In late 2016 I had the opportunity to catch up with British Architect Will Alsop in his London Studio to record this conversation. Will, who sadly passed away in May this year, was an architect with a passion and unwavering energy for the creative potential of architecture, often using terms such as delight, fun, cosy and surprise.

Will who graduated from the Architectural Association in the late 1960s relentlessly pursued a creative agenda in his architecture, one that relished invention and discovery and was paralleled by an equally prolific and creative drawing and painting practice. He had a long standing creative
relationship with his close friend the Scottish artist Bruce McLean with whom he often collaborated on architectural projects, paintings and installations.

Will was the recipient of the Sterling prize for architecture in 2000 for his Peckham Library and won numerous awards and competitions. He built projects in the UK, Germany, France, Canada, China and most recently two new metro stations for Toronto’s subway.

His work ranged across scales from urban renewal masterplans to public domain projects, landscapes, infrastructure and buildings. Public domain projects include the Bradford City masterplan, Singapore’s Clarke Quay, Blackfriars station on the Thames and a large park in southern China that was in design when we spoke.

He taught throughout his career both in architecture and art and he held the position of professor at the Technical University of Vienna.

I spoke to him about his relationship and attitude toward landscape.

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The Conversation

Will: Well, Anton that’s a good question. I’m not a landscape architect. I’m an architect and I like landscape. I think that’s an important thing to state from the beginning. So I think your first question is where and how did your awareness of the idea landscape form come from, I think?

Anton: Yes.

Will: Well, I was born and bred in Northampton which is a market town in the middle of basically an agricultural landscape. A lot of farms around there and rolling landscape. Nothing dramatic. All quite comfortable. But within those landscapes there are some large estates with some formal gardens. Castle Ashby is the one that comes to mind, but there are others. Castle Ashby is an Inigo Jones’ house. But I was supposed to be interested in the architecture, which I was. But I was equally interested in the landscape. And of course in that particular case - I was raised on Capability Brown in particular. There’s a lot of it around. He was a busy boy. Which, is as you know, is often just a very natural form. Of course it’s actually not natural. It’s just perfectly placed trees and vistas and some wilderness. I think it would fall in the category of pleasant. But it was for the eye. I mean, you could walk through it but there was nothing there to embrace you, to say come on, come on in. And I think that’s important. But I suppose it was part of my life early on. I used to get taken for picnics in these places.
Anton: So you spent quite a bit of time out in those landscapes?

Will: Well, I suppose over a period of time I did. And I liked going there, you know. The sandwiches were good.

Anton: Were you aware that they were not natural or was that idea of the -

Will: I think so, yeah. On some of these states there are lakes which are clearly - and you can swim in the lakes as well. Some of them. And they’re all dammed up so this was not natural. God didn’t build dams. But I used to think in choosing this as an estate they must have made sure, in nearly every case I can think of, that there was some access to water. So they could actually make those lakes which were an important part of it and the reflections, quite apart from me swimming which I don’t think they particularly had in mind. Well, there were one or two exceptions to that because –

Anton: A bit of boating, maybe?

Will: Boating. Fishing perhaps? You wouldn’t want to eat much that came out of that. Carp. Germans like carp. It’s not very tasty fish actually. Full of bones. It’s like eating cotton wool with pins in it. But good to catch. I suppose that I learnt to fish there as well when I was a bit older, 11 or 12. But I was surrounded by landscape. But I also, as I still do, I appreciated the agricultural landscape.

Anton: I was about to say, that’s interesting. What is landscape in terms of is it productive? Is it visual? And those Capability Brown landscapes, as you said, were very much visual.

Will: They were visual and they were there to be beautiful however you define that. And I can’t argue with that. They were beautiful. But then sometimes it’s better to walk down some agricultural lane where, because of the high hedges and the blackberries and the whole things that you could pick, it was more surprising. And there was a gate and you can look out over a field of barley or whatever waving in the wind. That’s just as exciting, and even more exciting in some ways, than the stuff that is actually quite a formal landscape. William Kent in Rousham, which I always liked, which is in Oxfordshire, there’s a formal house there. And I always found that quite interesting because the house had a view looking down on a river or a lake. I’m not sure which it is. And then there was one formal, well it’s not a huge garden but it had, still has, a rill. So you walked across, I think, the lawn and then you look out and there was this thin rill that was about 30 centimetres wide with water running down it. And then that opened up into the depths of the woods, into an octagonal swimming pool, and then the rill carried on. And that was intended for swimming. But I always like to think that while you’re walking through the woods you couldn’t see the river. So it’s like a reminder of the river and then you get to the end and you turn around and it brings you back by the river, so you’re always by water in one sense or another. And then you’ve got this big hill and there’s the house on the top and you think, mmm, time for tea.
Anton: That's an intriguing one, the line in the landscape dragging you through.

Will: I think Kent was more — well, he always had an idea and a concept. I'm not an expert on Kent but it was a concept that was particular to what he wanted to do at the time as opposed to a general theory of landscape. And that's why I think on the whole Kent is a more interesting, well both architect and landscape architect. I often wonder whether he knew much about plants but we'll come to that later.

Anton: Yes, and in terms of then your architectural education, how did that fit in with your idea of landscape and what was maybe happening then in terms of how landscape was seen?

Will: Well, I was a student at the AA. And to be honest I don't remember any real conversation about landscape at all. It didn't seem to be an issue or anything. You know this is way before the years of so-called place making or as I prefer to call it non-place making —

Anton: But despite the fact that that was really the time of the Earth art movement wasn't it, in the States?

Will: Oh, there was all of that. Yeah, absolutely. Smithsonian and all of that lot were — Spiral Jetty and Walter De Maria and the Lightning Field — to the point that they were — I like the fact, because they're in rather remote bits, usually in America, that the art gallery had to do tours by plane to go from here to see this and to see that. I thought that was interesting. But I never — I saw them as artworks, not as landscapes, but of course they are landscapes in reflection. Richard Long walking through landscapes of course, as he still does and still often makes works with the mud collected from the landscape.

Anton: That jumps maybe a bit, but you did spend some time in the US. Did that change the way you saw the landscape?

Will: It was very flat. The first time I went to America was 1977, I think, and apart from landing in New York, I then very quickly had to move on to Ball State University in Indiana. Which was a flat and small place. And it was winter when I arrived there but actually two weeks later it was summer and thank God for that, it improved things. And then the corn comes up. And of course you can't see anything, nothing. Because the corn's very high. As high as an elephant's hide, they say. But I quite like that because you then have these farmhouses in the midst of this vast fields of corn, and they were like islands. They were like oases within this sea of corn. So I mean that's interesting. I wouldn't have said it was a — it was a lot of the same thing. So it was not a landscape tutorial. But you just respond to what you see. And that's the way they live. I mean I think that's intriguing, in a way. Land was very cheap. Some people — a very junior member of the architectural staff, I remember, bought this piece of land which was huge and built this huge house on it. You couldn't do that with the UK teaching salary. And then attempted to do a landscape. And the word is attempted. So he put into it everything he thought the landscape should have in it. And in a way some of this is true today. There was a big lake, bigish. Birch trees, very white, rushes. In a way I suppose it was quite radical because you see a lot more of that today than you used to at that time. But there was an expectation of what the landscape could be rather than an evolution of what landscape should be. I mean I have a garden which is not as big as his garden by any means but over 40 years and it keeps changing and that's what I enjoy about it.

Anton: It strikes me you also enjoy the slightly quirky aspects of the found.
**Will:** I think you can't ignore that because actually most of our life experience is just where you are. I mean we're sitting in my studio here in Hackney, in London and I've got a nice little terrace which I enjoy when the weather is warmer than it is today. And you observe the bits of architecture around which actually I hate but actually after you've been with it for a while you don't hate it do you? You notice things because things change on a diurnal basis, that you're very aware of. They didn't have their curtains drawn yesterday. And you think, what's going on? And you learn to transpose yourself into this landscape, which of course in itself is changing, but it's an urban landscape for sure. There's not much green here.

**Anton:** Could you define landscape? That's always a tricky one, isn't it? What makes something landscape, and what makes something just stuff out there, or nature, or whatever other word we use?

**Will:** As you were alluding earlier, one definition of landscape is that it's modified nature. But I think that you were just looking at a very small section of what is landscape. If you go to Arizona, no one's modified it. Well, in some small parts they have. It's just beautiful. And it's a landscape. It's a very particular type of landscape, as you know. But I think in my travels and observations I've come to the conclusion that I'm not very fond of mountains.

**Anton:** You're not?

**Will:** No. And one of the reasons I'm not very fond of mountains is that if you're with a friend or friends, or driving through, or walking or whatever – it's exhausting to walk – is they're always saying, look at the view. Strange. Yeah, the view's a lot like the last view actually. And I don't get that sort of excitement. I prefer flat, completely flat, going back to Indiana, to landscape. Ideally a rolling landscape. So there is some surprise, there is some undulation within those - certainly within the UK there is no - there are bits of wilderness but not around the bits that I occupy. It's all heavily worked over. And they've become more interesting. I think, since I was in my 20s in the way of storing hay. They were bales before. Now they have sort of roundels or whatever they call them. So that gives another aspect at a certain time of year when the sun goes down, long shadows and the deep straw colour which is just beautiful. So you can't ignore these things. And these are the things you see more than going to a specific garden. I know in Norfolk – I spend a lot of time in Norfolk by the way – there's a gay couple who started a garden in 1987 and you can visit this garden. I like them, and that's why I like to go. But it's fascinating because they keep buying more and more bits of farmland. I think they've probably read, digested and swallowed every major book on landscape, from the Italians to the Spanish, to the French, to the Japanese and so on and so forth. So every year, more or less, they add another garden. Last time they added the Japanese garden and you go through all these rooms and it's quite well laid out. I think it's well done because you can never be sure that you've seen it all. You shouldn't go into a garden like that and try to see it all. You should just go back and take another route. But I like them and it's a passion for them, and therefore you can appreciate the passion. Whereas going back to Capability Brown you're not aware of the passion in the landscape. I'm sure he had lots of passion but the people he did it for, the clients, I think it was a status thing. That's what they had to have. You can never be sure, it's the whole thing, but I think that's probably right. So you know landscape I think is good. There's the two guys - quite a big garden at a place called East Ruston, is that they do a lot of the work themselves. Okay, they have a lot of staff because it's a big area and you need to have that. But whenever you go they're always out there cutting stuff, planting stuff, moving stuff around. And it shows. And that's what they love doing.
Anton: So is that something about the intimacy and inhabiting the landscape rather than necessarily as a backdrop?

Will: I think so. I mean, take away from the absurd scale of the large English estate or European estate, or some of those Australian estates which are farms really, which I quite like actually, but you come down to a more modest scale of landscaping. And the UK is a nation of gardens really and gardeners. And I think that gives a quality, I mean if you come into a city like London on the train you look into people’s back gardens from the train, you’ll think I’m stupid. No one is. But that’s because they’ve by the railway and they don’t bother. And the growth in garden centres in the last 30 years has been extraordinary. And they’re interested in the garden. They’re interested because they do it themselves. Others, they buy a new house and they hire a landscape architect who comes to do it, and then that’s a tick. And that may be a person who will probably come back and maintain it three or four times a year. You think, that’s no fun. And you can feel within them, it’s no fun for them either. They just do it. It’s like having 10 zillion bathrooms in your house. You can only piss in one, I think.

Anton: How do you then approach, if you have a project that’s obviously in the landscape, do you look for particular things? Or what do you do? What do you look for in the landscape? What comes to mind is Bundanon. I remember seeing that scheme in Bundanon years ago. How would you approach a landscape?

Will: Well in that particular case the artist –

Anton: Arthur Boyd?

Will: Arthur Boyd, it was all about him. He had a particular concern that after he died, and he was pretty old when I was down there, but walked around. He was more sprightly than me walking around that landscape. It was quite large. You’ve got the Shoalhaven River and all the rocks. He had names for all the rocks so he occupied that landscape in his head. And of course he was interested obviously in painting but he was interested in other things, the word as in poetry. So I thought about it a lot and I decided the best thing to do was to actually make some specific points within the landscape. Because the landscape in itself was beautiful, rather beautiful. Why would you want to adapt it? You just want to add a few more things to it, which have something to do with Boyd. And that’s what I did and he liked it. And he gave it to the nation and the nation didn’t want it for a while. And then I think it’s been fucked up by Philip Cox, would that be right?

Anton: Glen Murcutt is the architect there.

Will: Well you know you Australians, you get very parochial on these things, I know. Nothing against Glen and I’m glad it’s Glen rather than Mr. Cox.

Anton: It just struck me that that as an example was one where you in a way chose to not do, or to do in a particular way, and so much of landscape is about editing or not doing.

Will: Well, the point is that he wanted something doing, which is a response to his desire, so that he could actually say to the nation this is the sort of thing I want. Nothing was going to happen till he died. And I don’t know really what happened after that.

Anton: No. But just generally how would you formulate, how would you respond to some places? Is there a particular way? Is that in the paintings, in the drawings, or do you go for a long walk?
**Will**: Okay yes.

**Anton**: Yes to all of the above.

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**Will**: All of that. Well, we're just doing one now which is a landscape with some buildings in it, just outside Chongqing and phase one is 4000 mous [m²] and a mou is 666 square metres, the sign of the beast. It's very undulating. It's a sub-tropical climate, which is new for me. I spent quite a lot of time walking around it. It's very undulating. Until I get some new paths it's very difficult to walk around, for me. It's too hot. Last time I was there it was 45 degrees and humid. But you do it. And there's mosquitoes. Actually I'm all right with mosquitoes, they don't like me so that was okay. So I'm doing that. And it's supposed to be an art and agricultural park. So agriculture to keep the farmers going is a part of the project. We've been doing some research – we haven't got all that far with it - but the concept is there, that actually because there are very high bits where you can look down on some of the more agricultural parts you could then look at different things that are grown in different colours. So if we could try, as far as you can, is to actually always have an interesting mix of colours on some sort of patchwork there. Is it a patchwork, or is it something else? The theory I think is right. But I also feel quite difficult is that I'm imposing something on the farmers, as in you're going to grow flax because it looks beautiful, and is that right? I don't know. But it is China. Ah, you grow flax, yes?

Okay. No money for flax.

**Anton**: So you explore that through your paintings? Through drawings?

**Will**: I explore it through paintings and conversation. I think conversation in that particular case. I've done a lot of sketches and things because there are quite some long views as well as some very restricted views. You can arrive and you have to go over a bridge, a 150 metre long bridge to get to the – then you continue and you end up in a valley and this is more of a public part. How much you want to give away. So it's like playing with the whole experience. Because it will be a place for the Chinese. Because they don't have cars and they want to go somewhere but what they haven't learnt is that they can go, in this particular case it's about an hour and a quarter outside Chongqing which is 32 million people, and they can be in the countryside. And they can go for a walk and that's actually quite good for you and could be quite enjoyable. All that is to come. You don't have to tell an Australian or an English person that that's what you can do if you want to, because it's natural. You just do it. If you want to –

**Anton**: So it's quite a different priority on what landscape is, possibly, isn't it?
Will: In this case I mean there will be – commercial aspect in the park, it will be beautiful. It will be. And I want to contrast some of the smaller gardens, walled gardens which will have art within them done by artists, as opposed to me, which I think is right. So that there’s a whole series of different experiences there. A lot of places to sit and to appreciate the view. I will use some of Brown’s theories in terms of vistas and views, so it’s quite fun to think about how we construct this because you’ve got a bit over here, a bit over there and a huge valley here. So can you start a vista here that actually ends up in something there? Knowing that if you’re here, enjoying this rather solitary tree in a clearing that you will, if you go another route, you’ll end up at that tree. So there’s sort of disconnected elements I quite like. So it’s all about experience really.

Anton: So how do you – do you make models for that? Or do you draw, some mapping or planning?

Will: We have a huge model for that in Chongqing which is four metres by four metres, which is very useful because the topography is pretty baffling I find. Some bits you can’t walk down, or you can – you’d just die. But you can come down - there will be some entertainment in terms of music or poetry or drama in one particular part around the lake that we’ll create. And then you evacuate – oh and the other thing that I want to put in it which is in deference to David Green’s logplug, I want to put some logplugs in. So when you’re walking – to walk at a leisurely pace it would take you three to four hours to do this, if you spend a bit of time on things. And I think it’s quite important to have the odd logplug where you can actually get a cup of tea and I won’t say a piss but I think you’d just piss in the bushes, I mean that’s all right. And you can sit on the log and maybe listen to something that informs you about the landscape or the artist or whatever. That’s definitely deferential to Mr. Green who used to teach me, so I’m very happy with that. But there’s a Valley of Light, so it will be responsive light at the end of the thing. So it won’t work very well in June when the days are longer but of course it’s sub-tropical so the days are never that long unlike here. And that’s when you want to – so my tip for you when you go is you arrive about 3 o’clock in the afternoon. By the time you get around to that bit then it will be more or less dark and you get the full effect of changing lights and everything. So there’s a responsive element to the landscape as well. And it should always be varied and beautiful. And there’s a wonderful, quite a formal part in it which has a lotus pond rectilinear with a teahouse at the end. I think that’s proper, because it’s beautiful. Nice cup of tea, made properly, looking over the lotus and hey what fun. You can have lotus there. In England? Forget it, you can’t. So that variety of plants and things that they have – and they grow very quickly as well which is a bit like Singapore. You just shove a seed into the ground and –

Anton: So do you ever use film? Do you ever think about using film for conveying these – how you project that experience forward? Or mainly through painting? Because there’s an inadequacy of the plan and section and perspective, isn’t there? For conveying some of those qualities of landscape.
Will: Yeah, there is. I mean it’s one of the problems I think with all the young guys. They love to get on the computer, don’t they? Of course it has its uses and functions, and you can build a 3D model relatively quickly. But it wasn’t until we made the physical model from the digital model that you really begin to appreciate it, and that’s important for us. It’s also important for the client. Well you want to do something here, well look. You can see that that’s not possible, but we could do – so that informs you. Paintings, well that’s one which has faltered a bit over this particular project. I like – there’s the lake and there’s this changing sky. Usually the sun doesn’t shine in Chongqing. In the centre that’s right. No, it rains a lot actually. When the sun does shine it’s spectacular. I thought it would be quite nice to have one bit where you can always see the sun. There’s always a blue sky with clouds. Remind you of what you’re missing, like a hole in the sky. That would be good. So it’s by doing the paintings and thinking about these things - I also like the idea of the three dimensions, that I call fog. I don’t know what these hand things are. They could be plants. Actually they are growing very close to you, so you actually – there’s definite sort of screen or filtering of some of these views. Otherwise views become too obvious I think and not so –

Anton: Views are the provenance of the real estate agents these days.

Will: Is it? When I was driving here this morning— I don’t know how it is in Australia but it’s got to be similar. There are some very large developments, and I’m talking about billions, not millions but billions, which in the old days would have been done by the local authority and now it’s not. It’s all done by some large corporation of some sort or another. And these guys, and actually there’s this Martins estate which is where the new GLA building by Norman Foster is, so I know this very well. Kings Trust is another one, there’s another one in Salford. There’s one coming in there. There are quite a few of them around, naturally. So all the public space actually becomes private space. And if you go in – and this happened to me at the GLA building – and you want to take a photograph someone comes up and tells you can’t do that. And you say, well why not? It’s a security issue. Really? Why is it a security issue? I have no idea. But I do take exception to that, that all this space, and it’s actually our space,

Anton: Absolutely.

Will: And how we allowed society to get into that position – I understand local authorities who are squeezed of money have to do something through some other means but how have we allowed them to give so much power to these large organisations? Another example is the Olympic Park. The Olympic Park, I don’t know if you’ve been to it or not? It’s not the best time of year now but it actually is quite beautiful, quite beautiful. But if you want to go to it, and you go by car – the only time I went to it last week actually – but I wanted to take Sheila there shortly after the Olympics and she was on crutches, which would normally be okay. And we also wanted to go to the velodrome because there was some event going on there. You could only park in Westfield Shopping Centre carpark at enormous charge. And I found myself saying well a) we’re not quite where we want to be, it’s a long way on crutches, and I don’t want to pay that much to Westfield. Fuck you.

Anton: No, absolutely. And it is happening everywhere, I think.

Will: Yeah. And I think it’s time that the folks rose up against all this business. I have to make an exception with the Olympic Park. I think it is pretty good. Not all of it, but a lot of it is good. But what I see in other parks, or other new public spaces is all the same. Just a response. And it’s like when you furnish a new property you want to have – and everyone goes to Conran’s and buys variations of the same sofa, the same lights and the same everything. There’s nothing personal or individual about it. And yet as an architect, or landscape architect, if you propose something that would be something seen as being off the wall, even though it’s not off the wall, it’s quite sensible, then they mention well, it doesn’t look like what they did up there. And I think we’ve successfully created a society where we are denying the general public all sorts of wonderful things that could be given for no good reason, due to venture capitalist wank really.

Anton: It is. Risk averse, maintenance free.

Will: Yeah. Because they have to pay for the maintenance. I live here, I pay my taxes. I’m quite happy that we use some of that money to maintain it, sweep it up. Let’s put it on hold because I
need another cigarette. I’m just getting into my stride. What’s the time?

Anton: Okay.

Will: Well, I’ll just repeat that bit. Yeah, the whole point to — and it doesn’t matter what you do with using the computer, painting, drawing, looking, sketching, talking. These are just devices to try and loosen things up, see something that actually might really — it’s like you just know that is the right thing to do. It’s a proposition that comes out of working, not out of a book of theory.

Anton: No.

Will: That’s the point.

Anton: And it’s a dialogue often, isn’t it? It’s a dialogue with whatever you find, or what’s there, rather than a monologue and I think that’s something —

Will: Bit boring talking to yourself isn’t it?

Anton: But that’s something again seeing that little movie you just showed about the importance of the sociability of — for you and your work, there’s always a social aspect in everything.

Will: Well people are interesting. They’re mad. Ease them along a bit and it’s fine. Sometimes you have to rein them back a bit, that’s a bit risky. But it’s good, it’s good. It’s a good experience. And people — very often clients, they don’t want you to go through that process because they think there’s a danger in that that if you involve and talk to the locals too much, they might not like what you’re doing. It’s not my experience. That is not my experience. They would rather where you evolve the design, you talk to the planners, you talk to the politicians or to — and I mean is that really where — you’re doing something that’s quite interesting and the client says no, no. That’s far too risky. And I’m not talking about economically, that we won’t get planning permission. Yet we will. I think we will. So it just becomes boring.

Anton: Just on painting. Do you — the history of landscape painting. Is there a trajectory there in the way you choose to represent landscape in its broader sense, including architecture? Do you draw on anything there? Are there particular people that interest you, besides Bruce?

Will: Well, working with Bruce in the landscape of course, that’s something else. That’s not your question though. There are some landscape artists which I find have more effect on me now than used to, nobody used to take much notice of them. Because I think it’s really hard to do a good
landscape, to get to the essence of what it is. And then I mean the obvious ones like Turner's seascapes, he's just making it up at speed. But it was great, really good, of course. But I think painting, I don't really use painting in the way that I used to anymore. Sometimes they are representations of something that it could be. But you know I've done that big rock, I don't know if that's finished or not. I quite like a big rock. I don't know what it means.

Anton: Because I do notice you've started to introduce pot plants and some things that are a bit more - are they sort of short hand for landscape in a way? Or short hand for the external environment?

Will: It's likely because pot plants are usually not far from you. I think it creates some sort of distance into the painting. I mean in painting - you can see on that painting there, to the right of the rock there's a hint of some buildings, and I quite like that.

Will: I'll probably do the whole thing white again and you'll have even less of those buildings, and just a bit of the rock and then you build up over there. It's more to do with painting than anything else, actually. But it is to do with painting, but also to do with your architecture. It's the same process. You just obscure what you've already thought about.

Anton: It strikes me it comes back to that dialogue, like Jasper Johns said that about doing one thing and then you do something else and then you do something else, and then you do something else. You're always responding to what's happening rather than having a grand plan.

Will: That's right. It begs the question about content in the work. I've never been very interested in content, really. But I suppose that places me in art history because there are lots of others today, aren't there, whose work today is full of content. So much I can't read it. And then I object to that, that I've got to I'm supposed to read it and you don't have the tools to read it.

Anton: Yes.

Will: Well I suppose classical painting was like that. What was that thing? And you see them in National Gallery, where you have a beautiful woman with its hanging out and the hands are on backwards. And there's a very bad woman. That's all I can remember. But if no one told you that, you'd think oh they've got the hands the wrong way around. There is something about it and when art historians and art critics tell you things it's interesting. And of course with historians some of it's true. That's what that represents, okay. Critics, you don't believe a critic, in itself really. I was interviewing Robert Maxwell - not the tycoon because he's dead - the architect. I like him very much, last Wednesday in fact at the London School of Architecture. I wanted to invite somebody that was old that could talk about their early life. It just opens up first hand some of the history to current students, which I think is always good. He's just written a biography so it was all quite fresh in his mind, actually. I didn't know he'd just written a biography. I must read it. But what I really like I was thinking these names probably don't mean anything to you but he's very friendly and very sporty with a man called Alan Colquhoun and after about 30 minutes I said you haven't mentioned Alan. Oh yes, I haven't mentioned him. Yeah, he was very boring. It made me laugh. In a way you tend to forget these people who are quite forces. Bob Maxwell, he was Dean of Princeton for about 11 years. He built a few things; then he went more into academic life, as such, a man of words. Well he became. He gave me a copy of the book and I was telling Sheila about it. She was saying, how old is he? I said I don't really know. But I mean it's perfectly true And that used to be true. When I had Roland Paoletti who was the chief architect at the Jubilee line extension, the station, come on the scene - I liked him but he could be a difficult man. The meeting was going difficult - tell me about the time you were a student in Venice and Le Corbusier came to present these plans for the hospital? He didn't need much pushing. He tells the story really well, it is very instructive. I still feel now that I was actually one of those students because of the way he told the story. And then he went on to work for Pierre Luigi Nervi, an engineer in Rome. But equally great stories about that, so then –

Anton: The culture's important.

Will: I think it is. My great chum, Ryan Aohaguard he's written a lot of books and most of them are crap, I think. One good book I really liked which is called the -- well, I don't know what it was called
but it was dealing with 1946 to about 1963 and all the artists in the UK. And I think they've had pretty bad press, a lot of those guys. The artists and actually they're very serious artists and there's some very beautiful things that they did. And I'm happy just to indulge myself in the summer of '57 or whatever. It has a — but they had great commitment. There was an idea, an idea about making life better, which is all that matters really. And they could do that, and there was money, and there was a lot of repairs from the war of course. A lot of things to do. And I sometimes think that a lot of the younger guys today, they don't know what to do so all they can do is learn how to use Revit and go and work for somebody.

Anton: I think that's right, the question of why it's being done and you think in landscape as well, why do you need to change it? Why are we doing these things? It's an important question.

Will: And always will be a question of course, really. You're sounding a bit old. Somewhere in there, and I do have a belief there is some interesting things to do and I hope that I'm doing them, but I'm not making any theories about it because we're in post-theory aren't we? I hope.

Anton: But I think what you're saying about wanting to make things better and make things delightful and surprising already shows a reverence for something that's found. I think that's the point.

Will: That's all you can do. I done one or two buildings, people really liked them and they responded very well, and that gives me the confidence to know that I can do that, given half a chance.

Will: I'm going to throw you out now.

Anton: Good, thank you Will.

Will: Thank you for coming.

Anton: It's very good. Nice to see you.

Will: It's lovely to see you.
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0 Likes