A Conversation with the Gravel Pit

10th Anniversary of Mie’s Trail

East Haddam, Connecticut

Sponsored by the

I-Park Foundation, Inc.
In October 2002, I started an intervention in the existing landscape at I-Park. My intention was not to add anything but to expose what was there through careful editing. I mapped out an area containing an abandoned gravel pit and constructed a trail meandering around its rim. The original trail linked four sites: The Pine Circle, The Mound, The Bowl, and The Cypress Garden. In 2011, I extended the trail into The Gravel Pit, a site that was originally transformed by man from lush woodland into a quarry, but which has slowly been reclaimed by nature. The expanded trail opens with The Funnel, a V shaped entrance garden that beckons you onto a small platform overlooking the wetlands. From there, you are carefully routed to experience the inherent beauty and stunning variety of this site.  
- Mie Preckler, 2012
a conversation with the GRAVEL PIT

Mie Preckler began work on her concept piece while an artist in residence at I-Park in 2002. Mie’s Trail, as the piece is now known, reveals the complex beauty of the natural process of reclamation that has taken hold, over the last 50 or so years, in this once desolate site. Through Mie’s gentle editing, a series of ‘gardens’ have emerged from the underbrush and detritus of nature’s steady cycles.

Mie has returned to I-Park each year since to maintain and refine the piece. In 2009, the scale of the project was significantly expanded when the gravel pit proper was joined to Mie’s Trail to form the Gravel Pit Preserve, a space now dedicated to environmental preservation and observation. The rerouted trail traverses the gravel pit itself and gives the walker a more up-close and immediate exposure to nature’s regenerative forces at work.

Mie’s gravel pit project was the first significant environmental art installation at I-Park. This work helped galvanize our interest in and growing support for the aesthetic engagement of the I-Park landscape as well as the broader field of site-specific, ephemeral art.

For the 10th anniversary celebration of the trail, Mie is collaborating with author Hazel White and composer Eleanor Aversa to explore different ways of experiencing the trail. Hazel examines the trail, its context and its motivating spirit in a site-responsive sonnet consisting of 14 lines of thought: proposal, audience participation and poetry. Eleanor premieres three site-responsive movements for flute and guitar. The celebration is capped with a retrospective exhibition of select photo and video documentation of the trail as it has evolved over the years.

Ralph Crispino, Jr.
Executive Director
COLLABORATION

In 14 forays, or lines of thought, Hazel’s presentation explores landscape and human movement, with reference to Mie’s Trail. Integral to the work are the vocabularies of landscape architecture—threshold, prospect and shelter, the syntax of adventure—and the aesthetics of experience—greeting, immersion, duration. Hazel tells how, while staying at I-Park as a resident, she became convivial with the margins of the woods, the knoll, the gravel pit, and the other elements of the trail. The lines of the spoken work follow a journey in the landscape where the reciprocities between the world and Mie’s Trail can be seen and felt, and to walk is to know what’s near.

Hazel White

The work is a suite of three pieces, each inspired by a different location along the trail: the Gravel Pit, the Pine Bluffs, and the Meadow. The music reflects the tension between artificial and organic elements in each of these places, with the Gravel Pit being the most disorienting and strange location, and the Meadow being the most simple and natural. In each piece, the music portrays both how it feels to be on a certain part of the trail (invigorating, peaceful, etc.), and also the location itself. For example, in the movement portraying the Gravel Pit, short and savage phrases evolve into longer, softer lines just as the scars of mining were gradually covered over by greenery.

Eleanor Aversa
Mie Preckler is a visual artist who works primarily in the area of site-specific installations and interventions. Her work has been shown widely in the United States, South America, Asia and Europe. Born in Antwerp, Belgium, Mie Preckler currently lives in Oakland, CA, where she is a professor at the California College of the Arts. She has received numerous awards and honors, including fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Phyllis C. Wattis Foundation, and residencies at the Djerassi Foundation, I-Park, Anderson Ranch Arts Center, the Corporation of Yaddo, and the Headlands Center for the Arts. She has received International Fellowships at the Instituto Sacatar in Brazil, the Frans Masereel Centrum in Belgium and the Sanskriti Foundation in India.

Hazel White grew up on farms in the southwest of England. After finishing undergraduate degrees in philosophy and literature at Warwick University, she studied crop agriculture at Bridgewater College Center for Land Based Studies, and then, through University of California, Berkeley, Extension, landscape architecture. She’s the author of eleven gardening books, published by Sunset Books and Chronicle Books. Her first book of poems, Peril as Architectural Enrichment, was published by Kelsey Street Press in 2011 and was a finalist in the Northern California Independent Booksellers Association Best Poetry Book of the Year Award. She’s currently an affiliate artist at The Headlands Center for the Arts, in northern California.

Noted for being both lyrical and bold, the music of Eleanor Aversa has been honored with national awards including the Northridge Composition Prize, First Prize in the San Francisco Choral Artists’ New Voices Competition, and fellowships from the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, the I-Park Foundation, and the MacDowell Colony. Other awards include the Brian M. Israel Prize and a grant from the Queens Council on the Arts for her work with choreographer Danuta Petrow-Sek.

Eleanor’s work has been performed in 18 cities in 10 states, including venues such as the Boston Conservatory, the Bowdoin International Music Festival, June in Buffalo, Symphony Space, and Tanglewood. Dr. Aversa holds a B.A. in Russian Language and Literature from Princeton, an M.A. in Composition from Queens College of the City University of New York, and a Ph.D in Composition from The University of Pennsylvania, where she studied on a Benjamin Franklin Fellowship.