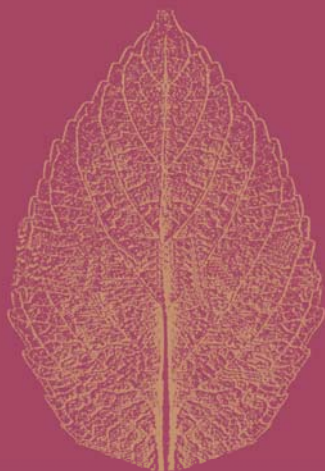


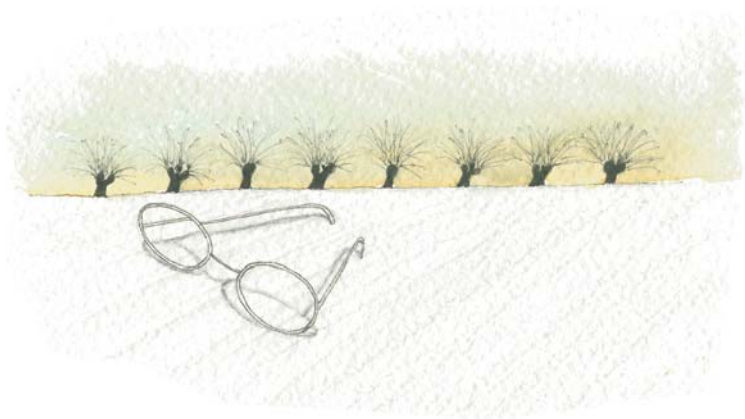
BOTANICAL CITIZEN



TEXTS AND PICTURES
VITTORIO PERETTO

THE JOURNEY

"SGUARDO", 2008



One of the greatest truths
that travel has taught me is
how genuine and shareable
the words of Wislawa
Szymborska are: "Only
what's human can be truly
alien. The rest is mixed
forest, undermining moles,
and wind."



These are few and enlightening verses that often come back to my mind while traveling. Crossing borders and customs, one encounters the differences that humans know how to impose but, at the same time, through differences, one perceives the sense of the real unity of Nature.



Surely the opportunity offered by business trips brings together colleagues, consultants and suppliers who are forged by other cultures, who speak and write other languages, listen to other music, enjoy other flavors and are obliged to work in other climates.

In the professional environment, it is a type of experience that I could undoubtedly define as extremely stimulating, especially when it happens to focus on similarities and differences. Generally there are many: the first are due to the fact that we all refer to the natural world of plants that work in the same way everywhere and without borders, while the second derive precisely from the different "theaters" that require specific answers, which arise from experience, from training and ultimately from culture.

Our beautiful condition as gardeners (a term which joins many of us) perhaps lends itself especially to soliciting reflections of unity and diversity. We often speak of other Worlds - a very human concept, however questionable - but Nature is still the common Mother who knows how to reveal surprising points of encounter. If, for convenience, we reduce the



object of our passion to
plants only we discover
that, traveling around the
world, we have a third
language available: the Latin
of scientific classification.
In fact, with genres and
species, we find ourselves
understanding each other on
a common ground - a very
appropriate term - on which
we measure ourselves.

DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES



Thus, a vision that belongs to not one but to myriad and diverse geographies, finds its way between the ability to see differences and also similarities. Here meet the climates, the stories (both great and small), the music, the agricultural production and therefore the gastronomic specialties, the migratory



and non-migratory animals,
the insects, the invasions and
the raids, the influences and
the aspirations, the politics,
the traditions, the legends
and other countless contents.
Perhaps there is really no
paper thick enough to draw
such a complex map, which
perhaps dwells only in the
mind that traces it in the air.



Certainly, however, we must be able to find a balance between the suggestions, the reveries and the concrete results that our arrival demands. We must therefore leave space in our heads for all those clues that are a key to interpreting places, between micro and macro landscapes: the Caucasus Mountains in Georgia deflect



the Siberian Buran wind (our Bora), the Yenissei River in Siberia freezes in winter and becomes a road for trucks, the Caspian Sea in Azerbaijan mitigates the climate of Baku, in the Puskino forest the hazelnut trees are arranged close to the largest trees to provide protection from the snow, in Belarus there is a lot

of water, and so forth and so on, without end.

In this vortex I like to discover that in Lvov in Ukraine, the shapes of the city are sculpted by the Italian Baroque, in Yalta in Crimea there is a foundation of truth in the myth of Jason and the Golden Fleece, since in Colchis the precious metal was sought by passing river water through sheep's wool.

I admire the connection between the domes of the Orthodox churches and the buds of the plants, as a result of the transition from animist cults to the Christian religion. Similarly, the conquest of Eurasia on the double grid marked in the East-West direction of the many Silk Roads, and in the North-South direction by the course of the great rivers, still does not leave me indifferent.

Could a garden in a remote place be built without knowing all this? Yes, of course. It would be enough to have some data tables on the climate, an analysis of the terrain and a survey of the state of affairs.



However, I wonder if this effective endowment alone could be enough to compose the mosaic of a beautiful project. Personally I prefer to nourish myself with my curiosity for the world, each time finding solutions truly designed for places, which can sink their roots - not surprisingly - in a “geo-poetic” background that unites space and time.



Perhaps this is the formula that has led many Italians to work all over the World: a fertile composition between cultural baggage brought from home along with a respectful understanding of places, without arrogance and without preconceptions.

GEOGRAPHY OF MEMORY



An emblematic case I treasure is the project for the Arbuzovka Memorial, in Russia, where in the week of Christmas 1942, during the tragic retreat, about 10,000 Italian soldiers, starving and frozen, died. A story cited in much of the survivors' literature.

Due to a series of coincidences, I find myself having to think about the translation of such an atrocious story into a garden. And I do not miss the fact that I represent, unfortunately, in a now shared vision of History, the wrong side, that of the aggressors. So I choose to give an answer through the search for a possible common matrix, which I identify in the apple tree. The motivation is broad: it is the tree on which, according to the widespread attribution common to the Catholic and Orthodox Christian tradition, the distinction between good and evil was made for the first time. It lives well in the Russian climate, it has a strong identity and both Tolstoy and Chekhov were passionate growers and collectors of it, with flower and fruit it may well symbolize rebirth, it attracts hardworking bees and therefore carries a message of hope.



An apple orchard, therefore,
with a simple shape, the circle,
to recall the encirclement
that our soldiers suffered. The
diameter is 70 meters, where
the reference is to the biblical
"you will forgive your brother
up to 70 times 7". In my
opinion, everything fits, and
I received heartfelt approval
from the Veterans Union in
Moscow during a meeting



organized for receiving this important placet. On the other hand, the cold shower comes when I went to the local Governor in Voronezh and I am told that due to the sanctions recently applied by the European Union on Russia for the annexation of Crimea, the time is not favorable for an initiative of this type.



In this way, I experiment directly how to making a garden, certainly pushing sensitive and open buttons. It could be an operation that has to do with diplomacy and geopolitics.

The fact is that although it started with the best conditions, the project has remained on paper for now.

BELARUS

Minsk - Belarus, 2020



In February 2020, just before the lockdown for Covid-19, I had another interesting experience and, upon a much-appreciated invitation, I participated in the International Landscape Forum in Minsk. I went with great pleasure, also because I have never been to Belarus.

Moskow - the Russian Federation, 2010



Moskow - the Russian Federation, 2018

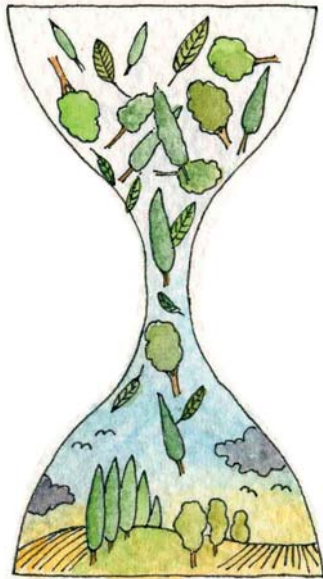




I was one of the speakers and had specially prepared presentations. With me were the English landscape architect James Hitchmough and many other Russian and Belarusian landscape architects. Quickly it seemed as if we have known each other for some time and there was no shortage of topics. Yulia's organization was very courteous, perfect, precise and punctual.



Dina accompanied us with great availability and she assisted us at all times. Really the common factor of plants is a very valid means of communication, and I did not miss an opportunity to reconfirm it. Belarus is two-thirds the size of Italy and has less than 10 million inhabitants. A country that has suffered, which emerged destroyed by the Second World War.



It suffered very serious consequences from the explosion of the Chernobyl power plant, but it has a high level of education and is now trying to turn the page with very civil protests against a government that has lasted for 26 years. The regime's response to this legitimate aspiration is instead violent, and is causing all kinds of suffering to Belarusians.



So, once again, based on my theorem of common factors (the art of gardens) and differences (contingent political situation) I often find myself thinking of these people who perfectly master my own craft and know the World of Nature and plants no less than me, but who live in a society where one cannot express oneself freely. I had intense conversations with them about the landscapes which do not make you perceive the boundaries.

Marc Chagall - "Sulla città"

Tretjakovskaja Galerie - Moskow, the Russian Federation

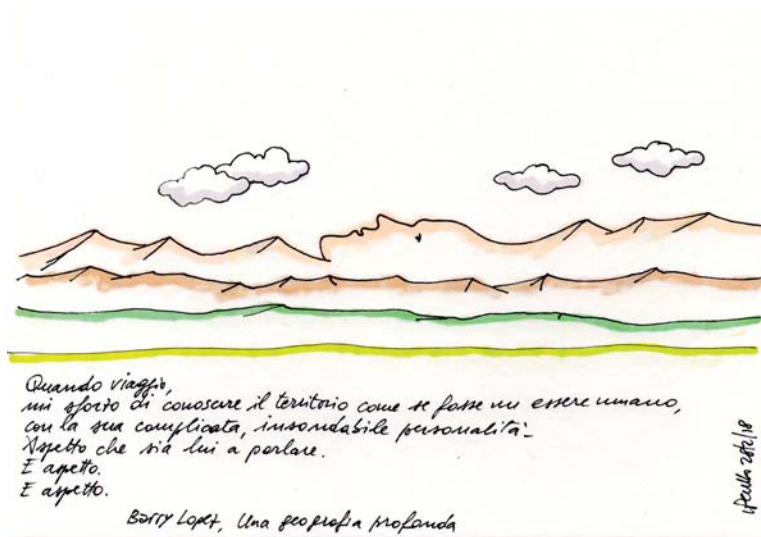


After the days of the Conference we have maintained a certain correspondence, and when I happen to read in a message "now we cry and then we go out to go to the barricades" I feel all the fragility of our uplifting speeches on the beauty of the gardens. And perhaps even when we forget the value of certain achievements.

THE HOMECOMING



On return journeys, I often find myself thinking about how much nature and plants can teach us. So I dream of a botanical nationality complete with a passport, which unites us all and makes this world better. It is a chimera, a utopia of course, but every time a new



piece becomes clear to me,
every time a new level of
knowledge opens up to me,
this thought reoccurs with
force.

Only what is human can be
truly alien.



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