

ABSTRACT

Through an analysis of the Parque General San Martin in Mendoza, Argentina, this paper examines the work of 19th century landscape designer Carlos Thays alongside the material contributions of the indigenous Huarpes people to consider the discipline of landscape architecture as part of a long line of landscape practice in the challenging environment of western Argentina. Mendoza, Argentina is a modern city of nearly one million inhabitants situated on the border between the great agricultural plains of Argentina and the desert foothills of the Andes Mountains. Historically it has been a frontier settlement of utmost strategic importance, existing variously at the southern edge of the Incan Empire, the eastern edge of colonial Chile, and now the western border of Argentina. In addition to its location at the political and geographic margins, it leads a perilous existence at the edge of environmental sustainability- the region receives less than seven inches of rainfall a year, is located in a highly active seismic zone, and is susceptible to flash flood events. In the late 19th century a large public was projected on Mendoza's western edge. Parque San Martin was intended to mediate environmental extremes for the growing urban population and offer a new form of public cultural expression. In this context landscape architecture developed to mediate challenging environmental conditions and help form and reflect shifting cultural identities. This paper presents this landscape as both an early example of modern landscape design in western Argentina and as part of a long lineage of cultural landscape transformation intimately bound up with hydrological manipulation and shifting cultural values.