

THIES SCHRÖDER

CHANGES
IN SCENERY

CONTEMPORARY
LANDSCAPE
ARCHITECTURE
IN EUROPE

BIRKHÄUSER

PUT NOT YOUR TRUST IN NAÏVE GARDENS!

“Landscape architects usually have a marginal part to play.” Michel Desvigne likes to make this his opening remark. The Frenchman, who prefers to do his experimental work on a small scale, and his office partner Christine Dalnokoy want to change this. They may not want to change landscape architecture as a whole, but Desvigne & Dalnokoy do want at least to have some influence on design developments in the environment – and they want to do this with new creative ideas and approaches on a large scale. A conflict of aims?

This has been the assumption for the last thirty years. For this reason, the handling of landscape started to be professionalized by a process of specialist differentiation. Protecting the landscape was seen as a counterpart to designing it, cultivation was separated from garden design and from environmental management, and landscape architecture was temporarily forced to take a back seat to social and ecological goals. The assumed opposites were dogmatically defended in order to take up a position, instead of sharpening outlines within a process of looking for consensus. Desvigne and Dalnokoy want to make artistic and joyful use at least of the marginal influence of landscape architecture on changes in the landscape – their landscape architecture functions as a catalyst, indicator and seed for new developments.



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Rue de Meaux, Paris, France: courtyard for a residential building designed by Renzo Piano.



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“We believe that a garden does not have a spirit until a piece of landscape crystallizes within it, along with all necessary rigour.”

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Little money was available for the design. The bolted birches are rejects from a tree nursery, set in square beds with honeysuckle as ground-cover.





1. LE PAYSAGE EXISTANT.

La spatialité de ce site est une donnée spécifique, et plus elle est connue, plus elle est précieuse. C'est pourquoi elle est prise en compte dans la planification du territoire agricole, et plus particulièrement dans l'élaboration du plan agricole.



2. LE TERRITOIRE DU CHANTIER.

Les modalités de réalisation de ce chantier de planification agricole sont définies par les principes de planification du territoire agricole. Elles sont définies par les principes de planification du territoire agricole, et plus particulièrement dans l'élaboration du plan agricole.



3. LES METAMORPHOSES DU PAYSAGE.

Les transformations du territoire agricole sont définies par les principes de planification agricole. Elles sont définies par les principes de planification du territoire agricole, et plus particulièrement dans l'élaboration du plan agricole.



4. LE REPLI PROGRESSIF DU CHANTIER.

Le repli progressif du chantier est défini par les principes de planification agricole. Il est défini par les principes de planification du territoire agricole, et plus particulièrement dans l'élaboration du plan agricole.



5. LE PAYSAGE DU VIGNON.

Le paysage du vignon est défini par les principes de planification agricole. Il est défini par les principes de planification du territoire agricole, et plus particulièrement dans l'élaboration du plan agricole.



Ce paysage de vignon, en continuité avec les sites des plans agricoles, est défini par les principes de planification agricole, et plus particulièrement dans l'élaboration du plan agricole.



Les principes de planification agricole sont définis par les principes de planification du territoire agricole, et plus particulièrement dans l'élaboration du plan agricole.



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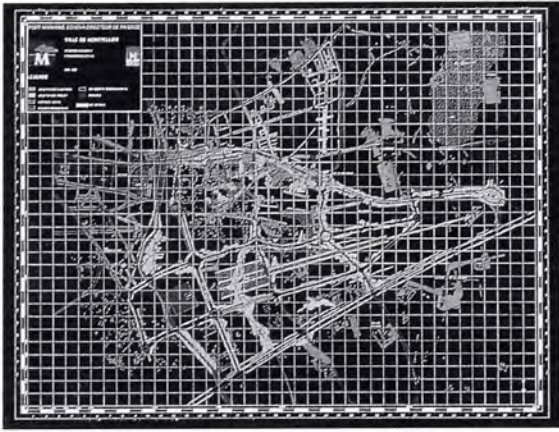
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Desvigne and Dalnoky's work as landscape architects is scarcely open to classification, the spectrum being as broad as it possibly could be. It includes studies for the routes and stations of the French TGV express trains, and also the birch grove in a little inner courtyard in the Rue de Meaux in Paris. This landscape garden in the middle of a residential development, designed in 1989 and completed by 1992, is to some extent the point at which Desvigne and Dalnoky's working planes intersect, indicating not an intermediate scale, but probably an intellectual and aesthetic connection of gardens and landscapes. By contrast, the classification of their work as "garden" or "landscape" that the two of them formulated in 1994 for the magazine *Topos* was largely coquettish: "We alternate between designing large landscapes or small parcels according to the commissions that come into the office." However, the relationship between their working planes is by no means restricted to the chances of the work situation. Linking the landscape element, which was increasingly equated with structure and function in the course of time, and the tranquil, locally restricted garden admittedly has always had a tactical significance for Desvigne and Dalnoky, but it also means something in terms of content and system. "To be recognized, our creative ability has to be expressed in the gardens, these highly regarded prototypes of landscape." And for their development as landscape architects this implies: designing gardens as a marketing offensive as well as a five-finger exercise in preparation for designing landscapes. And what about the development of

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Competition entry for the Viaduc du Millau, France: interventions made while a motorway bridge was being built are organized in time-and-space-patterns along the existing landscape structures. Sets of scaffolding are placed as belvederes. When the construction work was finished the landscape seemed to have been

tidied up, rejuvenated, while the spatial structure remained the same.

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Jardin Caille, Lyon, France: this urban square in a residential area is organized in parallel bands made up of paths, planted areas, play strips, benches and lighting elements.



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the garden? “We believe that the garden has no real spirit of its own until a piece of landscape crystallized within it, in all austerity.” Tall birches as a green feature in the courtyard, for example. Planted like a little wood, they have straight-edged paths running between them with an avenue effect given by low lamps. Since then this birch motif has been repeated by many colleagues in many contexts.

“Now and again we come up with designs that fit in with our dream of a garden, because the image of an open landscape is expressed in them.” This almost apologetic explanation is based on a paradox that they have perceived themselves: Desvigne and Dalnoky, who are so sceptical about gardens, discovered their specific interest in landscape in a garden. Both partners made drawings in the mysterious Renaissance garden of Bomarzo in Italy during their training in landscape architecture. They later returned to it as Villa Medici scholarship-holders, before founding their joint office in Paris in 1988. “It was while drawing in this garden that we decided to become landscape architects, in an architectural place in the midst of the Italian scenery. It was there we realized that gardens can be an artistic discipline of its own.”

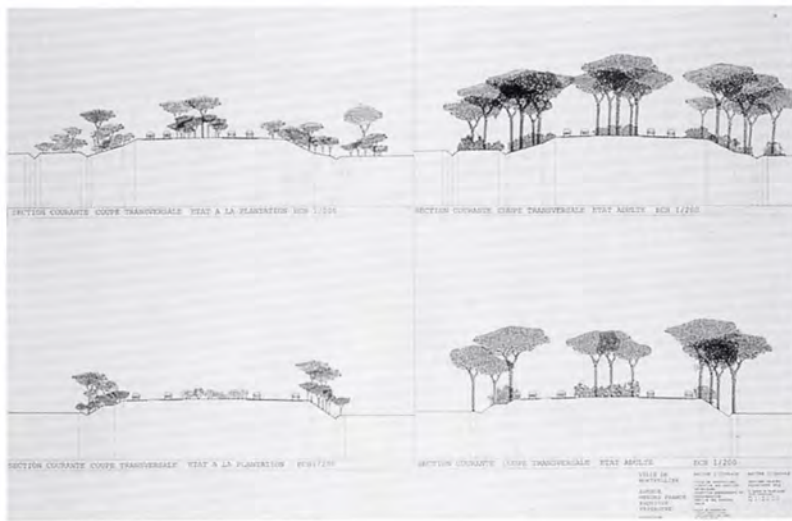
But gardens can be deceptive as well. For this reason Desvigne and Dalnoky have declared that the garden theme is taboo in current landscape architecture so long as gardens are merely equated with sweetness, charm, leisure and other atmospheric window-dressing. The garden stands for a deceitful aestheticization of the surroundings, a decorative snare, and a delusion. “Naïveté and an insufficiently critical approach are common in numerous publications about gardens – far more critical attitudes are taken to any other subject. But this banal discussion brings the modest and

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Landscape design concept for Montpellier, France: starting with a design competition for the eastern access area to the town, the landscape architects were able to persuade the authorities to develop uniform design principles for the town as a whole.

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Parc du Lez in Montpellier. The general guidelines continue into the town centre. The “key tree”, the pine, is also used in a municipal park.



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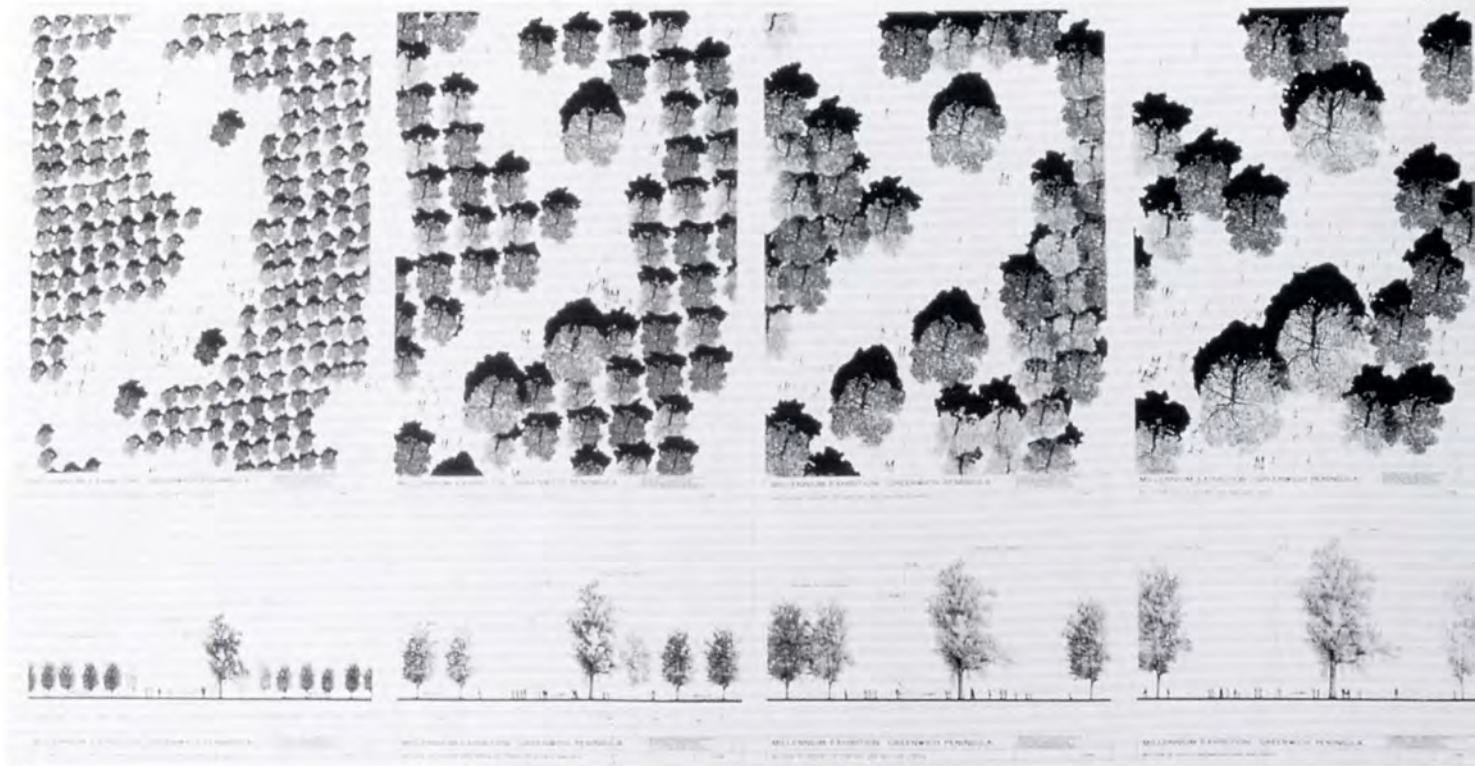
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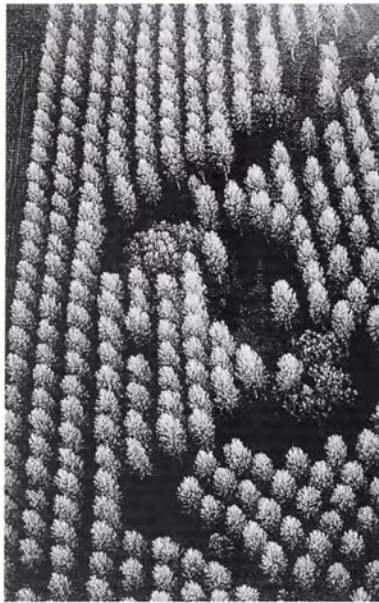
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"A landscape that lasts two minutes." Montpellier's eastern access area has a striking backdrop of pine trees. The change of perspective gives a sense of travelling through the landscape.



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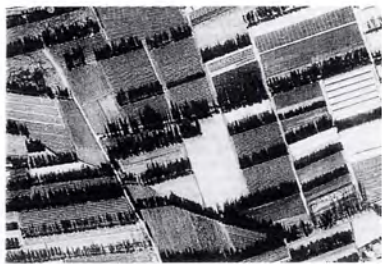
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Greenwich Peninsula, London, Great Britain. The design concept for the site of the "Millennium Dome" and the "Millennium Exhibition" is based on planting large areas with trees.



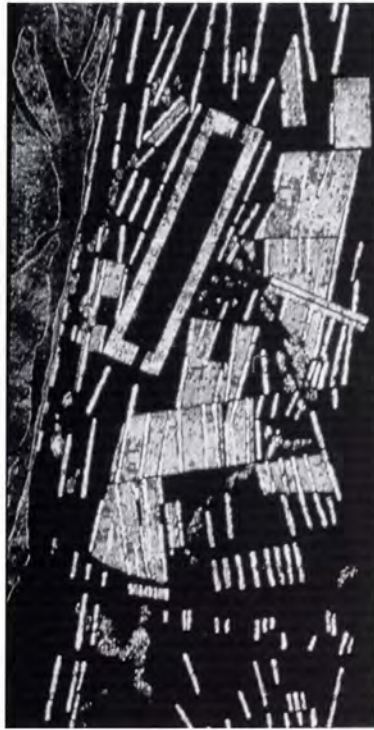
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The design radicalizes the idea of "tabula rasa". The interaction of sequence, cultivation and intervention from construction is generating a new landscape.

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The peninsula was contaminated waste land until recently, and the topsoil had to be removed and cleaned. There was no possibility of relying on existing structures or historical strata.



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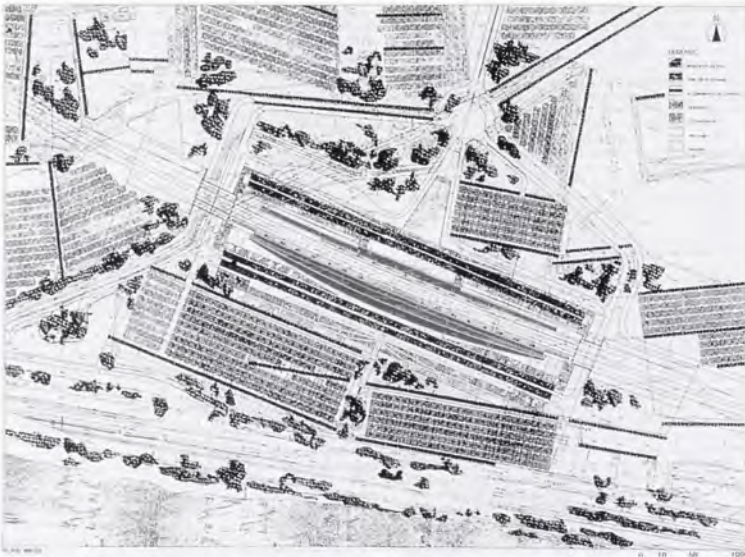
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serious efforts that we make as landscape architects into disrepute. Once landscape architects had regained respect through their commitment in the field of landscape planning, it now seems as though the newly acquired knowledge and experiences of the past few decades have been swept away in a trice by the reactionary tendency to shift the garden as a prettified object back into the centre of interest. This is certainly comparable with the architects' cult of creating buildings that look like brooches, or the designers' cult of designing bodywork for cars in the form of aerodynamic equipment. None of this should be trusted."

Here distrust of the garden leads to enthusiasm for the landscaping experiment. This approach is based on a second paradox: "The European landscape has changed more in the past thirty years than in all the preceding period." Nothing new in this, as Michel Desvigne stresses. But he is disturbed by the part that landscape architects are playing in view of these increasingly fundamental changes. "Of course it is legitimate for European landscape architects faced with the scale of change in the landscape to dream of being involved in these processes. It is equally justifiable to claim an important social role for landscape architecture on the basis of these changes. But paradoxically this is not the case, this role does not exist." Desvigne and Dalnoky have put the marginal

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TGV Méditerranée, France: project to tie three stations on the high-speed TGV railway line into the landscape. Detail of the landscape prior to the project.

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Structures like wind-protection plantations, fruit groves and avenues are used as the "original" that is quoted in the landscape design along the TGV line.



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role of landscape architecture into figures: every French landscape architect works on an area per year corresponding to an eightieth of the land changed by forest fires, or a thousandth of the area that becomes urbanized. Working on these figures, it would take 2700 years merely to redesign the landscape of all the agricultural land that has currently been set aside. This significant game with numbers has a fundamental effect on conceptual attitudes. “In no case do our interventions have global significance or even a healing role. We neither define nor control the future of the landscape.” It is essential to take note of this lack of meaning in order to find a productive approach to landscape architecture. “In some ways we are like a house-painter who has only one bucket of paint to cover a ten storey building. Under such circumstances it would be hopeless and wrong to try to paint the whole building. So the single bucket of paint has to be used for something else.”

Desvigne and Dalnoky think that they have found a better use for the bucket of paint. Marginal interventions in particular should seem like works of art. People learn to look at their landscapes and the way in which they have developed in a new way. If you can’t change the appearance of the landscape in a major way, you can at least influence the way in which people look at it. A marginal approach in terms of landscape and pleasure – this is the way the two of them define their work. “Changing a landscape is an enormous pleasure for a landscape architect.” For this reason, things can definitely not be solved by falling back into a defensive position after identifying marginal significance. And yet this happens quite frequently. This reaction to changing the landscape is a “protective” reflex; action of any kind seems suspect to some landscape architects, and preservation becomes the central point of their argument.

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Design for the Avignon TGV station.

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Model of the Arignon TGV station.



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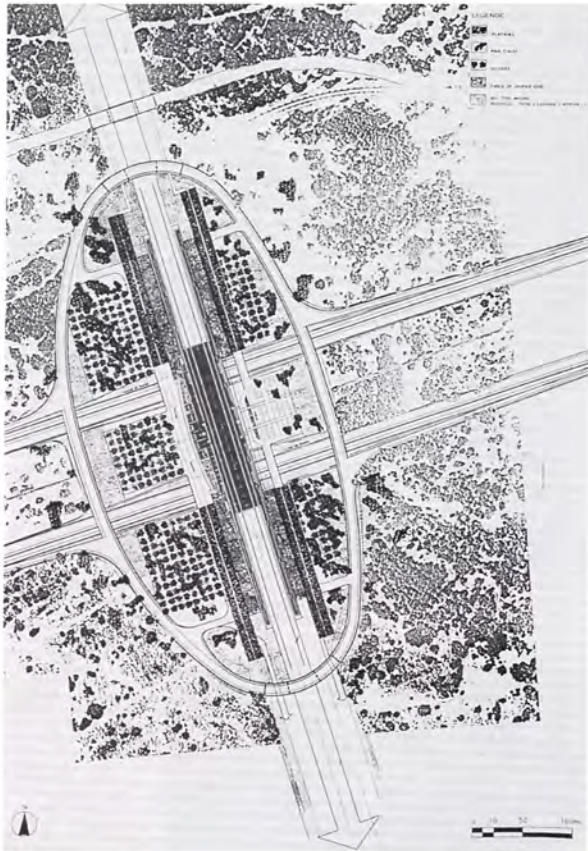
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Plateau d'Arbois TGV station, Marseille:
planned route for the track.
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Fitting the TGV station into the land-
scape.



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Desvigne and Dalnoky approach things differently: “We play with our landscapes and thus make forms that have to be created specially, and that are usually not taken seriously, meaningful and beautiful.” They take the cue for their landscape-changing games from the present, the “century of communication”. As knowledge about the nature that surrounds us is becoming more complex and at the same time more accessible, they feel that there is an incredible discrepancy between this contemporary knowledge and the survival of stereotypical images of gardens and landscape. It is both necessary and possible to detach ourselves from the traditional image, from the self-referential archetypes of landscape that have existed since the nineteenth century, in which the land is always hilly, water is always falling, nature is always intertwined. The vacuum between these old-fashioned images of landscape and strict formalism is what drives Desvigne and Dalnoky to produce new work.

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*Fitting the TGV station into the patterns
 of the surrounding vegetation.*

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Patterns of the surroundings.

“We do not want to imitate nature.” The fascination of landscape does not lie in imitating forms, but in having insight into their development. The beauty of landscape is mathematical by nature, linked with thermodynamic processes and scientific laws. Thus merely reproducing forms is a backwards step in the face of insight, creating a dead piece of landscape, deprived of development.

Instead of this, Desvigne and Dalnoky influence developments by trying to avoid the trap of the complete landscape image. They achieve great effects with supposedly small interventions, appropriate to the landscape architecture of the future.

CHRISTINE DALNOKY and MICHEL DESVIGNE founded the DESVIGNE & DALNOKY practice in Paris in 1988.

Christine Dalnoky studied architecture at the Ecole nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris and landscape architecture at the Ecole nationale du Paysage in Versailles. Michel Desvigne first studied botany and geology at the Faculté des Sciences in Lyon, before studying for a landscape architecture diploma in Versailles. This was followed by a phase of working with Michel Corajoud and Alexandre Chemetoff. A prize from the Académie de France in Rome took Dalnoky and Desvigne to the Villa Medici as scholarship-winners in 1986–87. After founding their joint practice, projects were realized in Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Spain, South Korea, Switzerland and the USA. Their best-known projects are the Millennium Park in Greenwich in co-operation with Richard Rogers, landscape design for three stations for TGV Méditerranée and open spaces for the Middelheim Sculpture Museum in Antwerp, Belgium. Desvigne and Dalnoky work regularly with the architects Richard Rogers and Norman Foster.

Michel Desvigne has been a visiting professor in Lausanne, Geneva and most recently at Harvard. In 2000 he was invited as a visiting professor at the Architectural Association in London. Christine Dalnoky was visiting professor in Geneva in 1994–95 and since 1999. Both were invited as visiting professors at the Academia de Architectura in Mendrisio, Switzerland.

Desvigne and Dalnoky received the “2000 Award” of the French Academy of Architecture.