

Bontei Tray Gardens

Marc Peter Keane



In a garden there is a stillness or a motion

A sense of time or one of timelessness

a certain color, texture.... a balance of parts.

These are the things I try to capture in my bontei



Bontei Tray Gardens 盆庭

I am an artist and garden designer who works in the Japanese tradition. Now based in Ithaca, NY, I lived in Kyoto, Japan, for nearly twenty years designing gardens for private individuals, companies and Buddhist temples. My recent work includes a series of modern, sculptural tray gardens that evoke aspects of Japanese gardens – some physical and some philosophical. I call these tray gardens Bontei (盆庭) an old word — not in most dictionaries — that I resurrected because it suits these new, modern tray gardens perfectly.

The design of my tray gardens derives from that of Japanese gardens, especially the arrangements of sand and stones known as karesansui, and from the tea gardens, called roji. The overall balance, for instance, often incorporates “empty” space and points of punctuation found in karesansui. This emptiness is called “ma” in Japanese and can refer to the undeveloped space in a garden, the unpainted portion of an ink landscape painting or a silent period in music. The aesthetic of bontei, their colors, patterns and textures, is that of common materials used in a refined way. Stones, rusted metal, wood-fired ceramics. In Japan, this would be called the wabi aesthetic, which is most closely associated with the tea ceremony. As a counterpoint to the rusticity of the wabi elements, I introduce elements that are precise and highly controlled. This interplay between opposites is also a common theme in the aesthetics of the tea ceremony in which the element of control is called “shin” and that of wildness is called “sô.”



By the Riverside

In the collection of the Johnson Museum of Art

river stones, rusted iron & wood-fired ceramic, with pegged cherry tray, 35" diameter



Still Point 1

Private collection San Francisco

river stones with black walnut tray, 38" x 24"



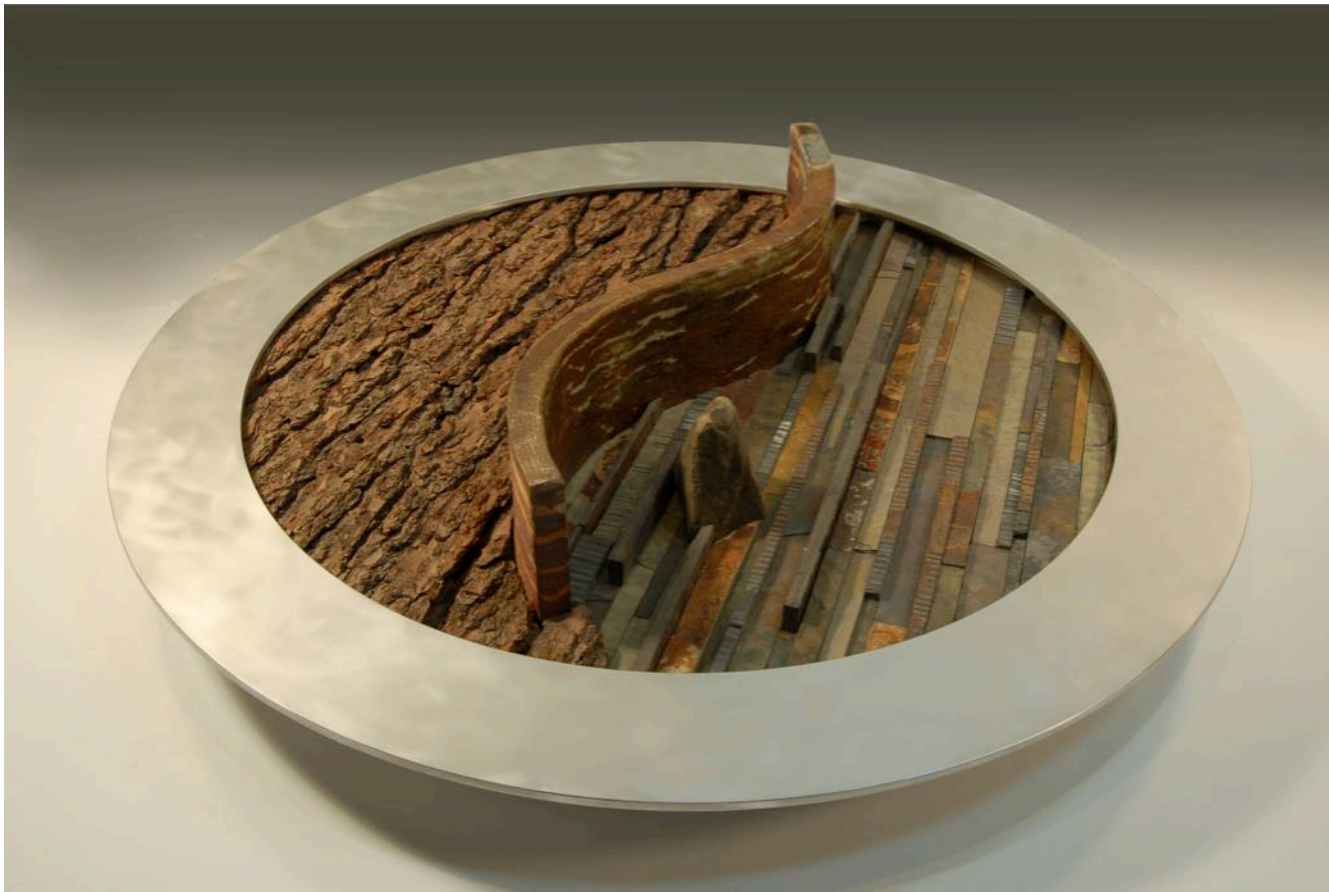
Still Point 2
Private collection, Ohio

river stones, red oak grooved tray, 38" x 25"



Where Forest Meets Field

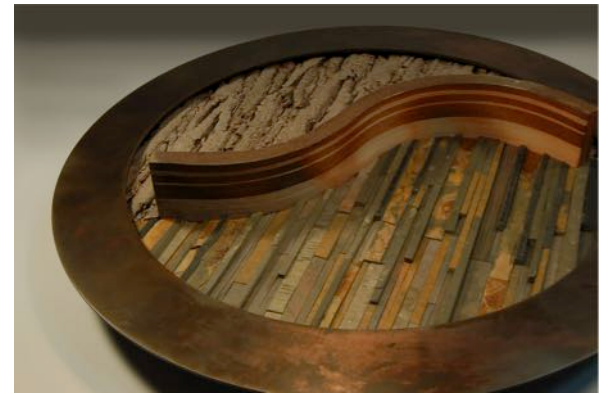
hemlock bark, weathered & burnt pine slivers, wood-fired ceramic, black walnut/maple tray, 30" diameter



The Ploughman's Dream (aluminum)

Edwin O. Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies, Harvard University

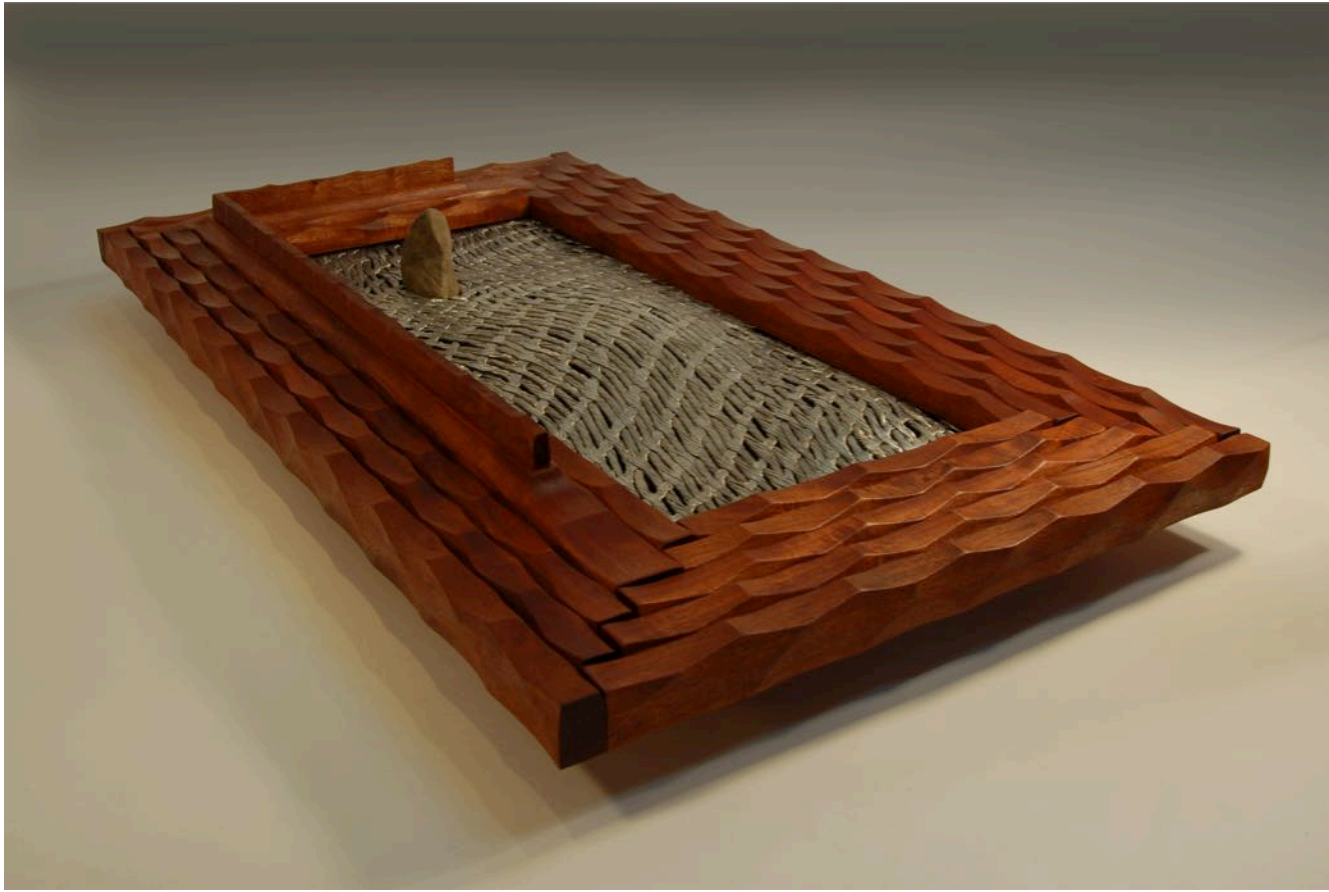
slate, river stone, hemlock bark, wood-fired ceramic, brushed aluminum tray, 36" diameter



The Ploughman's Dream (steel)

Edwin O. Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies, Harvard University

slate, river stone, aspen bark, wood-fired ceramic, patinated steel tray, 36" diameter



A Stillness in the Stream

Portland Japanese Garden, Portland OR

river stone and woven aluminum wire, carved mahogany, 37" x 21"



Blue Mountains Walking

Private collection , Boston

wood-fired ceramic, flamed glass, weathered barnyard tray, 37" x 10"

about the designer

Marc Peter Keane is an internationally recognized landscape architect, author and educator. Having lived and worked in Japan for nearly 20 years, his designs are deeply influenced by the culture of East Asia. Over the past three decades, he has worked on projects in Japan, the United States, and the Middle East.

Keane has published 8 books, mainly on aspects of Japanese gardens: their history, design and aesthetics. These include *Japanese Garden Design* (1996) an introduction to the history and design of Japanese gardens; *Sakuteiki* (2001) a translation of Japan's thousand-year-old gardening treatise; and, *The Art of Setting Stones* (2002) essays for the philosophical gardener, or the gardening philosopher.

Keane has taught landscape architecture at The Kyoto University of Art and Design, and at Cornell University, and is presently a visiting fellow at those two institutions as well as at Columbia University.

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