

The science behind the art of embellishing gardens

Revisiting the language of 18th and early 19th century garden treatises

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The question of the place of garden design in the hierarchy of the arts became most evident with the spread of the idea of the landscape garden, which was introduced to continental Europe as “jardin anglo-chinois” in the 18th century. The debate about garden art being distinct from other art forms was reflected in the growing field of European garden literature, or “garden treatises”, called *sadovniki* in the Russian tradition. This article highlights some of the general features of the process which established the autonomy of garden art. Focusing upon the linguistic aspect of this process, it outlines the development of a specific language and terminology for describing gardens. Using examples from Russian and European garden literature, the study shows that at the same time as garden art achieved autonomy around the turn of the 19th century, the necessary conditions arose for its potential establishment as a scientific discipline as well.

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Gardening in the early modern period aspired persistently, albeit with varying degrees of success, to attain independent status in the hierarchy of the arts. At least two reasons contributed to the unsettled position of “the art of embellishing gardens”: In the first place, both the subject of creating gardens and its practical methodology were, on the one hand, distinguished by their inherently hybrid character; they included in their armoury both craft skills and branches of the sciences, for example botany, architecture and even geometry. On the other hand, the creation of gardens also depended on various forms of art, since the garden or park ensemble includes, alongside the natural elements (vegetation, water, etc.), sculptural and architectural components, and often pictorial, and sometimes also literary and musical elements. Secondly, the fact that the art of the garden depends on other forms of art to represent it and disseminate its achievements also gave grounds for doubting its autonomy. Evidently, there is a need for the garden as a work of art to seek additional documentation in written or visual form; this is due