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EUROPEAN GARDEN AWARD 2023

Category: Management of Development of a Historic Park or Garden

1st Prize: Tuinen Mien Ruys (The Netherlands)

A few years ago, when I was looking for inspiration for my own garden's design, I found the following photograph: *A rectangular pool of water lined with grasses on one side, with three yew hedges in the background, behind which you could see trees and obviously another garden room.*

Within this small picture, all design principles were recognisable: the proportions of fullness and emptiness, water in the garden, visual axes and obscured view, borrowed landscape – but the main role being played by: plants.

My research revealed that it was a section of a green monument, the design and creation of which was due to the creativity and enthusiasm of a single woman:

Mien Ruys had taken over a nursery from her parents and was already redesigning the gardens belonging to it in 1923. From the beginning, she wanted the individual garden rooms to inspire and encourage other garden owners to create a beautiful and useful garden.

She studied in Berlin and completed an apprenticeship as a gardener at Tunbridge Wells in Kent. Up until World War II, she designed mainly private gardens – but was always interested in architecture – and this interest also led her to design green spaces for a group of social housing apartments as early as 1933, and to work extensively for housing associations after the war.

Mien Ruys (actually Wilhelmina), 1904-1999, used her ideas about plantation and garden architecture to create a fascinating garden. The inheritance is now managed by the non-profit Mien Ruys Gardens Foundation.

The gardens are now a sequence of thirty gardens which have been designed and laid out according to both old and new ideas with a well-balanced combination of plants. New combinations and garden materials are tried out. There are often new developments to be seen in the field of garden architecture.

The Mien Ruys Gardens give a chronological overview of 20th century Garden architecture. This unique heritage has been kept in its original form and illustrates all the different periods of Mien Ruys' work.

Although the gardens stand for experimenting and renovation, not everything has to change of course. Some of the old are kept in their original state with much care and attention. The very first experimental gardens where plants were tested in sun and shade

remain as they were. They form the basis of a long garden history. Also, several of the gardens designed just after the war remain unchanged.

Until now they are beautiful examples of garden architecture following the principles and style of „functionalism“.

The Gardens are unique in Europe and for that reason invaluable from a cultural-historical point of view and in contemporary meaning as well.

The quality and history, the tremendous knowledge of plants and their use, the versatility and magnificent design of the individual garden spaces, their state of maintenance and the careful development over time render the gardens of Mien Ruys a unique testimony to European garden art, and also made an extraordinary impression on the jury.

In the same way that her gardens receive the first prize in the category “Management or Development of a Historic Park or Garden”, with Mien Ruys, we direct our gaze to one of the most important female garden architects of the 20th century, who, with Gertrude Jekyll, Vita Sackville-West or Beth Chatto, shaped garden and landscape culture in Europe.

It is time to honour the achievements of these great women!