Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys

Mary Miss
Nassau County Museum of Fine Arts
Roslyn, Long Island
1977-78

Public art: ensemble of five related structures spread over four wooded acres. Each structure existing as part of a sequence to form a total narrative.

- Three vertical structures (towers)
- A dirt embankment (earth mound)
- A subterranean courtyard (pit)

Mary Miss described her work as "images on an extended scale." The suggestive nature of certain constructions (structures), forms, and materials, and their interaction with the landscape, help to make her pieces ambiguous and mysterious. She explores the built environment which heightens awareness and provokes the curiosity of the viewer.
In limited plots of ground, whatever is their shape, greater variety of view will be produced by placing the house nearer one end, or nearer one side, than in the center. . . . Add to this, that in a small place, depth of view is not expected; and consequently, when it does occur, its effect is the more striking. . .

J.C. Loudon
*The Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion*, 1836

"[Structure] up on stilts off the ground is appealing."

During the 1900's, fire towers were lookout points to spot forest fires, started by the lumber company's machinery.

While walking the grounds of the old Frick estate, Mary Miss observed some existing forms:
- Old fire tower
- Bear pit
- Bird Cage

Mary Miss' towers were built to heighten our sensitivity to scale.
And yet as he watched the maiden began to make certain signs, speaking to him silently across the waters. . . . the prince and his companion saw but the prince understood nothing.

. . . [The minister's son] explained: she said, "I live in the land of King Karnotpala. . . . My father is an ivory carver."

*The Language of Signs, Tales of the Vetala*

The subterranean courtyard, inspired by the bear pit, heightens the public's awareness of the ground beneath them. The approach, untelling of the courtyard and excavation below. The public arrives at the opening, where the extended space below is revealed undermining the ground they just walked across. The public then becomes "unsure of the limits of the space."

Focused on public interaction, Perimeters engaged the public to walk around and uncover the mystery of the work. Each element interacted "in, on and around the natural area."

- Passing across; walking around
- Achieving relaxation
- Deceptive arrangement
From here one enters another courtyard known as Crucero, because it is cruciform in plan. Below lies a subterranean garden of orange trees. Along the sides of this garden run corridors which support the paths.

*James Dickie*

*Thee Islamic Garden in Spain*

Mary Miss takes references from the Alhambra, with its columnade surrounding a courtyard, Catal Huyuk, entrance to the subterranean courtyard was through the roof as a system of defense, and the Prophet's window in Mohammed's tomb, which opened to a dark narrow passage that made it difficult to determine its depth.

**Source Material:**

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