



Premio Internazionale Carlo Scarpa per il Giardino

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Désert de Retz

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Jury report

Created by Monsieur de Monville between 1774 and 1789, in the heart of a valley surrounded by the Forêt de Marly, the Désert de Retz is a still striking witness to the philosophical speculation, irony and melancholy detachment of the Enlightenment, an architectural folly of masterly wisdom, including the main house, in the shape of a massive, ruined column, echoing the visionary utopias of Ledoux or Boullée, and its satellites the delightful Chinese house, the Egyptian pyramid and the temple of Pan.

Thirty years ago, Olivier Choppin de Janvry found the site in a state of abandon. Though the present state of this magnificent symbiosis of art and nature testifies to the extraordinarily successful efforts he has made to revive the fabric and spirit of the place, the existence of the Désert de Retz is still threatened and offers a disturbing example of how the apparently “simple” task of maintaining a historic garden can turn out to be one of the great challenges facing our age.