

[project file - diefdijk, the netherlands]

**Bunker 599**  
Rietveld Landscape & Atelier de Lyon

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This remarkable little project is located along part of the New Dutch Waterline, or NDW, which was a military line of defence from 1815 until 1940, that protected cities such as Muiden, Utrecht, Vreeswijk and Gorinchem through periodic intentional flooding. The scheme opens up one of the 700 tiny bunkers along this line by literally slicing it open in two equal parts, pulling them apart and running a promenade route through the new gap. A boardwalk, delicate and seemingly temporal, marks the walkway in sharp, intended contrast to the heaviness of the concrete structure. This leads visitors to the flooded area and footpaths of the adjacent nature preserve. A narrow pier shoots out into the water; just above its surface, supported on flanking piles that lend an almost abstract quality to the horizon, particularly when reflected by the water, almost like soldiers marching into the distance. This reminds us of the use of water for defence during times of military necessity.

The axis of the walkway running down the gentle slope as new concrete steps, through the sliced bunker and onward to the water's edge, then out upon it via the timber pier; delivers a very diagrammatic linearity to the scheme, in potent contrast to its natural setting. Potentially this contrast can be read as a metaphor for war. But it is undoubtedly the unusual experience of the historical bunker, a demonstrably heavy object in rough concrete, sliced open and spread apart as if it were something much lighter, or merely a 'model' of something real, that carries the thrust of the work. Yes, the strategy allows visitors to see inside it and understand it literally, but more importantly, it encourages them to experience it conceptually, through the new rupture. It is not difficult to interpret this as another metaphor – a more obvious one, perhaps – of war itself. It may also be read (more optimistically) as a 'disruption' of war... the new cut appearing to interrupt the impetus toward conflict, an act of precise, formal 'violence' against violence in general. The project can be seen clearly from the A2 highway that passes nearby, ensuring that unknowing motorists will see the odd and powerful ensemble as they whiz by, and maybe wonder what they've seen. It would be nice to think this is as close as they'll ever come to war or the original need for buildings such as this.

The tradition of war memorials is justifiably impressive. Well, they are meant to impress. This is not exactly a memorial, and yet it acts in a similar way. It is a snippet of historical evidence that has been altered to teach something more; a formal arrangement that dramatises a story; an architectural folly with a very serious and, yes, sombre subtext.

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