Early Social Agendas of Women in Landscape Architecture

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Abstract

During the early twentieth century, landscape architecture was frequently considered a "natural" profession for women. Women as professional landscape architects designed diverse landscapes with a strong focus on residential landscapes. Collectively their works reveal investigations into the social politics and the potential of designed landscapes to meet the needs and visions of contemporary society. This paper draws on archival texts, drawings, and photographs alongside contemporary critiques and reviews of the residential work of three successful female landscape architects: Martha Brookes Hutcheson, Annette Hoyt Flanders, and Marjorie L. Sewell Cautley. By exploring their diverse approaches to suburban landscapes, housing projects, and model gardens, the essay traces a political thread connecting what might appear to be individual garden designs reflecting private concerns. This thread reveals a shared commitment to home and garden as transformational spaces with the power to modernize and improve the lives of American residents. While men shared an interest in residential landscape design, women were granted the public’s authority in residential matters, and many focused specifically on the potential of such domestic space to modernize and improve women’s daily lives. This investigation challenges us to reconsider how we discuss the history of landscape design, the vital role of residential landscapes, and women’s role in the profession of landscape architecture.