DIANE DURSTON

Garden as Window

If the Japanese gardens of North America were merely places of tranquil repose amid the chaos of modern life, that alone would be enough to justify their existence in today's complicated world. But we know that today they can be so much more. The lessons inspired by the Japanese garden are many and varied—not only can we learn about the proper care of a pine tree, but also about the elegance of the curved line it forms, and about the fascinating culture of the people who noticed and nurtured that special beauty. Gardens are windows through which to see and experience the heart and soul of Japan.

Their potential to inspire is almost unlimited, but every Japanese garden in North America also faces a basic need to find ways to support itself. The care and maintenance of our gardens requires a great deal of time, energy, expertise and, yes, money. Most of us rely on admissions to earn the revenue we need to survive. We all need to find ways to attract new audiences and bring more people through our gates, while maintaining the tranquility that is our shared mission.

Dream Weaver – *Bamboo Art of Jiro Yonezawa*

The bamboo sculpture of Jiro Yonezawa connects with the garden landscape in this Art in the Garden Exhibition.

Kizuna – *Ceramic Installation*

An exhibition of Mashiko ceramics celebrates the pottery town's recovery from the 2011 earthquake.

At the Portland Japanese Garden, we began the process of expanding audience by addressing the bone-chilling realities of Portland's notorious rain, and how it dampened the enthusiasm of prospective visitors during the long months of winter. In 2007, we decided to launch a series of indoor exhibitions that would run throughout the year to give people a place to escape the rain. This also gave rise to a discussion of the significance of seasonality in Japanese culture, expressed so clearly in Japanese gardens designed to be beautiful in every season. We sought exhibitions that would speak to the theme of the beauty of the changing seasons—kimono (a different pattern and material for every season), stone sculpture (demonstrating the stark beauty winter brings). More people began to make their way up the hill in the drizzle that year to find out what was up at the Garden. They learned new things, began to understand the connection between the Garden and the arts of Japan, and realized just how beautiful this Garden is in the rain!

Subtle changes like this in the Garden's programming, started with the hiring of Steve Bloom ten years ago. His vision was to explore the untapped potential he saw in Japanese gardens as an art form. He decided to create two new positions: a Garden Curator (Sadafumi Uchiyama) to oversee the care and development of the Garden itself and a Curator of Culture, Art, and Education (a position I am honored to hold) to improve the level of authenticity and expand audience through creative programming. This set in motion the pursuit of the deeper and broader meanings a Japanese garden has to offer. This was not only a major change, but a big investment for the Garden, but with the support of the Board of Directors and the patience of our longtime members, we discovered together that these Garden walls hold a rich and meaningful depth of experience—one that brings worlds together and cultures to life.

Art in the Garden

The launching of the Art in the Garden series of four seasonal exhibitions each year, led us to conclude that we should continue to let the Garden itself be our guide in choosing exhibition themes. Exhibitions would have relate to the Garden or to nature in some direct way with work that would demonstrate, for example, an appreciation for the unadorned beauty of natural materials–wood, bamboo, stone. Or work that would enhance understanding of one of the principle aesthetics of the Garden, "ma," for example, the use of empty space demonstrated in the sand and stone garden or a calligraphy exhibition, or "wabi," as could be felt in the tea garden and in unassuming beauty of tea baskets made by an equally unassuming, but nonetheless great bamboo artist.

Exhibitions became opportunities to enhance understanding of the Garden and its unique culture. They also became a chance to draw more visitors to the Garden and connect people with people.

Watching potters from earthquake-ravaged Mashiko laugh and joke and swap kiln tales with Oregon potters on the veranda at the recent exhibition "KIZUNA: The Rebirth of Mashiko Ceramics" at the

Threads of Hope

FAR LEFT: Dyed muslin coats by Hiroshi Saito of Kyoto on view in the Pavilion Gallery in the "Threads of Hope" exhibit.

CENTER LEFT: The PJG partners with Art from the Heart, a learning center for developmentally disabled, to dye fabric with Hiroshi Saito. The fabric was sent to Tohoku for use in craft making projects to help fund the recovery.

Sinajina – *Urban Green*

CENTER RIGHT: Tiny keshiki bonsai tray gardens bring a touch of green to the lives of Tokyo's condo dwellers.

FAR RIGHT: Kenji Kobayashi leads a keshiki bonsai workshop for a new generation of Tokyo urbanites help fund the recovery.

Garden last June convinced me that language is no barrier when people come together in a beautiful natural setting around the things they love—clay, craftsmanship, camaraderie, resilience and compassion in the face of natural disaster.

Over the past eight years, the PJG has explored a number of different ideas through exhibitions, lectures, classes, and workshops:

- One exhibition brought Ainu and Native American weavers together to dance and share the great traditions and sometimes sad tribulations of the indigenous cultures of Portland's sister city Sapporo and the Pacific Northwest.
- Another exhibition featured garments made by hand-splitting bast fiber from vines foraged by the wives of impoverished farmers a hundred years ago, teaching us the meaning of *mottainai*, that nothing should be wasted.
- A lecture by Isoya Shinji, Japan's leading authority on Japanese gardens, explained that Japanese gardens are created through an integrated process of *waza to kokoro*, technical skill and a deep sense of spirituality.
- A strikingly modern outdoor glass art installation drew attention to an overlooked corner of the Garden; the controversy it created lured the community's most respected patron of the arts to visit the Garden for the first time in 20 years.
- A haiku program that brings children from a low-income and often violent urban community inspired one child to write that in the Japanese garden, she actually learned what it means to feel "calm."

The lessons garnered from Japanese gardens are many, and they are diverse. We can learn about the proper nurturing of plants, and we can also absorb the aesthetic and moral theories that inform the use of plants in a garden. Gardens pull us into a culture that nurtures a profound sense of beauty.

Rather than focusing on art for art's sake, we came to realize that the many art forms Japan has fostered—such practices as tea ceremony to ikebana to bonsai--enabled us to draw from a broad spectrum of artists and objects to speak to the concepts the Garden itself demonstrates. It also allowed us to focus on people first. Bringing the artists themselves to Portland became an essential part of the mission of our exhibition program. We would seek the best traditional and contemporary work possible, but first and foremost these

exhibitions would offer an opportunity for people in our community to connect with people from Japan as well as those whose work was influenced by Japan. We began to seek artists whose inner strength was by itself a lesson in the cultural values of Japan.

One such artist was Hiroshi Saito, a warm-hearted Kyoto textile artist who with just a beaming smile and very little English succeeded in lighting up the faces of severely disabled Portland residents of a local non-profit Art from the Heart with one of Saito-san's exuberantly colorful fabric dyeing workshops! Held in conjunction with his Threads of Hope exhibition of stylish kimono coats, the event provided an afternoon of sheer joy during which everyone learned how much fun it is to spread brightly colored dyes exuberantly across a 50-meter stretch of white cotton with giant *yuzen* brushes. Once a month since the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, our friend Hiroshi Saito drives from Kyoto to Sendai to help displaced families living in temporary shelters heal their weary hearts by dyeing fabric together outside their temporary shelters. Hiroshi's visit was one of the highlights of what we called The Year of the Healing Garden.

Through this year of programming, we discovered the next piece of the puzzle, by adding the element of integrating programming with a purpose with community collaboration. Throughout that year, we continued to explore the role of gardens as places of healing in collaboration with horticultural therapists and health care professionals from Western and Eastern medical traditions. We expanded the range of relevant programs further by partnering with a yoga school to hold morning yoga sessions and working with a local school of eastern medicine to offer demonstrations of shiatsu and other healing practices throughout the cold month of February. Later that year, we partnered with friends at two local hospitals and a college of natural medicine—all of which have built healing gardens in their own spaces. Hospital staff and guests from the wellness community visited the Garden throughout the year to participate in programs and exhibitions that spoke to the importance of gardens as a source of healing. Through this year of programming we learned that we could draw audiences that had never visited the Garden before by collaborating with other organizations that shared our vision, some of which would go on to become Garden members.

Little by little, we came to see that the Garden could provide a great depth of experience if we would only continue to explore the ideas, aesthetics, and values that the Garden and its culture represent. We found that by expanding our own way of thinking about the Garden, we could offer our visitors a richer experience and build new audiences in the process.

The following year, we looked to the very essence of the Japanese garden as an idealized representation of wild nature and began to examine more deeply one of the most

important roles it could play in the modern world—that of fostering a heightened awareness of the fragility of nature and of our role as stewards rather than masters of the world around us. Here in a community of people that prides itself on its commitment to urban green and urban growth boundaries, could the Garden become a vehicle for a broader international discussion of the environment?

In 2011, we launched a year of programming that explored the notion of living in harmony with nature. By focusing on the traditional Japanese affinity for nature and the environment, however challenging that may have become in the modern world, we were able to draw environmentalist groups and individuals to the Garden to join us in exploring this theme in exhibitions, lectures, workshops and panel discussions held throughout our Year of Living in Harmony with Nature. We brought an innovative young DIY nurseryman from Tokyo where he had opened a small business in a downtown neighborhood to teach his fellow Tokyoites to make miniature keshiki-bonsai in order to bring a little nature back into their modern lives. His visit to Portland for our Urban Green exhibition became the centerpiece of a year of themed programming exploring the relationship among people, gardens and the environment. We called upon local potters to make bonsai pots and local nurseries to provide appropriate plants. The exhibition was the result of two weeks of potting workshops conducted on site at the Garden. A book project was born, and the workshop drew Portland urbanites—young and old—to the Garden to learn that something new was happening in the traditional world of bonsai that could have applications for modern urban life.

We talk about environmentalism as if it were a new idea. In the old days in Japan, people learned how to get by in difficult times. They came to value things their descendants would one day carelessly discard. We hosted a lecture by an architect and designer who talked about his book *Just Enough: Lessons in Living Green from Traditional Japan,* introducing the lives of Japanese who left the city to go back to live on the land. The notion of *satoyama*– the sound ecological balance between mountains, forests, rivers, farmlands, oceans and humans all share a delicate balance–is a truth that Japanese people once knew but then all but forgot.

Visitors who had never been to the Garden before came to see the exhibition and participate in related programs. A conversation about the environment amid the lush green setting of the Garden attracted a new audience (including recyclers, young back-to-nature farmers, DIY artists, and community activists) with interest in the urban green movement to meet the experts and the artists and take a look at the world's shared problems from a new perspective.

Reaching out last year to our counterparts at the Tokyo Metropolitan Parks Association, we learned that in Japan, too, the garden world is now in the process of exploring ways to make Japanese gardens the center of community advancement and international exchange. The TMPA oversees all the traditional Japanese gardens and Western parks open to the public in Tokyo. They have begun to create new programs that will add relevance to the perceived role of Japanese gardens and draw new audiences beyond mandatory school excursions and the tourist trade.

By letting the Garden itself suggest the themes—seasonality, aesthetics, master craftsmanship, respect for nature, awareness of its healing qualities—and by exploring the depth and universality of their meaning, we can not only increase attendance at Japanese gardens throughout the world, but more importantly, we can add greatly to the depth of our visitors' experience and understanding of the world.

The Garden is alive and changes with time; it grows and dies and is reborn. It offers all the lessons of human life, just as the remarkable Japanese garden designers of centuries ago intended.

As a Zen priest from Kyoto once said, "What you find in these gardens depends on what you bring to them." Or, perhaps, it is what we, the gardens' stewards, can help visitors discover.