



Anne Whiston Spirn
Cecil and Ida Green Distinguished Professor of Landscape Architecture
and Planning
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

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ASLA MEDAL 2020

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January 23, 2020

ASLA Medal Nomination
c/o Honors and Awards
636 Eye Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001-3736

Dear Sir or Madam,

Since the publication of the Granite Garden in 1984, I have followed the career of Anne Whiston Spirn with awe. Though I was not fortunate to be one of her students, her writing and lectures have been a major influence on my career as I am sure they have been for many, many members of our profession. She is in the truest sense, a thought leader, shaping the trajectory of landscape architecture for over fifty years. I can think of no one more deserving of the ASLA Medal and nominate her for this honor with great enthusiasm.

I have had the pleasure to develop a personal friendship with Anne over the last decade. She has served as a mentor to me through my dissertation always available to debate and discuss concepts and to explore new ideas. Over the course of the last ten years I have had the chance to read every one of her publications. The breadth and depth of her knowledge is astonishing. Most importantly, I have been particularly moved by her groundbreaking work in issues of spatial equity and environmental justice in West Philadelphia. As always, she was way ahead of her time in urging the profession to address the needs of those less fortunate.

She is the best our profession has to offer – an inquisitive, creative, and thoughtful leader. I heartily urge you to award Anne Whiston Spirn the ASLA Medal.

Sincerely,



Chairman / CEO

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Massachusetts Institute of Technology
77 Massachusetts Avenue, Room 10-390
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January 22, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

I am delighted to write this letter of recommendation in support of Professor Anne Whiston Spirn's nomination for the ASLA Medal in 2020. I have known Anne and her work for three decades -- from her early groundbreaking research on the *Granite Garden* at the Harvard Department of Landscape Architecture to her role as head of the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania to her appointment as Professor of Landscape Architecture in both the Departments of Architecture and Urban Studies and Planning at MIT. I subsequently learned of her early studies at Radcliffe, discovery of landscape architecture, work with MWRT on the Woodlands project, and more.

In the course of her career, Anne has inspired two generations of students, faculty, and practitioners of landscape architecture, who look to her for expertise, knowledge and, above all, wisdom. On the latter point, Anne recently authored an extraordinarily thoughtful review of challenges faced by women in our School of Architecture and Planning and the academy at large, a report that came at a pivotal time in MIT's history. It is a model of rigor, critique, discernment, and principled judgement. But that is to leap ahead.

I first learned of Anne's work through the *Granite Garden* and immediately assigned it to my students in a course titled the Human Habitat at the University of Chicago, where it had the combination of scholarship and practical inquiry that captured students' interest and imagination. Anne realized that it had continuing importance and she has updated all of the chapters, seeking input from many experts, and posting these materials online, which reflects her passion for disseminating research in innovative ways. In every study she tries to ensure that her work will reach people and make a difference.

The West Philadelphia Landscape Project (WPLP) is arguably the centerpiece of Anne's contribution to landscape architecture. It originated from her research on low income communities in low lying areas of Boston, and when she moved to Philadelphia she took it to an unprecedented level of scholarship and community engagement. Four aspects of the WPLP stand out: first, its multi-decadal commitment to an underserved community; second, its innovative engagement of middle school students as a cohort for community landscape change; third, its creative application of mapping methods that correlated deteriorating housing with buried floodplains and sewer corridors; and finally, its transformative educational role for Penn and MIT design students who learned from her example and their experience that the boundaries of landscape architecture are limitless. I had the privilege of teaching two design workshops with Anne in West Philadelphia where I witnessed these contributions firsthand, and came to understand how Anne has become a public landscape architectural intellectual over the past 35 years. She is now completing

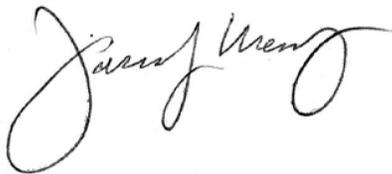
her book on the West Philadelphia Landscape Project, and I believe it will be her *magnum opus* for the profession.

Three other major substantive contributions stand out that will continue to increase in significance over time. The first is *The Language of Landscape* published by Yale University Press. In this work Anne retraces the etymology of landscape, which others have also done, but goes on to develop a sustained philosophical perspective on key words, phrases, sentences, and texts. What distinguishes Anne's perspective is her focus on the *pragmatics* of language, that is, its *uses*, not to the exclusion of syntax or meaning, but rather in the spirit of pragmatist philosophy inspired by John Dewey, in which for designers the use of landscape concepts lies at the heart of our work. *The Language of Landscape* is a complex, closely-written, brilliant text that will stand the test of time.

Anne's other major works are books on landscape photography. *The Eye is a Door* explores photography as a design method, a mode of landscape inquiry, and ultimately a path to spiritual insight into the land. Anyone who has traveled with her has witnessed her keen visual search and rigorous curation of raw uncropped images. I refer all of my MIT advisees to Anne's photography as method course, as it transforms their visual understanding and creativity. Anne's book on Dorothea Lange's depression era photography involved revisiting the places where Lange worked, traveling with irrigation ditch riders, and further extending the boundaries of landscape architecture.

Anne Whiston Spirn is an extraordinary landscape architectural colleague, within and far beyond the academy. Her enthusiasm for landscape architecture is contagious, and her support for anyone who shares that passion and especially for communities in need is boundless. Anne's advisees become mentees for life, many of them are now leaders in the profession, and these mentors for young professionals. These are perhaps the highest criteria, exemplified by this most deserving candidate, for the ASLA's highest honor.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "James L. Wescoat Jr." in a cursive style.

James L. Wescoat Jr., FASLA
Aga Khan Professor of Landscape Architecture and Geography
Co-director, Norman B Leventhal Center for Advanced Urbanism



January 9, 2020

ASLA Medal Nominations
c/o Honors and Awards
636 Eye Street, NW
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honorsawards@asla.org

Dear Esteemed Jury,

I am most enthused to endorse the nomination of Anne Whiston Spirn for the ASLA Medal. She is most worthy of this highest honor bestowed by ASLA. Her contributions and achievements truly have had a special and lasting impact on the welfare of society and the environment. Professor Spirn has promoted the profession of landscape architecture as a teacher, writer, photographer, and practitioner for nearly 50 years. The reach of her work has been international and sustained and will likely influence the design and planning professions for years to come.

Professor Spirn has served on the faculties of Harvard University, the University of Pennsylvania (Penn), and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Currently, she is the Cecil and Ida Green Distinguished Professor in Landscape Architecture and Planning at MIT. At Penn, she succeeded Ian McHarg as department chair (not an easy assignment). Professor Spirn was able to maintain and advance Penn's stature in landscape architecture. She made significant hiring decisions (James Corner, for example). Throughout her academic career, she has had a reputation as an outstanding teacher and mentor. Professor Spirn is especially good at involving her students in challenging social situations, perhaps best exemplified by her continued engagement (both at Penn and later at MIT) in African-American neighborhoods of West Philadelphia.

Professor Spirn's most significant writings are her books *The Granite Garden: Urban Nature and Human Design* (1984) and *The Language of Landscape* (2000). A pioneering work in urban ecology, *The Granite Garden* has been recognized as one of the most important books of the 20th century. Its prescient vision helped advance our understanding about the nature of cities. She illustrated how McHarg's ecological design and planning ideas could be applied to urban areas. *The Language of Landscape* lays out clear principles for reading landscapes. Both books are used in landscape architecture, city planning, and architecture courses around the world. In addition to these two major books, Professor Spirn has written numerous essays, articles, and book chapters and has made many presentations throughout North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia.

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She is a committed photographer and an advocate of the use of photography in design. Her book *The Eye Is a Door: Landscape, Photography, and the Art of Discovery* (2014) is a significant contribution to “seeing as a way of knowing and photography as a way of thinking.” Professor Spirn has expanded her use of photography through multimedia and the web.

After completing her Master of Landscape Architecture at Penn, Professor Spirn worked several years at Wallace, McHarg, Roberts and Todd (now WRT) before taking a teaching position at Harvard’s Graduate School of Design. She participated in several of McHarg’s firm’s most influential projects in the 1970s such as The Woodlands, Texas, and the Toronto Waterfront. After leaving private practice, Professor Spirn became an academic practitioner, again best exemplified by the West Philadelphia Landscape Project. This work helped lay the ground work for the city of Philadelphia’s important undertakings in storm water management and green infrastructure. It has also done much to improve impoverished neighborhoods.

Anne Whiston Spirn is a distinguished scholar and important design thinker and innovator. I highly recommend her for ASLA Medal. She is most deserving.

Thank you for considering this nomination.

Sincerely,



tz Steiner

Frederick R. Steiner, FASLA, FAAR
Dean and Paley Professor

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February 4, 2020

The American Society of Landscape Architects
ASLA Medal Nominations
c/o Honors and Awards
636 Eye Street NW
Washington, DC 20001-3736

Re: ASLA Medal nomination for Anne Whiston Spirn

To the members of the ASLA Executive Committee,

I am writing in strong support for the nomination of Anne Whiston Spirn for the 2020 ASLA Medal. Anne and I have been colleagues and supportive friends since we first met at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design in 1984. We were the only female faculty members in the whole school at that time! Fortunately, we really liked each other and collaborated on a very interesting report for the Oak Ridge National Laboratory entitled "Plants for Passive Cooling."

Our careers continued with parallel engagements as I left to be the Chair of Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania and was one of those recruiting Anne to succeed Ian McHarg as Chair of Landscape. For a short time, in contrast to our experience at Harvard, all of the department chairs at UPenn were held by women under the Deanship of Lee Copeland.

I was then recruited to be the founding Dean of Architecture at UCSD and Anne was later recruited to join the Department of Architecture and Department of Urban Studies and Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The story does not end there. In 2003 Anne was a tireless member of the recruiting team to appoint the next Dean of the School of Architecture and Planning at MIT! Despite very little interest on my part I became the next Dean at MIT and never regretted it.

I feel easily able to judge the importance of Anne's contribution to the profession of landscape architecture not from the point of view of practice but through her academic career and the importance of her teaching and publications. She became an important international voice in shaping the profession starting with her prize-winning book the "Granite Garden; Urban Nature and Human Design" (1984). She studied under Ian McHarg with his large-scale analytical view for landscape professionals but in her book was another increasingly important role for the profession. Much of landscape was urban and man-made. The important role of design, of aesthetics was finally recognized. Her next book "The Language of Landscape" broadens the topic of meaning for the profession and examines the importance of seeing visual material and designing with nature aesthetically and ecologically. She had also become a serious photographer by this time as well.

Parallel to her writing, her role as a Professor was very influential. At UPenn she and her students began working with the local garden movement, developing vacant plots of land in poor neighborhoods to grow food. West Philadelphia had many of these gardens which became community centers of importance. The monograph "West Philadelphia Landscape Plan. A Framework for Action" was published by UPenn in 1996. Her involvement in this subject continued after her move to MIT and was recognized by a Community Service Award by ASLA in 2004.

In 2001 her role in the profession was recognized by Japan when she was given the International COSMOS AWARD by the government. This is a prize given to one individual a year. The ceremony

lasts days with speeches by the most prestigious members of academia and the government. She was praised for her "contribution to the harmonious co -existence of nature and humankind." After accepting this award, Anne received many international invitations to speak on this philosophy.

Joining MIT's School of Architecture and Planning as a Full Professor Anne was given a dual appointment, one in Architecture and the other in Urban Planning. This was unusual at the time but allowed her to teach a larger group of students. Although MIT did not have a department of landscape architecture it did have many landscape architects. Anne became the most influential one, working as City Design and Development faculty in Planning, and Urbanism faculty in Architecture. Her courses are very well received. One of the most popular courses involved photography as a means of seeing and understanding landscapes. Her book "The Eye is a door" is available as an e-book and her work in photography, "Knowing Where to Stand" was exhibited in the Compton Gallery MIT Museum in 2003-2004 and at Vassar College in 2004. Her courses are very important experiences for architecture students in particular who learned about landscape design in a very tangible manner.

Her appreciation of the work of Dorothea Lang, who was a photographer working in a government agency and not very well known, became her next important book. "Daring to Look; Dorothea Lang's Photography and Reports" was published in 2008 by Chicago University Press. Anne literally followed Dorothea's journey in order to experience her story and the subjects she recorded resulting in making exceptional photographs visible in this well received work.

Anne contributed twelve book chapters to international publications, eleven monographs (some co-authored), four exhibitions on her work, gave many invited lectures at important venues, engaged in award juries, was on publication boards, and was truly a strong and informed voice in the evolution of the landscape profession over her career. She has been an exceptional teacher of landscape design and theory, promoting the important relationship with architecture. Students who experience her pedagogy continue to talk about Anne with reverence years later. Recognizing her contributions with this important award would be a fitting appreciation of her life time dedication to the profession of Landscape Architecture. She would be an exceptional choice for the ACSA Medal.

Sincerely,



Adele Naude Santos
Professor Post Tenure of Architecture and Urban Studies
Dean Emeritus, School of Architecture and Planning