Slow Burn
Fire cistern and forest shelter, Collobrières, France

Main author
Frédéric Bouvier, architect, Renens, Switzerland

Project data
Project group: Architecture, building and civil engineering
Project background: Research project

Summary and appraisal of the project by the jury

Entitled “firebreak”, the project proposes a structure that can be put to use when combating forest fires in the region of Collobrières. Part water tank to extinguish fires and part shelter for hikers, the structure is additionally conceived as a monument to the Algerian volunteers who supported the French army during the Algerian War and were thereafter repatriated to serve as firemen in France. More than just a small intervention, the structure has a territorial dimension inscribed as it is intended in an elaborate water collection system of ditches that mark the landscape.

Though highly impressed by the young architect’s ability to translate a complex set of ideas into a pristine architectural artifact, the jury argued that the project would gain credibility if considered part of a broader “firebreak” infrastructure along anticipated firefighting lines – rather than being treated as a singular and exceptional object. This said, the jury more than appreciated the structure’s construction and its representation by means of beautiful drawings. Something as mundane as a tank is here transformed into a poetic artifact in a natural setting, a “machine à émouvoir” that touches the senses, while performing an indispensable function – a “techno-aesthetic” object, so to speak.

Statements on the sustainability of the project by the author

Rain water, a common link between a firemen cistern and a test garden to fight fire

The project proposes the construction and the supply of water of a cistern for firemen of 40m³ working by harvesting the upstream water flow of the site thanks to “barradine system” (a kind of ditch constructed on the mountainside in a specific manner in order to collect the rainwater), and on the downstream section of the site by a streams spillway. 10% of the annual rainwater (1344m³ in 2014) should be drained in the tanks, which would be full in one semester. During the rest of the year, the collected water would be accumulated in the intermediary tanks, and then distributed on several mountainside terraces where different plants with deep roots, is blocked by the construction of restanques (a retaining wall made of dry stones). A semi-temporal perception, and constructive formulation.

Create a fertile ground for an eroded firebreak

The ground of the intervention site is a terrain of thin ground with a siliceous underground. The little amount of humus and mulch rests directly on the bedrock. The erosion of the firebreaks ground, void of any plants with deep roots, is blocked by the construction of restanques (a retaining wall made of dry stones). A complete fertile ground is recomposed with first, reactive mineral substances, which would come from sediments and any other thin dirt accumulated in the de-cantation tanks of the cistern or deposited on the terraces during the summer irrigation, and then humic substances that will come from the weeding and the pruning of the mountain’s firetrails. Mineral and organic substances will intermingle to create the clay-humic complex: the basis of the ground’s fertility.

This project creates a place that offers a possible silent commemoration is done in a playful manner with an intervention that mixes integration to the landscape, spatio-temporal perception, and constructive formulation.

€€€

Europe

Next Generation 4th prize 2017