

Landscape Architecture Europe



Fieldwork

Birkhäuser
LAE Foundation

Location Le Havre (F)

Jardin Portuaire

Programme A temporary garden over the course of four days on an abandoned quay in the port of Le Havre

Designer Thilo Folkerts
Landschaftsarchitektur

Client Association Jardins
Temporaires

Area 100 m²

Design period 2000-2001

Implementation period 2001

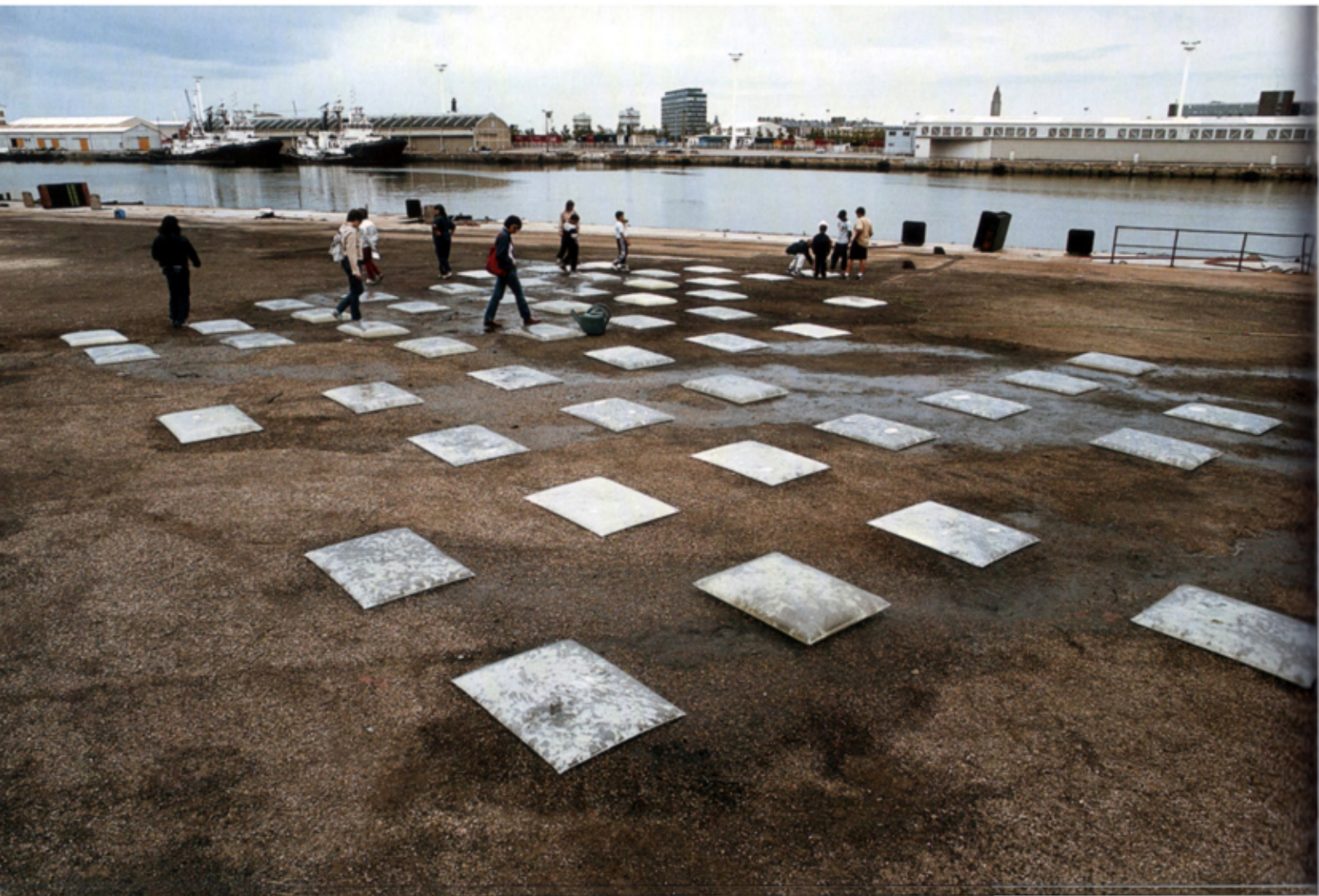
Cost € 500





• | • To bring the water of the deep basins closer to the people, the landscape architect placed 80 plastic bags on a quay and filled them with water from the harbour. (Photo: Arnaud Duboys Fresney)

A harbour garden, a garden in the harbour – that sounds paradoxical. This should be where containers are shipped and cargos discharged, where machinery roars and men pour sweat... However, the part of the harbour where this garden was created is undergoing transition. No longer suitable for modern container technology, it has not yet been won over by the nearby city centre for residential, office and commercial buildings. This was the venue of the four-day "Les Jardins Temporaires" event held for the second time in July 2001, where some twenty landscape architects set up installations that were not so much to serve as prototypes for conventional open space designs in public or private



- The Le Havre people discovered the disused harbour area in a way they had never seen it before and may get ideas for the spaces that will be built there in the future. [Photo: Arnaud Duboys Fresney]





space but to create a world of visions. The harbour's transitional state allowed projects between imagination and reality, between experiment and duration, between learning to see and seeing. The people of Le Havre at least saw their harbour the way they had never seen it before. They discovered it as a garden with qualities that they may now ask for of those building the city to arise here in future.

One of these qualities is water. Thilo Folkerts' installation dealt with this water. Paradoxically, while water distinguishes a harbour it is inaccessible to people. Its depth can be gauged from looking at the basin; its expanse surmised by the horizon. To bring it up closer, Folkerts chose an area of about 100 square metres on a quay and placed 80 rectangular transparent plastic bags, heat-sealed all around, in an orthogonal grid. He filled the bags through an inconspicuous hole at the top with water from the harbour basin. The bags thus bulged out into pillows resembling jellyfish lying on the asphalt. Like windows, they provided views of the harbour water inside them, including all the flotsam: rubbish, aquatic plants, algae, little crabs. Hardly anyone would ever have experienced the water of a harbour basin right in front of his nose in this way. Each pillow thus invited people to carefully observe its contents, which obviously turned out to be more than water.

Contemplation was accompanied by action. Folkerts himself filled up the water pillows during all four days with a watering can, a hose and a small pump. With one pillow holding about 100 litres, the job was an exercise in patience. Once filled with water, the soft, shiny, wobbly and warm pillows virtually asked visitors to touch, sit and jump on them. Because the little fill holes remained open, the pillows could not burst and the water could squirt out in jets when children jumped around on them – fun for visitors but more work for the designer, who had to keep refilling. He looked after his project like a gardener, and the pillows grew, withered and grew back again, displaying themselves in different colours under the changing light of the sky.

The jury's discussion on this project was controversial. Some opined that it is not a garden but a performance. Exactly, this is radical and therefore outstanding, was the counterclaim. Others felt strongly attracted by the space, the pillows and the water in the pillows but then repelled because they thought the water was polluted. The fact that it was suited for play after all and revealed all of its gentleness eventually convinced the jurors, as did the contradictory feelings that this garden evoked.

- Besides contemplation the garden of plastic bags called for action. Filled by a little hole which stayed open, the bags couldn't burst when children jumped on them. The landscape architect refilled them afterwards to make them grow again to normal size and beauty. Refilling is a gardening activity here.