

EUROPEAN GARDEN AWARD 2021

Laudation for Waterloopbos and Deltawerk//

1st Prize "Protection or Development of a Cultural Landscape"

Laudation by: Jacob Fischer (LYTT Architecture)

In the jury we often discuss „Is this a cultural landscape?“ or “Who or what contributed to the care or development of a landscape?“.

For Waterloopbos (which can be translated as “a forest with running water”) no questions like these were raised. Waterloopbos is more than “one” cultural landscape and the actions and people involved can clearly be identified. And the results are stunning.

Everything started – not at all surprisingly in the Netherlands – with a piece of flat landscape and some water nearby.

In the early 1950s a forest was planted, which we might consider as the first surprising act that happened here as the Netherlands have this priority on agriculture or housing.

Engineers from the Hydraulic Science Laboratory then started their work here, which formed this unique landscape. Scientists and engineers calculated the designs of dikes, dams and quays by working with enormous models of harbours, rivers and coastlines from the Netherlands and from all around the world.

These experiments helped shaping landscapes at many places, reducing the use of landscapes for infrastructures or minimising possible damages of landscapes which might be caused by floods.

Philosophically, you may say: Waterloopbos was replicated around the world.

With improved computer technologies, on-scale experiments became redundant. In 1996, the laboratory closed. But many of these model landscapes with their technical equipment were kept when the experiments were finished.

And then – as it is often said – “nature took over” at Waterloopbos. And as always, nature has done it very well, adding a lot of green elements and structures, a lot of charm and some mystery too.

The next key stakeholders for Waterloopbos have been the people living close by. In the 1990s, the woods almost fell prey to the construction of bungalows. Local residents started the campaign for keeping the remains and for protecting the biodiversity.

They found a powerful partner in Natuurmonumenten, the main Dutch organisation caring for nature and heritage. Natuurmonumenten bought the site in 2002 and made several investments to ensure accessibility and to provide amenities such as an information centre and guided tours.

Today, many models are overgrown with mosses, plants and trees. There are many places where birds and small mammals take shelter. New life has arisen in the water. There are all sorts of dragonflies, butterflies, fish, frogs and salamanders as well as some endangered insects.

In many places, visitor can hear water flowing. Along the water, unusual plants grow and the kingfisher hunts for fish. In the autumn, the area is bursting with mushrooms. More than 400 species have been counted.

But what happened next was the stroke of genius that also raised the interest of our jury. The biggest test model, the one for the huge Deltawerk to secure the Dutch coastline, a concrete basin of 250 to 5 meters and 7 meters deep in the ground, was turned into a phantastic work of art.

This was done by Atelier de Lyon & RAAAF operating at the crossroads of visual art, architecture and philosophy.

In absence of the waves, the devastating power of the water is made clear by sawing, turning and tilting large blocks from the concrete walls. A new rhythm of falling slabs is created. These cuts literally open the work of art towards the 35 other water models in the Waterloopbos.

The heaviness of the work becomes a physical experience allowing the visitor to walk over the water under the massive blocks. Once inside, they are confronted with a grand perspective on the void between the plates. The space offers an intense spatial experience of light, shadows, reflection, and views through the Waterloopbos. The space changes through the day, the seasons and over the years the slabs will be colonized by a nature.

Deltawerk// questions recent Dutch history and it's the ambition to build an indestructible Holland in times of climate change.

The Architectural Review wrote: *"Dealing with obsolete and vacant architecture represents a global challenge for the profession and demands a site-specific approach of carefully designed interventions. Deltawerk// is a monumental tribute to the majestic architecture of indestructible Holland."*

As a landscape architect from Denmark, I may say that we have some very good examples on how to develop "a piece of flat landscape with some water nearby". But it seems that the Dutch are world champions. But maybe it is only because they found these brilliant artists with their unique reading of the place.

This combination of Waterloopbos and Deltawerk// deserves the "European Garden Award" for the "Management or Development of a Cultural Landscape" the most. Congratulations!