

TURNING POINT

CARINE VAN STEEN





Dear reader,

The funeral tradition in the modern world is changing. People are looking for new ways to bury their dead in such a way that it expresses their feelings and thoughts about life as it is today. If this is the case in your community, this book offers a turning point in funeral culture.

Carine van Steen

T U R N I N G P O I N T

C A R I N E V A N S T E E N

photography by Jeroen Scheelings
layout by Maarten Rens

“there is only one land: our earth
there is only one people: humanity
there is only one faith: love”

anonymous



WHY CHANGE ?

Throughout the ages and in all cultures, feelings and ideas about life and death have been reflected in art and burial traditions. In the 19th century we see a romantic layout of the burial grounds, whereas in the 20th century the layout is more efficient and business like. In our times there is an increasing awareness of the importance of a sustainable living environment. When ideas change, the form should follow.

In 2004, I approached the Dutch governmental organisation for nature and forest management with ideas for a burial site for the 21st century. Commissioned by their Foundation Natural Commemoration. *) I made a design for a new burial concept.

As an example of what a burial ground in the 21st century could look like, I would like to present the site-specific design I made for a nature area near Nijmegen in The Netherlands. In this area many traces of life have been found from late Neolithic, Iron Age and Roman Times. Alongside the location there are two Bronze Age tumuli (burial mounds).

The concept is a response to a universal tendency to evaluate life in times of mourning and parting. It highlights the notions of transience and continuity; coherence and connection with each other, the earth, the past and the future.

THE OBJECTIVES ARE :

- to stimulate a reflective funeral culture, in which death as an inseparable part of life is not suppressed
- to develop a burial site in nature, emphasising the importance of the natural environment and create a cemetery as an example of harmony between nature and culture
- to intensify the contemplative quality of a nature site through interaction between the burial monument and the surrounding environment
- to express a relationship to the past and the future and show continuity by drawing a timeline from ancient history to time yet to come
- to link piety with care and love of nature
- to make a monument that offers comfort and perspective

This concept has a generic character. Depending on the location and other circumstances the design will vary.



SPIRAL HILL

URN INTERNMENT IN THE LANDSCAPE

site-specific concept for the pilot 'Natural Commemoration'

CARINE VAN STEEN

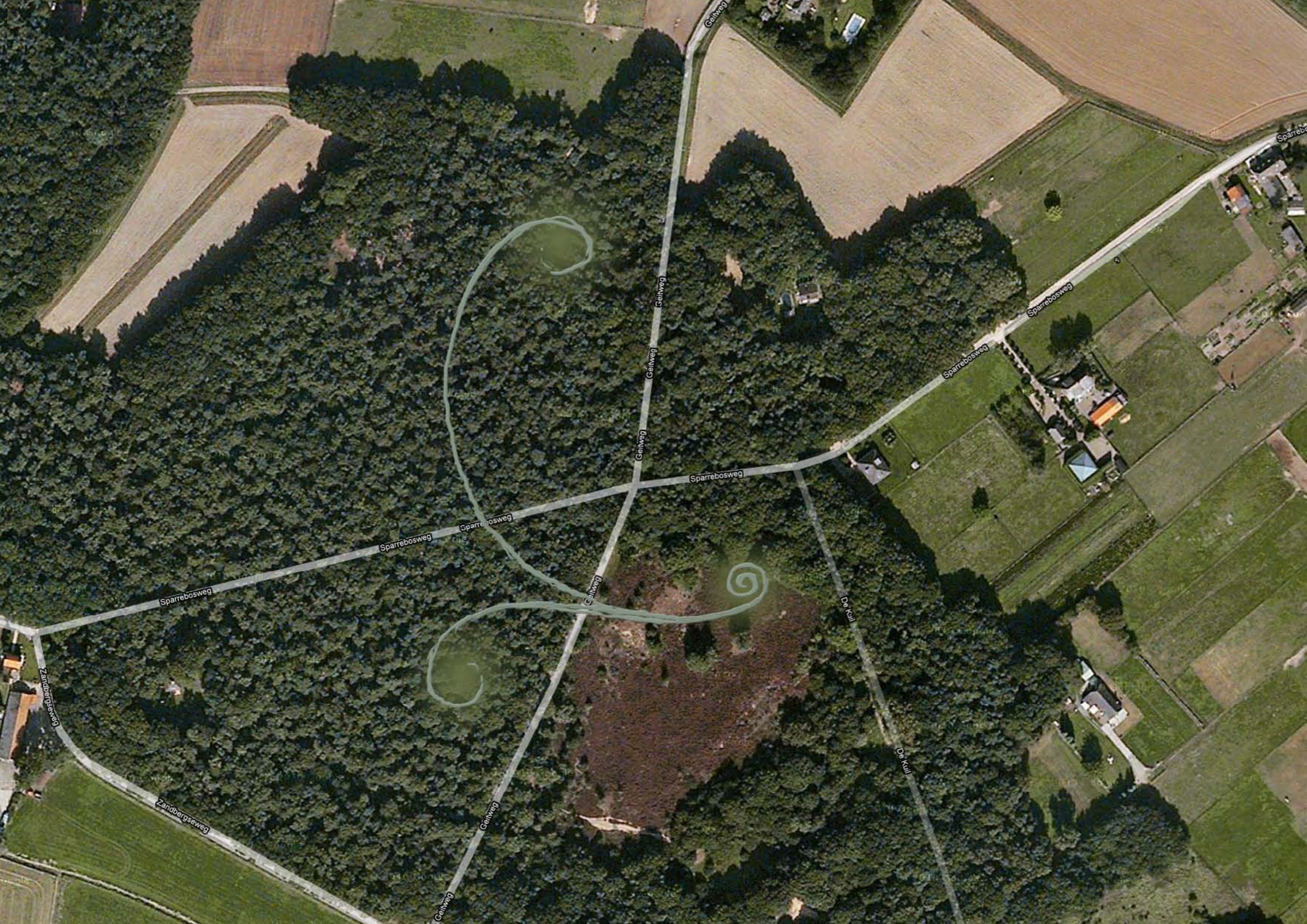
logo and illustrations by Marcel de Jong

THE LOCATION

This location and set up as a burial ground differentiates itself from other cemeteries by:

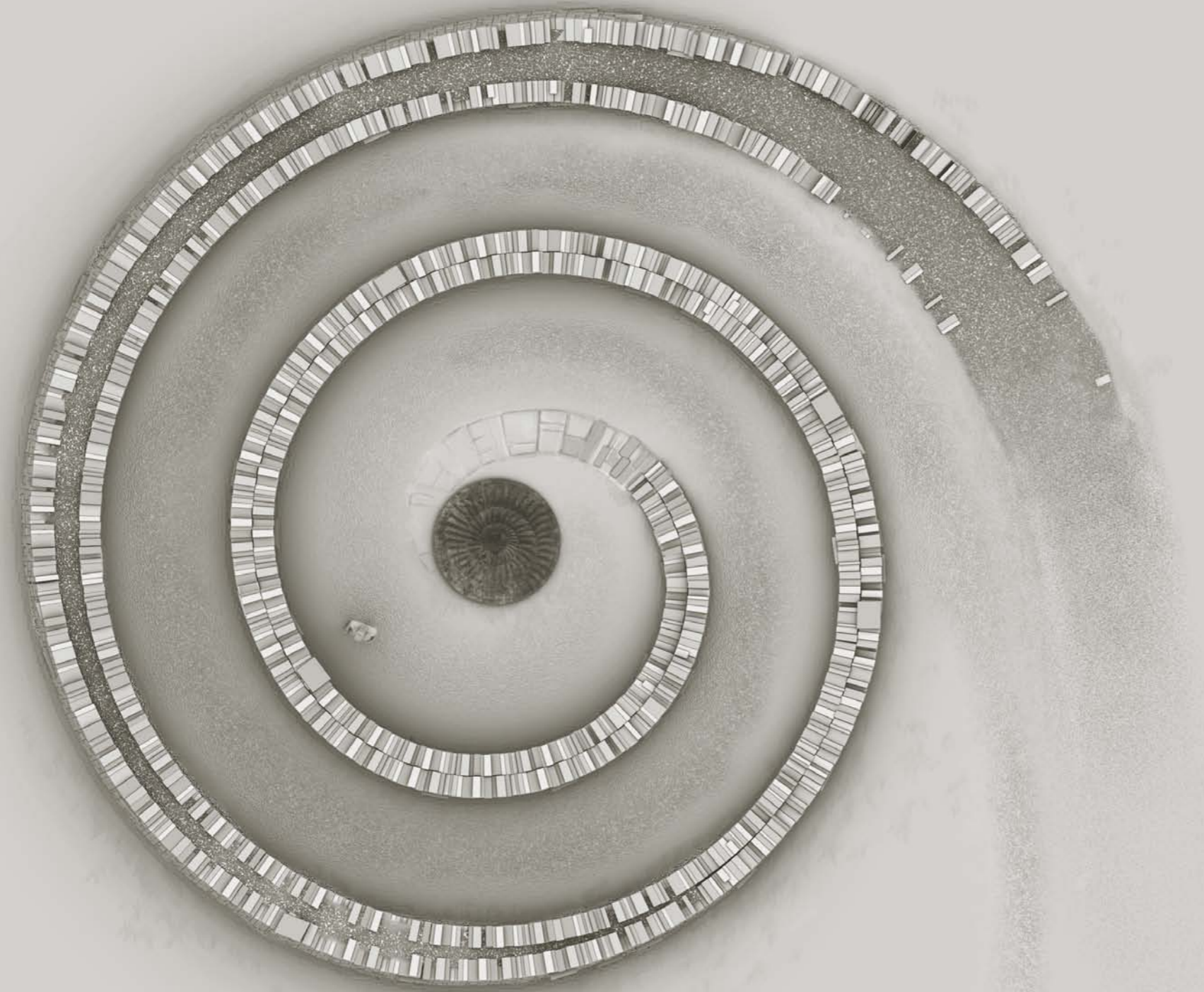
- the rough natural character of the heath
- the traces of life from late Neolithic, Iron Age and Roman Times
- it's situation alongside two Bronze Age tumuli
- the open approachable character of the location; this site will not be fenced in and thus the land art and monument will be totally integrated with their surroundings





A LANDMARK CONNECTING TWO ANCIENT TUMULI WITH THE NEW MONUMENT

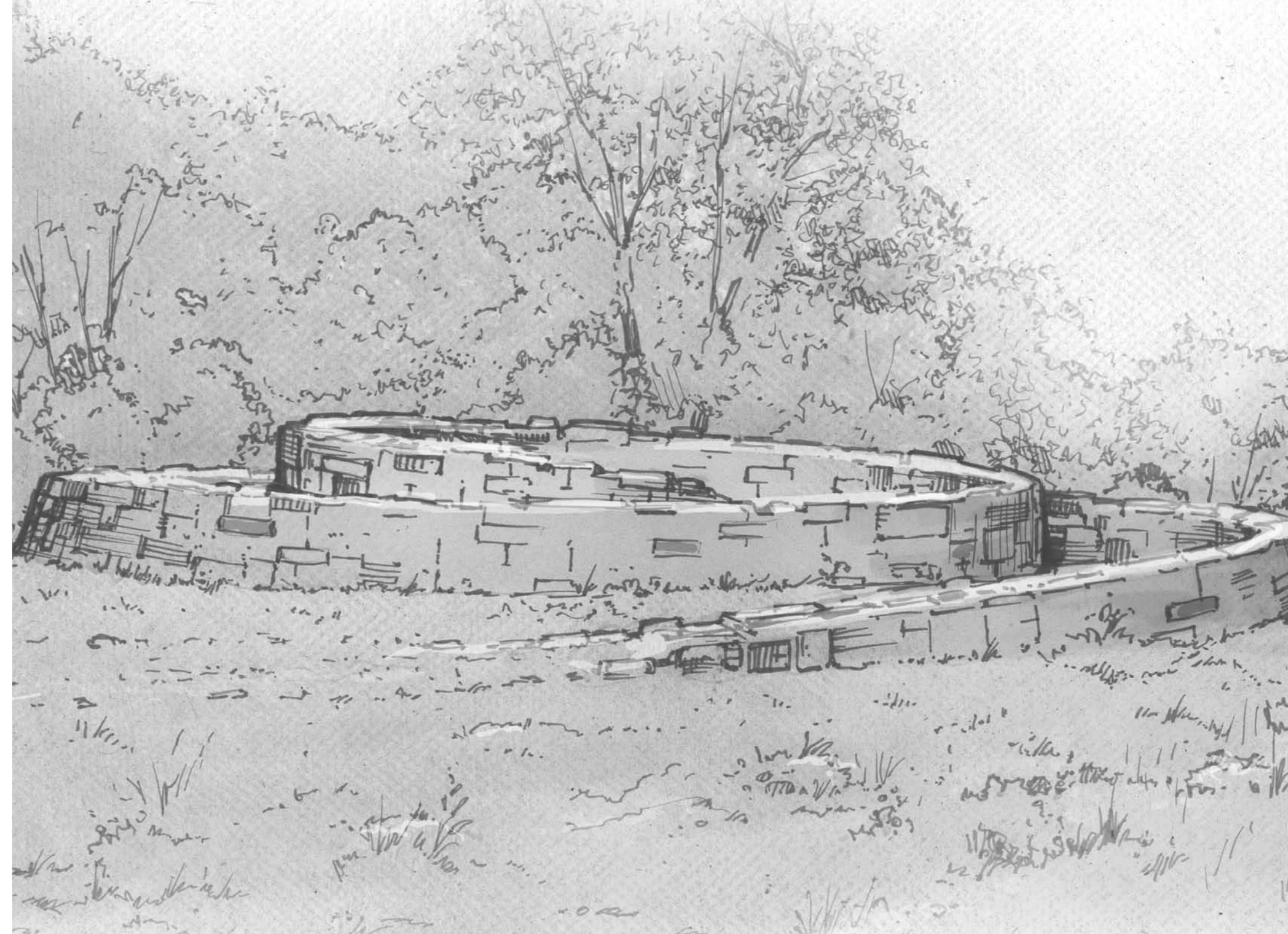
A path that runs down from the centre of the spiral hill splits up at the crossroad. In an expansive movement the two branches curve around the ancient tumuli. As a contrasting image with the environment the three monuments are held within the gracefully sweeping lines which crisscross the linear infrastructure.

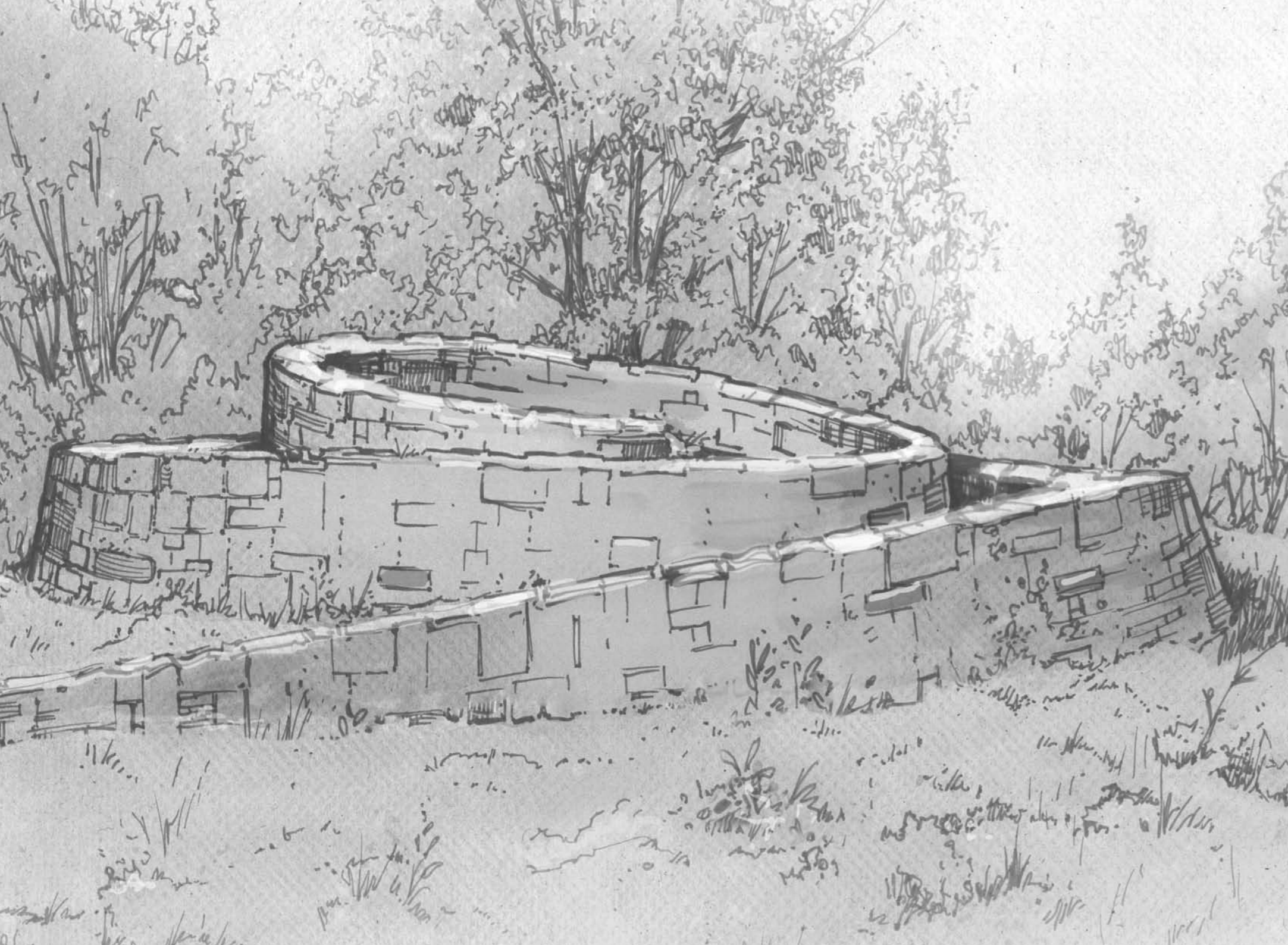


SPIRAL HILL, A GROWING MONUMENT

1st phase:

Built with loosely stacked bricks, BUILDING URNS and paving stones, a spiralling wall (diameter 21m) begins at a low outermost starting point at ground level and increases in height until it reaches 1.5m at the second winding. Then it descends again, until at the centre of the innermost winding the spiral is back at ground level. There the descending movement of the spiral continues into a central hollow dish, repeating the form in ever decreasing windings.





2nd phase:

The initial layout and structure of the spiralling wall as delivered, will be 1.5m high. Thereafter, under the supervision and responsibility of the burial organisation, the monument will gradually grow with the addition of new urns, bricks and paving stones. As the urn wall grows, the walking path within the spiral will be graded in an upward slope, thereby maintaining a constant relationship between the top layer of the wall and the footpath. This winding path leads to a central dish. Ultimately the spiral hill will reach its maximum of 6.5m. As required, the central dish will be raised to level with the adjusted path.

URNS, BUILDING STONES AND DISH

THE BUILDING URNS: are hollow terracotta blocks containing a metal ash drawer or ash tin. The metal front can be used for an inscription. The building urns are inserted into the brick wall in a rhythmic display. To create a visual variety, the urns are of three different sizes and can be inserted horizontally or vertically.

THE BRICKS: are handmade so as to introduce as many coincidental factors as possible.

THE CENTRAL DISH: could be made in bronze or in ceramic and will rest on a cylindrical foundation of bricks or paving stones. As the spiral hill grows the dish will be raised to level it with the path. The foundation can be built higher each time the dish is raised.

THE GROWING SPIRAL HILL: With every new urn interment the required amount of bricks, paving stones and gravel will be added to the wall and the path. The growing process will be supervised by the caretaker of the monument following the instructions of the design.





*) This proposal was commissioned by Stichting Natuurlijk Herdenken (The Natural Commemoration Foundation) collaborative organisation of Staatsbosbeheer (Dutch governmental organisation for nature and forest management) and the undertaker De Facultatieve Groep (The Facultative group).

“However much we try to avoid it, the fate of all living creatures is death. It is inescapable. But its certainty need not be depressing. On the contrary, contemplating death makes you realize you are alive, right here, right now, in this moment. That is all you will ever really have. To put it more poetically, life is a gift from death.

Still we cannot close our eyes to the needs of the bereaved and we should pay respect to lives lived.

In my opinion the design of Carine van Steen’s monument does all that: it creates a space for mourning, paying respect and contemplation. Above all it does so in a way that is wholly contemporary but at the same time enables you to connect with ancient death rituals.”

MARCEL VAN OOL
Art historian, Staatsbosbeheer



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