

James DeTuerk Drawings and Illustrations

based on

Sidónio Pardal Ideas and Landscapes

The gift of interpreting and expressing the landscape through image is sublime in the work of Master James DeTuerk.

I was fortunate to have him as a friend and colleague, always attentive to the conceptual process, with a rare sensitivity to achieve the absolute in the art of drawing and illustrating the ideas and landscapes that flowed from his pencil.

I met Professor James DeTuerk in 1973 at Penn State University, where he taught the subject of DRAWING in the Landscape Architecture course, and I immediately realized that I was in the presence of a wise man in the way of seeing, reading and representing the landscape.

In 1978, at the invitation of the University of Lisbon and with the support of the Fulbright Foundation, DeTuerk, along with Lynn Miller (History of Landscape Architecture) and Professor Ray Master (Informatics Applied to Project Design and Territorial Planning), spent three months in Portugal with the mission of providing information and didactic documentation on the Landscape Architecture course program taught at Penn State University, where they were professors. Since then, we have maintained a close professional relationship, and I have had my projects, works, and simple ideas interpreted through the remarkable illustrations of James DeTuerk. It is from this rich collection of artworks that I recount in this text, expressing my admiration and gratitude to my friend and colleague.

Generously, over the course of about 40 years, DeTuerk regularly traveled to Lisbon to sit at the drawing board with me and patiently interpret the landscape design of my projects, observing sketches of ideas and images of the completed work to make simple graphic notes and more elaborate illustrations. This resulted in hundreds of works that showcase the talent of this distinguished Master and constitute a rare and valuable collection and source of inspiration for Landscape Architects.

The act of designing the landscape as a mosaic of sites, of panoramic compositions, is a work of pre-vision.

Interpretive illustration, as an act of constructing memories, contains within itself a critical discourse on the landscape object.



James DeTuerk Illustration – April 2011

DeTuerk's work has aesthetic qualities that stand out for the visionary and imagistic dimension with which he works with ideas and for the representation of reality in drawings possessed of a poetics that goes beyond simple illustration, assuming the aesthetic dimension of pictorial expression. The illustration of the landscape, as we can dream and envision it, offers security and comfort to the conceptual process, creating correspondences that allow us to evaluate its expression in terms of scale, composition, and emotion.

We are faced with a work directly related to territorial reality. DeTuerk's sketches and illustrations, in the intuitive reading of the eye, refer to elements and fragments of the architected space. It is not raw nature, but architected nature, and its "images" drawn by the Master go beyond what they represent of the world and take us to the pure domain of the imaginary, imposing themselves as a reference of absolute aesthetic values.

The complete drawings have part of their content written, traced on paper, and another part is in an impressive subtext, in an assertive presence of what is obviously there. This consubstantiality of what is shown and what is

implied because it is implicit in the essence of the image, introduces a unique aesthetic dimension to DeTuerk's work.



Sidónio Pardal and James DeTuerk in Lisbon 1995

The decomposition of language into scenic fields, into places and objects—be it a tree, a dam, a bridge, a lodge, a large window, or a simple stone offered to those who wish to sit and rest—forms a fundamental architectural lexicon for creative imagination in the act of designing the landscape.

DeTuerk likes to draw on white paper with a relatively soft charcoal pencil, with an eraser embedded in the pencil itself, a small metal stencil, and that's all. He rarely uses color. I believe I only saw him use it on request, to give a bluish tone to the water, but I recognize that it wasn't necessary.

The virtuosity of graphic expression in DeTuerk's work is evident at first glance and causes astonishment and emotion. The drawn work presents itself as a significant subject that allows itself to be seen and learned, and therefore, it is not a means of communicating, but of being and materializing as an object of art. The drawing, the illustration, contains everything within itself without representing anything beyond what it is.

The imagery aroused by contemplation lends itself to helping predict and evaluate the emotion of being in a constructed reality by exploring correspondences with the image, but the opposite is also true, which consists of the illustration being made not based on ideas, but capturing impressions of pre-existing landscape sections and elements.

The magic of drawing lies in the implicit cultural content that spontaneously reveals itself in the observer's mind. Illustration is materialized memory.



James Detuerk .- Grady Clay – Sidónio Pardal and Lyn Miller - Penn State University 1979

From simple sketches to elaborate illustrations, Detuerk has the talent to master the language of drawing as a work of art. More than expressing ideas, he clarifies details, presents and explains architectural compositions through images. What Detuerk gives us is the gesture of thinking and daring to create in order to remake the world.

The continued practice of expression through drawing, supported by the interpretative observation of the form and meaning of things, is inseparable from research on the patterns of landscape architecture language used to give meaning to the organization of the territory.

It is evident that professionals and scholars of architecture need the visual syntax of drawing to develop ideas and express them.

There is an Art of Image, resolved and shown in Detuerk's work, worthy of study on its effects of meaning in the cultural process that assists in planning, designing and building landscapes that, more than being visual culture, evokes the need for comfort in being in the world.

However significant the illustrated image may be in the landscape design process, it is required to assert itself as a drawing in its full authenticity as a work of art.

If there is a correspondence between the merit of the illustration and the architectural quality of the object that the illustrated image represents, all the better, but they are always distinct works.

The visualization of the drawings has no subliminal messages, nor any intentional message other than the emotional sense of the image itself and, at most, what it represents as landscape imagery if the illustration has a scenic dimension.

Anyone, regardless of their literacy, fully grasps the meaning of James DeTuerk's drawings; there is an obvious correspondence in them with the purest imaginary reality that, unconsciously, we would like to have guaranteed as a place to be and live.



JRD

James DeTuerk Illustration – April 2011

For landscape architecture, DeTuerk's work is a functional test, a trial, to prove the legibility of the idea.

The illustration shows the ensemble and the effects of form and scale of the elements in the morphological composition of the landscape, and evokes absolute emotional readings and meanings in the assertion that they are common to all ordinary people as observers. I say ordinary people to exclude any indoctrinated alignments that have preconceived approaches that repress the spontaneity of the relationship with the observed object, even if this object is understood and valued with support in critical theory.

DeTuerk masters the art of landscape design and the way of seeing and learning about it.

There is no reciprocal relationship between the illustration and the observer, but in the act of designing the landscape, the pre-vision of the user's reading and emotions regarding the landscape being idealized is explored, and this assumption influences the project, resulting in an almost reciprocal relationship based on the observation of the illustrated images.

The possibilities of comparison between the feeling towards the image produced by illustration and the image of the "corresponding" real landscape refer to the debatable General Theory of the Image in the psychological aspect of perceptions, the production of ideas in the conceptual process of architecture and analysis, and its practical result.

The act of drawing the essential elements of the landscape in a project follows a logic distinct from that which structures the illustrated image of ideas of that same project.

DeTuerk's illustrations and other drawings, in the case of landscape architecture, are absolutely dedicated to the aesthetic expression of the drawn image that is shown on paper and that transports the observer to the imaginary world that this image awakens.

But the usefulness of these illustrations in the black box of the creative process that takes place in the act of designing and constructing landscapes is invaluable. The same is true in the act of planning and composing territorial spaces in general, where the perception and representation of the objects that define the spaces and their meanings are crucial.

In DeTuerk's drawings, the mode of production works essentially with the line, rarely resorting to shading to define the compositional elements.

The relationship between the elements, having a "programmatic" basis that corresponds to the idea to be represented, is released and operates a selective and refining exercise in which the drawing is limited to the essential, focused on meaning, without giving space to interpretations, and thus the image imposes itself as a work of art.

The challenge I shared with DeTuerk consisted of bringing to the landscape of urban parks elements, compositions, and structures from the imaginary concept of a substantive and pristine Nature, never wild, but "natural," that is, let's face it, unadorned, but with everything we desire from a welcoming, safe, and providential environment. This almost paradoxical minimalism is masterfully resolved and illustrated by DeTuerk. The trees, the meadows, the ancient paths, the water in its places, the gentle hills, the expressive stones shaped by the scope of time, and everything designed to position itself at the forefront of the aesthetics of urban park architecture as we should dare to do it today.

In this challenge, the insights of the History of Urban Parks were crucial, knowledge that was transmitted to us in wise lessons, with guided and densely documented visits, given by our friend Professor Lynn Miller. More than just providing accurate and serious historical information, Lynn offered unique landscape interpretations and critiques of the comparative aesthetics of the works of the great masters.

There are hundreds of sketches and illustrations that James DeTuerk patiently and generously drew, with a stroke of genius, based on loose ideas I sketched and sections of landscapes from the parks I designed.

I conclude by expressing my admiration and gratitude to my friend for the pleasure and privilege of so many precious years of working together.

Lisbon, March 15, 2026

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sidónio Parda', with a stylized, flowing script.

Sidónio Parda