



Premio Internazionale Carlo Scarpa per il Giardino

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**Natur Park Schöneberger Südgelände
and Berlin's Urban Nature**

**Statement of the
Carlo Scarpa Prize**
edited by
the Foundation's
Scientific Committee

The Scientific Committee of the Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche has unanimously decided to award the 32nd International Carlo Scarpa Prize for Gardens to the Natur Park Schöneberger Südgelände in Berlin, a large park situated in the south-east of the Schöneberg district.

The park, formerly a vast railyard, is the result of many years of abandonment and its later acknowledgement as a shining example of 'Berlin's urban nature,' a crossroads where the aspirations of the local residents, the contemporary landscape culture and the manifestation of a profound ecological awareness for the city all came together. Today the area has become a large public space and has thus been instrumental in redefining the concept of an inner-city park. Its abandoned railway structures, vast expanses of vegetation, which have for the most part been left to grow wild, and art installations which make a visit to the park even more enjoyable, emphasise the dialogue between signs of human presence and ever-evolving nature.

The Natur Park Südgelände, which is 1.7 kilometres long, is just one in a series of public parks which stretch from north to south of the city, created from a constellation of 'empty' spaces which were brought together to form a whole landscape. The park is a 'piece of urban nature' and an open laboratory where ecological experiments meet different social needs and new methods for tending and maintaining urban space are put into practice.

The history of the Natur Park Schöneberger Südgelände is inextricably linked with that of the city of Berlin in the years after the war, an isolated, divided city where the railways and industry had ground to a halt, the lines had gradually been decommissioned, the facilities abandoned, allowing nature to claim back the land for itself. Later, plans for future infrastructures led to the proposal to build a new freight station to the south of the city in Südgelände. However, in 1980, there was a change of heart, as an ecological conscience began to emerge and thus the realisation of the importance of this site, both for its naturalistic value and its social potential in the everyday lives of the city's residents.

The area was entrusted entirely to the Berlin Senate and managed, since 1986, by Grün Berlin, signalling the beginning of a great experimental 'worksite' and the intervention of ecologists, environmental associations, residents, the landscape planning studios Planland and ÖkoCon and the group of artists ODIIOUS, who were working on site. In an immersive condition, surrounded by the invasive presence of nature and the 'ruins' of an abandoned landscape, all those involved developed a *modus operandi*, resulting in the living experience of the Natur Park Schöneberger Südgelände, which was symbolically opened to the public in 1999.

The Natur Park Südgelände marked the beginning of a large field study which reads the city today as a comprehensive landscape, dotted with places which, from the 1960s onwards, gave rise to the concept of 'urban nature,' inseparably linked to Berlin's political and social history. The existence of a 'school of urban ecology,' which guided but did not inhibit widespread awareness of the urban landscape and the living environment, was crucial for the experiment's success.

In the abandoned, fragmented places, large empty spaces left behind after buildings and infrastructures had been demolished, the extension and barren nature of the land were to become, in just a few decades, the starting point for a feeling of belonging and unprecedented projects, arising from a condition of suspension in space and time. A mindset and a working method emerged from all this, uniting a profound ecological conscience, a sense of community and political and administrative management skills. Segregation turned into coexistence, places previously explored in secrecy became places where people could meet and socialise, the fences – impenetrable for decades – came down, revealing extraordinary areas with exceptional biodiversity.



The Natur Park Südgelände is a result of this project, a site dotted with 20th-century ruins which live alongside slow growing vegetation, animals and the people who have embraced it as a 'workshop' of ideas and experiences encompassing landscape, ecological research, art and civic participation.

Once again, the site selected for the Carlo Scarpa Prize reflects the meanings and teachings of previous prize winners, and its reading of landscape not only in its historical context but also as an even more pressing reasoning of contemporary culture: the lessons time can teach us in the signs left of work that has been suddenly interrupted, as is the case of the *Cusa Quarries* in Sicily, Carlo Scarpa Prize 1999; or the necessity to inhabit ruins, as seen in the *Désert de Retz* in France (1993); the creativity behind the sympathetic composition of waste materials along the *Paths opposite the Athens Acropolis* (2003), where Dimitris Pikionis arranged the pieces of a past archaeological puzzle with the sensitivity of the present.

But, as we examine the more recent events in Südgelände's history, we discover a landscape which, from its original invisible existence, has re-emerged after having slowly been alienated from urban life and which has grown almost involuntarily into a garden, on the frontier and behind the scenes of a city which had denied its very existence. This is the story of *Maredolce-La Favara*, which received the Prize in 2015, an Arab-Norman garden which, after surviving for centuries, vanished as the outskirts of Palermo pushed ever outwards. It is also the story of Südgelände, an island whose traces were lost in just a few decades but which then discovered it belonged to its very own archipelago, to a debate involving social needs, the responsibility of governing change, artistic research and scientific exploration.

In its examination of the evolution of the Natur Park in Berlin, the Carlo Scarpa Prize recognises a series of values and teachings which prompt much-needed reflection of the modern-day urban landscape. The park is part of a moment in history, when the awareness of being part of a landscape was complemented by scientific research, unfolding and guiding the work of those striving to turn the mere idea of urban nature into a reality and an expression of citizenship.

For these reasons, and for the increasingly pressing need to consider places as the culmination of shared experiences, the convergence of diverse sets of different knowledge, the ability to listen, social environment and cultural debate, the Scientific Committee of the Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche has decided to award the seal designed by Carlo Scarpa to three people who, collectively, convey this sense of sharing: landscape architect Rita Suhrhoff (Grün Berlin, park manager), sculptor Klaus Duschat (ODIOUS) and ecologist and landscape planner Ingo Kowarik. Through them, this Prize brings together and recognises all those people who strive, through their work, to develop a responsible relationship with the land and a passion for knowledge, who never tire of exploring and interpreting the highest aesthetic, ethical and ecological values when designing the landscape.