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## **GARDEN - A PLACE OF FULFILLMENT AND A SHELTER FOR ARTISTS**

**Review paper**

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## **Abstract**

There are places in the world that, with their beauty and atmosphere, can take the viewer (or participant) to another dimension. There are extraordinary people who can create such spaces around their homes. The magic of a garden made of passion, love, a desire to illustrate philosophy, or a desire to forget or escape reality turns the garden into a capsule separated from time and space. What do Claude Monet, Frida Kahlo and the cholera, flu and COVID-19 epidemics have in common? How do the design thought and the space of a garden, as a place of expression, change under the influence of various events and emotions? In the post-pandemic reality, can a garden become the “fifth room”, referring to the earlier garden salons and rooms - a modern safe place to work, find fulfillment, rest and live with nature and beauty?

## **Keywords**

garden, gardens, garden art, Claude Monet, Frida Kahlo, Józef Mehoffer, Krzysztof Penderecki, the fifth room, CoViD-19

## Garden as art

Just as an image of a garden can be art, so can be the garden itself. This approach to the problem is in line with the definition of painting and horticultural art presented by Kant in his *“Critique of Judgment”*.<sup>1</sup> Of course, it is logical that not every garden is a work of art, as not every object, building or sculpture is. A physically realized garden, alive and variable, can become a series of paintings, or a performance if we treat plants and nature as artists, or an open work of art given the variability of time and matter.

The relationship between art and gardens is very long, intimate and symbolic. Artists had a big influence on garden styles. Good examples include the landscapes of Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665), the perfect landscapes of Claude Lorrain (1604-1682) and the romantic ones by Salvator Rosa (1615-1673), which inspired the development of the landscape movement at the end of the 18th century. Idealized or wild, wind-blown, landscapes of the artists of that time were eagerly collected by young aristocrats on Grand Tours. They eagerly transferred their inspirations from Italian landscapes, captured in paintings by artists, to their gardens where they built copies of classical civilization monuments, ancient temples or Palladian villas.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, as of around the early 19th century, it was the gardens that began to affect artists. At that time, urban backyard gardens began to become popular among, and accessible to, the middle class. Suddenly, an average person was given an opportunity to decide on their own space, the opportunity to design a garden and plant vegetation in it for their own pleasure and aesthetic value. Previously, gardens of the ordinary mortals were associated with the cultivation of vegetables and with the breeding of animals. Sometimes the relationship between man and garden was so serious that it turned into a kind of union. Gustave Caillebotte, Camille Pissarro, Henri Matisse, Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky are just examples of the artists who mixed gardening tools with the painterly palette. Also David Hockney makes no secret of the importance of nature and his garden, which, moreover, often appears in the artist's paintings.<sup>3</sup>

1 “Painting (...) I would divide into that of the beautiful portrayal of nature, and that of the beautiful arrangement of its products. The first is painting proper, the second landscape gardening (...) The latter consists in no more than decking out the ground with the same manifold variety (grasses, flowers, shrubs, and trees, and even water, hills, and dales) as that with which nature presents it to our view, only arranged differently and in obedience to certain ideas.” – I. Kant: *“Critique of Judgment”*

2 E. Kosiacka-Beck, *Angielskie ogrody krajobrazowe XVIII wieku i ich recepcja w Polsce*, Warszawa 2018, pp. 95–104

3 Museum Van Gogh, <https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/stories/hockney-van-gogh-two-painters-one-love>.

## Garden as a place of self-fulfillment

“I spend all my money on the garden,” complained Claude Monet. On the other hand, he wrote to his art dealer: “Now I am in the right place. I can capture color.”<sup>4</sup> The painter was fascinated by color. He filled his garden in Giverny with irregular stains of plants, which were sometimes monochromatic, sometimes on the contrary – full of contrasts, but always planned to be interesting at any time of the year. Tulips, pansies, forget-me-nots and daffodils bloomed in the spring and his beloved irises, roses, peonies, multicolored poppies, sword lilies and larkspurs in the summer. The autumn was the time for dahlias, sunflowers, asters and color-changing leaves of trees and shrubs. In the morning, Monet roamed the aisles, setting up easels to create several paintings at once. He loved to show a single motif in different light settings at different times of the day.

He developed his garden in steps for more than 30 years. The painter built a pond, among other things. Inspired by Japanese woodcuts, he designed the famous bridge and planted it with wisterias. He planted a bamboo grove and filled the pond with water lilies. At that time Monet became interested in botany and started to read books and articles on plant breeding and cultivation. He imported seeds from botanical gardens, bought plants not only in France and England. He imported peonies and water lilies from Japan. He also drew knowledge from water plant breeders and the pond and lilies became his obsession. For hours he was able to stare at reflections of flowers in water, watch leaves moving in the wind and admire their closing cups at dusk. During this time, he painted the Japanese bridge 45 times and the collection of paintings of water lilies consists of 250 canvases.<sup>5</sup>

“It took me a while before I understood my water lilies... I cultivated them with no intention of painting them. The landscape cannot be fully appreciated in one day... And then, suddenly, I experienced a revelation of the magic of my pond. I took my palette. Since then I have hardly had another model.”<sup>6</sup>

At first, when the garden was small, the painter took care of it personally with his family. After some time, when the garden had grown, he employed six gardeners. His obsession with the pond and lilies became so intense that one of the gardeners was assigned only to work on the pond. Every morning he had to sail by boat and collect debris from water and remove leaves of plants that did not correspond to the artist's vision.

“I'm good only in two things,” he used to say, “and these are gardening and painting.”<sup>7</sup>

From an art history perspective, gardens of artists, including painters, are usually referred to as “art laboratories” for experimenting with color and form, rather than as works of art themselves created by means of gardening. A friend of painter Georges Clemenceau said that Monet's garden was his studio,

4 Fundacja Moneta, *Cytaty*, <http://fondation-monet.com/en/claude-monet/quotations/>.

5 *10 Facts You Might Not Know About Claude Monet's „Water Lilies”*, <https://www.claude-monet.com/waterlilies.jsp>.

6 Fundacja Moneta, *Cytaty*, *op. cit.*

7 *Ibid.*



while others claimed that the garden was a sketch for his paintings. The painter himself did not talk about painting at the end of his life but was obsessed with his garden until the end.

“My garden is my most beautiful masterpiece.”<sup>8</sup>

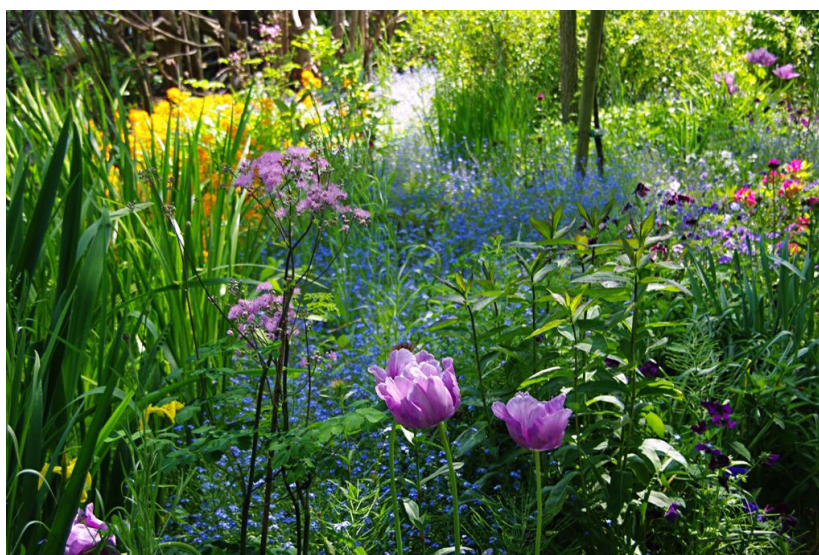


Figure 1. Monet's garden, photo. Agnieszka Hubeny-Żukowska

## Garden as a place of refuge and inspiration

Frida Kahlo used to say that she painted plants so that they did not die. She carried in her hair flowers from her own garden and her library contained many books about botany and herbal medicine. The beauty and diversity of Mexico's plants and animals were an integral part of her works: from self-portraits and still lifes to provocative depictions of a female experience. In her paintings, she assigned cultural and spiritual ideas, as well as personal meanings, to plants in unexpected ways.<sup>9</sup>

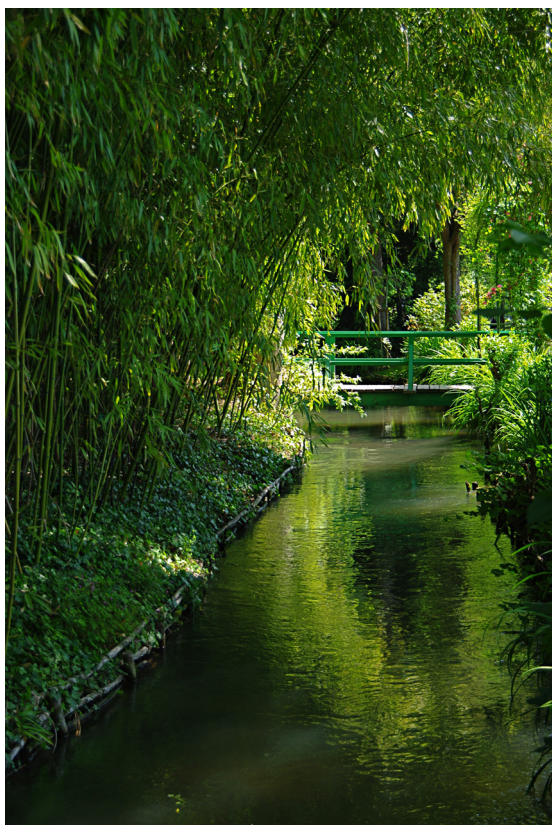
Over the course of her life, Frida has created about 140 paintings, 55 of which are self-portraits. In the painting titled “*Roots*” (1943), Frida presented herself as the tree of life. The rising plants come out of her trunk and grow into dry land, nourishing soil. The image shows the author's frustration at not being able to give birth to children (due to injuries she sustained in the accident), as well as her belief that all life on earth is combined into one whole: plants, animals and humans.<sup>10</sup>

8 *Ibid.*

9 A. Zavala, *Inside Frida Kahlo's Garden: A deeper look at the iconic artist*, <https://womenintheworld.com/2015/05/18/inside-frida-kahlos-garden-a-deeper-look-at-the-iconic-artist/>.

10 D. Mainville, *How Frida Kahlo Used Flowers to Express Her Identity*, <https://floracracy.com/blogs/art/how-frida-kahlo-used-flowers-to-express-her-identity>.





Figures 2-5. Monet's garden, photo. Agnieszka Hubeny-Żukowska



From 1939 until her death in 1954, the painter's main residence was her family home, Casa Azul, in the town situated 10 km from Mexico City. Over the years, Kahlo and her husband rebuilt the house and garden, creating numerous collections of books, paintings, porcelain and plants in both, which densely filled the space of their lives. Interestingly, the painter herself designed her garden, planning in it a series of elongated courtyards filled with various native and foreign plants. In pots she planted agaves, cactuses, cactus pears, yuccas and flowering herbaceous plants. Orange, quince and pomegranate trees also grew in her garden. Her garden, which is now part of the museum, is an eclectic collection of plants, colorful pots, natural and worked fragments of volcanic stones and sculptures both valuable, pre-Hispanic and modest, made by Mexican workers. The whole garden clearly pays homage to the indigenous Mexican culture. "*The plan of Casa Azul*" drawn by Frida in 1940 can be seen in this museum. The drawing includes the plan of the building with the description of the interior and the arrangement of plants in the garden, as well as, interestingly, animals and laundry lines with clearly described colors of the individual parts of the wardrobe hanging on them.<sup>11</sup>

The garden was both a source of inspiration and a creative refuge for the artist. Kahlo's works are full of colorful and fascinating depictions of flowers, leaves and fruits, most of which come from Mexico. Her botanical paintings reflect a view of the archetypal Mexican indigenous and natural elements that defined art in the decade after the Mexican Revolution.<sup>#</sup> Many of the plants we find in Kahlo's garden and in her paintings had great cultural significance: calendulas were commonly associated with Halloween, dahlias were Mexico's national flower, cactuses were used as living fences, and sunflowers represented the deity of the Sun. Fuchsias, monstera, bougainvilleas, zinnias and philodendrons are just some of the many plants grown by the painter.

The artist's studio was located on the floor of the house, from where she had a view on the garden. When Kahlo's health began to deteriorate and she could no longer walk freely in the garden with its numerous terraces, platforms were built for her, on which she could ride a wheelchair. The garden was certainly very important for the painter: chained to her bed before her death, she had the bed moved to the smallest of the bedrooms from where she could see the plants through the door.<sup>12</sup>

11 A. Zavala, M. D'Avanza, J. Groarke, *Frida Kahlo's Garden*, The New York Botanical Garden and DelMonico Books, Prestel, New York 2015.

12 S. Rose, *Famous painters and the gardens that inspired them*, <https://gardentherapy.ca/famous-painters-gardens/>.

## Polish backyard

“I thank God for this patch of land of my own that gives me contact with nature, essential for creative imagination.”<sup>13</sup>

These are the words of Joseph Mehoffer's letter to his wife Jadwiga. He described in the letter the joy of the garden at their first home in Jankówka. The artist personally designed the garden by the manor house and then planted it and cherished with enthusiasm.

“This terrace, which now serves as a tiny observatory, almost entirely piled up by me, was still a modest, unruly slope a few years ago.”<sup>14</sup>

The artist created an idyllic scenery extending around the manor house, falling down in terraces towards the orchards. The composition was based on geometric forms referring to gardens in the French style, but the beds were filled with plants popular in Polish gardens. In the paintings “*The Mansion in Jankówka*” (1907), “*The Mansion and the Garden in Jankówka*” (1914) and “*The Red Umbrella*” (1917) depicting his beloved garden we can clearly see smooth hydrangeas, dahlias, roses, sunflowers and even corn planted on beds surrounded by low hedge borders and lawn strips. It was a dream place for creative thinking and for a quiet holiday with the family. An idyllic place full of characters from other worlds, which the painter repeatedly depicted in his genre scenes from 1913-1914.<sup>15</sup>

Another garden was established by Mehoffer at his family home at 26 Krupnica St. in Kraków, which he acquired in 1932 (now known as “The House of Józef Mehoffer”, a branch of the National Museum in Kraków). Due to its location in the city center, it is a space much smaller than the garden in Jankówka. The artist, as before, designed the garden himself, referring – even with the rose flowerbeds – to the previous one, with which he undoubtedly associated pleasant memories. The artist devoted a lot of time to this new space, brought a variety of plant species and took care of them himself. He created a place that became a refuge for his family and creative imagination. It was the place where the author painted the realistic landscapes with an idyllic aura in the last years of his life.

Certainly, nature was a great inspiration and source of motives for Józef Mehoffer. Having the garden and the need to create inextricably combined in his personality. The garden was an inspiration, field and background for the artist's imagination, as evidenced by the dissertation *on art and its relation to nature* published in the *Polish Review* magazine. Among other things, the author wrote: “Nature needs a sensitive and artistic soul in order to be reflected with dignity as in a mirror of silver”.<sup>16</sup>

13 J. Mehofferowa, *Rozwój myśli twórczej Józefa Mehoffera*, rkps w Bibliotece Zakładu Ossolińskich we Wrocławiu, nr 14039/ II, p. 257.

14 *Ibid.*

15 B. Studzińska-Kubalska, *Ogrody Józefa Mehoffera*, „Niezła Sztuka”, 11.10.2017, <https://niezlasztuka.net/o-sztuce/jozef-mehoffer-ogrody/> [accessed on: 25.03.2021].

16 M. Smolińska-Byczuk, *O stosunku sztuki do natury. Praktyka i teoria artystyczna młodego Mehoffera*, „Artium Quaestiones”, 2004, no 15, p. 81.



In the Polish backyard we can find many artists, not only painters but also composers or directors, for whom their own gardens become places of respite, rest, inspiration and creative work.

“I’ve been searching for this place on earth for a long time. A place that could become an asylum for me and my loved ones, which would allow me to realize the thought that has accompanied me since childhood: to build my own garden, just as you build a score, a note after a note.”<sup>17</sup>

This is what Krzysztof Penderecki wrote about his Lusławice gardens. Juliusz Machulski, on the other hand, when asked where he likes to work the most, answered:

“In my garden in Sopot I write my best. At the table on the terrace I can spend whole days immersed in work.”

## Pandemic time

During periods of pandemic, the fear of getting sick, the desire to contain the spread of viruses and the longing for a “normal” life force many changes. Sanitary rules restrict but they are also a trigger of transformations. Evolution is visible at virtually every step of. Man is a being who can adapt quickly, which is why in such a difficult situation as a rapidly spread of a disease, many new solutions appear, including design ones.

Between 1810 and 1815, more than 25% of deaths in New York City were caused by tuberculosis which spread around the world as a result of overcrowding and poor living conditions. Entire neighborhoods were demolished in England for the purpose of erecting new residential buildings with gardens for workers. In the interwar period in Poland there was also a debate on the need to resolve, among other things, the issues of housing, air and good water.<sup>18</sup> As a result of the sanatorium movement, the first Jordanian gardens, modeled after the parks of Henry Jordan’s idea, and sports gardens that allowed children and adults to stay outdoors, began to be built. The response to war-time diseases and destructions were the purity of the form, strict geometry and modern materials. Modernist designs of buildings with large windows letting sunlight into the interiors, easily washable flat surfaces, balconies and terraces with sun loungers, among other things, were the result of fear of tuberculosis.<sup>19</sup>

17 M. Tomaszewski, K. Penderecki, *Lusławickie ogrody*, t. 2, Wydawnictwo Bosz, Olszanica 2005, p. 7.

18 S. Władyczko, *Krytyka organizacji służb zdrowia publicznego*, [w:] *O gruźlicy jako największej klęsce społecznej naszych czasów*, Wilno 1927, p. 8.

19 Naglaa A. Megahed, Ehab M. Ghoneim, *Antivirus-build environment: Lessos lerned from COVID-19 pandemic*, „Sustainable Cities and Society”, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2210670720305710> [accessed on: 3.12.2020].

## Garden as the “fifth room”

Now, in the era of CoViD-19, social isolation and fear of infection, the home garden's own space is beginning to gain value. Especially urban residents locked together with their families in small apartments need outdoor space, for example in the form of a balcony or terrace. The backyard garden is becoming a rarity and the gardening movement around the world is experiencing a renaissance.<sup>20</sup> The perception of green spaces and backyard gardens has changed. Owners of gardens, until now often just neglected lawns, have now begun to adapt outdoor spaces for family life or work. Thanks to a greater amount of free time, horticultural hobbies and design work began to flourish. For some people, the functionality of the place – an additional space to expand the small living area – has become a priority. There came children's playgrounds and work rooms in gardens. Others focused on the growing of vegetables, herbs and fruits to supply organic products to their kitchens. The slow-moving wave of biodiversity has suddenly accelerated and settled in the city gardens for good. Some owners, like Monet, began to appreciate the beauty of their plants and develop their interests and gardening skills. Others, like Frida Kahlo, began the building of their own safe havens.

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the most important for man are physiological needs, safety, belonging, recognition and self-fulfillment. The growing of vegetables and fruits is associated with physiological needs: satisfying hunger and thirst. Both for Frida Kahlo and for modern city dwellers living under the pressure from CoViD-19, the garden is a place to escape from dangers. It is an outdoor space, an extension of the house, the “fifth room”: own space giving a sense of stability and a kind of intimacy. Thanks to the belonging to a group of gardeners sharing knowledge and experience, the garden gives opportunities to contact other people, a sense of friendship but also, very importantly, recognition. According to Maslow, self-fulfillment is the highest and most important need of man. This is certainly what the aforementioned artists have experienced, also thanks to their gardens.

So, if you look closely at the garden, a paradise lost [an regained], it will turn out that this is an unusual place where man can find all the elements that meet his or her primal needs.

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20 K. Dubow, *How will the future of gardening post COVID-19 look like?* *Garden Media*, „Florida Daily”, <https://www.floridadaily.com/article/9252195/how-will-the-future-of-gardening-post-covid-19-look-like/>.

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