

MICHAEL  
VAN  
VALKENBURGH  
ASSOCIATES  
INC

3 February 2022  
ASLA Design Medal Nominations  
c/o Honors and Awards  
636 Eye Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001

RE: Nomination of Laura Solano for the ASLA Design Medal

To the ASLA Executive Committee:

It is with great pleasure that I nominate Laura Solano, my esteemed colleague of three decades, for the ASLA Design Medal. Laura is a landscape architect's landscape architect, bringing together the passion, curiosity, humanity, intelligence, and rock-solid expertise that make our profession great. In the 40 years since she entered the field, her influence has extended far beyond the projects she has worked on, enriching both the teaching and the practice of landscape architecture.

In other words, MVVA has had to share Laura with the entire landscape architecture world, and it has been our honor to do so.

If you know the work of MVVA, you know the work of Laura Solano, who joined the firm in 1991 and is part of the core leadership team that has allowed the firm to grow to its current size of over one hundred professionals. Although my name is on the letterhead, her influence is felt in every major MVVA project, including Teardrop Park in Manhattan, Allegheny Riverfront Park in Pittsburgh, Alumnae Valley at Wellesley College, Brooklyn Bridge Park, the George W. Bush Presidential Center in Dallas, the restoration of Gateway Arch National Park in St. Louis, and the Port Lands Estuary Project in Toronto.

Each of those projects, however inevitable their design may appear, faced daunting infrastructural and environmental challenges. That's just how it is nowadays. And luckily for MVVA, we have Laura, who brings a combination of resourcefulness and vast technical knowledge to the table. It is Laura who has made our landscapes not just places for recreation and contemplation but also innovative works of infrastructure, wherein the technical and aesthetic aspects of the design complement and reinforce each other.

In a lecture at the University of Toronto, Laura explained some ways in which the profession has evolved during—and sometimes because of—her career. In the early days, she said, “Water was something that threatened your project. You assumed a position of defensiveness.” Now, she says, landscape architects work with water, using hydrological conditions as generators of form. “You develop ways people can interact with the water, and you can even teach them about the process

water goes through from raindrop to faucet.” She added: “Drainage should relate to both performance in the landscape and how one experiences the landscape. I don’t think those two things can be separated. Luckily, we’re in a time in the profession where the two can be married together. We’re creating working landscapes where the emphasis is really on performance, but where the performance contributes to society. It elevates people’s place in the world.”

Thaïsa Way sees this commitment to empowering users through high-performing landscapes in everything Laura does. It is more critical now than ever to recognize leaders like Laura, Thaïsa explained, “in a moment when landscape architects are seeking to more fully reflect the public for whom we design.”

To highlight her achievements, I want to focus this letter on the distinct roles she has played in our profession: design implementer, technical expert, builder, colleague, and teacher.

### Design Implementer

Laura doesn’t solve problems from a distance. She gets inside the skin of the project and makes sure the implementation is not only technically sound but that it furthers the designer’s goals. She has performed this alchemy on scores of MVVA projects, many of which have won national design awards.

For the George W. Bush Presidential Center, Laura assembled a team of local experts in soil science and ecology to transform a 24-acre urban brownfield into a collection of native ecosystems. Excavation for the 225,000 square-foot building by Robert A.M. Stern Architects produced some 100,000 cubic yards of soil. Carting that away, she said, “would have blown the entire landscaping budget.” In addition, she said, “It was the wrong thing to send it away. You take care of your own messes.” What developed from that mess of soil was a highly contoured landscape. But the topography also had to prevent flooding. Instead of being allowed to run off and cause problems elsewhere, water that accumulates on the site now feeds a 250,000-gallon underground cistern that meets most of the center’s irrigation needs. Thus, Laura solved hydrological problems in ways that help create a rich experience of place. And when the team determined that the excavated soil could not support a healthy prairie ecosystem, Laura created the blueprint for suitable topsoil herself. Her hands-on approach conveys just how far she is willing to go to bring a project to fruition, pushing it—and our profession—forward in the process.

### Technical Expert

More than anyone I have known over the course of my almost 50 years in landscape architecture, Laura is in full command of all aspects of landscape construction—from grading to paving to planting to stonework to drainage to habitat preservation, and so much more. She is a nationally recognized expert in these areas, but she is always learning. When we began working on Teardrop Park in 1999, we encountered a client determined to manufacture the necessary soils on-site and develop maintenance protocols free of toxic herbicides, pesticides, and fungicides. Laura embraced

these challenges, overseeing tests of certain plants in certain soils, and, in doing so, became a leader in soil engineering. Among her particular specialties: introducing plant life into “designed soils.”

Her formulas and methods have been used in MVVA projects of all types and sizes, but her efforts resonate beyond our firm. She has served on the SITES Soil Committee, has lectured widely on the topic (to the ASLA, the Soil Scientist Society of America, and landscape architecture departments at countless universities), and has served as a technical reviewer on books and academic papers on horticultural soil. Moreover, she is an excellent communicator who has shared her expertise with her colleagues far beyond MVVA’s offices. For example, she created a guide for the organic maintenance of Toronto’s Corktown Common, an MVVA-designed public park. Beyond the implementation at one park, the manual now serves as a vision document for the Parks Department’s stewardship of other public landscapes.

Laura is a top-notch collaborator, particularly adept at working with contractors and engineers. She inspires them to use their expertise to serve the goals of whatever landscape architecture project they are working on. In the process, Laura helps these colleagues gain a better understanding of what landscape architects do. She is our ambassador to people who see themselves as technologists but are, like Laura, contributing substantially to the advancement of landscape design.

Laura has spent more than ten years on the Port Lands Flood Protection project in Toronto, leading a sizable team through the complicated process of designing and building a new mouth for the channelized Don River. One small but important part of the project involved disposing of contaminated soil. This was a job that might have been handed to an engineer in the past, but through Laura’s efforts, and those of her team (she would be the first to underscore the fact that nothing can be achieved without a good team), the need to move soil away from the project site was turned into an opportunity: Laura realized the soil could be used to raise the banks of the newly located river, making a whole new section of the city flood-free and therefore available for development. Working with the geotechnical engineer Geosyntec, she channeled the work of ecologists, hydrologists, and soil scientists into the creation of highly functional and attractive new riverbanks.

Laura also supervised the creation of the site drainage plan for Toronto’s York Quay, where she minimized the need for hard infrastructure (e.g. catch basins, manholes, and pipes) with a grading scheme that accentuated the design motif of broken ice floes. Working with a civil engineering firm, she developed a drainage plan for the plaza that would meet stormwater management requirements and protect nearby buildings from flooding without the need for extensive hard infrastructure.

There are countless other instances of Laura innovating, as when she pioneered methods of planting on steep slopes (at Teardrop Park), or on top of structures (at the Novartis Institutes for Biomedical Research in Cambridge, Mass.). These advances are experienced and valued by every person who has worked with her, studied under her, or visited an MVVA landscape.

## Builder

Laura deserves to be recognized as one of the world's great landscape builders, a role not celebrated nearly enough. She is completely at home on a construction site, always prepared to identify the best way to ensure that the landscape is built for maximum durability as well as ease of maintenance. Known for her fair-mindedness, she is loved by construction crews and managers, reflecting the camaraderie that arises among people who share a core knowledge of how to get things done. MVVA works on many sites where conditions are unknown at the start of construction. In those cases, Laura's creative problem-solving is essential to keeping the design concept intact. In the event of unexpected discoveries during construction, there is no person you would rather have on your team. For instance, at Wellesley College's Alumnae Valley, we were already well into design and construction when a deep layer of coal ash contamination was discovered. From that point on, Laura worked closely with environmental engineers to advance the project as one of environmental remediation while still serving its original goals. The completed landscape solved myriad environmental problems without sacrificing the qualities that make it a particularly attractive part of the historic campus.

Teardrop Park's Ice Wall is another product of Laura's resourcefulness. The Ice Wall drips water year-round and produces dramatic ice formations in winter. It is a wonder of complex construction that, thanks to Laura's work, is taken for granted by park users. That's how it should be. Collaborating with the structural engineer and fountain consultant during the technical design phase, Laura created a system for hanging giant slabs of natural cleft stone off a concrete wall that also contains necessary tubing. When you visit Teardrop Park, or any other landscape Laura has worked on, you can sense that a big idea was matched with an exceptional level of craft and care in execution that lifted the design even higher.

## Colleague

Laura is an ideal citizen of the republic of landscape architecture. She has committed her time to mentorship and advocacy in a variety of ways. She has held a leadership role with the Landscape Architecture Foundation in addition to serving on its Board. A professional mentor for the Landscape Architecture Foundation's Fellowship for Innovation and Leadership, she is a valuable resource for fellows researching such topics as resiliency, carbon sequestration, and environmental justice, to name just a few. The fellows often continue to seek out her counsel well beyond their terms as they become leaders in the field in their own right.

Over the course of decades, Laura has lectured frequently at professional conferences and universities on a range of topics. She also sits on design juries of all kinds. She is an outstanding landscape writer who has published articles on such topics as design equity, design process, urban soils, site remediation, and topography. She lectures frequently at academic institutions and has been a panelist for the National Building Museum, the Building Stone Institute, and the ASLA and AIA annual meetings. Truly she is a colleague to all.

Teacher

Any MVVA staffer could tell you that Laura is a superb teacher, a skill that she honed during her 25 years at the Department of Landscape Architecture at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design. She developed courses in landscape technology that became part of the core curriculum offered to MLA candidates, thus influencing hundreds of future design professionals. In celebrating Laura's impressive academic career, it seems worth mentioning that although our profession can be criticized as elitist given its exacting educational requirements, Laura has demonstrated that a BLA can be a fine launch pad for an illustrious career. In fact, Harvard had to waive its master's degree requirement for lecturers to access her expertise. Her academic career extends beyond the GSD; in 2019, for example, she was the Trott Distinguished Visiting Professor at the Ohio State University Knowlton School, her alma mater. Anita Berrizbeitia has observed the "unbelievable energy" with which Laura sustained her commitment to teaching over two decades as her responsibilities at MVVA grew along with the mounting scale and complexity of our firm's work. According to Anita, she remained committed to "anticipating and keeping up with changes in technology and the regulatory environment, adapting her teaching while ensuring students learned the discipline's core principles."

In conclusion, please let me say that I hope we are all past the point where it is the name partner in a firm who is given sole credit for everything the firm achieves (and if I don't like that, imagine how my five partners feel.) Laura's extraordinary accomplishments as a builder and a technical expert have improved the physical world we live in, and her leadership has had a positive impact on our profession as a whole. She has helped pave the way for new generations of women and Latinx designers.

Laura Solano is beloved in our office. She is also well-known and deeply admired throughout our profession. Please help highlight her lifetime's worth of achievements by awarding her the ASLA Design Medal.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Van Valkenburgh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail that loops back under the name.

Michael Van Valkenburgh, FASLA



Laura Solano, FASLA  
Partner, MVVA

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(617) 593 - 7730

149 Forest Street  
Medford, MA 02155



date: 01 February 2022  
to: American Society of Landscape Architects Executive Committee  
re: Nomination of **LAURA SOLANO** for the ASLA Design Medal

Dear Selection Committee,

Nineteen past Medalists, primarily designers with a capital “D,” four of them women, few principals of firms whose primary role is to realize conceptualized landscapes in the field. Should our discipline begin to acknowledge the beneath-the-radar heroes who take ideation of the masters to realization for the multitude? My hopes are that your committee might expand the definition of design authorship to members of firms who take design schematics and propel them beyond drawing board expectations. If this notion resonates with you, then the absolutely perfect candidate for the Design Medal is Laura Solano.

Michael Van Valkenburgh’s nomination letter thoroughly enumerates Laura’s accomplishments and her contributions to his firm and the discipline, which affords me the opportunity to share my professional respect as well as personal admiration of Laura as a fearless woman who continues to advance the standards for built work. I witnessed and benefited from Laura’s brilliance and generosity during my formative design years at Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates (MVVA). Laura’s desk was behind me, a very welcome guardian angel who had my back. Each of the numerous times I turned to her for advice, she would patiently quiz me about design intent and tutored me toward possible translations into physical and performative form. It wasn’t just a matter of helping, it was elevating. Her patience and rigor continue to astonish me as she endures as a giving colleague, as I watch her mentor countless fledgling landscape architects in and out of the MVVA office.

If all eyes are on the manifestation of the numerous renowned projects of MVVA, then Laura comes into focus as one who has led the firm to become an exemplar in the art of making beautiful and significant landscapes. Plenty of firms execute construction well. Laura goes above and beyond to ensure that the paramount level of design *plus* implementation sets benchmarks for the profession. This is her stealth stamp under the MVVA marquee. She insists that the fusion of design and craft be offered universally to the vast range of people benefiting from the firm’s widely reaching purview. Laura cares. She cares about the integrity of the landscapes themselves and is driven beyond the clients’ desires to make authentic places for folks who need them.

When I visit an MVVA landscape, I don’t just recognize the genius of Michael and his design associates but, at the beating heart of that place, I see Laura. Imagine a Latina woman, skillfully and willfully rendering shape to the projects of a global, growing and award-winning firm for no less than thirty years. During this time, she has persistently pursued innovative methods to propel designs to their greatest possible outcome. It is common for firms to call their work “innovative.” What it means in Laura’s case is uncommon, to say the least: She actually *invents* technologies with her scientific and engineering collaborators. Both implicitly and expressly, she inspires designers to do their best possible work and ultimately become better at their art, one that serves the public good. She commands respect with a wonderful smile that reflects at once her kindness and firmness. It is a look that inspires confidence to excel. Excellence—that’s what you see in the

articulated landforms, water systems and impeccable details. Construing sustainability as good common sense, the three 'e's—ecology, economy, equity—are at the core of her principled approach, which she shares through lectures as well as conversations sought out by colleagues like me. Listening to Laura, you can't help but think, "Of course!" And then try like hell to emulate the critical imperative and high standards she embodies.

In another dimension of teaching and service, Laura demonstrates a devotion to the discipline that is unwavering. For twenty-five years as an instructor at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, she instilled the art of constructing landscapes with the utmost integrity. As a design educator myself at a peer institution, I can attest to how challenging that is. But Laura persevered because she believes that learning to love building as an expression of design infused with values is a high calling. A teacher at heart, she has also dedicated her energy, through the Landscape Architecture Foundation (LAF), to nurture next generations by actively participating in the LAF Innovation and Leadership program. It's downright heartwarming to have witnessed her in action, mentoring young landscape architects. Humbly yet assuredly uplifting the next line of men and women, especially women, she bolsters those who may not fancy themselves as designers per se, but who want to imagine masterful and meaningful landscapes while wearing a hard hat.

I have followed Laura as the ultimate role model of a woman in our discipline, a formidable force that is always surefooted and infinitely generous. Her level-headedness navigates gnarly situations, never to merely compromise, always keeping the bar high. In an image I hold dear, Laura is standing at Allegheny Park in Pittsburgh, hard hat firmly in place, surrounded by Carhartt-clad men looking to her for clear and firm directive, with absolute respect. This picture of inspiration bolsters me and, by extension, it is a source of courage for young landscape architects poised to take on the challenges and the joys of building.

I believe Laura's level of commitment to landscape architecture, her expertise with the built landscape, is well on par with past recipients of the ASLA Design Medal—only not in the headlines. What impact would it have to choose a medal winner who is not identified as a "Designer?" What message would it send to the construction boot-wearing members of firms across the country? What sign could reach women to be fearless in the field, like Laura?

Thank you for all the time you devote to reading about nominees and debating the selection of the ASLA Design Medal recipient. As you do, in your minds' eye, please walk through the landscapes Laura has rendered for us all and sense a bit of her embossed genius.

Yours respectfully,



**J U L I E B A R G M A N N**

founder + principal, D.I.R.T. studio

professor of landscape architecture, University of Virginia School of Architecture

inaugural laureate, Cornelia Oberlander International Prize in Landscape Architecture



# mikyoungh kim design

January 23, 2022

**ASLA Board of Trustees**

American Society of Landscape Architects  
636 Eye Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20001

re: support letter for the ASLA Design Medal

Dear ASLA Trustees and Nominating Committee,

It is with great pleasure that I write this letter of support nominating Laura Solano for the ASLA Design Medal. Laura has been a role model for the profession, bringing an innovative design approach to construction and technical management. Her work is the backbone of the conceptual thinking at MVVA ensuring that their innovative built work artfully expresses the natural systems of hydrology and ecology. We all know that conceptual work from paper to experience is won and lost in the final phases of design and implementation.

Laura has shown us through her tireless work in creating and stitching together natural systems that building natural systems is a complex business. Over many decades, her work has focused on green infrastructure and resilient systems that have transformed public parks and universities throughout the country. This work is so impactful because it moves beyond the profession in educating communities about the impact of global environmental issues that face us today.

Ultimately, Laura is not just a technical master, but also a thought leader. She has led teams that have built an extraordinary body of landscapes that have quietly transformed our everyday lives. Building an office is a collaborative and group effort. One person cannot do it alone. As an early partner at MVVA in the Cambridge office, she has played an instrumental role in creating the timeless and elegant designs of the firm through excellence in construction and implementation. Her work with MVVA has always considered the issues of global warming and rising tides -- looking to the future with a long-term vision.

On a personal note, Laura has been a generous leader for young practitioners within her firm and beyond. Twenty-five years ago, she came by my office as it was starting up and helped us understand the building blocks of a fledgling business. Since then, she has offered advise throughout the years sharing process advice that I still adhere to today. Laura has also been an important role model, watching her as a woman take on the construction side of building landscapes. This was a groundbreaking role two decades ago for a part of the industry that today is still dominated by men.

Laura Solano is a unique role model to many of us, with her advocacy for the communal experiences, and as a woman paving new pathways for leadership and mentorship. Bestowing this honor would be an important acknowledgement of the groundbreaking contributions she has made through her work and the role she has played crafting designs that impact our landscape.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mikyoung Kim', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Mikyoung Kim, FASLA  
ASLA Design Medal Winner- 2018



# OLIN

1 February 2022

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

Dear ASLA Executive Committee:

I will start by sharing a true story that is emblematic of Laura, then ask you to swing that door wide open to see who is inside, ending with how I came to know Laura Solano. Taken together, this is my fervent endorsement for you to select Laura Solano to be the recipient of the venerated ASLA Design Medal in 2022.

## A TRUE STORY

It was the summer of 2019, a time when people socialized freely. I had invited Laura and her daughter to my home in Massachusetts for a day of cooking, walking, swimming, reflecting, and, most importantly, great conversation. We were both taking one of those rare days off - I'm sure those of you reading this know what I mean. As the day wore on, this nagging sensation inside of me kept churning. I had something I needed to say to Laura. Hesitant, I took the opportunity to bring up the topic when her hands were coated in mango and her daughter was squeezing an unfathomable number of limes as they fashioned a very fine salsa for dinner. I figured she was stuck and couldn't leave.

I said, Laura, "I need to talk to you about something very important."

Looking at me with a familiar cocked head, always unafraid of diving in, she said, "OK, tell me more."

I continued, "Have you started the nomination process to become a Fellow of the ASLA?"

"Well, it's so interesting that you ask. I've been approached by the Boston chapter over the years, but I am not sure I understand why I should become a Fellow. What does it really do for anyone? It always seemed self-serving to me."

"Laura", I retorted, "I can understand how you might feel that way, but you do it for no other reason than to demonstrate to women, and especially women of color, that they can do what you have done and be recognized for their outstanding accomplishments too. You are their leader and role model. You need to do it for no other reason than that."



There are many people in the profession of landscape architecture who do not seek the spotlight. Moreover, there are another handful of **extraordinarily** talented and dedicated people in this profession who purposefully walk around the spotlight because, quite frankly, it is a distraction from the important work at hand. Laura is one of those people. Always disinterested in shining a light on herself, Laura seemed to have been bolstered by the prospect of fellowship embodying this greater purpose. Mercifully she took the necessary steps that led to her nomination to the 2020 Class of The Council of Fellows, perhaps a good decade or so later than was merited. Laura Solano stands out as a beacon among her peers who is selflessly motivated by service to others through the profession of landscape architecture.

### **SWING THAT DOOR WIDE OPEN**

We should all contemplate for a moment the reality that with a profession of just under 20,000 landscape architects employed in 2020 (according to the Bureau of Labor & Statistics), we still stop at the name on the door. These are the people whose last names we don't even need to use because we all know who they are. Yet we don't know the people who do or did much of the work attributed to the name on the door. Perhaps it is human nature, but we do a disservice to this *miniscule* profession, and I mean *miniscule* — consider civil engineers at ~125,000 and lawyers at ~800,000 if we stop at the door. There are big, urgent, and vitally important 21<sup>st</sup> century issues in need of the attention and ambitions of landscape architects. Because of this reality, we need to work together to diligently uncover every voice of significance, especially voices that have traditionally been overshadowed.

It's time to swing that door wide open, step inside, and see who is in there.

Inside is a highly accomplished Latina woman driven by a deep sense of purpose to make the world a better place utilizing and expanding the tools of landscape architecture, doing the work that Michael so eloquently describes in his nomination letter. Laura's influence is felt well beyond the bounds of MVVA and has touched anyone who has had the opportunity to work with or alongside her, had a casual conversation with her, picked up an article she has written, or attended one of her lectures. Laura's heart-based laser-like focus is on ensuring the betterment of others, enhancing the efficacy of practice, and advancing the profession of landscape architecture. It is her calling, and she carries it out with the utmost grace and determination. This is important because how a leader shows up matters; after all, the way a leader shows up is reflected back to that leader and then, in turn, back at society. Laura models the highest levels of wisdom in leadership in our profession.

### **HOW I KNOW**

I know these things about Laura because for the last five years, I have spent nearly 60 hours each year in deep dialogue with Laura and each of the 6 fellows selected annually for the Landscape Architecture Foundation's (LAF's) Fellowship for Innovation and Leadership. This program is explicitly directed at developing and strengthening voices in the profession to



encourage leadership in landscape architecture around important ideas and urgently needed actions. The individuals we work with are comprised of emerging, mid-career, and senior landscape architects. We believe it is imperative that these enthusiastic voices do not get subsumed by traditional tendencies to 'see' only certain individuals and that their ideas do not get confined by the narrower traditions of the past at the expense of supporting the innovations of the future. Laura is dedicated to this mission.

Through her time in this program, Laura has demonstrated to me her commitment to growing the efficacy of the profession using wisdom and heart-based leadership; we are part of a profession that is, by in large, populated with ethically based professionals who hold a quantum worldview and who want to make peaceful environmental and social change through design thinking. Yet, once in practice, the steps toward achieving this vision can seem somewhat thwarted as clients take the reins in shaping the problems. The visionary cohort of fellows simply needs a platform for dialogue and a space of encouragement. Laura shapes the platform and holds that space for the cohort to ensure their success; their success ultimately becomes our success as a profession, and society is the beneficiary. Our largely practice-based profession (70% according to the ASLA) needs more people like Laura who dedicate their time and resources over and above practice to ensure that we are having an impact on the places that so desperately need us.

The spectrum of Laura's leadership toolbox is impressive. In these sessions, Laura frequently reminds the cohort of our bigger purpose: "We [landscape architects] have obligations to society. That's why we're here." She encourages exploration: "It's OK to wander. That's how you'll sharpen what you're trying to do." She effectively pushes for clarity: "If you had to give a talk on your topic today—right here, right now—what would you say?" And she frequently provides cogent guidance: "You know, I have a theory about writing and speaking. If you get the first few sentences right, the rest flows seamlessly, but you have to work really, I mean *really*, hard to get those first sentences right."

The breadth of Laura's generosity in the name of landscape architecture is boundless. Laura's selfless leadership is the type of leadership necessary to grow the strength of our profession; leadership worthy of recognition. I encourage you to award the 2022 ASLA Design Medal to our own commendable Laura Solano.

Sincerely,

Lucinda R. Sanders, EdD Transformational Leadership, FASLA, PLA  
CEO and President OLIN

Anne Hawley  
Director Emerita  
Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

To the ASLA Executive Committee and Trustees:

I write to nominate Laura Solano for the ASLA Design Medal, the honor her career merits.

My letter of support is in three parts: first, a client's view, followed by a professional assessment, and finally a recognition of her contributions as a teacher.

I first met Laura as a client when she was presenting to the Horticulture Committee of the Mt. Auburn Cemetery. She presented the design concepts for a new landscape extending a garden for cremation burials in the Tower Hill area of the Mt. Auburn Cemetery, just below its highest elevation, a place called Hazel Path. Her presentation inspired immediate confidence because she not only emphasized the design and technical aspects, which were unique and creative, but also addressed the spiritual. Furthermore, she emphasized the character and contribution of each species of tree, shrub, and flower, showing how the plantings would contribute to the overall feel of Hazel Path.

As a partner at the Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates (MVVA) firm, she was in charge of this important project at Mt. Auburn Cemetery, a treasured historic landscape. The Cemetery feels like a continuous natural landscape composed of many parts, each with its own character, yet acting as a coherent whole. Visitors to the Cemetery feel immersed in nature.

Her passionate presentation convinced us that her design was an inventive yet sympathetic departure from the past. She captivated us with her ideas of how a landscape can evoke an emotional response that would honor and console. She convinced us that her project would give one a transcendent experience and a refreshed sense of life.

As Thomas Cooper, the Chairman of the Horticulture and Landscape Committee, eloquently stated:

“Laura’s rare blend of sophisticated landscape engineering skills, a wide-ranging knowledge of and passion for plants, and an ability to articulate her vision, resulted in the transformation of a steeply sloping eroded site smothered by forsythia into an innovative garden that weaves seamlessly into the surrounding historic landscape. Laura immersed herself in history and ethos of the Cemetery (as well as its business model) and energized the Cemetery’s Trustees with her vision for the site: that of a boulder-flecked hillside reminiscent of New England woodlands. The resulting garden, a complex, multi-layered, four-season landscape, laced with inviting paths, providing an intimate space of beauty and serenity.”

Having walked Hazel Path many times both during and since its creation, I can attest that she succeeded. She used large boulders to shape the outcropping around one side of the steep hill. Each boulder or stone is able to discreetly carry the name of the person or persons whose ashes

are buried there. The site is located next to a special burial area for Harvard University alumni and in close proximity to the commanding Washington Tower. In her design Hazel Path, towards its end, offers an expansive vista forcing one to look up and feel joined to the sky.

The Cemetery has provided a ‘final resting place’ for 120,000 of Boston’s elite for nearly two hundred years since its founding in 1831. It is a most foreboding place in which to propose a dramatic conceptual design departure from the past, which Laura successfully did.

Laura certainly deserves recognition for her professional contributions to the field of landscape architecture. Her projects with MVVA represent significant design solutions for many of the most iconic public places in the U.S.—including the St. Louis Arch Grounds, the Restoration of Pennsylvania Avenue, and the George W. Bush Presidential Center.

Another aspect of her professional acumen is her deep knowledge and love of plants. In her presentations she emphasizes the character and contribution of the trees, shrubs, and flowers MVVA has selected for the site. One comes away from her talks inspired and wanting to grow her plants.

In her distinguished teaching career at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, Laura made her students enthusiastic about shaping the earth. According to one of her former students, she did so by giving them siting projects that were engaging and fun. The same student described her patience in teaching students how to use topography in addition to plant material to evoke feelings of place. Over her teaching career, she has had a positive influence on hundreds of students.

Finally, over many years I have heard about Laura’s work from her colleagues. Without exception, they laud her as a designer, as a teacher, and as a civic leader. This ASLA Design Medal would recognize her considerable contribution to her field and the many projects she has given life to over her long career.

Sincerely,

Anne Hawley  
Director Emerita  
Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum



Columbus, 27 January 2022

Letter of support for Laura Solano—ASLA Design Medal

Dear Members of the ASLA Executive Committee,

This letter is written to express my wholehearted support of Laura Solano (BSLA '83) as a nominee for the ASLA Design Medal.

I am writing as the Director of the Knowlton School (architecture, landscape architecture, city and regional planning) at The Ohio State University, a position I have held for the past year and a half. Prior to being named director, I have headed Knowlton's landscape architecture programs (BSLA and MLA) for seven years. In 2010, I founded the MLA program at Washington University in St. Louis. Between 1999 and 2010, I taught at Harvard's Graduate School of Design (GSD) as an Assistant and Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture. It was there that I met Laura Solano. As an academic, I will focus on Laura's contributions to landscape architecture as an educator.

I first came to notice Laura's teaching abilities over two decades ago, when I realized that the superior sensibility of certain GSD students toward site design came in great part from her instruction on grading. I have since then sought to promote the same engagement with earthworks across several landscape architecture curricula with mitigated success: mastering/teaching grading is difficult enough but making it an integral part of design is downright daunting. Yet Laura did just that, with students responding enthusiastically to her expertise, dedication, and sense of humor. I would often run into Laura, at the end of a long day at the office, as she huddled with students over their projects, never tired, always patient and to the point. Several of my current faculty still remember her teachings and cite her projects.

It was with great pleasure that I found myself at Ohio State's Knowlton School, surrounded by Van Valkenburgh's gardens and signs of Laura. In 2017, we had the opportunity to grant Laura Solano Ohio State's College of Engineering Distinguished Alumni Award. This award recognizes career achievements across "significant inventions," "genius in production or manufacturing," and more to the point, "research and design." Laura shone at the awards



ceremony, one of very few women, and the only honoree who was equally familiar with earth-moving equipment as with habitat preservation. This was beautifully summarized by her collaborators on Pittsburgh Allegheny River Park, world-renowned artists Ann Hamilton and Michael Mercil who declared: “Laura makes landscapes possible. She can move highways and the Army Corps of Engineers.” In 2019, Laura returned to Ohio State’s Knowlton School as the Richard. W. Trott Distinguished Visiting Professor. She engaged with undergraduate and graduate landscape architecture through workshops and a seminar entitled “Why does topography matter in landscape architecture?” Taking full advantage of the scenography of our building’s spaces, Laura staged clay modeling sessions in full view, making her teaching methods apparent to all faculty and students. She is now serving on the Knowlton School Advisory Board.

Looking back on her education as an undergraduate at Ohio State during the so-called “Carpenter years,” one can find the foundation of Laura Solano’s affinity for technology. Jot Carpenter was a visionary chair who, from 1972–86, brought the standards of the landscape profession to academia while using academia to advance the profession—diversifying landscape education, recruiting underrepresented faculty and students, as well as seeking a 25% target of female enrollment. Still, Laura must have stood out as one of few female non-Ohio minority students in the late 1970s early 1980s amid a sea of mostly young white men. If she was a product of Ohio State, benefitting from a solid preparation for landscape practice and an appetite for expanding the discipline, she must also have learned that to be different is at once demanding and an opportunity. From her long-standing central role in Michael Van Valkenburgh’s office to her striking presence in construction management, she remains an exemplar for scores of women. She operates in the background yet is widely known as an expert. She was recognized by the Boston Society of Architects with the Women in Design Award of Excellence and was elevated to the ASLA Council of Fellows. In 2022, she was invited to contextualize earthworks across time and space at the University of California Berkeley symposium “The Shape of the Land: Aesthetics & Utility” alongside highly regarded practitioners Jennifer Guthrie, Adriaan Geuze, and Georges Descombes.

I consider Laura Solano to be highly worthy of consideration for the Design Medal, recognizing the exceptional body of work she's produced. In addition, I should underscore that her impact is not only felt in the profession but also the discipline of landscape architecture. She has transformed landscape architecture through technology and shaped generations of practitioners and environmental citizens. Finally, she has served as a mentor and role model to women and Latina from undergraduates to professionals. In short, Laura

Solano teaches technology and thinks through technology to make great landscapes possible, teaching people to be better stewards and users of these landscapes. In her modest yet powerful role, I believe that she has had a “unique and lasting impact on the welfare of the public and the environment.”

I hope that you will view her candidacy with the regard and appreciation it deserves.

Please do not hesitate to contact me, should you need additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dorothée', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Dorothée Imbert  
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**Knowlton**



Laura directing the installation of glaciated boulders on Hazel Path at Mount Auburn Cemetery





A shaded lot in a 8,150-square-foot mock-up of the native lawns at the George W. Bush Presidential Center, a study led by Laura to test slope retention, planting soils, shading, and irrigation



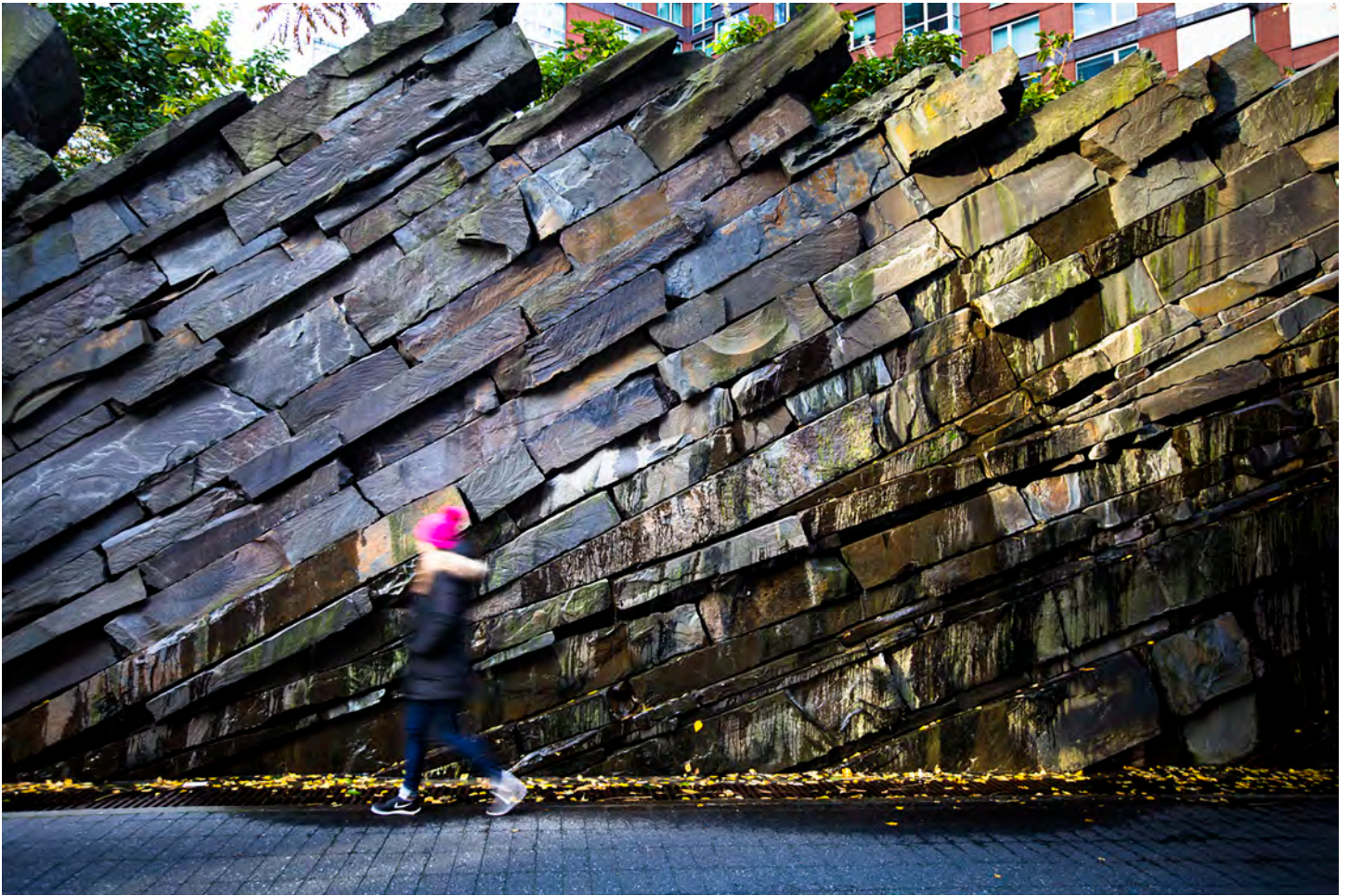
Laura modeling bluestone outcrops and topography on the site of Teardrop Park





The bluestone ice wall mock-up for Teardrop Park at New York State Quarries in Alcove, NY





The completed ice wall at Teardrop Park, an emblem of Laura's dual expertise in form and construction.





Martin's Park in Boston, MA





Allegheny Riverfront Park in Pittsburgh, PA





Laura on site at Allegheny Riverfront Park



Laura (second from right) with Michael Van Valkenburgh, Matthew Urbanski, Michael Mercil, Ann Hamilton, and Carol Brown at Allegheny Riverfront Park, 1994





Corktown Common in Toronto, Canada





Alumnae Valley at Wellesley College in Wellesley, MA





Construction of the sound berm at Brooklyn Bridge Park, a feat of engineering that shelters the park from the noise of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway.



## Providing Flood Protection for 300 Hectares of Downtown Toronto



The Port Lands Flood Protection project in Toronto, Canada