

# THE STAR

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## INSIGHT

# How Rotterdam got a floating forest

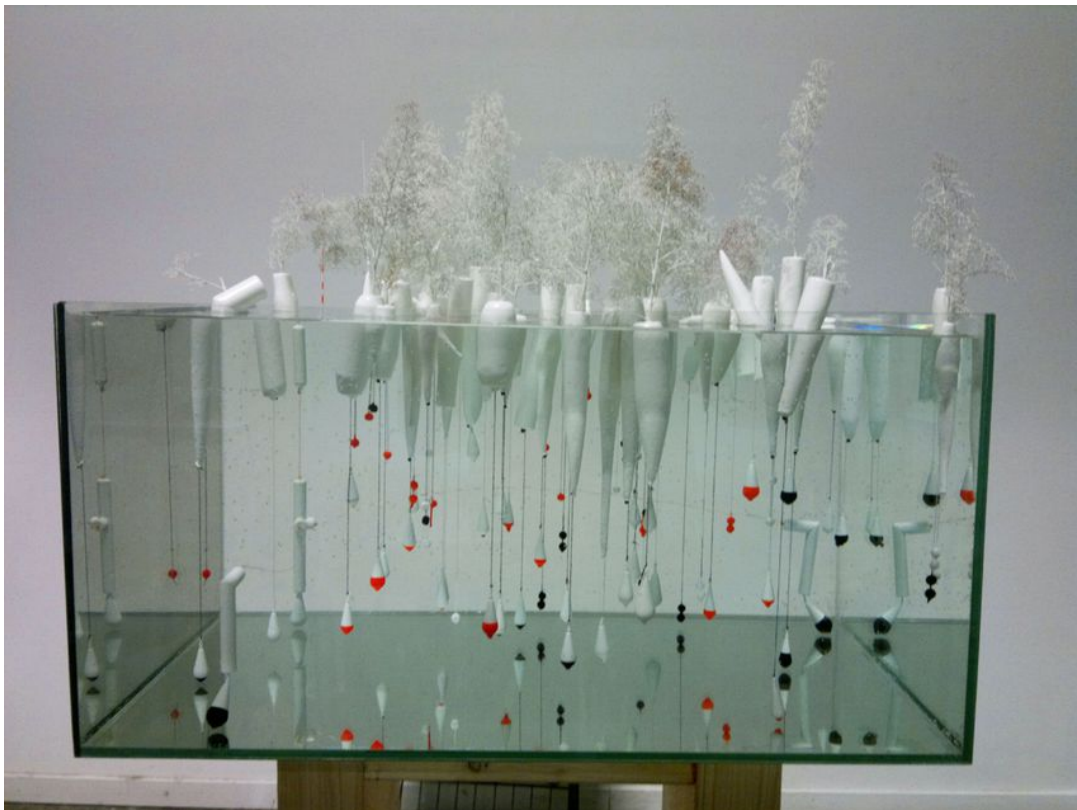
By **Amy Dempsey** Feature Writer

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Jeroen Everaert runs an art production company called Mothership in Rotterdam, Netherlands. Three years ago he was drinking wine with friends in a pub when one of them showed him a photo of a miniature forest floating in a small aquarium: an installation by the artist Jorge Bakker.

“This is too beautiful to keep it this small size,” Everaert said. “We must make it bigger. There must be a real forest bobbing here on the harbour in Rotterdam.”

To make his vision a reality, Everaert needed harbour space, which the city was happy to provide. He needed buoys, which the harbour authority donated. And he needed trees, which he got from the local tree authorities. Then he and a team of artists, designers and tree experts spent three years working on a prototype, planting test trees in old buoys recycled from the North Sea.

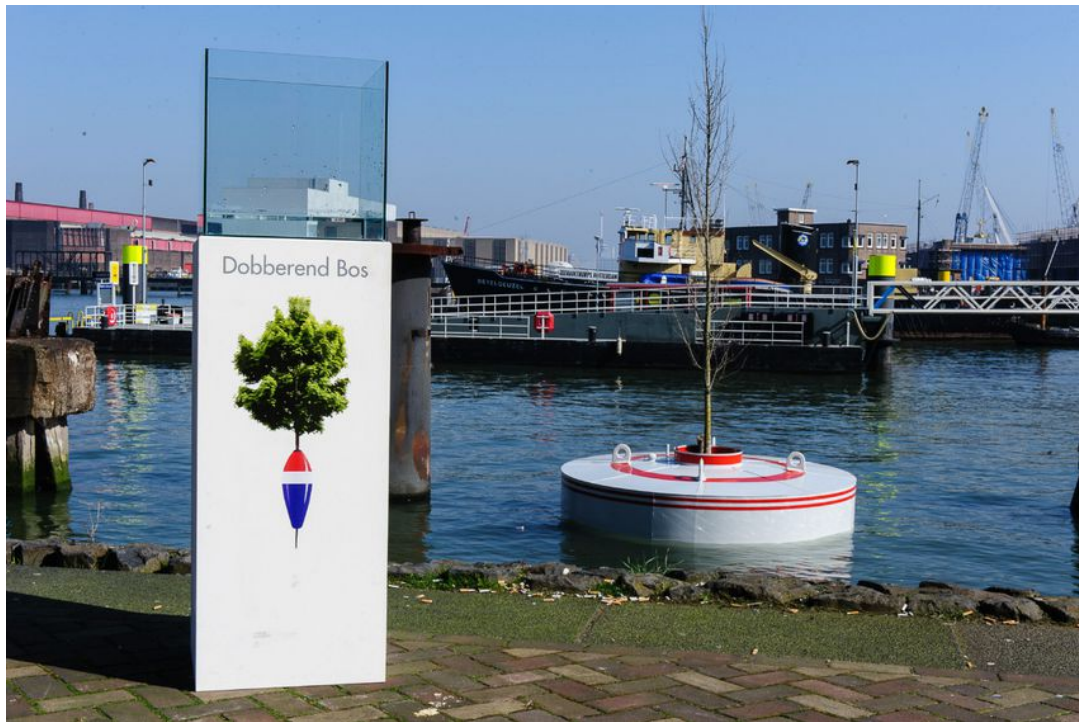


The first species they tried — a field maple — got a little seasick, Everaert said. Waves knocked it around and it couldn’t withstand the rough movement. Everaert consulted with local arborists. The Dutch elm turned out to be the best bet because it

is hardy and can withstand salt water getting on its leaves.

Early buoys wouldn't stay afloat with all the extra weight in them. The earth was the main problem: they needed something lighter than dirt. The winning formula was a combination of earth and ultralight lava rocks, which help regulate moisture and temperature.

But how would they water the trees? The harbour's salt water was out of the question, so the project team designed a 500-litre tank that slips into the bottom of the buoy and is filled with fresh water. It must be refilled four times a year.



Over the coming weeks, Everaert and his team will begin planting 20 trees relocated from construction sites across Rotterdam. The exhibit will open in March. It's called *Dobberend Bos* — The Bobbing Forest.

"What I want to do as much as possible is get people interested in art, especially people who don't study art," Everaert said.

There's also an environmental aspect. "We have a problem here with the rising of the water levels — a serious problem," he said. Rotterdam is protected by dikes. He hopes the trees will get people thinking about what the city's future could look like without intervention.





