

De-Vice

Standing seven metres tall, De-Vice is a kinetic meditation space: a closed steel shell that a person opens to the landscape by working a set of paddles.

Caspar Schols is a Dutch artist and designer whose work deals with ritual and domesticity in architecture. His Cabin ANNA, featured in the New York Times in 2025, began as a garden house for his mother: four sliding shells, two of wood and two of glass, pushed open and closed by hand as the weather, the light or the mood of the day changes. Opening the house is a daily act. Home, in his work, is something made and remade rather than a shelter one moves into.

The Missing Room, in Piemonte, reduces the house to two elements - water and fire - which meet at the foot of a seven-metre chimney. Its platforms, doors and hatches have no handles and prescribe nothing; bathing, cooking and resting are left to the visitor to invent.

De-Vice continues that line of work and strips it even further. A steel frame and ladder lead to a small volume high above the ground. Inside there is a seat and the paddles that move the surrounding shell.

Once seated, the participant paddles and the shell opens, its two halves moving in opposite directions. The legs perform the effort of travelling while the structure stays exactly where it is. Nothing is reached; the enclosure simply stops being one. What is outside comes back slowly and in order: light first, then shapes, then sound, then wind.

"I'm interested in spaces that don't separate us from our environment, but pull us deeper into it; that work to slow us down, notice, and participate."

– Caspar Schols

The work draws on embodied cognition, the principle that thinking is shaped by both what the body does and where it does it. Putting the mechanism in the participant's legs makes effort, rhythm and duration part of the experience rather than the means of getting to it.

The habit behind the work is an old one. Schols's father treated certain places in the forest as significant and built high seats in them, elevated hunting platforms that the two of them used for watching rather than shooting. They would sit for hours and follow the light moving across the landscape and whatever animals passed through it. De-Vice gives that habit a form and reduces it to a single seat.

Seven metres is a measured distance. High enough for the body to register a mild unease, low enough that the ground remains a fact rather than a view. Discomfort sharpens the senses, and sharpened senses are the condition the piece is after.

Climbing a ladder into a man-made object puts distance between the participant and the ground, which appears to work against the intention: it makes an observer of someone who was standing in the landscape a minute earlier. The piece works with that contradiction rather than against it. A certain distance is what makes looking possible. Once something is set apart - an object on a plinth, a room above the trees - it becomes distinct from what surrounds it, and the two can regard each other. The landscape looks back. And because the participant is the one

working the mechanism, the exchange is never fixed; it opens and closes at the speed of the legs.

Unlike a watchtower, the position carries no control; nothing is being surveyed. De-Vice inherits the reversal his father performed on those hunting seats - a structure with no purpose beyond contemplation.

None of this argues for doing without made things. ANNA, The Missing Room and De-Vice all stand between a person and their surroundings, and what they become there is an interface rather than a barrier. We build in order to cook somewhere, bathe somewhere, look at something; the right tool at the right distance is what allows it.

The structure is anchored by boulders of the kind used to build the Dutch hunebedden, megalithic chambers raised more than five thousand years ago and among the oldest surviving structures in the country. They were communal graves and places of ritual, understood as entrances to the world of the dead and used collectively, it seems with the help of substances that altered what people saw. De-Vice borrows their scale and their function as a threshold, but not their crowd. This ritual is for one person, sober and awake.

Schols built the piece by hand, applying roughly 3,000 sheets of gold leaf, eight by eight centimetres each, to the inside of the shell. The making is not preparation for the work but part of it: the attention the piece asks of a participant is the attention it took to assemble. The gold catches whatever light is available and changes character through the day; at night the open structure reads as a lantern, seven metres up. It is the only extravagance in an otherwise plain object - the spectacle of the opening shell set against exposed steel, a visible mechanism, one seat.

The piece is a proposal for a ritual: a break in the ordinary run of a day, at a fixed point in the landscape. Climbing, sitting and opening a shell from the inside describes a passage out of an enclosure and into somewhere else. Behind it stand two structures: the house Schols built for his mother, and the seats he sat in with his father.

"Are these objects real gateways, or more like the huts I used to build as a child? To me there is no difference."

– Caspar Schols