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Frank Havermans and RAAAF seek inspiration from the Cold War



Photo Michiel de Cloene

Text François-Luc Giraldeau

Dutch artist Frank Havermans and Amsterdam-based multidisciplinary studio RAAAF recently brought to the public's attention their obscure *Secret Operation 610*, an alienesque art installation whose terrifying silhouette would most definitely leave most observers confused yet fascinated.

The mobile structure embraces its mechanical legibility and takes the military aesthetic to a whole new level. The project remained informed, throughout its conceptual design phase, by explicit references to the Cold War and its associated weaponry and aircraft.

As if leading an oddly lethargic cortege, the 5-m-high creature, propelled by caterpillar tracks, moves at a dramatically sluggish pace along a deserted runway that once served Soesterberg Air Force Base (closed since 2008), not far from Utrecht, the Netherlands. Crawling along the paved strip, the installation engulfs the viewer in a startling post-apocalyptic scene.

Havermans says his work shows an awareness of its context and is highly expressive, regardless of its purpose. *Secret Operation 610* backs the artist's words with its menacing appearance, charged with conspicuous references to

violent matters. The surprise lies inside, where an angular ten-seat cockpit provides students from Delft University of Technology with a workplace for the development of a research programme at the forefront of sustainable progress in 21st-century aviation.

A tactile object that displays the makers' careful attention to the often overlooked sensorial dimension of materials, the work lives up to the reputations of both Havermans and RAAAF. Reinforcing the dauntingly heavy, machinery-inspired image – to which the design team clung stubbornly – is the matte-black rubber coating that was sprayed on the steel-and-wood body.

Celebrating applied art at its most practical level, *Secret Operation 610* takes an approach to design that can only encourage more of these successful cross-disciplinary collaborations, through which designers, practitioners and researchers work out innovative ways to reach and engage a wider audience.

frankhavermans.wordpress.com
raaaf.nl



Photo Renée de Wit