

## International Symposium II

The Japanese Garden Intensive Seminar Plus in Kyoto 2016

# Understanding Japanese Gardens: Spirituality or Science

## Introduction to the Symposium

The Japanese garden has become an object of conscious reflection since the end of the nineteenth century. It made Japanese gardens a distinct art expression that could develop with its own focus in the overwhelming spiritual wealth of modern society. It benefited landscape business and research enormously. Huge sums were invested in developing landscapes that were embedded in a context of culture and the humanities.

The meaning of such landscapes and gardens was expanded too, supporting in turn modernizing processes enormously. Recent highbrow projects like Roppongi Hills or Namba Parks, in Tokyo and Osaka, respectively, show the ultimate expression of landscape in post-fordist place making, fully supporting wider cultural notions.

But fame makes victims when it seeks to perpetuate its own image, losing sight of the object of fame - the Japanese garden is no exception. Most obvious were the obligatory “Japanese gardens” presented at world exhibitions that without much authenticity tried to suggest some kind of standard aesthetic. And books on “How to create your own Japanese garden in half a day” are still offered in multitudes and by a wide array of seeming specialists: Amazon dot com offered 13.633 titles last August when requesting ‘Japanese Garden’. In Japan, in the mean time, first-year college students of horticulture or landscape architecture in Japan struggle with whether they should become a professional in the Western or the Japanese style. Against this reductive view of the Japanese garden, trying to make the case that there is no such recipe for Japanese gardens, is like shouting in the desert against the wind. The history of Japan’s garden art has in the past century not been able to escape such a loss of intrinsic focus, and it was fueled —not in the least— by landscape businesses and the cultural policies of the Japanese government.

In this flurry of strategic culture politics, kitsch and superficialities the pressing question comes up: How can we understand Japanese Gardens? Is it a spiritual haven, a tool to personal enlightenment? Or is it rather an object of research - and if so – what is the point of departure, the paradigms with which it can be tackled? Or is it not more than what it just is: technical perfection in horticulture with a centuries-old tradition of mutual understanding by gardeners that don’t talk or write but just do their work?

This symposium hopes to shed light on such themes for consideration by eminent speakers on the subject.

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# Understanding Japanese Gardens: Spirituality or Science

2016, 10 / 10 Mon  
[9:30 ~ 16:00]

At Kyoto University of Art and Design

**NINGEN-KAN B1F Audio-visual Hall**

**Free Admission  
Program**

**Lectures in English** (or with simultaneous translation)

**Morning** 9:30 ~ 12:30

### Speakers:

- Shōji YAMADA ( Research Center for Japanese Studies )
- Emmanuel MARES ( Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties )
- Takayasu SEKINISHI ( Minami Kyusyu University )
- Other speaker

**Afternoon** 13:30 ~ 16:00

### 1 : Keynote speech and Hot Topics

- Wybe KUITERT ( Seoul National University, RCJGAHH ) Keynote Speech
- Hiromasa AMASAKI ( Kyoto University of Art and Design, RCJGAHH ) Hot Topic 1
- Ken KAWAI ( Kyoto University of Art and Design, RCJGAHH ) Hot Topic 2
- Other Hot Topics

### 2 : Panel Discussion

Moderators : **Wybe KUITERT** ( Seoul National University, RCJGAHH )  
**Takahiro NAKA** ( Kyoto University of Art and Design, RCJGAHH )

Panelist : **Hiromasa AMASAKI** ( Kyoto University of Art and Design, RCJGAHH )  
**Takayasu SEKINISHI** ( Minami Kyusyu University )  
**Emmanuel MARES** ( Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties )  
**Ken KAWAI** ( Kyoto University of Art and Design, RCJGAHH )

The symposium is hosted by:

**Research Center for Japanese Garden Art and Historical Heritage** ( RCJGAHH )

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