Constrained Views, Natural Vistas, and the Constructed Landscape:
Revealing a Science-Based Approach to the Aesthetics of Nature

Constrained Views invites the Bates College community to contemplate the conventional quality of the aesthetics of nature by exploring the constructed campus landscape. The project introduces a framework for a Science-Based Approach to environmental aesthetics/ethics. Science-based approaches are grounded in the following analogy: just as an understanding of the artist's formal and compositional choices enhances our aesthetic appreciation of an artwork, an understanding of the dynamics of an ecosystem enhances our aesthetic appreciation of nature. Standard theories of the aesthetics ground the appreciation of natural beauty in the apprehension of uniformity amidst variety in the natural landscape. The general idea is that the aesthetic features that one appreciates in the natural world do not reside in single elements such as color, sound, shape, texture, etc., but rather emerge from the way these individual elements cohere in our experience of the landscape. This concept easily translates to a science-based approach. Ecospheres are dynamic systems. All of their elements are interconnected. The identity and state of each is dependent on its place within the dynamics of the whole. In other words natural environments naturally exhibit uniformity amidst variety. Science-based approaches argue as a result that our aesthetic appreciation of natural landscapes is enhanced by a scientifically grounded appreciation of their ecology...or that environmental sciences can make a productive contribution to our understanding of environmental aesthetics.

You are invited to visit each of the five sites in the installation and explore these ideas:

1. Keigwin Amphitheater - Lake Andrews / The Puddle
2. Hathorn Hall Steps - The Quad
3. Alumni Walk, Dana Building door, - Alumni Walk (Hedge / Roger Williams / New Commons)
4. New Commons, North Entrance - Garcelon Field
5. Career Services Office - Chase/Carnegie Roof Line

Constrained Views borrows its methods from Nancy Holt's Locators series (Missoula Ranch Locators: Vision Encompassed, 1972; View through a Sand Dune, 1973; Vision, 1973; Sun Tunnels, 1973-1976; Buried Poems, 1992). You will find a length of PVC pipe installed on a tripod at each location. These lengths of pipe function as surveyor's transits to site each location. They are view-finders that constrain one's gaze to salient aspects of the landscape. The constrained view at each site is photographic. The locators are live action pinhole cameras - or camera obscura if you prefer - that flatten the landscape and eliminate the distance between the viewer and what is seen. The tripods are built from disposable materials. They are pragmatic, ephemeral, and designed to reflect the temporary displacement of our campus aesthetic by active construction sites involved in the developing Campus Master Plan. The material impermanence of each locator thereby exposes the act of seeing as a construction and lays bare the unnoticed conventionality of landscape aesthetics. The sites were chosen to illustrate a Science-Based Approach to the aesthetics of nature and to invite a critical analysis of the constructed landscape of the Bates Campus. A roadmap locating, documenting, and explaining the five sites can be found on the announcement board in the Fireside Lounge in New Commons.
1. Keigwin Amphitheater – Lake Andrews / The Puddle. Prospective students on Bates College tours are told that this location is the perfect place to sit back and do some homework with an opportunity to view Bates College’s only manmade body of water (you can pick up wireless internet from Olin Hall and there are outlets embedded in the rocks). Lake Andrews was created out of a boggy area on the northeastern side of campus known by students at the time by the same name. It was drained and restored in 1998. The landscaping uses 75 varieties of native trees, shrubs, and perennials. The site chosen is the Florence Keigwin Amphitheater which, along with Olin Hall, forms a highly articulated architectural space which serves as one of Bates College's signature views. However, the view from the Keigwin Amphitheater towards the southwest end of the pond is dominated by a parking lot and the unarticulated backs of Lane Hall, Parker Hall, Pettigrew Hall, and Schaeffer Theater. Further, the view of the landscaping of the southwest end of the pond is currently obscured by encroaching grasses and cattails. Thus there is a sense in which the Keigwin Amphitheater / Olin Hall space is designed to be seen rather than used.
2. Hathorn Hall Steps – The Quad. Many people refer to Hathorn Hall as Hawthorne Hall. However, Nathaniel Hawthorne went to Bowdoin College. Hathorn is the oldest building on campus. It was built in 1857 along with the Parker Hall Dormitory and has served as classroom space, the President’s Office, laboratories, the library and the chapel. The Quad was landscaped as a complimentary space around which the new college could grow. This location thereby presents a view of a land area that is noted as historic. It is the center of campus. Students arrive and leave at this location through the ceremonies of Convocation and Commencement. We walk through it everyday without giving it much attention. The Quad is framed by Bates’ Chapel, Dana Chemistry Building, Parker Hall, Hathorn Hall, Coram Library, Carnegie Science Hall, and two busy streets - Campus Avenue and College Street,. The area was once an elm forest, cleared for farmland, and replanted as The Bates Quadrangle in the late 1850s. It is a manmade space. The trees, shrubs, and perennials are all native, including some of the original trees that have only survived the persistent threat of Dutch Elm Disease through constant care. This space therefore bears little resemblance to a natural landscape. The viewpoint at this site looks towards Admissions through the main campus gate (its signature lamp is obscured by the new spring leaves) and encompasses the full range of native trees, shrubs and perennials.
3. Dana Entrance, Alumni Walk – Alumni Walk (Hedge / Roger Williams / New Commons). There is something to be said about the cohesion of a college campus – recall the concept of uniformity amidst variety. This site calls attention to the fact that the architectural elements in view are each unique. Hedge Hall, built in 1890 as the original chemistry building, is one of the original Bates College buildings. Roger Williams was built in 1894 to house the Cobb Divinity School. These two buildings are architecturally distinct (although they do share a roofline - a fact obscured by their different orientations to Alumni Walk). Both Hedge and Roger Williams are currently undergoing modernizations. The Dana Chemistry Building (just out of view to the right) is a contemporary building (1965) designed to blend in with the older architecture of the campus. New Commons, completed in 2008, is angular and modern. The walkway itself uses paving stones instead of the standard asphalt paving found elsewhere on campus. The concrete slab benches are unlike the teak benches found on other paths on campus. And finally here we see birch, not the elms, maples, oaks, and white pines we find elsewhere. This view invites us to contemplate how cohesion is cobbled together from a range of disparate building projects across time in campus design.
4. New Commons, Cole Terrace - Garcelon Field. The purpose of this site is to focus attention on the juxtaposition of the new Astroturf field and the line of trees that are hidden behind the grandstands. Garcelon Field is said to be the 10th oldest football field in the country. Bates College alumni adamantly requested that the trees lining Central Avenue be kept next to the field as part of its renovation. This juxtaposition of the manmade field, which uses a type of artificial surface that is literally an imitation of natural grass, with the row of trees is interesting in that both are objects of aesthetic appreciation. The viewpoint is focused on a small stand of four short pines. Across the street behind them is a larger stand of tall white pines preserved as part of the construction of the James Wallach Tennis Center (1999) and the Campus Avenue Field in (2000). These are the last of the last of the all Bates Pines that once stretched along Russell Street to the corner of Lafayette Street. This site challenges us with ethical questions about conservation and the costs and benefits of the choice of artificial turf.
5. Career Services Office - Chase/Carnegie Roof Line. This site is designed to focus attention on architectural similarities between two buildings that at first glance look nothing alike. The 1990 addition to Carnegie Science Hall (1913), which doubled the size of the building, can look flat and architecturally incongruent. However, one should notice that the Campus Avenue façade mirrors the Campus Avenue façade and roofline of Chase Hall. Chase Hall is a signature icon of The College. These two facades are the public face of The College as one approaches along Campus Avenue from Central and Sabbatus Avenues. Students often comment on the empty unarticulated quality of the Campus Avenue façade of the Carnegie addition. However, the small windows maximize the utility of interior lab space, are energy efficient, and their arrangement is a repetition of the triplets of windows on the Chase façade. An understanding of these facts about the functionality of the building and the range of design decisions that shaped its appearance tie it clearly and cohesively into the campus landscape. This site therefore recapitulates the campus-wide installation in microcosm and invites viewers to reflect back on the content of the four previous sites.
While visiting various archeological sites in England in 1969, Nancy Holt shot a series of slides in the rolling landscape of the Dartmoor highlands. These twenty-four frames document granite rocks, the smooth rounded shape of the terrain, and the gates that mark the entrance to a path in the moorlands. The rocks edges pepper the moorland, peaking out from beneath a blanket of peat vegetation. Shot during a temperate season the photographs capture the verdancy of the highlands. Operating like still lifes they present a study of rocks that have constituted the granite hilltops, or tors, since their creation from magma almost 300 million years ago. Upon a number of rocks is an orange circle marking, indicating a trail that connects one outcropping in the landscape to another, one view to another. Much can be gathered from this modest series of images. It charts the human engagement with the surface of the earth – patterns of use that have been trodden into the dirt over millennia. At the same time, in spite of photography's fragmentary nature, these images seek to define a "collected" history, a sequence of points on a map that is unified by the camera under the artist's gaze.