

RIETVELD LANDSCAPE

Founded 2006, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Interview with Ronald and Erik Rietveld

Territories of Engagement



Rietveld Landscape with
Atelier de Lyon, *Bunker 599*,
Diefdijk, The Netherlands, 2010.
Courtesy Rietveld Landscape

Scale and Scope

We work at a lot of different scales. For example, for one project, Vacant NL, we have been studying vacant buildings across the Netherlands and using them to advance the innovation agenda of the Netherlands. It's a kind of politically driven project. But another project, Bunker 599, is at a completely different scale. It's on the scale of a point in the landscape. But even though it's a small intervention, it tells something about a bigger system.

Approach

It's what we keep asking ourselves over and over again. It's always about fascination, of course, in the first instance. And then there is often a given task or a program, but we look at how those can contribute to the relevant questions for society today. We are searching for the biggest problem and then finding the most radical solution. That's really important because otherwise nothing happens.

Given the contemporary complexity of cities and landscape and society, urgent societal tasks call for an integral and multidisciplinary approach. We characterize our context-sensitive approach as making 'strategic interventions' or carefully designed interventions in the city or landscape that use the forces of existing developments and processes to set desired developments in motion. That's the general thought, and it works in our projects most powerfully if they are connected to larger societal issues.

We think that if landscape architecture and architects in general really want to make a relevant contribution to the big problems that society is facing today it's necessary to go into alliances, and that's what we do in our office, with researchers, interested parties, and specialists.

And so the role of the landscape architect—or the architect—is to integrate the relevant knowledge of the team and all the different ingredients at different scale levels, and then translate that into strategic interventions. That's when you'll need to use, of course, a broad set of design skills, and so it's important that you know what you're good at and what you can translate into a design.

Tools

Our approach often takes advantage of those landscape processes that are already going on. If you look at a project like Deltaworks 2.0, it's about how design anticipates floods and can organize a whole new urban area today and make new emptiness. In the 21st century we build everywhere, but we're trying to make a new emptiness, an urban emptiness in-between cities. In that sense, you are making use of a natural force to create a new kind of landscape and also the necessity for it. So it's always a search for a relevant question to do something, to come up with an intervention. But we always try to do this as minimally as possible—not to give too much form. In our opinion, designing is not about form; it's about organizing, giving energy to a place, and using available ingredients. That can be the energy of people; it can be a natural force. So in general you can say it's always a search for relevance.

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Challenges

It's always about designing for people, of course. It's about the way people use a certain kind of space and about trying to create a new kind of public domain—that's really important. And we think that doesn't happen too much in general, because lots of designers are just designing because they like a certain kind of form, or they have not asked really basic and relevant questions about how something is going to be used by the community. Our fascination is always in the way people can use a kind of space.

Future Challenges and Opportunities

One of the important issues in landscape architecture is the inner city, where landscape architects have more and more influence. And if they still want to contribute to this in the future, it's very important that they get really interested in the way a city functions today. The public domain is what we are talking about. The public domain and social cohesion in the public domain is really important. And that's something completely different, in our opinion, than just designing outdoor space.