

Press Release, 28 June 2021

On 3 July

THE HIGH GROUND
Water Safety as Leverage for Sustainable Urban Development

the closing exhibition of
DOWN TO EARTH
the 9th edition of the
International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam
will open in the Biesboschhal in Dordrecht

Dordrecht is not only a city, it's also an island. Due to its location in a sea-river transit zone, the Island of Dordrecht is very vulnerable to flooding.

Today, 600 years after the legendary Saint Elizabeth's Flood, Dordrecht is still vulnerable to flooding, which is why the City of Dordrecht is constantly working to improve its flood protection measures. Here, water safety has the highest possible priority.

Located outside the dike, the high ground of district De Staart – currently an isolated area with many problems and few prospects – constitutes a safe haven: it can accommodate many evacuees in the event of a flood.

Over the past two years, the IABR–Atelier Dordrecht and its lead designer Adriaan Geuze (West 8) has investigated how the *future* need to realize mass accommodation for evacuees on De Staart at a moment's notice in the event of a major flood can be deployed in the search for an answer to the *current* sustainable area development challenge: How can water safety be used as *leverage*?

The results of this investigation are presented in the exhibition THE HIGH GROUND, curated by DOWN TO EARTH Chief Curator George Brugmans.

The results clearly show that De Staart can play an unexpectedly important role in the realization of Dordrecht's water safety agenda. If Dordrecht decides to go with the *water-safety-as-leverage* approach, this will create unexpected opportunities for the sustainable development of an attractive living and working area, including new forms of housing, water-safe facilities, innovative work concepts and a unique river-bound tidal park, all in harmony with nature and including new connections for slow traffic that can also serve as escape routes.

On De Staart, the City of Dordrecht can hit many pins with one ball: increase water safety while at the same time building housing and stimulating employment, optimizing connections in the city and region and increasing the quality of life and recreational opportunities for all inhabitants. Thanks to the *water-safety-as-leverage* approach, the Map of Opportunities of De Staart presented in THE HIGH GROUND reads like the chance in a lifetime to seriously contribute to the *Growth Agenda Drechtsteden 2030* and the sustainability ambitions of Dordrecht.

Where Can We Land?

With the 9th edition of the IABR, DOWN TO EARTH Chief Curator George Brugmans raises the question: Where can we land? Can we resettle on planet Earth, as it were, in a sustainable balance with all other lifeforms? Can we, as philosopher Bruno Latour puts it, redesign our living environments as that on which a terrestrial depends and always ask ourselves what other terrestrials also depend on it? For this is now inevitably the challenge we face: We have to redefine all of our actions as that which takes us back to Earth. DOWN TO EARTH.

DOWN TO EARTH is a plea for systems thinking and proposes to use the solutions to recognizable and urgently felt problems as leverage for the sustainable transformation of the entire system. Not only to transform our urban landscapes and living environments to create a sustainable balance with other species and with nature, but also to stimulate the political-social debate on the constitution, quality, and ownership of radical change. Concretely, practically, and locally, DOWN TO EARTH explores ways to bridge the gap between plans and projects, between knowing and doing.

Water and Energy Transitions as Leverage for Change

The research into water and energy transition-related challenges aimed at *real-world change* that the IABR has carried out in recent years, in its own IABR–Ateliers as well as in several collaborative projects, is the common thread of DOWN TO EARTH.

Water management and energy transition present urgent global challenges, which are highly topical in the Netherlands, too: in our country, we're facing both drought and flooding, we need to make our houses natural gas-free and we must step away from the fossil economy as quickly as we can. Deliberately using these infrastructural challenges can help us develop new ways to inhabit the Earth more wisely and use its resources more responsibly. However, they can become social challenges as well when specifically used as leverage for broader, sustainable, and collectively supported, truly transformative change.

IABR–Atelier Dordrecht

The exhibition THE HIGH GROUND presents the results of the research by design by the IABR–Atelier Dordrecht, a collaboration between the IABR and the City of Dordrecht into ways to wield water safety as leverage for sustainable urban development on De Staart.

The research of this Atelier led by Adriaan Geuze (West 8) has now been concluded. It resulted in an opportunity map of De Staart based on five sub-studies which were carried out by the design offices VenhoevenCS, PosadMaxwan, Studio Donna van Milligen Bielke, EGM Architecten and West 8.

Curator

The curator of THE HIGH GROUND is George Brugmans (Chief Curator DOWN TO EARTH and President IABR)

About the IABR

The International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam (IABR) is both a knowledge institute and a cultural platform. Its two most important tools are the IABR–Ateliers, at which its research takes place, and the Biennale, a biennial cultural event. The IABR mainly focuses on the future of the city where, in a few decades, nearly 80 percent of the world's population will produce more than 90 percent of our wealth – and this will have to be done sustainably. We believe we can best help solve the global climate crisis if we first solve it in the cities – where we reside, work and live. Design plays a crucial role in this process.

The IABR has fully committed itself to the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* of the United Nations and all of its activities and research take full account of the Sustainable Development Goals and contribute to the design of socially inclusive and sustainable cities to the best of its ability.

A Biennale in Times of Pandemic

DOWN TO EARTH, the 9th edition of the International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam, is a biennale in times of pandemic. Instead of a single large exhibition with an extensive side program, the IABR is presenting a series of exhibitions, activities, and programs spread over a longer period of almost twelve months, from September 2020 through August 2021 and in two cities, with the form depending on the circumstances. Step by step, the IABR is presenting the results of the research by design conducted in the IABR–Ateliers in combination with selected projects, various activities, and a number of partner exhibitions under the umbrella of DOWN TO EARTH.

For all exhibitions and the program, please visit www.iabr.nl

Biesboschhal

The exhibition will take place in a unique location on De Staart in Dordrecht: the Biesboschhal, the former machine factory of shipyard De Biesbosch. In addition to the exhibition THE HIGH GROUND, visitors can experience the Dordrecht approach to water safety. This is not only meant to show them that the people of Dordrecht know what to do in the event of a flood, but also to create awareness of the fact that a flood taking place in Dordrecht is not an unlikely scenario.

The exhibition in the Biesboschhal will be open to the public from Saturday 3 July, from Wednesday to Saturday from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. The Biesboschhal is located at Maasstraat 11 in Dordrecht, where DordtYard was located until last year. Admission is free and reservations are not required.

600 Years Saint Elizabeth's Flood

THE HIGH GROUND is part of the commemoration of the 1421 Saint Elizabeth's Flood, perhaps the greatest flood disaster in Dutch history, which had dire consequences for Dordrecht. In 2021, Dordrecht will commemorate the flood with a program of activities. For more information, please visit [this website](#).

NOTE TO EDITORS

For more information and/or visual material, please contact us via pers@iabr.nl or +31(0)10-206 00 33

iabr.nl | Twitter: @IABR | Instagram: @iabr_downtoearth

International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam
Keilestraat 9 K1
3029 BP Rotterdam