

## Notes on the Design and Execution of the Painting, *Iconic Landscapes of Chicago*

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### *Artist's Statement*

This painting grew out of a desire to create a poster to commemorate two significant events of 2009 in Chicago: the Centennial of the Plan of Chicago and the ASLA Annual Meeting. The piece is intended to portray the context within which Windy City landscape architects design and execute their projects. It was also designed to be compatible with the ASLA Centennial poster I had painted ten years prior that commemorated significant landscapes of Illinois. This new painting picks up where the first one left off; it focuses on the Chicago parks that were mentioned but not illustrated in the earlier piece.

### *Architecture and Landscape*

Chicago is a city recognized worldwide for its role in defining architecture. Indeed, the “Chicago School” is a term that is well understood to be a touchstone of Modern design. It is clear that in this context, designs on the land are often framed and defined by architecture. While this is not necessarily unique to Chicago, the personalities and imagery of city architecture are so pervasive and well-documented that they are a part of the local landscape.

Given the wealth of historic parks in the city – parks that have stood the test of time and become significant in the eyes of the public – one of the first decisions made was how comprehensive the piece could be in documenting the parks and their designers. Luminaries of landscape architecture such as Frederick Law Olmsted, O.C. Simonds, Jens Jensen, and architects such as Daniel Burnham and William LeBaron Jenney could all be included, as could their less-well known contemporaries or more recent landscape architects and their firms. In the end, I decided to limit the graphic references to those landscape architects and park architects who truly had achieved iconic status.

### *Format*

A stained glass window motif was chosen as a framing device, both for its relevance to Chicago architecture and for its graphic potential to tell several small “stories.” The overall dimensions were set to fit comfortably on a piece of standard watercolor paper and to allow for the smaller paintings to be arrayed around the four borders of the piece. The larger themes were presented along the top border; all of the east parks were arrayed along the right (east) border, the south parks along the bottom (south) border, and the west parks on the left (west) border. This facilitated the referencing of the small scenes to the larger context map in the middle. The corners were designed to portray related themes that were not directly tied to the central map but were, in some way, applicable to the larger ideas and themes. The painting was done as a single image (not digitally montaged) using the traditional Beaux-Arts method of graded washes.

### *Top Border: The Big Ideas*

“The Naturalistic” and “The Sublime” were two related schools of thought prevalent during the era when many of these parks were designed. Jens Jensen was a proponent of naturalistic design (“a sea of flowers”) while Frederick Law Olmsted was an advocate of landscape characterized as “sublime.”<sup>1</sup> The quotes were chosen to be representative of these two ideals as well as have poetic imagery that

would lend itself to the overall painting. The thumbnail drawing that accompanies the Jensen quote was originally from his book, *Siftings*. The thumbnail with the Olmsted quote was similar to one from the *Plan of Chicago*. Of course, with 2009 being the Centennial of the publishing of this seminal work, I wanted to make reference to it, as much to portray a piece of the context for Chicago landscape architecture as to commemorate this historic event. The *Plan of Chicago* has many excellent images from which to choose; I selected an iconic Jules Guerin watercolor with strong axial symmetry to fit at the top center of the overall piece to “mediate” between the quotes. The Centennial banner along its top commemorates the 1909 origin of the Plan and also recalls the 1999 Illinois landscapes painting which also had a “Centennial” title at the top. “Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men’s blood...”<sup>2</sup> was an obvious candidate for a quote but Daniel Burnham was not a landscape architect and the quote has only been attributed to him without actually having been verified. It therefore seemed justifiable to reference the Plan graphically but select other quotes.

*Right Border: Lincoln Park and the Lakefront Parks*

Lincoln Park – The Lagoon affords stunning views of the Hancock Building and the North Loop. (Landscape Architects: Swain Nelson; O.C. Simonds; Alfred Caldwell)

Millennium Park – Of the eleven parks depicted in this painting, this is the only one not on the 1999 poster as it didn’t exist then. In the years since, however, it has certainly become an iconic park. The Pritzker Pavilion, Cloud Gate (“The Bean”), and Crown Fountain are three of the memorable features of the Park. (Landscape Architects: Daniel Weinbach & Partners, Wolff Clements and Associates, Carol YH Yetken Landscape Architects; Terry Guen Design Associates; Gustafson, Guthrie, Nichol, Ltd.)

Grant Park – Buckingham Memorial Fountain is one of many gems within this park designed in the French Renaissance style. (Park Architect: Burnham and Bennett)

Burnham Park – This somewhat forgotten lakefront park stretches from the Museum Campus along Lake Michigan to Promontory Point and Jackson Park. (Park Architect: Burnham and Bennett; Landscape Architect: Alfred Caldwell)

*Bottom Border: The South Parks*

Jackson Park – The reconstructed Osaka Garden is a Japanese strolling garden on the Wooded Island that occupies its original site from the World’s Columbian Exposition. (Landscape Architect: F.L. Olmsted)

Midway Plaisance – Originally designed as a canal to link Washington Park to Jackson Park and Lake Michigan, the Midway was used to house cultural exhibits from around the world during the Columbian Exposition. (Landscape Architect: F.L. Olmsted)

Washington Park – Yes, sheep really did graze in the commons of this park years ago. Today, the park is valuable open space for the surrounding community. (Landscape Architect: F.L. Olmsted, H.W.S. Cleveland)

*Left Border: The West Parks*

Douglas Park – Several stone bridges afford views of the park’s winding stream. (Park Architect: William LeBaron Jenney; Landscape Architect: Jens Jensen)

Garfield Park – The Garfield Conservatory, designed to resemble a Midwestern haystack, houses a valuable collection of plants from around the world. (Park Architect: William LeBaron Jenney; Landscape Architect: Jens Jensen)

Humboldt Park – The lagoon and boathouse comprise a central element of the park. (Park Architect: William LeBaron Jenney; Landscape Architect: Jens Jensen)

Columbus Park – This park is considered to be Jensen’s masterpiece where he gave full definition to his design ideals of using native plants and landforms to create a sustainable aesthetic. The waterfall was to be an allegorical “source” for the prairie stream that flowed from it. This image was placed near Jensen’s quote to make a connection with the broader ideas of the painting. (Landscape Architect: Jens Jensen)

#### Center

This map of Chicago was drawn at larger scale than the 1999 Illinois landscapes painting so that more detail could be shown. It includes the Grand Boulevards which were an important feature that connected the parks to each other. A grid of smaller streets was lightly drawn to incorporate the text guidelines and provide a grayscale tone; some of the individual blocks were lightly rendered in various colors to recall the stain glass frame. A period typeface was used for “Chicago,” again to impart an historic flavor to the piece. The Chicago flag was positioned just above the title and near the corner panel depicting Chicago’s history so that the two groups of four stars would be visually connected. The onion (a botanical painting of which is in the upper left corner nearby) is a riff on the Chicago six-pointed star in the style of Louis H. Sullivan and his famous *A System of Architectural Ornament*.<sup>3</sup> “Che-cau-gou” is the word used by the indigenous Potawatomi tribe, literally meaning “Land of the Stinking Onion.” This drawing makes reference to Indian culture and connects the name of the city to its native plant namesake.

#### Corners

History – The four stars on the Flag of Chicago represent the Ft. Dearborn settlement, the Great Chicago Fire (1871), World’s Columbian Exposition (1893), and the Century of Progress Exposition (1933).<sup>4</sup>

Diagonal parallels – The upper right and lower left corners contrast man-made and natural themes in a similar quadrant arrangement. The other two corners are related in that Promontory Point (lower right), which is in Burnham Park, was designed by Alfred Caldwell, a protégé of Jens Jensen (Columbus Park and *Siftings* quote, upper left) and the council ring was a feature often employed by both designers.

Orthogonal parallels – The upper and lower left corners depict naturalistic themes while the upper and lower right corners show man made artifacts or events.

#### Text

The two fonts used in the painting were both designed by Frederick W. Goudy who started his career as a type designer in Park Ridge, Illinois, a Chicago suburb. He designed the two used here, Goudy Old Style and Copperplate, as well as over 100 other original fonts. Copperplate is a sans serif face but with short glyphic serifs. It was designed in 1901 and is a contemporary of many of the parks shown. The letters are bold, strong, and drawn in caps and small caps only (no lower case letters). In the painting, I used it to label the individual scenes; its bold strokes and lack of descending letters were an advantage in small, tight spaces. In contrast, Goudy Old Style is a serif face and was released in 1916. The serifs give it a more lyrical look when compared to Copperplate and so the font was more appropriate for use with the quotes.

#### Materials

Paints – Windsor and Newton Artist series watercolors

Paper – 140# D’Arches cold press paper, 22” x 30”

Poster – 100% size reproduction of the original painting, printed on Centura Dull 80# cover weight paper (10% total recovered fiber, processed chlorine-free) with soy-based inks

### Artist's Bio

Craig Farnsworth is a Senior Associate with Hitchcock Design Group in Naperville and Chicago, Illinois, and has worked in the Chicago region for fifteen years. During that time, he has worked on projects in many of the historic parks depicted in this painting including Millennium Park, the Lincoln Park Lily Pool restoration, and the Midway Plaisance Master Plan and Winter Garden. In 1999, he was awarded the President's Award by the ILASLA for his watercolor painting and poster commemorating the ASLA Centennial. He received the E.V. Jones traveling scholarship for Rome studies from the Institute of Classical Architecture (2002). For the past five years, he has served as an Adjunct Professor in the School of Architecture at Judson University where he teaches architectural drawing and watercolor classes. He has also lectured on professional work and rendering techniques at the University of Illinois, Purdue University, and Ball State University. He was the illustrator for *Sustainable Landscape Construction* (Thompson and Sorvig, 2000) and has illustrated several articles for *Landscape Architecture* magazine (1993 - 1996). He is a graduate of Ball State University (BLA, 1986) and the University of Virginia (MP, 1988) and is a registered landscape architect in Virginia and Illinois.

### Footnotes

1. I am indebted to Julia Sniderman Bachrach, Chicago Park District, for her work in drawing these distinctions. Her book, *The City in a Garden: A Photographic History of Chicago's Parks* (2001), provides a wealth of information on Chicago's Parks. *Chicago's Urban Nature: A Guide to the City's Architecture + Landscape* by Sally A. Kitt Chappell (2007) is also an essential book on these and related topics.
2. "Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die." Another apt, though lengthy, Burnham quote which fell to the cutting room floor was,  
"Each of you know the name and genius of him who stands first in the heart and confidence of American artists. In the highest sense he is the planner of the Exposition, Frederick Law Olmsted. An artist, he paints with lakes and wooded slopes; with lawns and banks and forest-covered hills; with mountain-sides and ocean views. He should stand where I stand tonight, not for his deeds of later years alone, but for what his brain has wrought and his pen has taught for half a century."  
(Daniel H. Burnham, March 25th, 1893, at a dinner honoring Burnham, paying honor to Olmsted, his collaborator, at Madison Square Garden in New York. My thanks to Frank Clements, FASLA, for sharing this quote.)
3. Louis Sullivan sought to unite the forces of nature and the man-made in his work, which in many ways, was the architectural equivalent of landscape architecture.
4. Incidentally, the top blue stripe represents Lake Michigan and the North Branch of the Chicago River and the bottom stripe represents the South Branch and the Great Canal. The three white stripes represent, from top to bottom, the North, West, and South sides of the city.

### Reprints

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