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EUROPEAN GARDEN AWARD 2024

First Prize: Design or concept of a contemporary park or garden

Project: International Festival de Jardins – Hortillonages Amiens (France)

I am delighted to praise the winner of the category 'Design or concept of a contemporary park or garden': the Festival International de Jardins – Hortillonages Amiens.

Even at the time when today's historic gardens were still 'contemporary', garden designers and their clients wanted their gardens not only to be places of recreation and status symbols, but also to convey messages and moods, to transport visitors to another time, to encourage them to reflect or even to philosophise, and thus to encourage visitors to rethink their own position in their social environment and their future.

Temples, grottoes, hermitages, statues and fountains represent some of the variety of artistic interventions used for these purposes.

In this respect, this year's contemporary winner is very historical and follows a similar approach, though of course more open, more democratic and very joyful.

Created in 2010 by the Maison de la Culture d'Amiens, this international garden festival is organised since 2018 by art & jardins I Hauts-de-France. It aims to further strengthen the links between contemporary gardens and works of art, ecology, social inclusion, and sustainable regional development.

The International Garden Festival - Hortillonages Amiens presents gardens, landscape creations and works of art. Each year, landscape designers, architects and visual artists are invited to respond to a call for proposals to create works in situ.

This year, from 24th May to 13th October 2024, the festival is celebrating its 15th edition with 14 new creations, including 7 gardens, 5 artistic installations and 2 projects by art students from the Université Picardie Jules Verne.

In total, visitors will be able to discover 46 productions, accessible to the public on foot or by boat on the islands of the Hortillonages in Amiens and along the river Somme. All the works fully integrate the contemporary issues of sustainable development and changing environmental challenges into their thinking and design: preservation of the eco-system, strengthening river banks, water resources, food production and food quality.

Despite these common objectives, the works vary greatly in their individual focus, in their scale, design and materials used. Sometimes the intentions and concepts are easy to understand, or at least seem so at first glance, sometimes their artistic or philosophical approach requires time and thought for reflection.

In this combination, the works invite for a gentle exploration that allows us to question the links between nature, culture, agriculture, and heritage in the face of the many effects of climate change.

What convinced the jury even more to honour the festival with a first prize is the fact that it not only makes use of a wonderful location, but also presents an exceptional cultural landscape and contributes to its appreciation and preservation.

This landscape, the Hortillonnages, is a natural site between land and water covering more than 300 hectares in the heart of the city of Amiens. It was created when the river Somme broadened into several indistinct ponds, creating a kind of jigsaw puzzle of land and water. In the Middle Ages, the inhabitants dug irrigation canals to create an area of productive market gardens (or hortillons). In the 19th century, there were as many as 950 hortillons. These gardens supplied the entire city with fruit and vegetables. Spread over this exceptional site, the 46 creations offer a quirky or poetic view of this complex environment, its history, and its future, sometimes funny or critical, but always unexpected.

The International Festival de Jardins succeeds not only in promoting and preserving this green heritage and in helping people to discover it, by organising meetings and workshops for all ages. The festival also aims to contribute to the social economy by distributing the food produced, and to promote social integration by employing workers from integration projects to maintain the gardens and volunteers from the civic service to welcome visitors.

To summarize:

The International Festival de Jardins – Hortillonnages Amiens dissolves supposed contrasts and combines the old with the new. In perfect harmony, nature and art enter into a symbiosis that serves as an attraction for all ages and social groups. Against a unique backdrop, the diverse works invite you to embark on a walk of the senses – a journey of reflection.

Félicitations pour votre première place et merci beaucoup pour votre engagement exceptionnel !