

17 January 2017

ASLA Medal Nominations c/o Carolyn Mitchell 636 Eye Street, NW Washington, DC 20001-3736

RE: ASLA MEDAL – CHARLES A. BIRNBAUM, FASLA, FAAR

Dear Executive Committee Members and Board of Trustees,

It is my great pleasure and honor to nominate Charles A. Birnbaum for the ASLA Medal in recognition of his lifetime achievements and extraordinary contributions on behalf of our profession. Charles has dedicated his career to elevating the value of landscape architecture, the role of the landscape architect, and the visibility of the profession's unique contributions to the built environment, our cultural identity and our social wellbeing. Charles has become one of our most passionate, articulate, and charismatic advocates. His work in private practice, as a public servant with the National Park Service, and as the Founder and President of The Cultural Landscape Foundation (TCLF) has been a catalyst for activities that have affected designed landscapes, have secured the legacies of notable practitioners, have positioned the profession in a leadership role, and are informing and inspiring a new generations of practitioners. He has engaged and empowered advocates, municipal officials, citizens and others through more than 500 lectures, two-dozen thematic conferences, eight national traveling exhibitions, and exhaustive writings for both scholarly and general audiences.

I have known Charles for three decades and was pleased to become a founding board member of TCLF when it was established in 1998. I have on many occasions witnessed Charles' masterful and articulate advocacy, but one recent example demonstrates the breadth of his impact. In 2014 New York City's Frick Collection announced an expansion plan that would result in the demolition of a rare, surviving public commission in the US by the great English landscape architect Russell Page. Through his articles in the *Huffington Post*, extensive press outreach, public lectures, coalition building, and behind-the-scenes counseling of numerous advocacy organizations, Charles positioned this significant garden as a prime issue in the expansion plan debate.

The Page garden went from being a potential construction site to a recognized and protected work of art, Page went from obscurity to visibility, and the concept that landscape architecture actually had value achieved critical "critical mass" when the *New York Times* architecture critic Michael Kimmelman castigated the proposed expansion and concluded: "Great public places and works of landscape architecture deserve to be treated like great buildings." The upshot:

Reed Hilderbrand LLC Landscape Architecture 130 Bishop Allen Drive Cambridge, MA 02139 Advocacy organizations that historically focused on buildings began to see value in designed landscapes; the general public became aware of the virtue of something they took for granted; and the "paper of record" put landscape architecture on equal footing with architecture. That's only one example of how impactful and consequential Charles' work has been to our profession.

#### BACKGROUND

Charles A. Birnbaum, a native New Yorker born in 1961, received his bachelor's degree in Landscape Architecture from the State University of New York (SUNY), Syracuse, following an associate's degree in Applied Science of Ornamental Horticulture from SUNY, Farmingdale. In 1997-98, he served as a Loeb Fellow at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design, during which time he founded The Cultural Landscape Foundation. In 2004, he was the Samuel H. Kress Fellow in Historic Preservation and Conservation at the American Academy in Rome.

Charles was in private practice in New York City for eleven years, first working on urban design as an intern with M. Paul Friedberg then with Thomas Balsley Associates, and the Office of William Kuhl. Charles hungered for a stronger analytical framework to underpin his work. At the suggestion of Philip Winslow he then went to Walmsley & Company where he worked with Tony Walmsley (who was a protégé of Ian McHarg and Ann Spirn at the University of Pennsylvania) and finally LANDSCAPES with Patricia O'Donnell, focusing predominantly on landscape preservation, urban waterfront projects and site and community planning. Of note, as a project manager, he was involved for multiple years in the rehabilitation of two iconic works by the profession's founder Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.: Prospect Park in Brooklyn, NY, and the Emerald Necklace in Boston, MA.

He was recruited by the National Park Service to become the Coordinator of the Historic Landscape Initiative in Washington, DC, and served in that position from 1992 to 2007. In 1995 ASLA awarded the program the President's Medal of Excellence. In 1996, Charles became an ASLA Fellow (the youngest in the ASLA's history, I believe); in 2007 he received the LaGasse Medal in recognition of his work in public service; and in 2008 the President's Medal from Angela Dye.

Over the years, Charles has held several teaching positions: Instructor, National Preservation Institute, 1999-2008; Professor, Professional Development Program, Harvard University, Graduate School of Design, 2001-03; Glimcher Distinguished Professor, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, Graduate Studio and Seminar, Landscape Architecture Program, Fall-Winter, 2007; Visiting Professor, Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture Planning, Spring 2011 – present; and Visiting Critic (collaborating with West 8's Adriaan Gueze) at Harvard's Graduate School of Design (2014-present).

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### ADVOCACY

The inspiration to create The Cultural Landscape Foundation emerged from two things: Charles was overwhelmed by the very personal and visible emotional responses by audiences to a documentary, for which he served as executive producer (with ASLA) while at the Park Service, Connections: Preserving America's Landscape Legacy, narrated by Angela Lansbury. And he felt the governmental "top down" approach to education, outreach and advocacy was less effective than a "bottom up" grass-roots approach. He used his time as a Loeb Fellow at Harvard to learn the skills needed for creating, operating and managing a non-profit. He immersed himself in the Harvard and MIT communities, the Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations, the Kennedy School of Government, and Project Zero at the Graduate School of Education. In 1998 he founded The Cultural Landscape Foundation (TCLF), and for the next nine years ran it as a volunteer. In 2007, the Foundation had a million dollars in the bank (at that time enough for three years of general operating expenses), and Charles left the government to run TCLF full time. He operated out of one room on the third floor of his house, then two rooms before moving the operation to the basement. When TCLF outgrew that space, it moved to its current offices on Connecticut Avenue in Washington, DC. They've never touched the original million dollars and are today a staff of ten with a \$1.6 million annual budget and a web presence that in 2016 resulted in 1.1 million page views. All of the Foundation's efforts have consistently asked the question, why look back in order to move forward?

The three major initiatives at TCLF are: *Pioneers of American Landscape Design*; the *What's Out There* online landscape database; and *Landslide*. I'll describe them all in a moment, but it's important to know that what makes all of these projects successful is intellectual rigor, attention to detail, and accessibility. All of these programs are designed to make the profession, its practitioners, and the profession's impact understood by a wide range of audiences from the general public, to elected officials and decision makers, and specialists. Of equal importance to the success of these programs are broad, multi-disciplinary collaboration and the network of partnerships that Charles has created. To ensure that the Foundation's message is broadly delivered and TCLF's "followers" continue to grow, he engages not only the landscape architecture community, but laymen, university faculty and students, advocates, allied organizations and non-profits, and allied design professionals, while also cultivating elected officials, civic leaders, journalists, and bloggers.

Charles initiated the *Pioneers of American Landscape Design* project at the Park Service to chronicle the lives and careers of practitioners. The program has mushroomed and includes four extensive print publications (with two hardbound volumes that each took a decade to complete) and a fifth on the way; an online, carefully vetted database that features more than 900 profiles of landscape architects and allied professionals; and at present fourteen on-going video oral histories series (awarded ASLA's 2010 Award of Excellence, Communications), with practitioners including Carol Johnson, Lawrence Halprin, James van Sweden, Laurie Olin, M.

Paul Friedberg, Harriet Pattison, Joe Yamada, Shlomo Aronson, Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, and most recently William "Bill" Johnson. Each *Pioneers* oral history is divided into three sections – biography, history and design – and parsed into one- to six-minute segments. They capture crucial information from amusing anecdotes to profound insights and moments of inspiration that might otherwise be lost. Professors such as Elizabeth Meyer at the University of Virginia say the oral histories are invaluable primary source material.

The *What's Out There* online landscape database is an unrivalled resource about cultural landscapes throughout the US (and into parts of Canada), with more than 2,000 sites and nearly 11,000 images. It's divided into 27 types and sixteen styles, and each carefully vetted 250-word entry is accompanied by up to ten photographs. The database has been leveraged for the creation of print guidebooks (fourteen currently) to cities including Denver, Los Angeles, Miami, and Richmond (the series received ASLA's 2016 Award of Excellence, Communications), and eight extensive online guides to cities including New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC, with three more due in 2017.

The *Landslide* program was created to bring national attention to threatened and at-risk landscapes and landscape features. The Frick's Russell Page-designed garden mentioned earlier is one example. The program engages multiple audiences from the general public to park and landscape advocates – this is a powerful and visible way of highlighting a landscape's significance, telling its story and that of its designer, and promoting a broader and sustained stewardship ethic.

Since 2003, Charles and TCLF have issued an annual *Landslide* list, but each year is thematic and accompanied by a richly illustrated online exhibition. For example, in 2008, *Marvels of Modernism* featured the Lawrence Halprin-designed Heritage Park Plaza in Fort Worth, TX (a threatened site that was saved, listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and is now being rehabilitated thanks in large part to TCLF's efforts), Lake Elizabeth, designed by John O. Simonds in Allegheny Commons in Pittsburgh (another project saved, designated and rehabilitated), and many others.

Significantly, under the *Landslide* umbrella, Charles and TCLF have organized and curated traveling photographic exhibitions. Initially, they were done in partnership with the George Eastman Museum of International Photography and Film, as well as *Garden Design*, *Landscape Architecture* and *American Photo* magazines. The exhibitions travel on average three to five years and are hosted by institutions such as the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, PA; The Center for Architecture, New York; Dallas Center for Architecture; various botanical gardens, and a host of other diverse venues.

Recently, the Foundation has focused on the legacy of several titans in the field. In 2013 *The Landscape Architecture Legacy of Dan Kiley* opened in Kiley's hometown of Boston at the Boston Architectural College (and will be at the Chicago Architecture Foundation April 12 – September 17, 2017). Kiley was one of the most important Modernist landscape architects of the twentieth century, yet the centennial of his birth in 2012 went unnoticed and unheralded (by contrast the centennial for Mies van der Rohe's birth was marked by museum exhibitions and symposia). Charles was determined that something had to be done, and he mounted the exhibition in eleven months. He raised the funds, commissioned leading landscape photographers (who donated their services), built a website, produced an exhibition gallery guide and got bookings at multiple cultural venues including the National Building Museum in Washington, DC. *The Wall Street Journal* review said the exhibition (which received ASLA's 2014 Award of Excellence, Communications), "shows how modern landscapes often make a better argument for modernism than the architecture itself."

In 2015 TCLF produced the traveling photographic exhibition *The New American Garden: The Landscape Architecture of Oehme van Sweden*, organized on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the duo's influential book, *Bold Romantic Gardens*. The exhibition originated at the National Building Museum and featured photographs, select segments from the *Pioneers* oral history with van Sweden, prints, drawings, as well as furniture and other artifacts they designed. The *Washington Post's* Pulitzer Prize-winning critic Philip Kennicott wrote that the exhibition, "gives a thorough sense of their accomplishment, their style and their influence. It is also the largest monographic exhibition the National Building Museum has devoted to landscape architecture, and it bodes well for yet more attention to this often-neglected discipline."

This past year TCLF mounted *The Landscape Architecture of Lawrence Halprin*, timed to the centennial of Halprin's birth. This, too, debuted at the National Building Museum (where it is supplemented with drawings, dioramas and other artifacts from the Halprin Collection at the University of Pennsylvania Architecture Archives), and has been the subject of coverage in major dailies such as *The New York Times*, to influential international online sites including *Dezeen*, and many others. As with the other exhibitions, the net result is to show the power, impact, prescience and diversity of landscape architecture to a broad audience.

It's hard to do Charles and his career justice. His 21-page vitae is daunting (and apparently incomplete, as it lists "selected publications and articles" and "selected awards and honors"), and his list of accomplishments too numerous to count. He is indefatigable. There is, however, an underlying theme and purpose. Charles Birnbaum has spent the last thirty-five years passionately advocating for and promoting a profession he loves, practitioners for whom he cares deeply, and the profession's impact on our lives and society. Moreover, he is an exceptional entrepreneur who continues to build the biggest possible tent and the broadest of coalitions to broadcast what we do, who we are, and what we create. And the impact is

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measurable, from Google Analytics that show the 300-500% annual growth of traffic to TCLF's website from cities and town with university landscape architecture programs, to actual places such as the Frick's Russell Page-designed garden that will continue on in perpetuity, to the accolades by critics, and simple notes of thanks in museum visitor logs for the exhibitions.

I have given short shrift to TCLF's conferences. They have been very important in positioning landscape architecture as a leader in the remaking of cities, particularly in urban planning. For example, Charles' recent and carefully curated conferences in Toronto (2015), Houston (2016), and a forthcoming one in San Antonio (March 3, 2017), have attracted Mayors, City Planners, municipal officials and other key decision-makers. As we are preparing for the San Antonio conference, I was told this week by the chief donor of the event that Charles, in his last eight months of work with this diverse community advocating for the cultural stories that have defined that city, has in effect transformed San Antonio. These are the audiences we must reach to increase our work, our influence and our reputation. These conferences are consequential.

## CONCLUSION

Twenty-one years ago at the ASLA Annual Meeting in Los Angeles, Charles became a Fellow, and *Connections: Preserving America's Landscape Legacy* premiered. This was the turning point in his career that resulted in the creation of TCLF. What Charles and the Foundation have done since has raised awareness of the designed landscape and of our nation's landscape legacy, promulgating the importance of what a landscape architect is and does. I therefore respectfully propose that the Society confer on Charles the ASLA Medal.

Sincerely,

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Douglas Reed FASLA RAAR Principal

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1/16/2017

ASLA Medal Nominations c/o Carolyn Mitchell 636 Eye Street, NW Washington, DC 20001-3736

RE: ASLA Medal – Charles A. Birnbaum, FASLA, FAAR

Dear Executive Committee Members and Board of Trustees,

I am honored and privileged to offer this letter of recommendation in support of Charles Birnbaum for the ASLA Medal, the highest honor of the American Society of Landscape Architects.

Charles is not your traditional candidate for this honor. As a visionary, Charles has fought against the destruction of the built landscapes that have contributed to our history and culture. His programs have brought the public into the process though education and example. He recognized the necessary support and advocacy of an educated public to demand quality landscapes as an entitlement and a need, rather than a wish and hope.

It is commonly said that it takes a good client to create a good project not just a good designer. The public is our client and through the efforts of Charles Birnbaum and The Cultural Landscape Foundation (TCLF), they are providing the 'good client'.

I cannot overstate the importance of his lasting contribution to the profession we share as well as the public realm. Charles is a force, an unbound source of creative energy who has dedicated himself to the preservation of the history and legacy of the cultural American landscape.

As the CEO and founder of The Cultural Landscape Foundation he has done more to create public awareness and importance of the designed landscape than any of the professional societies, individually or collectively. Under his leadership and direction The Cultural Landscape Foundation has taken on the responsibility, in many instances alone, of protecting threatened landscapes and resisted the misappropriation of all or portions of historic landscapes.

TCLF has and continues to document significant members of the landscape profession making their work and ideas available to the public and students of the profession through video interviews. The Foundation has created traveling exhibits, landscape tours, and this is only the tip of the iceberg. Charles has filled a void that has prevented many seminal works of landscape design to be destroyed, misappropriated or mutilated. We, the public, the students of the profession, and professionals, would have been denied the first hand experience of inhabiting these spaces.

If the criteria for the award are "contributions to the profession that have had a unique and lasting impact on the welfare of the public and the environment", what more deserving person is there to receive the honor than Charles Birnbaum?

It is my hope that this year The ASLA Medal, the highest honor the American Society of Landscape Architects, may be bestowed upon Charles Birnbaum, a more than deserving colleague, and a landscape architect whose lifetime achievements and contributions to the profession have had a unique and lasting impact on the welfare of the public and the environment.

M.Paul Friedberg

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January 17, 2017

ASLA Medal Nominations c/o Carolyn Mitchell 636 Eye Street, NW Washington, DC 20001-3736 RE: ASLA Medal – Charles A. Birnbaum, FASLA, FAAR

Dear Executive Committee and Board of Trustees

This letter is in support for the nomination for the ASLA Medal for Charles Birnbaum. I have known Charles for over 20 years and have witnessed his enormous impact on the profession of landscape architecture by founding The Cultural Landscape Foundation (TCLF) after having worked at the National Park Service. The TCLF has been a gift to our field and has created an awakening and better understanding of the contributions of landscape architecture to the private and public realm.

Charles is disciplined, principled, creative and strategic, and he knows how to communicate with practitioners, the general public, private developers and public officials. Charles and TCLF have made a tremendous impact by: raising the public visibility and importance of the profession through conferences and public speaking that engage government officials and other decision makers who learn first hand about our impact and how we can make a difference; documenting thousands of landscapes throughout the US, and now in Canada, in a format that's readily accessible and easy to use; educating the public through superb, expert led tours that reveal all of the multiple dimensions – environmental, social, economic, etc. – of our work; and by being a courageous and intrepid advocate.

My personal experiences include the video oral history he did with me some years ago. He warned me that it would be intense, and it was; but, it was ultimately a very rewarding process because he got information out of me that I hadn't previously shared with the public. He has done the same with several of my colleagues and collectively these documentaries offer profound insights, some great and amusing stories, and real insights into the profession and the life of a landscape architect. Parts of our built legacy may not last, but thanks to Charles, our thoughts and ideas will.

There are many areas where Charles has been a leader, but I think his work in raising the visibility of modernist landscape architecture is extremely important. He was a pioneer in calling attention to its significance and in sounding the alarm about threats to it. His publications, conferences and public lectures, along with lots of prodding and cajoling, has helped establish the importance of this significant chapter in our design legacy. Just look at what he did for my dear friend Larry Halprin; Heritage Park Plaza in Fort Worth would have been destroyed if not for Charles' leadership. And what a champion he has been for Paul Friedberg. A few years ago when Arthur Erickson's Atrium Garden at the Bank of Canada was threatened, Charles and TCLF did not hesitate to get involved.

Next month at Modernism Week in Palm Springs, I will be doing a panel discussion with landscape architect Harriet Pattison, moderated by Charles. Harriet is a gifted and inspiring professional. Were it not for Charles and his documentary about Harriet, her story would almost certainly not been told.

We are fortunate to have in Charles a passionate, articulate and dedicated advocate for our great profession. Through his articles for the general public and scholarly journals, beautiful and substantive museum quality exhibitions, entertaining and provocative lectures, and the rich resource he has created with TCLF, Charles has and continues to make the case not only for the relevance of landscape architecture, but its primacy. That is leadership we need.

Therefore, I highly recommend Charles Birnbaum to receive the ASLA Medal.

Sincerely yours,

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Cornelia Hahn Oberlander O.C., O.BC, LL.D. (HON), FCSLA, BCSLA, FASLA

Inaugural Recipient of the Governor General's Medal in Landscape Architecture



## OLIN

The ASLA Board of Trustees The American Society of Landscape Architects 636 Eye Street NW Washington, DC 20001-3736

16 January 2017

Dear Colleagues,

I write to support with enthusiasm the nomination Charles Birnbaum to be awarded an ASLA Medal. It is hard to think of another who has done as much, let alone more, than Charles to educate the public about the achievement and contribution of landscape architects in the past century in America. Beginning with his remarkable cultural landscape history initiatives within the National Park Service, then with the founding of the Cultural Landscape Foundation and its superb and extensive activities, publications, awards, exhibitions, tours, and video-websites. Simply creating the multi-volume *Pioneers of American Landscape Architecture* publications, or the *What's Out There* educational materials, might be enough, but when one adds his organization of the *Preserving Modern Landscape* conferences and publications, the exhibitions of great designers work and careers (such as those for Kiley and Halprin), the growing documentary multi-part video biography/interview series with prominent landscape architects – in some cases just in time, Charles has been indefatigable in service to our profession. He deserves both our deepest thanks *and* a Medal!

Sincerely,

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Laurie D. Olin FASLA

NELSON BYRD WOLTZ LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

January 18, 2017

ASLA Medal Nominations c/o Carolyn Mitchell 636 Eye Street, NW Washington, DC 20001-3736

To ASLA Executive Committee,

It is with great enthusiasm that I submit this letter of recommendation in support of Charles Birnbaum for his candidacy for the ASLA Medal. I have had the pleasure of getting to know Charles through a broad range of interactions over more than a decade of conversation and collaboration. The substantial achievements of his career represent significant contributions to the profession of landscape architecture. I can think of no contemporary colleague who is more singularly responsible for making cultural landscapes, and the profession of landscape architecture, more visible to the greater public than Charles.

Over the years, Charles Birnbaum has methodically dedicated himself to the task of preserving designed landscapes and the narratives and individuals responsible for their creation. This started with his work at the National Park Service where he launched the Historic Landscape Initiative that ultimately developed national standards for the preservation and documentation of cultural landscapes. Prior to this effort, many important landscapes went unnoticed and undocumented as the evaluation standards of the day referred primarily to architectural components. Charles successfully established the lexicon of cultural landscapes and the standards by which they are evaluated and protected.

With the creation of The Cultural Landscape Foundation (TCLF), now almost twenty years old, Charles has developed a powerful vehicle that is an important advocate for the profession. TCLF has grown tremendously in influence, not only through the sheer output of publications, events, exhibitions, and symposia but also in the quality of scholarship that it supports and encourages. Recent exhibitions on the work of Dan Kiley and Lawrence Halprin have brought renewed interest in the work of these two icons of the profession, and significantly contributed to the preservation of their landscapes. The extensive archive that TCLF has amassed on the places and people of landscape architecture provides the general public and scholars with an invaluable tool for teaching and a framework for the protection

and preservation of landscape architecture in America. Ultimately, what Charles and TCLF have been able to accomplish is transformative in recognizing the potential of landscape to thrill, heal, and inspire. He has evolved preservation from a restrictive science into a living and thinking engagement with the landscapes that surround us and inform our cultural markers of place.

Charles continues to relentlessly advocate and gather support for landscape and the professional community dedicated to its design, care, and preservation. He has led a life committed to scholarship and the stewardship of cultural landscape preservation in America. Throughout this journey there has been a drumbeat of consistent volunteerism, board service, and publishing. These activities are shaping the 21<sup>st</sup> century intellectual discourse in landscape architecture. His articles in the Huffington Post and other mainstream outlets provide a crucial perspective that is otherwise absent in the popular media environment. He has been published widely and has achieved a voice of authority that few in our profession rival.

Given the remarkable accolades and accomplishments that Charles Birnbaum has achieved as a champion of landscape architecture over the last 30 years, it is difficult to think of anyone who has had a deeper impact on the visibility of the profession and who is therefore more deserving of the honor of the ASLA Medal in 2017.

With regards,

Tumun L. Wolf

Thomas L. Woltz FASLA, CLA, Principal Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects

# The Landscape Architecture of Lawrence Halprin

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## 70TH STREET GARDEN

## by Russell Page The Frick Collection, New York, NY



"A discerning eye needs only a hint, and understatement leaves the imagination free to build its own elaborations."

- Russell Page, The Education of a Gardener, 1962

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

In order to demolish the Page garden and proceed with its

