Last Landscapes: The Architecture of the Cemetery in the West

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Last Landscapes is an exploration of the cult and celebration of death, loss and memory. It traces the history and design of burial places throughout Europe and the USA, ranging from the picturesque tradition of the village churchyard to tightly packed 'cities of the dead', such as the Jewish Cemetery in Prague and Père Lachaise in Paris. Other landscapes that feature in this book include the war cemeteries of northern France, Viking burial islands in central Sweden, Etruscan tombs and early Christian catacombs in Italy, the 17th-century Portuguese–Jewish cemetery 'Beth Haim' at Ouderkerk in the Netherlands, Forest Lawns in California, Derek Jarman's garden in Kent and the Stockholm Woodland Cemetery.

It is a fact that architecture 'began with the tomb', yet, as Ken Worpole shows us in Last Landscapes, many historic cemeteries have been demolished or abandoned in recent times (notably the case with Jewish cemeteries in Eastern Europe), and there has been an increasing loss of inscription and memorialization in the modern urban cemetery. Too often cemeteries today are both poorly designed and physically and culturally marginalized. Worse, cremation denies a full architectural response to the mystery and solemnity of death.

The author explores how modes of disposal – burial, cremation, inhumation in mausoleums and wall tombs – vary across Europe and North America, according to religious and other cultural influences. And Last Landscapes raises profound questions as to how, in an age of mass cremation, architects and landscape designers might create meaningful structures and settings in the absence of a body, since for most of history the human body itself has provided the fundamental structural scale. This evocative book also contemplates other forms of memorialization within modern societies, from sculptures to parks, most notably the extraordinary Duisberg Park, set in a former giant steelworks in Germany's Ruhr Valley.

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