

CIRCULAR ARK AWARD

A REFLECTION BY FIRST LAUREATE
LEEN VANSTEENKISTE

A description of the first selected project and the nomination of the second selected project:

The abbey of Herkenrode has a rich history amid its landscape. A former bocage landscape consisting of various small landscape elements was managed by multiple farms on behalf of the abbey, supporting the landscape's productivity and ecological diversity. Today, the landscape is subject to spatial fragmentation and ecological degradation. Urbanisation and the increased scale of agriculture have pressured the current landscape. The Herkenrode Forests – a collection of fragmented forests that once belonged to the abbey as a whole – suffered from this complex spatial transformation. These centuries-old forests lack a resilient landscape that can withstand further degradation.

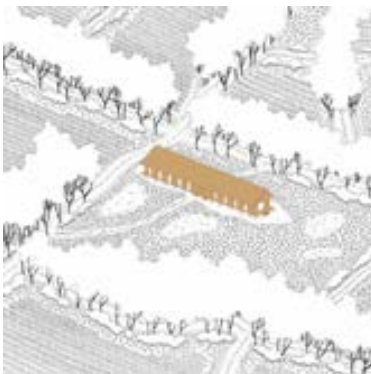
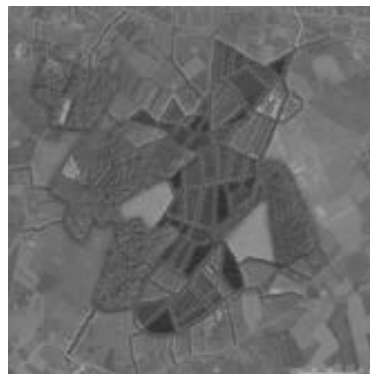
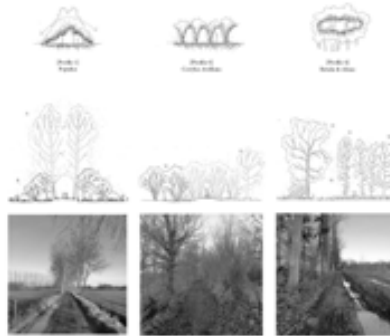
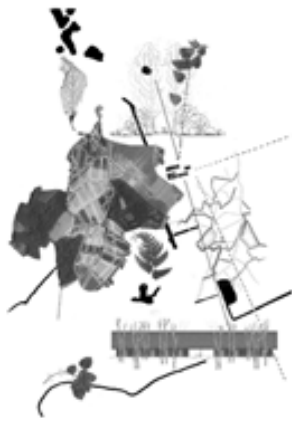
re-designed profiles aim to introduce a spatial framework for the Herkenrode Forests: a productive bocage landscape that operates as a more resilient and connecting figure.

During the design process, a renewed, productive bocage landscape emerged by layering the designed profiles on top of the current landscape palimpsest, connecting the fragmented plots of the Herkenrode Forests. Experimenting with landscape profiles is realised through attentively designing with the current landscape elements (local species, slow roads, waterways, the soil, etc.). During this process, architecture operated as a catalyst:

The landscape of the abbey of Herkenrode was characterised by demountable half-timbered barns that facilitated the cultivation of the area on behalf of the abbey. To enable the repair of the landscape, the project introduced the design of a nomadic barn. Designed with local species of the Herkenrode Forests and detailed with demountable joints, this nomadic barn enables the transition from the current fragmented landscape to a more connected landscape, by moving across the landscape and facilitating the program of 'working-with' and 'learning-about' the landscape. When the Herkenrode Forests gain more resilience through the introduced landscape transition and the facilitated fieldwork, the barn moves to another location, supporting the repair of the next fragmented landscape.

→ How can re-introducing a productive bocage landscape operate as an act of repair in the current fragmented landscape of the Herkenrode Forests? To protect and repair the Herkenrode Forests, this project is conducting research through design into the historic bocage landscape around the abbey of Herkenrode. Through fieldwork and drawings of landscape sections, this project aimed to identify and portray the remnants of an old, productive bocage landscape. Local species – collected in a herbarium – formed the components for experimenting with re-designing landscape profiles, through re-imagining their resilience and productivity. These





I would like to pass the Circular Ark Award to Estée Scavone, Ruth Ubachs, Amber Vandezande and Jarne Vanhees for their project 'Wijk wordt TUINwijk'. In the seminar *Stadsmaken*, where their project took shape, the focal point of the semester was 'Design with Soil': a more-than-human actor that is too often neglected in spatial planning and design processes. With Zwartberg (Genk, BE) as a case study, Estée, Ruth, Amber and Jarne used fieldwork, observations, a soft atlas and research through design to map and visualise the garden city's sustainable practices in relation to the local soil. Together, they designed a toolbox for the neighbourhood's inhabitants to support them in sustainable gardening initiatives, strategies to take care of rainwater and soils, ideas to become more self-sufficient and ways to strengthen community building while supporting the above. By archiving, re-designing, and visualising the current caring soil practices of the garden city, they experimented with making intangible - yet very situated - practices more tangible and applicable.

They approached the soil as not only the foundation for the built garden city, but also for everyday life happening on and especially in the soil. The project 'Wijk wordt TUINwijk' delved deeper into the matter of soil, learned from relations between humans and soil, and designed with the soil towards a more caring, resilient and sustainable garden city.