weitzman School  
of Design, University of Pennsylvania  
[yudelman@design.upenn.edu](mailto:yudelman@design.upenn.edu)



Image Credit: Ian McHarg in Portugal, July 1967. Photo: Paula McHarg. Ian and Carol McHarg Collection, Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania.

Design With Nature Now (DWNN) is a set of events, including three exhibitions and a two-day conference tied to an upcoming book, marking the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of landscape architect and regional planner Ian McHarg's seminal manifesto *Design With Nature* in Philadelphia. DWNN celebrates McHarg's mid-century message emphasizing the imperative to design *with*—not *against*—natural processes and ecologies, by asking what it means to design with nature *now*, knowing what we now know about ecology and the world system in the present and near future.

Occurring at the newly renamed Stuart Weitzman School of Design at the University of Pennsylvania—where McHarg chaired the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning for

almost 30 years—DWNN's conference program acted to launch the school's Ian L. McHarg Center for Ecology and Urbanism. The conference on June 21 and 22 provided an opportunity for environmental theorists, ecologists, landscape architects, and allied disciplines to engage in much-needed discussions about the culture of nature and biodiversity, the nature of the Anthropocene, and the crisis of climate change from design perspectives, while honoring McHarg's impact on the discipline of Landscape Architecture through his teaching and work.

On June 21, 2019, the keynote

speeches for the Design With Nature Now conference, given by ecological and environmental theorists Ursula K. Heise and Erle Ellis, culminated with the public opening of three coordinated exhibitions under the title *Design With Nature Now: One Planet, Three Exhibits*. The largest of the three exhibitions, housed in Meyerson Galleries and called *Design With Nature Now: Five themes, 25 projects*, is a collection of ongoing and recently completed projects in 21 countries by landscape architects and allied professionals that show promise in addressing the epic complexity of designing with the natural understandings



of today. The exhibit thematically groups 25 intriguing projects into five areas. The themes address landscape connectivity and biodiversity; managing urban growth in balance with surrounding ecosystems and environments; rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of former industrial sites; fresh water concerns such as stormwater, sediment, and flooding management at many scales; and adaptation and mitigation for sea level rise and climate change. Two complementary exhibitions frame “*DWNN: Five themes, 25 projects*. *Ian McHarg: The House We Live In* explores McHarg’s teaching, thinking, and work as he developed the concepts and

methods that he included in *Design With Nature*. The title of the exhibit refers to the TV series that McHarg hosted in the early 1960s, where he interviewed intellectuals and major scientists to underscore the interconnectivity of the world as a contained system and the imperative of informed stewardship of the environment. The works on show provide context for the development of McHarg’s overlay method of landscape analysis for planning, as well as his professional work. *Laurel McSherry: A Book of Days* displays the work of artist and landscape architect Laurel McSherry, created when McSherry was on a fellowship in Glasgow,

Scotland, McHarg’s hometown. McSherry’s works encourage the understanding of landscapes in new and thoughtful ways. Relating to time, place, and process, the works carry a taste of the places that shaped McHarg’s life and work. The conference continued on June 22. Following tributes to McHarg’s legacy from former colleagues and students, panelists and moderators examined and thoughtfully discussed exemplary projects from the *DWNN: five themes, 25 projects* exhibition. Viewpoints were diverse, with excellent discussions concluding each panel. The final conference panel, entitled “Design with



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 Project Credit: The Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative is a joint Canada-United States not-for-profit organization dedicated to securing the long-term ecological health of the region. See <https://y2y.net/>.

Nature Now and the Future,” was comprised of speculations on the near future of landscape architecture and nature by seven Master of Landscape Architecture students and recent graduates from the Weitzman School of Design.

On Sunday, June 23, a series of gallery talks given by landscape architects and planners whose works were included in the exhibit, such as Kongjian Yu, Dirk Sijmons, and Michael Schwarze-Rodrian (of the Emischer Landschaftspark project), took place in Meyerson Galleries. Under the title Soapbox Sunday,

these intimate presentations gave the public a rare chance to hear internationally celebrated landscape architects talk about their thoughts on how to design with nature now from the point of view of what they had heard at the conference and their recent work. Following the big names was an update from a student researcher in landscape architecture who had recently used a travel award to visit the Senegalese portion of the Great Green Wall of the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative (the massive project across Africa that is included in the exhibition). More gallery talks

and updates continue through the summer.

In autumn 2019, the Weitzman School of Design will celebrate the release of *Design with Nature Now*, a book published by the Lincoln Institute for Land Policy. The book features essays and commentaries by many landscape architects and theorists who were invited conference speakers (including Laurie Olin, James Corner, Anne Whiston Spirn, David Orr, Dana Tomlin, Ursula K. Heise and Erle Ellis) as well as introductions to, and samples from, each of the 25 projects that appear in the Meyerson Galleries exhibition.





Image Credit: Zandmotor work begins, March 3, 2011. ©Harry Reeken. With permission, Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management and Province of South Holland. Project Credit: Zandmotor is overseen by the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment. The project was made possible with support from the European Regional Development Fund. See [www.dezandmotor.nl/en/](http://www.dezandmotor.nl/en/).

The book also includes a brief introduction to—and selected pieces from—*A Book of Days* written by Laurel McSherry, and an essay on McHarg's life and *Design With Nature*, by Bill Whitaker, the curator of the *Ian McHarg: The House We Live In* exhibit and director of the University of Pennsylvania's Architectural Archives.

Motivated by the desire to review and build upon McHarg's legacy in ways relevant to today's pressing ecological and climactic conundrums, a core team of colleagues from the Weitzman School of Design managed the many DWNN events, as well

as the exhibition, and the book. Dean Fritz Steiner, Department Chair Richard Weller, Associate Professor Karen M'Closkey, Billy Fleming, Director of The McHarg Center, and Bill Whitaker, Director and Curator, University of Pennsylvania Architectural Archives, formed the core group, acting as curators, editors, and organizers for the exhibitions, book, and conference.

The weekend launch of the DWNN exhibitions and conference attracted over 400 designers and planners from all over the world eager to celebrate the book that emerged as a vital part

of bringing ecological consciousness to landscape architecture and planning. Much of the DWNN programming and all of the exhibitions were made possible by a generous grant from the Pew Center for Arts and Heritage. The exhibitions will remain on view on the University of Pennsylvania Campus free to the public until September 15, 2019, and may travel to other countries in following years.

Photograph courtesy of Frederick Steiner – The Ian L. McHarg Center for Urbanism and Ecology, University of Pennsylvania, School of Design.