

Katrina Grant

Gardens and the Theatresque

William Kent and Filippo Juvarra



The artist William Kent wrote to his patron Burrell Massingberd in 1720 that “I keep my little room only twice a week (then) I go to the operas where I am highly entertained and then think my self out of this Gothick country.” His comment reflects a certain dissatisfaction with England after his long stay in Italy between the years 1709 and 1719, during which time he often wrote of his intention to introduce ‘ye Italian gusto’ to the arts of his birthplace. This paper argues that the garden style Kent initiated in England in the 1720s and 1730s was influenced by the set designs of Italian opera, specifically those of the architect Filippo Juvarra. Many of Kent’s ideas for garden structures and design in general can be visually traced to set designs by Filippo Juvarra. This theatrical influence should in turn lead us to revise our reading of Kent’s gardens not as picturesque spaces, but as theatresque spaces.

Monday 11 September 6.45 pm
Room 148 Elisabeth Murdoch Building
All Welcome