

Curator's statement: Bureau Bas Smets, Landscapes.

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Landscapes shows how landscape design in Flanders, '*a land without a landscape*', had a decisive effect on Bureau Bas Smets. This first retrospective is based on a theory regarding the firm's methods and study of historical landscape design. The seven stages of the design process are shown on the basis of seven projects that vary in scale and nature. Aerial photos, maps, isometric diagrams, sections, drawings and miniatures: the final results of each stage of the design are displayed in a well-considered arrangement in the exhibition room.

The method is demonstrated by just seven landscape designs: the A11 motorway between Knokke and Westkapelle, the squares for Ingelmunster, the three proposals for the Brussels sites, and the French projects: 'Parc des Ateliers' in Arles and 55.000 ha for nature in Bordeaux. The visitor is expected to compose the landscape in their mind using the images made by the firm. In this way Bas Smets refers to the notion that all landscapes are a mental construction.

For each of their landscape designs, BBS starts by studying the existing site by means of aerial photos. This '*framing*' of the project is the first stage of the design process. The contours, the elevation and the scale of the new intervention are established at this point. The second stage is the '*reading*' of the landscape: all the layers that make it up are singled out and drawn over. This results in a number of maps which are then compared and out of which an underlying structure appears. From this emerges a redrawing of the landscape. This new landscape, a selection of existing landscape elements chosen by the designer, indicates what the '*best possible landscape*' might be for the assignment. Bas Smets calls this the '*Exemplary Landscape*'. The first three stages crystallize into a '*landscape figure*'. This structures the visible site and offers people points of recognition. It mediates in the area of tension between the larger scale of the landscape and the small scale of everyday use. The next stage in the design process is what Bas Smets calls the '*writing*': this comprises the actual technical solutions and details of water drainage, soil, surface of the ground, vegetation, the dimension of time and the seasons, earth, water, oxygen, plants, etc., which are established in a design whose cross-section shows how all these elements are linked. The firm makes visualizations – growth of vegetation, sequence of seasons, etc. – to evaluate its

own design. This stage is called '*perception*'. In the final stage – '*the emblem*' – the essence of the landscape transformation is captured in a symbol.

Each assignment is tackled in this way regardless of typology: park, car park, public space, infrastructure or re-laying of a large-scale landscape. Several themes recur constantly in the seven projects and also in all the firm's other projects.

For instance, the hydrography and water management, the topography of the project, the manipulability of the public space, the history of landscape design as a discipline and landscape painting are the underlying foundations and knowledge.

All this requires wide-ranging expertise, so the firm engages in collaboration that is different for each project, ranging from scientific hydrographers, geologists and botanists to urban planners and artists.

The exhibition also includes a presentation of completed projects that is projected across the full width of the room. In this way the visitor can experience the project as a landscape by viewing it through 270°.

It is an exhibition that can be read in several ways, in the same way as it is possible to read a single landscape in different ways at different times.