The dynamic collaboration between 2015 Kranzberg Series artists Ashley McQueen and Zlatko Ćosić reflects the hybrid nature of Laumeier Sculpture Park. Both artists use the performative nature of their professions—dance and video—and cross-pollinate them with the unique spaces of our grand landscape. While the “high” art forms of dance and video live within their respective traditions, it is McQueen and Ćosić’s focus on the honorable labor that comes into maintaining the public spaces of Laumeier that makes this project transformational.

McQueen and Ćosić worked with St. Louis County Parks staff members Andrew Brown, Sharon Brown, John Corcoran, Pat Cotter, Gabe Cotton, Richard Edwards, Don Garling, Josh Garling, Tom Griffen, Yvette Lueldell, Dave Miller, Bob Moritz, Rich Neal, Dan Sachsenheimer, Tom Schweiss, Bud Spindler, Jason White and AJ Brown, along with Laumeier’s Curator of Exhibitions Dana Turovick and former Chief Preparator Nick Lang, to celebrate the beautiful dance of landscape equipment—mowers, edges, clippers and mowers—that shape our manicured landscape. St. Louis County Parks staff diligently tame and shape our grounds in the way that humans have managed their landscape for thousands of years, using ingenuity and invention to produce food and flowers that sustain life.

McQueen and Ćosić’s work asks: What does this weekly dance of Laumeier’s lawn mowers mean in making public space?

Laumeier’s landscape is part of the “filling in” of the western suburban sprawl of America’s cities. Interstate highways facilitated the abandonment of city cores in the 1950s and 1960s for the newer spaces of suburbia. Today, we are faced with the social and cultural isolation of these very same suburbs. Most Americans maintain their lawns as moats to protect them from their neighbors. Housing is no longer as affordable as promised and transportation to the few substubs is restricted to those with cars, leaving an ever-widening gap between city and suburb. With the recent events in Ferguson, Missouri, one of Laumeier’s suburban neighbors in north St. Louis County, we can now ask if the dream of suburbia is achievable.

In 1968, Mrs. Matilda Laumeier bequeathed the first 72 acres of the future Laumeier Sculpture Park, together with a large estate house of cut stone built in 1917, to the people of St. Louis County in memory of her husband, Henry H. Laumeier. In Mattila and Henry’s time, this area was also attractive to beer barons such as the Busch, Lemp and Griesedieck families. What is now Sunset Hills was appealing to wealthy business owners who were essentially looking to recreate their native Rhine Valley—a scene of hills and woodlands. A landscape architect such as Lancelot “Capability” Brown pushed the idea of sculpting a landscape to cover most of the English countryside in the 18th century, designing massive plots of land and more than 170 parks, manipulating every feature within monumental gardens. Edgar Allan Poe also wrote about the human ability to create fantasy with nature in his book, _The Domain of Arnheim_. In this tale, Poe claims that humans can improve upon nature by both being aware and organizing a composition of its individual components into a fantasy landscape. With bounded wealth and ample landscape design skill, Ellison essentially sought to achieve—using rocks and vines, water and trees—what landscape painters had achieved using paints on a canvas; namely, a fantasy landscape. Indeed, the land was Ellison’s canvas—and his work of art was the fantasy landscape called _The Domain of Arnheim._

For the 2015 Kranzberg Exhibition Series, video artist Zlatko Ćosić and dancer and choreographer Ashley McQueen emphasize the labor that goes into the manicured landscape at Laumeier Sculpture Park. Through a series of dance performances in 2014 culminating in the short film Harmony in 3, Ćosić and McQueen explore the Park’s unique relationship with St. Louis County Parks, highlighting the joy and grit that goes into the care and maintenance of our 105-acre landscape. Laumeier’s first “dance on camera” project, the performances of the dancers and the workers in the film mark our continued interest in representing a range of art forms in the Park that encomizes our mission to expand the boundaries of art and to embrace the purpose of our landscape.

Dance is often seen as an art form constrained to the stage; however, through this unique collaboration, the Park has provided a new stage for dance. Based on the principle of movement, dance-like cinema began as an art form centered on the human body, physical performance and communication through action and image. The film combines techniques of documentation and abstraction, pitting the real versus the performer and presenting a narrative that brings to the foreground which is often overlooked: Harmony in 3 is a celebratory work, organized as a projected triptych that ebbs and flows, shifting among imagery of the dancer, the work and the “nature” that is Laumeier Sculpture Park. With combining and interlocking views of the micro and macro worlds of the Park, art and nature are literally linked through the language of movement and the story behind (and meaning off) this acreage.

Within their collaboration, Ćosić and McQueen demonstrate the pervasive affinities between these two mediums through the play on the sounds of the environment, the dancer as movable kinetic sculpture and the worker as architect and builder.

Dana Turovick, Curator of Exhibitions

1. Faber, John, _Into This Last and Other Writings_, Penguin Classics, 2006, p. 9.