

Premio Internazionale Carlo Scarpa per il Giardino

XXVIII edition, 2017

Lanzarote, Jardín de Cactus

*The Guatiza quarry and the places cultivated
in the soil of a volcanic island*

Press release
16th March 2017

The Scientific Committee of the Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche has unanimously decided to dedicate **the 28th edition of the International Carlo Scarpa Prize for Gardens to the Jardín de Cactus on Lanzarote**, part of a unique system of cultivated quarries and crater embodying the fertile equilibrium between nature and culture existing on the island.

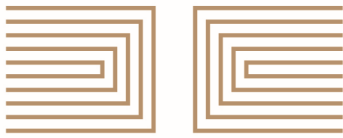
Part of the Canary archipelago just 130 kilometers off the coast of Africa, and the first island to be encountered by anyone arriving from Europe, Lanzarote surprises us with its vast expanses of lava, which occupy a quarter of a land surface of only 846 square kilometre (the island measures barely 58 kilometres at its longest point). In fairly recent times a series of lava flows have advanced slowly on a broad front over its gently sloping ground, leaving behind a world devoid of life and producing twenty-five new volcanoes.

After being hit by numerous volcanic eruptions – the most recent one took place in the 18th century and lasted over six years – the island has succeeded in starting over many times, transforming its extreme conditions – poor soil, incessant winds, lack of water – into a stimulus for regeneration and using them to provide the tools to build a conscious link with its living environment. The quality of its cultivations – the vineyards in particular – and the land area covered attest to this resilient character and to the island's capacity to develop inventive forms of co-existence with an apparently inhospitable territory. A capacity also expressed through fascinating aesthetic concepts and inspirational cultural policies.

In the 20th century, **César Manrique** (1919-1992), a Lanzarote-born artist, recognized the values of these places, introducing tools and practices capable of developing a social and political awareness of an environment previously considered poor and lacking in attractions. The contribution of this militant artist who fought against the exploitation of the island for tourism from the 1960s onwards by proposing an alternative model brings us face to face with a series of unresolved issues in the relationship between conservation and transformation in landscape. By building places like the *Jardín de Cactus* Manrique has shown us a path to follow. Together such places act like a manifesto for a different way of living on the island and for seeing its beauty through fresh eyes.

The *Jardín de Cactus*, located in the north-eastern corner of the island near the village of Guatiza, was inaugurated on 17th March 1990. Surrounded by a patchwork of prickly pear (*Opuntia ficus-indica*) plantations, the garden is situated in a disused *picón* quarry formerly providing local farmers with volcanic ash to scatter on their fields and later turned into a rubbish tip. Inside, a concentric system of terraces and settings nestles in the walls of the quarry, which hosts a spectacular collection of succulents that are the island's point of contact with other geographic and cultural environments, and with the American continent in particular. Taking on unexpected fantastical forms, the project continues the process of transformation of the folds and hollows of the surface of the island, using the age-old techniques: raising terraces, spreading volcanic ash on the soil, and inventing forms of windbreak.

Here Manrique's aesthetic awareness emerges above all in the teamwork, collective transmission of knowledge, and the use and promotion of practices and manual skills motivated less by ideological or nostalgic yearnings for traditional landscapes than



by the wish to leave a mark typical of his time, including a love of games and an amused gaze on the world. The cactus garden concentrates into its small space all the features of a history (that of Lanzarote's landscape culture), extending an invitation to continue and renew its key aspects and characteristics.

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The awareness-raising campaign linked to the 2017 International Carlo Scarpa Prize for Gardens will begin in Milan with a press conference on 16th March, continuing in Treviso, in the headquarters of the Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche, with a press conference on 18th May and the public days on **Friday 19th and Saturday 20th May**, which will involve: the opening of an exhibition dedicated to the award-winning place with a concert of traditional Canarian music, an in-depth seminar open to the public, the publication of a collective volume dedicated to Lanzarote and its *Jardín de Cactus*, the public prize award ceremony with the presentation of the documentary and the handing over of the seal designed by Carlo Scarpa (1906-1978) and symbolizing the Prize. This year the Scientific Committee of the Fondazione Benetton has decided to consign this seal to Antonio Martín Santos, the gardener from Lanzarote responsible for the *Jardín de Cactus*. His work, made up of daily gestures of care and civic devotion, is inspired by the teaching responsible for this unique political and cultural adventure, and for transmitting to the islanders an awareness of a landscape that, despite the fragility of its condition, can find in those hands the tools to build its future. The Prize campaign will proceed with other public initiatives, some at international level, during the course of the year.

Cultural initiative sponsored by:

Observatorio del Paisaje de Canarias, the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism, the Veneto Region, and the City of Treviso