

Premio Internazionale Carlo Scarpa per il Giardino

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**Skrúður, Núpur**  
Iceland, Dýrafjörður

Carlo Scarpa Prize  
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Jury report

Skrúður (Skrudur) is a vegetable garden on the shore of one of the fjords that indent the north-western part of Iceland, just a few kilometres from the Arctic Circle. Laid out on an incline facing south-west towards the Dýrafjörður inlet, it is backed by a grim chain of glacier-eroded mountains and in front lies barren land sloping down to the edge of the fjord.

With the school, the church and the farm of Núpur, it constitutes a place where, at the beginning of the XX century, a community launched a much-needed social improvement project that in such terrain and such a place represented a challenge to extreme environmental conditions: working the land and nurturing a process designed to cultivate knowledge, education and social progress.

Opened in 1909, the vegetable garden was the brain-child of the pastor Sigtryggur Guðlaugsson (1862-1959) who, a few years earlier, together with his brother Kristinn, had launched an educational programme devised to ameliorate backward rural conditions and inspired by the ideas of the Danish pastor Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872). It was indeed the impassioned teaching of Grundtvig – whom we have already encountered at Kongenshus Mindepark, the Danish farmers' memorial to which the 2004 Carlo Scarpa Prize was dedicated – that caused a consciousness of landscape as an expression of social progress and national sentiment to take root, especially in the rural world of his home country and in its then dependency of Iceland.

The ways in which this garden was constructed were those usually adopted in harsh conditions: trace a perimeter line around the plot, get rid of the stones from the soil and erect a protective fence or wall, source useful materials (earth, water and plants) and transport them to this fragile little enclosed world, outside which they would be overwhelmed by the forces of nature. The instruments were those of a courageous experiment which plugs away with dogged persistence in hostile conditions to carry through an educational project whose aim is to cultivate both plants and young rural citizens.

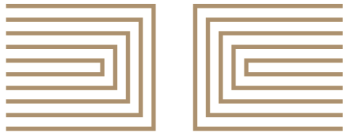
The simple, abstract figure of this enclosure presents us with a crystal clear example of civilization that denotes the presence of a world, Iceland, in which nature takes on an absolute force: in physical space, where it manifests itself in forms of extraordinary power, and through time in which those same forms are subject to ceaseless change.

In a land of the far north, shaped by dramatic upheavals and tremendous natural events, to track down a flimsy patch of ground, dauntingly remote, tenaciously surviving over a hundred years of history, may seem the gesture of affection of someone who, having travelled to a distant land, is still, despite everything, seeking to recognize himself in the familiar image of a garden that recalls his own history, his own original essence.

Skrúður, in fact, displays a number of rudimentary and tentative reminders of an order that belongs to the traditional garden. But the principle that informs it is much stronger than the modest means of expression by which it communicates its nature.

Skrúður is in itself a protection and a crucible: its enclosure describes a condition that seeks a point of contact between two worlds, that of intimacy and trust in cultivating the soil, and that of the conscious gaze over the vastness of places that accompany human experience itself.

The sharp image of the garden of Skrúður appears and fades in an environment and a culture that developed forms of housing that oscillate between being rooted to the ground, like the traditional constructions made of turf and stone, and architecture that evolves in a condition of uncertainty due to the scarcity of materials. Wood, for example, sourced from trunks washed up on the sea shore, carried there by currents flowing from east to west along the Arctic Circle.



The forms adopted are always provisional and reflect settlement practices that have to cope with the nature of a land that is in a constant state of flux. Earth, fire and water in continuous eruption wreak havoc on the face of the land, redraw its boundaries and even its horizons, when the winds carry away huge quantities of scoriae.

Geology is the key to understanding this land and its landscape. It tells of the relationship between nature and culture and underpins a human presence that oscillates between the coastal strip, where human settlements lie scattered between the sea and the pasturelands, and the more hostile environment of volcanoes, glaciers, deserts and underground forces.

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In this land which is in itself changeable and inconstant, lying as it does on the line where two tectonic plates meet, the Icelandic civilization has throughout its history given a name to every sign that accounts for the form or life of places, whether they be glaciers or volcanoes, geysers or waterfalls big or small, high mountains or geological faults, and thus has come to know its native landscape without claiming that it was human artifice which made places significant. The distinctive geological nature and the history of Þingvellir, the site of the oldest parliamentary assembly in the world (from 930 to 1798), is the most eloquent expression of this condition of political awareness and culture, of close connection between a place and a collective consciousness.

In the panorama of the many questions regarding a relationship between man and nature that must here come to terms with the boundless force of volcanic, geothermal and hydraulic phenomena and which seems to oscillate between a deeply rooted culture of landscape and rapacious attitudes to exploitation, Skróður is a sanctuary that reminds us of one of the possible forms of cohabitation between these two opposing conditions, which occur so frequently in today's world. Not, of course, for the fragile and modest configuration of forms that it consists of, but for the clear lesson of civilization that is distilled within this simple enclosure.

In the land of "stones that speak", Skróður embodies a different way of giving a name to a place and projecting the value of education into the future, the essential step of every process that generates an intimacy between man and the place where he spends his life.

So Skróður is the dense nucleus around which revolves a whole series of practical systems and universal symbolic values connoting man's dialogue with nature, a place of learning and experimentation that in the first forty years of its existence (1909-1949) beside the school, under the constant gaze of Sigtryggur Guðlaugsson and his wife Hjaltína, became a garden. And it continues to develop, thanks to the efforts of a group of men and women who in more recent times took responsibility for it, rescued it from abandonment, and in 1996 reopened it to cultivation and to visitors.

It is to these women and men that the Jury of the International Carlo Scarpa Prize for Gardens expresses its profound appreciation of the powerful maieutic example of their dedication, and presents their coordinator, Brynjólfur Jónsson, Chairman of the Framkvæmdasjóður Skróðs, with the seal acknowledging their commitment.