

Mise-en-Scène

—Design Research Through Multiple Lenses

Chris REED^{1,2,*}, Alysoun WRIGHT¹

¹ Stoss Landscape Urbanism, Boston, MA 02127, USA

² Department of Landscape Architecture, Harvard Graduate School of Design, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA

*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Address: 54 Old Colony Ave, Third Floor, Boston, MA 02127, USA

Email: cr@stoss.net

ABSTRACT

Mise-en-Scène is a design research project in the form of a book that expands the ways in which we think about the creative roles of publication and communication, and about our connections as a discipline to the issues and world around us. Taking from its title, *Mise-en-Scène* is an arrangement of the actors and sceneries that constitute our cities and lives.

This project is characterized by four features. Communication—Distinct from a design monograph, *Mise-en-Scène* is a collaboration between landscape architect Chris Reed and photojournalist Mike Belleme, directed towards a general audience. Arrangement—An arrangement of photographs, drawings, models, sketches, essays, literary excerpts, and community engagement quotes from designers, activists, and ecologists, offering greater multiplicity to the narrative and provoking new associations across cities, projects, and experiences. Perspective—A reflection of how Stoss Landscape Urbanism observes, investigates, and engages with our urban landscapes. Opportunity—*Mise-en-Scène* puts forth a new model of integrating interdisciplinary perspectives, as well as public audiences, within the formation of design research.

Built and speculative works, from Reed and the practice of Stoss, spatialize how these conditions coalesce—whether at the scale of a bench or the entirety of the city fabric. And through a foregrounding of human connection, rather than design, Belleme's photography elucidates both the quotidian and fantastical occupation of these urban landscapes.

KEYWORDS

Urban Landscapes; Public Space; Cities; Photography; Landscape Architecture; Communication

HIGHLIGHTS

- Unique collaboration between landscape architect and photographer
- Documenting human experience in urban public space
- New model for communication and research in Landscape Architecture

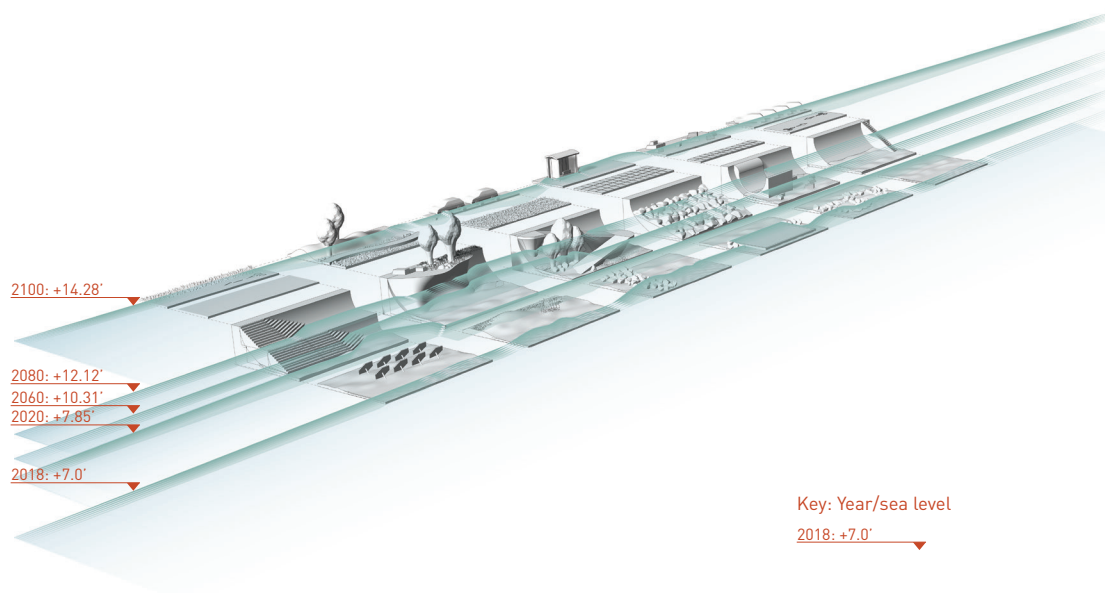
EDITED BY ZHOU Jiayi, WANG Ying

The demands of an active design practice often preclude opportunities and quiet moments to step back, reflect, and assess the trajectories of one's work, and the issues that motivate and inform the projects. Yet this is necessary if one is to lead and continuously energize an idea-based practice that is identifying and exploring new ways forward for the discipline of Landscape Architecture. This is especially so after the multitude of issues that have come to the fore in the past decade or so. The tensions, between societal, racial, and environmental advancement and retreat, the battle for the hearts and minds of people—as well

as our shared planet—continue to play out in so many of today's public discussions around urbanization, new development, open space, the impacts of climate change, and planning and design strategies in cities (Fig. 1).

How do we respond? How can we better or differently inform our work? And how do we communicate the multitude of ways in which expansive, critical landscape and urbanism practices can help take on these issues to an audience that extends beyond fellow designers and our clients?

Mise-en-Scène: The Lives and Afterlives of Urban Landscapes^[1]



1. Galveston seawall of Central Galveston Island, Texas, USA, showing anticipated flooding and speculative programming and design approaches.
2. Appropriation of space by necessity: Boys playing basketball, Galveston Island, Texas, USA.
3. Appropriation of space and seating for personal comfort and expanded events: CityDeck, Green Bay, Wisconsin, USA, designed by Stoss.
4. Lounging at Gerstacker Grove, University of Michigan, USA.
5. Portrait of a man, St. Louis, Missouri, USA.

by Chris Reed and Mike Belleme is a book about the diverse and complex issues that shape and impact contemporary urban landscapes and cities—and by extension, urban and landscape practices. More broadly, this is a project about the lives and afterlives of cities and landscapes and the people who inhabit them—both the actors on stage and the urban, social, political, cultural, and environmental contexts in which they exist (Figs. 2, 3). It is a conversation about what we, as designers, encounter in our everyday worklives, and in many ways, how we channel the diverse voices, lenses, perspectives, and currents to inform our work and to form the bigger project of city-making.

In the project of *Mise-en-Scène*, the photographer Belleme's eyes and lenses are most evidently present and are obvious starting points for diving in. The author Reed's voice and work are layered in both as the framer and the curator of the project, and simply as one voice contributing to the general collection of insights, commentaries, and propositions. The book is organized into seven chapters for the seven American cities of different sizes and types (Los Angeles, Galveston, St. Louis, Green Bay, Ann Arbor, Detroit, and Boston), ordered in a west-to-east fashion. Photographs are

interspersed with occasional maps (that speak to the scale and combination of landscape, infrastructural, and urban systems that form each city) and a few design speculations in drawing and model forms—though never tied directly to a photograph and never fully explaining a project. Photographs of realized projects are taken in the same manner as those of the people and places, and are scattered (unattributed) among them (Fig. 4); but most of the cities involved places where projects are still in formation or have yet to be realized. Five essays by collaborating writers (Mimi Zeiger, De Nichols, Julia Czerniak, Nina-Marie Lister, and Sara Zewde) from different backgrounds (curator, critic, artist, social activist, ecologist, planner, architect, and landscape architect) take on various issues of the day (politics, climate, social activism, cities, race, COVID, and design practice) in language that is directed at the book's intended broader audiences. All is enriched and illuminated by passages and excerpts from literary and multidisciplinary writers, members of the public with whom we work, and Belleme himself. The result is as thick and rich and unresolved as any of the contexts and social situations in which we work.

Each of the seven cities is explored and portrayed at a diversity



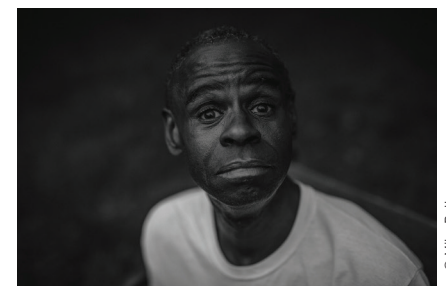
2 © Mike Belleme



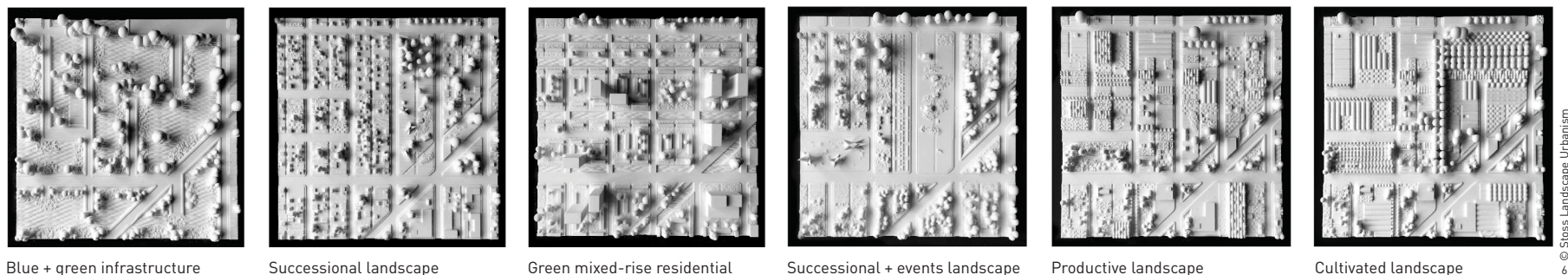
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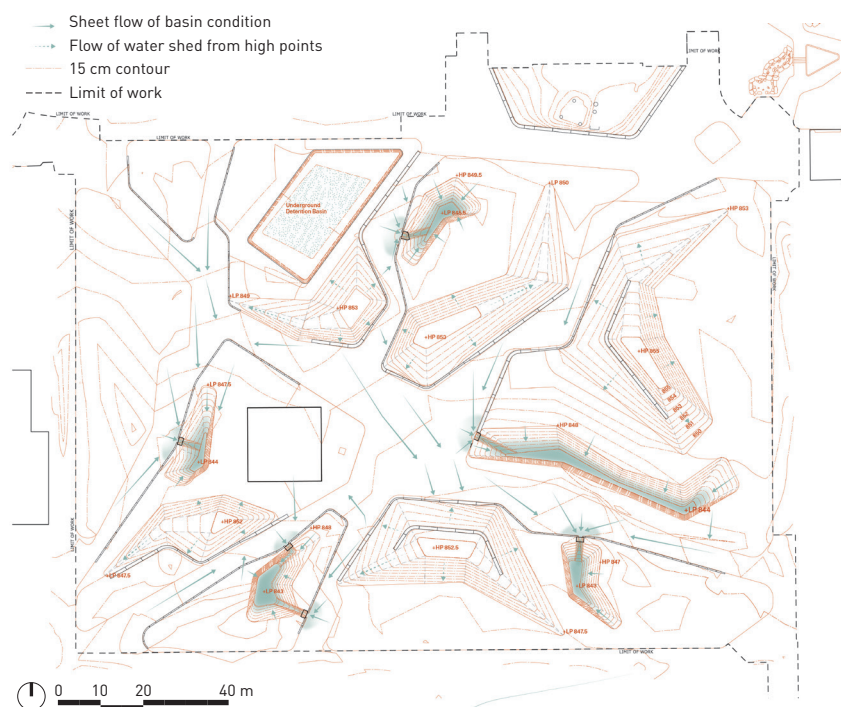
of scales—from the map to the park bench, to the reaction or emotion on an individual’s face as captured in one of Belleme’s photographs (Fig. 5). Diverse media and sources together weave a complex, visually rich narrative that provokes new associations on Landscape Architecture and American cities today. *Mise-en-Scène* puts forth a new model for integrating interdisciplinary perspectives and general audiences into design research.

At a deeper level, *Mise-en-Scène* is a project of both reflection and curation (Fig. 6). It reflects on and takes stock of the moment, pre-pandemic (and a little during): What is the state of public and urban affairs, environmentally, socially, culturally, and urbanistically? What is common to cities across the American continent, even to

cities around the world, and what is unique to each of these cities? Teju Cole captures a piece of this most poignantly in an excerpt placed at the beginning of the book: “All the cities are one city. What is interesting to find, in this continuity of cities, the less obvious differences of texture: the signs, the markings, the assemblages, the things hiding in plain sight in each cityscape or landscape; the way streetlights and traffic signals vary, the most common fonts, the slight variations in building codes, the fleeting ads, the way walls are painted, the noticeable shift in the range of hues that people wear, the color of human absence, the balance of industrial product versus what has been made by hand, greater or lesser degrees of finish, the visual melody of infrastructure as it interacts with terrain; wall, roof, plant, wire, gutter; what is everywhere but is everywhere slightly different.”^[2]

The project also offers an opportunity to reflect on the works of Stoss, as a public realm practice. What are and have been the starting points? How are they changing? What are the currents drawn on, the acts and actors and the places engaged? The book is a reflection of how Stoss observes, investigates, and engages with urban landscapes. In so many ways, the lives and situations depicted in Belleme’s photographs set the stage for the work to do in cities, just as the designs and projects set up new or altered conditions that they themselves prompt new responses, new actions, new dynamics, and new scenes that continue to play out long after completion (Fig. 7).

Importantly, it is also a project of curation: in the same way that we are not single actors in the places we work, the book is an assemblage of lenses, voices, perspectives that are intended to paint a multivariate picture and to offer complementary, complex, and sometimes contradictory standpoints. To amplify this approach, the book is modeled less on a design monograph, a bit more on an art book or a scrapbook: a collection of artifacts and documents that are not necessarily intended to create logical narratives, more intended as a curated collection of stuff that might reverberate, one thing off another, to offer multiple readings, multiple musings,



6. Detroit Future City, Michigan, USA. Study models of landscape and urban speculations.
7. Eda U. Gerstacker Grove, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. Berms and bioretention basins were designed on a former flat site to create a much more enveloping and spatially complex experience, altering the defining quality of the site.

multiple futures on city-life. It is one that asks questions and sets up prompts—without attempting to tie a neat bow on the messiness and richness that is contemporary life (Figs. 8, 9).

The book extends from various lineages of photography, which is reflected by Belleme’s insights into how we crafted the photographic work in the book. Landscape photography in North American is fairly well-known and shared between design and more general audiences. Both Ansel Adams and Edward Burtynsky, in very different ways, captured landscapes of the moment, in part to advocate for a (re)discovery (Adams) of American landscapes to be utilized for exploration and recreation, and reckoning (Burtynsky) of poisoned landscapes that result from the ways in which we inhabit and exploit the earth.^① Furthermore, Alex MacLean’s aerial work (enthusiastically shared among design and non-design audiences) has continuously documented landscape of many types, always seemingly in a state of transition, from a perspective we do not normally get.

Belleme himself is a photojournalist—not a photographer who captures the perfect light and formations of a just-finished design project. In this way, Belleme’s work fits more within strains of documentary photography, photojournalism, and photography of the common American landscape than it does of many other types (Fig. 10). This lineage invokes the works of Vivian Meier, Robert



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8. Tire Tracks, Santa Monica Beach, Los Angeles, USA.
9. Science Center Plaza at Harvard University, Massachusetts, USA. Custom-designed benches accommodate different body types, fostering different ways to hang out and experience that space.
10. Mississippi Riverfront, St. Louis, Missouri, USA.
11. The Heidelberg Project, Tyree Guyton, Detroit, Michigan, USA.



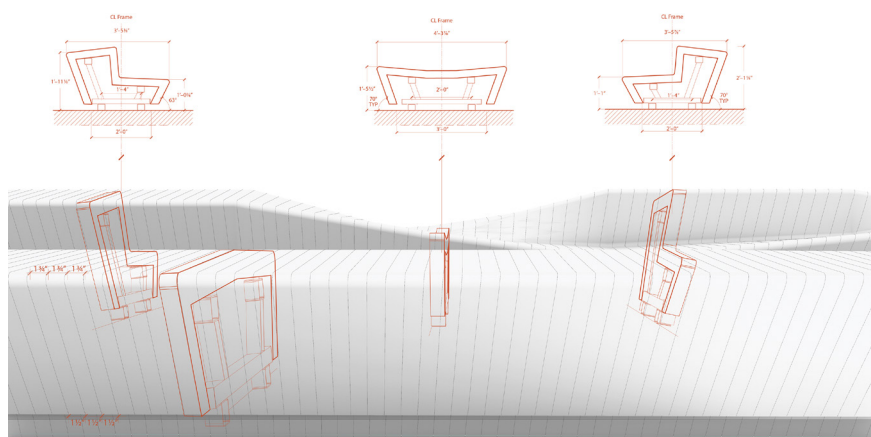
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① For instance, see the exhibition of Ansel Adams and Edward Burtynsky: *Constructed Landscapes*.

Frank, Jules Allen, Frank Gohlke, and Roy DeCarava, among many others. The 1975 exhibit (and later book) called *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* was pivotal: this exhibit turned photography on its head, as it depicted common landscapes presented simply as they are or as they were, with little gloss or fanfare. Notably, this is around the same time that John Brinckerhoff Jackson was first publishing his research^{[3][4]} on the common American landscape—itsself an important tipping point in the ways in which design research was done, and the kinds of landscapes that were the subjects of that work.

The project also extends from a lineage of designers working alongside or collaborating directly with photographers, a set of relationships that (in landscape) extends at least as far back as the late nineteenth century in USA (Fig. 11). It is well documented that the American urban parks movement led by Frederick Law Olmsted grew out of major social reform efforts at the time. In fact, photographers like Jacob Riis in New York and Lewis Wickes Hine in Boston were among those whose works brought to light the deleterious conditions of the contemporary industrial city—and especially their effects on children; Olmsted’s urban parks and park systems were a deliberate escape from and counter to the conditions depicted in the photographs.

Fast forward a century, a collaboration between landscape architect James Corner and aerial photographer Alex MacLean^[5] laid new ground for critical design research vis-à-vis the project’s vivid use of both photography and collage-montage drawings to capture



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12. An engineered berm inserted into a naturalized landscape.



13. Dog in midair, Carson Beach, Boston, Massachusetts, USA.



14. Restless pelicans in a fish processing house, Galveston, Texas, USA.

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the underlying logics and various manipulations/inhabitations of American landscapes. Subsequent projects by designers Anuradha Mathur and Dilip da Cunha (*Mississippi Floods and Deccan Traverses*), and by Alan Berger (*Reclaiming the American West and Drossscape*), extended this research—with designers acting as their own photographers—and culminated most recently with landscape architect Kate Orff's collaboration with photographer Richard Misrach on the petrochemical landscapes of the southern United States^[6]. These projects were reflective and projective simultaneously—design research that was as once analytical as it imagined new futures.

The collaboration between architect Michael Maltzan and photographer Iwan Baan in *No More Play: Conversations on Urban Speculation in Los Angeles and Beyond*^[7] was most influential in conceptualizing *Mise-en-Scène*. Maltzan's interviews bring forward a multitude of voices from design and non-design disciplines, all speculating on the maturation of Los Angeles as a city, as people, and as a place. Baan's photographs capture a rich sense of this moment through documentary street photography (rather than the glossy architectural photography for which he has become better known). The collection as a whole speaks to a broader set of issues that extend far beyond design but necessarily implicate design. Both the conversational tone of the interviews and the photographs especially make the project accessible to multiple audiences (Fig. 12).

Mise-en-Scène offers multiple starting points and multiple readings, multiple narratives—as much dependent on the readers' points of view and places where they begin as on any of the authors' or editors' intentions. Belleme's explorations in each of the cities documented were both guided by Reed and a result of his own curiosity, his own wanderings, often discovering things, scenes, and people in even the most familiar of places that were new and novel. The expressions captured on people's faces, the moments captured (Figs. 13, 14), and both the emptiness and fullness of the urban landscapes depicted offer their own vivid stories and narratives. In all of this, Belleme's photographs (and the various essays and text snippets throughout) remind us that so much of life in the city is about simply getting by—the daily rituals, challenges, and joys; questions of who we design for; the detailed and the discrete; accumulations of textured, even tender moments, sometimes amidst a swirling maelstrom of energy and information. Together the work as design research both captures the moment and suggests potential pathways forward, enriched by nuance and distinction in detail as much as the commonalities of everyday urban landscapes.

In so many ways, this project—through intense reflection, curation, and speculation—tries to communicate the hopes and dreams, the struggles and challenges, of contemporary life in American cities and urban landscapes—to all who will look and listen closely.

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舞台布景——多视角设计研究

克里斯·里德^{1,2,*}, 艾丽桑·赖特¹

¹ 美国Stoss景观都市主义工作室, 波士顿 02127

² 美国哈佛大学设计研究生院景观建筑系, 坎布里奇 02138

*通讯作者邮箱: cr@stoss.net

摘要

《舞台布景：城市景观的当下与未来》项目以书籍的形式向我们呈现了其设计研究成果，促使人们从更多视角去认识出版物和信息交流的全新作用，以及景观设计学科与我们日常生活的紧密联系。该项目展示了洛杉矶、加尔维斯顿、圣路易斯、绿湾、安阿伯、底特律和波士顿这七个美国城市中的人和人们的生活场景。

本项目的亮点主要包括以下四个方面。1) 信息交流：《舞台布景》源自19世纪下半叶景观设计师与摄影师合作项目的传统。不同于一般的设计专著，本项目的传播媒介和信息来源多样、行文用词简单易懂，并且聚焦于当代人们所关心的日常生活问题，力求覆盖更广泛的受众。2) 组织方式：《舞台布景》以七个城市的地理位置为序（由西向东），每个城市独立成章，从不同的尺度探索和描绘城市的方方面面，展示内容包括由设计师、活动家和生态学家等提供的照片、图纸、模型、草图、短文、文摘，以及社区活动简报。借由灵活的叙事结构，本书期望激发读者关于城市、景观项目和体验的更多思考。3) 多元视角：书中记录了对Stoss景观都市主义工作室项目的反思——如何观察、调查和参与城市景观，并试图提供更加多样的观点，它们或可互补、或可复合，也或许相互矛盾。《舞台布景》旨在抛出问题、激发灵感，而非提出明确的解决方案。4) 提供机遇：本项目以设计研究的形式在反映当下问题的同时提出了潜在的前进方向，其本身即是一种整合跨学科观点并面向公众的新模式。

本项目记录了克里斯·里德和Stoss景观都市主义工作室的众多实践和研究项目，展示了如何在不同尺度（从一条长凳到整个城市），通过空间设计解决塑造和影响了当代城市及城市景观的问题。与此同时，麦克·贝勒姆的摄影作品聚焦人与人之间的联系（而非设计本身），以此展示城市景观中所发生的琐碎日常和对景观令人意想不到的使用方式。

关键词

城市景观；公共空间；城市；摄影；景观设计学；交流

文章亮点

- 景观设计师和摄影师在项目中的合作相得益彰
- 项目记录人们在城市公共空间的体验
- 项目提出了适用于景观设计学科信息交流和调查研究的新途径

编辑 周佳怡, 王颖