

Vicky Uslé. Borrowed Landscapes. Curated by Brett Littman
From 10th October onwards

In my first studio visit with the artist Vicky Uslé in New York in the summer of 2018, I brought up the idea that her abstract works on paper reminded me of windows or doors and that led to a discussion of the concept of the “borrowed landscape,” an essential feature of Japanese garden design. Uslé, has been thinking about Japan and Japanese aesthetics for a long time – but she had never visited the country. We looked at a book of Tsukioka Yoshitoshirō's woodblock prints that she had and talked about my impressions of Japan, a place I have gone to quite a few times, even before I became Director of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum. After our conversations I encouraged her to plan a trip to Japan – I truly thought that it would be a place that would have an impact on her work and her thinking about how to contextualize and expand her painting practice into three dimensions and architectural space.

In the winter of 2018, Uslé decided to go to Japan to experience first-hand Japanese culture, architecture and the profound and wonderful gardens of Tokyo and Kyoto. She visited the Nezu Museum, designed by Kenzo Kuma, and its amazing garden in the middle of Tokyo, where one miraculously feels totally transported out of time and the city. At the Meiji Jingu's inner gardens, Uslé took in the scents of the blooming flowers and the camphor trees. In Kyoto, at the Heian Jingu and the Shin En, the experience of walking on and erasing with her footprints the meditative daily morning work of the monks who rake the gravel and earth brought a heightened sense of self-presence and a poetic understanding of the cycles of creation and destruction. During an early morning visit to Ryoan-ji, Uslé focused on the clay walls, which she described to me as velvet-like, the changing colors of the various areas as the sun passed over, the rock gardens and the aromas of the gardens themselves. Walking the Philosopher's Path, she was taken with Honen-In, a smaller temple that is full of subtle and unexpected details.

Since Uslé's trip to Japan she has continued to ruminate about how she might incorporate some of the elements that make up Japanese garden design (the major elements are: stone gathering, stone structures and groupings, stepping stones, gravel patterns, stone lanterns, plants, water elements, fences, hedges and walls, and the idea of incorporating “borrowed landscapes” to frame the other elements) into a new installation for Galeria Carles Taché for the Gallery Weekend in Barcelona. Uslé, who wants to transmit the exchange of cultural ideas, the fluidity between history and the present, and a deep sense of sensory experience, has decided to create an interior garden path in the gallery to complement her large scale works on paper. Inspired by her own experience walking on raked gravel and earth in Japan, Uslé will create the path out of gravel, earth and stones. This path will lead to three new paintings on paper on the far wall of the gallery that she has made since returning from Japan. This spare, experiential installation will allow the viewer to focus his or her energies on the “walk” to these works which have been stimulated by her memories, imagination and real experiences from her visits to the gardens in Tokyo and Kyoto.