

Tim Richardson  
with foreword by Martha Schwartz



# Avant Gardeners

50 VISIONARIES OF THE CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPE

 Thames & Hudson

# Jean-Pierre Brazs

Paris

Site-specific land art and conceptualist sculpture.

Practising as a painter, sculptor and photographer since the early 1970s, Paris-based Jean-Pierre Brazs first turned to the topic of landscape in 1996. Brazs creates what he calls 'interventions' in the landscape, always site-specific and always conceptually predicated on what he finds in the place. Unlike other site-specific artists – such as Andy Goldsworthy, whose work Brazs's can superficially resemble – his preoccupation is not with natural materials found on site, but with the viewpoints it contains. Brazs has consistently explored the theme of the emplacement of the body in the landscape, a phenomenological perspective he shares with several other conceptualists, including Philippe Rahm (p. 230).

Brazs's methodology of deconstructing a landscape space according to its characteristics, and then reconstructing it again, has clear links with the deconstructivist literary theory made popular among his generation (he was born in 1947), and which later found an architectural correlative in Postmodernism and more recent deconstructivist disciplines. Brazs says that his first task in any setting is to explore its different viewpoints, and to extrapolate the detail of the piece from that basis. His is a visual response, which later becomes emphasized by careful material additions to the space. This concentration on the relationship of specific points in a landscape with one another, and with the potential routes and emotional responses of visitors, paradoxically introduces a strong sense of movement or flux in Brazs's work.



## D'En Haut / D'En Bas

LE RAYOL CANADEL (FRANCE) 2006

A collaboration with landscape designer Gilles Clement, this piece was an installation for the Jardin des Méditerranées at the Domaine du Rayol botanic garden in the south of France. The garden's 'grand perspective' had already been decorated at each end by a pair of circular mosaics made by Clement, and Brazs decided to reference them in his own work by creating a circle of quartz halfway down the dramatic steps at the heart of the garden. For him, the quartz circle functions as a 'perfect form'.

The other element to the piece was a series of forms made from wire gabions, which seem to fall crazily and uncontrollably down the steps when viewed from above. Viewed from below, however, the forms appear to be exhibiting an attraction to the circle, and even coalescing with it. The apparent chaos visible from the top of the steps is seen to be ordered and controlled when observed from below.



## Le Chemin du Gaïac

NOUMÉA (NEW CALEDONIA) 2004

This installation was created around the Renzo Piano-designed Tjibaou cultural centre on the Pacific island of New Caledonia. It echoes some of Braz's preoccupations with images of encirclement, unseemly invasions of cultural spaces and the disruption of natural environments. A long, sinuous line constructed from twenty-eight separate branches of the gaïac tree (native

to New Caledonia) winds its way for some 180m through the forest surrounding the building, eventually merging with the building itself. There is a sense of the natural environment somehow reclaiming the space where the state-subsidized building now stands, though this can also be seen equally as either benign or threatening in its inferences.



## Points de Vue

JUMIÈGES (FRANCE) 2005

This deceptively simple intervention at the abbey of Jumièges in Normandy is the perfect summation of Braz's landscape sensibility. A stone staircase and its setting is the theme of the piece. Braz noted how the green apron of lawn in front of the steps echoes the strident form of the staircase, and the way that its central decorative feature – a column – has been broken off near the base, and took this compromised geometry as the basis of his inspiration. The first 'point of view' is from the top of the steps, looking towards the lawn, and then to the abbey beyond. The second is from the foot of the steps, looking back. To emphasize the strong shape of the stairs, Braz introduced a series of white-painted branches placed in the ground to create a symbolic copse of trees. Crucially, there is a gap in the centre, an echo of the absence of the column in front.



## Le Jardin du Cercle d'Or

CHAUMONT SUR LOIRE (FRANCE) 2004

An installation at the Chaumont Festival, this project utilized gold paint for primary effect. A pile of broken branches evokes the natural tragedy and chaotic beauty of a fallen tree, while the ground plan forms a complementary ellipse. The climax of the piece is the golden circle painted onto the pile of branches, hinting at the redemption, redispersal and reconstruction of the elements of the tree, back into nature and the universe. The circle can be seen in

focus from only one spot, however. Until one reaches that point, this sense of unity and resolution does not exist. In part, this is an evocation of the preciousness of any direct engagement with nature. Another installation of the same year, *Obscure Clarté*, also made use of gold paint. In that case, the gold colour echoed the play of sunlight of the smooth faces of the abundant natural rocks below the trees in its woodland location in Melle, in France.