

Gardens Without Boundaries

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MITCHELL BEAZLEY



Above left: This pond is part of an artwork created by Karen McCoy at a park near Syracuse, N.Y. The lines on the surface of the water are formed by arrowhead plants to echo natural and man-made lines associated with the local landscape.



Above right: The lines in this pond by McCoy are extended into the countryside by cutting and trampling the nearby grass. Some lines, such as this grass labyrinth circle, refer to the way man has marked the landscape.

American artist Karen McCoy was also inspired by a sense of place when she chose to create a temporary landscape at Stone Quarry Hill Art Park in Cazenovia, near Syracuse, New York. McCoy describes her art as “a process of remembering, imagining, and contemplating historical and present-day uses of the land”. For her, the ideal way to express her ideas regarding the effects of nature and culture on the landscape is by working with the land itself. The title of McCoy’s work at Stone Quarry Hill was “Considering Mother’s Mantle”, which refers to the thin layer of earth that lies over the bedrock – the part of the landscape that bears the most scars of the conflict between man and nature.

A particularly interesting feature of the area was the way the marsh grasses in a pond grew in clusters along glacial grooves. The work itself developed from McCoy’s study of the site, and she noticed that the organic lines of the grasses were echoed in the grid-like lines of nearby fields. She decided to emphasize these lines, and, with the aid of string and a compass, she rearranged arrowhead plants in the pond into lines. She then extended this effect into the surroundings by cutting lines in the grass near the pond and transplanting grass into the adjacent fields. Along the lines, she created other visual events, including a circle of flattened and woven grass. Rich in subtlety, the work was a gentle exploitation of nature connecting the underlying geology of the site to the overlying man-made agricultural landscape. Since McCoy used plants and altered an existing landscape, her artwork could also be described as a garden.