

Asparagus in Hoerd

In Hoerd, Asparagus is written in capital letters!

At any event, in any place, and any time of the year, the "good" Hoerdtois waves a stick of asparagus like a torch! It's something like our very own Olympic flame, consecrated every spring - and then all year round!

As a tribute to Pastor Heyler, who, through observations he made during his stay in Philippeville, Algeria, was at the origin of Hoerd's asparagus, the design of a sculpted object we will call the "shoot," with an intentional artistic dimension, was envisaged with a dual objective. On the one hand, to allow this object to act as an educational tool, and on the other, to provide it with a symbolic function.

This symbolic dimension should in fact be universal.

This aim can only be achieved by creating an object which encompasses more meaning than asparagus alone, extends further than the pastor himself, and above all avoids any confusion with a stone monolith in memory of Pastor Heyler.

Mother Earth

Indeed, by the very place of its installation (in front of the presbytery), and by the bust embedded in the wall overlooking the sculpture, Pastor Heyler is already very present.

Through his observation of the land in Hoerd's fields, and thanks to the brilliant idea of proposing asparagus cultivation in Hoerd, based on his observations made in Algeria, the pastor opened up an environment of great material and moral prosperity for our village, driven by the challenge to which Hoerd farmers were able to rise: that of hard labour and work on the land.

This is where the universal notion of Mother Earth comes in.

The universality lies in the fact that across all five continents, all people, regardless of origin, culture or religion, are defined by their dependence on Mother Earth, with varying degrees of success.

Whatever the continent, human survival depends as much on the potential of the land on which they live as on how the people living there show respect by the sustainable development of its capacity to nourish.

From simply observing the land, humankind has innovated and invented a wide variety of concepts to harness the potential of each territory. This has often required considerable energy and complex techniques. The example of the Maras salt flats in Peru, clinging to the mountainside, defying the laws of nature and divided into thousands of basins, is truly spectacular.

Everywhere, the bread that nourishes humankind comes from the earth that ensures its sustenance.

Just as reading provides the mind with spiritual nourishment, the symbolism sought for the project should be nourished with meaning through carefully chosen and recognizable examples.

The emergence of the spear!

To begin with the asparagus, and more precisely its spear which grows inside the raised bank, its movement is visible on the surface.



Whether in Hoerdt, or in Büttelborn in Germany (twined with Hoerdt), the smooth top of this sand bank cracks, fragments, and rises under the pressure of the spear. The moment when the asparagus head, which is about to emerge from the ground, and which we cannot yet see, is suspended in time, the moment when we hope that the asparagus will be very large, to ensure a good harvest.

This moment of hope announces the reward of the harvest, after so much effort and sweat!

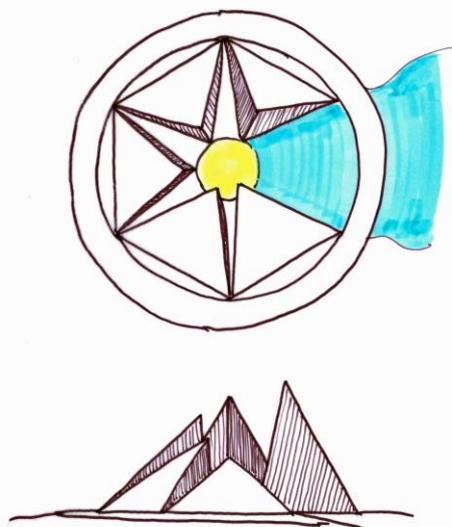
This moment exists universally, in one way or another, in all the processes of picking, gathering, uprooting, haymaking, crop and grape harvesting.

It is this key moment, this pushing up by the underground shoot as it appears just at the earth's surface, that the project proposes to magnify, highlighting it in a more or less abstract way.

This beauty, full of grandeur and brilliance, is remarkable for its representation of the emergence of life and the force of nature.

Like the rising ground, a structure of irregularly raised triangular facets, like origami, forms five wedge-shaped elements set at progressively varied angles, arranged in a roughly ascending spiral, and completed at their base by a sixth element symbolizing water.

Water from the water table that flows beneath our feet, water contained in asparagus, water at the origin of all life. This sixth facet is smooth and limpid, like a diamond of the clearest water.



Like the five Olympic rings, the five elements represent the five continents, but each one does not relate to a specific continent. Together, like the Olympic rings, they symbolize their union.

Together, they constitute a kind of epicentre, a tower of Babel for Mother Earth.

Continent derives from the Latin "continenis" (terra) and "continere" (to hold together).

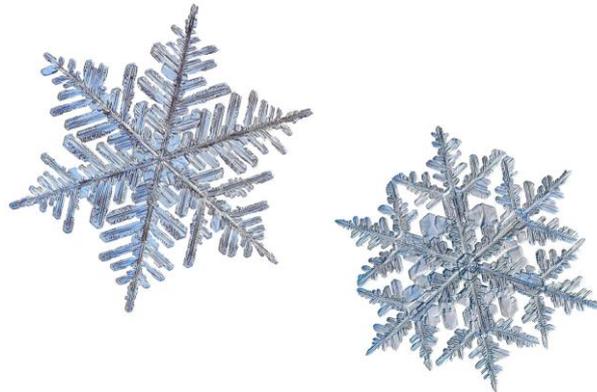
Like the petals of a flower, these protective forms shield the intimacy of the emerging of the shoot into the light.

Along with the facet representing water, they are arranged inside a hexagonal base, which is not a reference to the shape of France but because this regular shape is omnipresent in nature.



For example, the hexagonal shapes of bees' wax cells serve both for storing food (honey and pollen) and for renewing the population (eggs, larvae, pupae).

The crystals that form snow, whether that of the Vosges or of the eternal snows of the Andes, just like the clustering bubbles of foaming water, are hexagonal in structure.



In a spectacular and, until very recently, unexplained way, the columns of volcanic rocks on Staffa (an island in the Inner Hebrides of Scotland) have a hexagonal cross-section.

The same goes for the Giant's Causeway in Ireland where the basalt stone organs are also hexagonal.

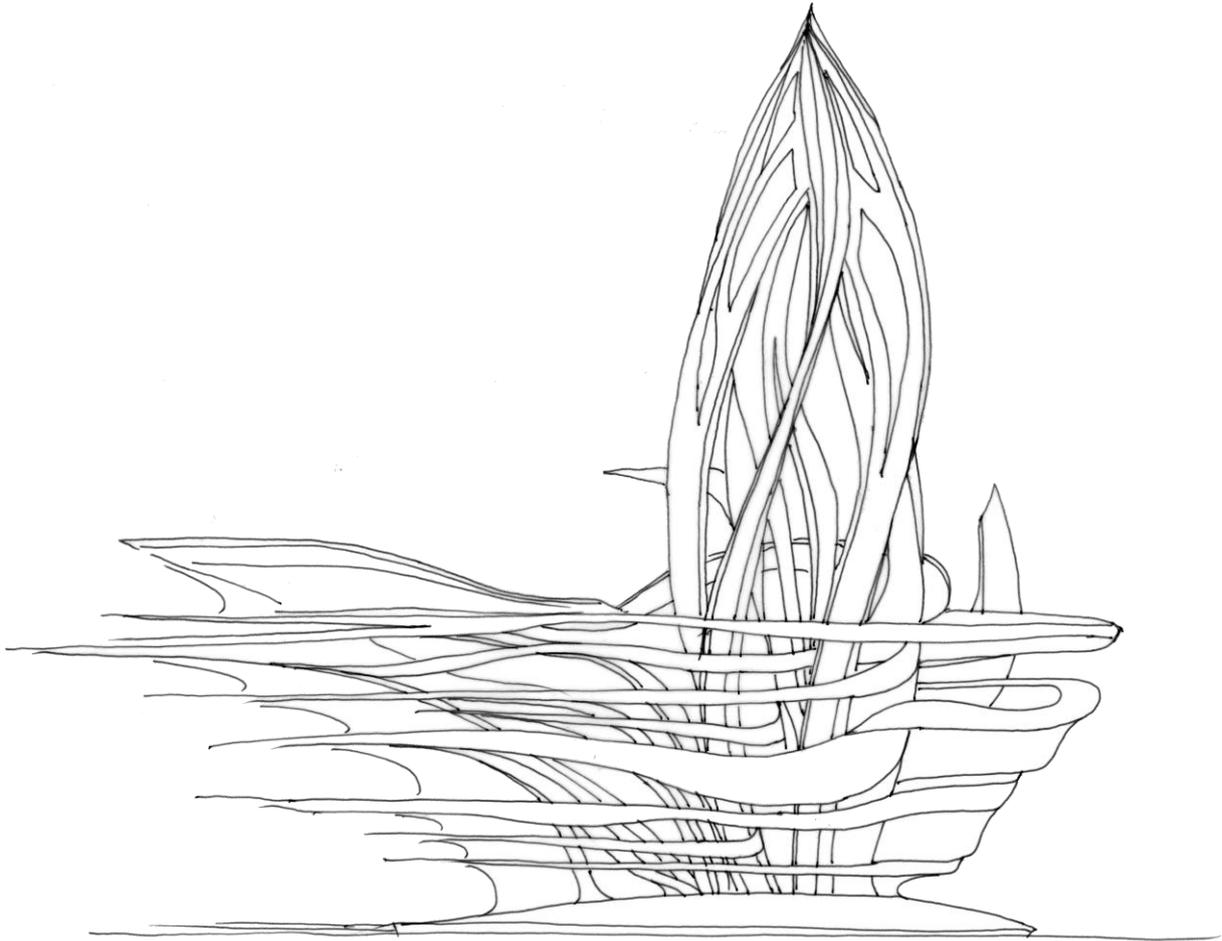
Nature has thus made the hexagon its own, which allows the hexagonal base to play an essential role in the project.



Industrial dynamics

Between the ascending spiral of the five peaks of the facets, a large, equally slender leaf emerges at a higher level, in a similarly spiralling, axial movement, symbolizing industrial dynamics, in the sense of labour and the results produced by human activity.

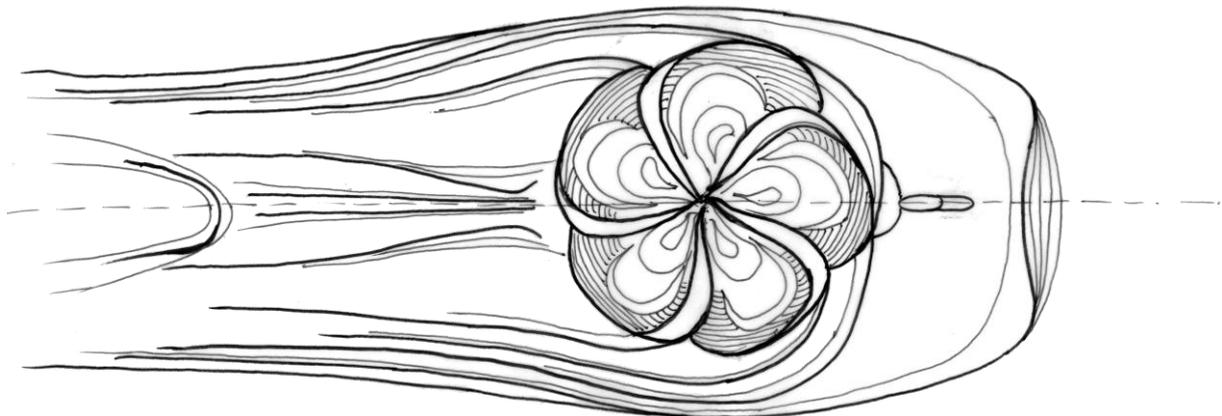
Comparable to industrious bees and ants, the people of Hoerdt have achieved progress for their city in all the senses of the term "industrial dynamics."



Lacerated to give it an upward-swirling filamentary appearance, this abstract representation of the green tree the asparagus grows into after emerging from the ground as soon as the season is over, could also recall the shape of the wheatsheaves or stacks of the past.

The industrial spiral appears like a torch of exchange between continents (Philippeville and Hoerdt), of sharing and generosity between people.

But it is also the image of the lifeforce bursting out, of creation.



Red sand, black earth, the white uniting all colours

The materials used for the project also hold meaning.

Since the renovation of the Protestant church a work of art by Alsatian artist Annie Greiner, hung high in the choir of the Protestant church, has been interrogating first-time visitors to the building.

Black railway ballast sleepers, laid vertically, display two red lines. Parallel to these red lines, a central, ascending white line unites all the colours of all hopes.

This work of art was designed to express, in a highly symbolic way, both the roots of local life, fuelled by the opportunities offered by the initially marshy black earth of the Ried, and the energy required to cultivate the red sand from the Rhine sediments upon which the village sits. (Red sand is considered poor soil and less suitable for agriculture.)

The black of ballast

While metaphorical evocations of black have many parallels in architecture, its tangible presence on the wooden outer walls of barns, naturally covered by this protective layer, is nonetheless reassuring for the landscape.

The Japanese technique known as "shou-sugi-ban" consists of charring the wood to protect it from the elements.

So perhaps the project and the ballast should be connected, through materials or colours?

The austerity of black

The fundamental opposition between black and white in the Bible places black in the negative world. Job thinks of the dark stain of sin, lamenting the obscurity of darkness.

The black horse of the Apocalypse represents famine.

For a long time, the Protestant choice black clothing was a symbol of austere piety.

Greek mythology uses black to decipher the essential natural order. Nyx, born of Chaos, god of the primeval void, is the personification of night, bringing darkness to the world.

Black as a catalyst of creation

In ancient Egyptian beliefs black is the origin, black gives life and represents the fertility of the earth.

The black silt deposited by the annual floods of the Nile on its banks fertilizes the earth, and is the foundation of the generative blackness that catalyses Egyptian creation myths.

The black of the Ried soil has proved itself a direct factor in the creation of identity locally.

Basaltic outpouring

The colour black could therefore be well suited, for example, for the base of the project from which the object to be created will emerge.

Black basalt stone is used in the construction of cathedrals (in the Hérault region, the presence of basalt allowed its use for the construction of the Saint-Étienne Cathedral in Agde). Its fine and isotropic texture gives basalt high density and great mechanical resistance.

In Algeria, the basaltic outpouring of Tassili n'Ajjer is known for its Neolithic rock carvings.

The sandy pink of the Vosges sandstone

This black volcanic magmatic rock, which also constitutes the surface of the lunar seas, could be used for the curved surface of the ground from which the five wedge-shaped elements in pink sandstone rise up.

The pink sandstone recalls the sand and softens the impact of the black.

By their arrangement in a spiral movement, the five sandstone elements form a wave, like a welcoming ovation to the asparagus shoot and to the representation of water.

This water is presented like a pearl of the most beautiful iridescent white.

Corten steel for the industrial spiral

The rusty appearance of the thin sheet of Corten steel, an extremely durable material, adds both strength and slenderness to the spiral leaf and its jagged filaments, thus accentuating the movement.

This Corten flame perfectly symbolizes two local characteristics. On the one hand, all the energy of entrepreneurship and industrial dynamics.

On the other hand, the joyful, festive, exuberant atmosphere of every asparagus festival, every carnival, and at many other moments.

Like the swirling skirts of the dancers, graceful movements that carry you away, this communicative and contagious blossoming is expressed in the laughter, the gaiety, and the exhilaration of this exceptional heritage.

Victor Hugo: Laughter "which simultaneously reveals souls and pearls"



At a time when many scourges tarnish the beauty of the world through selfishness, fundamentalism, modernism, or conservatism, this proposal is to introduce, through the treasures produced by our agriculture and our gastronomy, a unifying humanism.

This is about telling a story that, like all theories about the links between blood and vine, would proudly and loudly proclaim the celebration of the sensory heritage of the world of asparagus, through this omnipresent commitment which can bring together hearts and minds.

*Claude Wolfhugel
Hoerd, le 11/11/2020.*