



Inside The Jam Jars by Magali Reus

Giorgia Massari · 1 day ago · [Art](#)

Milan Art Week has just begun, and there are numerous events around the much-awaited **Miart** fair that will animate the city. Among these, the **Fondazione Arnaldo Pomodoro** will inaugurate on April 10th at the **Museo del Novecento** the solo exhibition of Dutch artist **Magali Reus** (1981), winner of the seventh edition of the *Arnaldo Pomodoro Sculpture Prize*. **Off Script** is the title of the exhibition curated by **Federico Giani**, which will present *Clementine*, a series of works that well illustrate the artist's practice and research focused on a careful observation of everyday life, particularly of all the objects that populate it, which are then recreated and reconfigured. This approach finds a strong parallel in the Milanese context of April, which with its two art weeks guides artistic and design research towards **new ways of seeing the world**, especially from a sustainable perspective and with a positive social impact. Similarly, Magali Reus's practice, drawing from reality to then manipulate it, stimulates an alternative reflection on our daily environment and our way of living. Let's think about the works at the Museo del Novecento, conceived starting from the **domestic context**, particularly the jars of preserves, which on one hand evoke **a homely and nostalgic dimension**, while on the other hand reflect on the artificiality that even a simple tradition has undergone. But let's discuss it with the artist and delve into her research, which in some ways nods to the **ready-made** without actually putting it into practice.

The theme of sustainability is becoming increasingly relevant in the contemporary context, with Art and Design Week also emphasizing this theme. Your exhibition Off Script also seems to carefully consider this issue. How do you think your artistic practice relates to this theme?

MR: Sustainability is an economic, social and environmental concept which stems from renewed, urgent thinking about ecology. It has become increasingly relevant as we find our habitat – this planet we live on – in environmental **perma-crisis**. However, sustainability is not defined or articulated as a thematic exploration in my work; certainly the notion of ecology is something that has been increasingly surfacing, whether this is explicitly coaxed out or intuitively leaned into. It inevitably pushes itself into the work because ecology is concerned with interconnectedness. Our growing consciousness makes it palpable and urgent today. It permeates every fibre of us: it determines how our lives, our physical surroundings, our psyche, our imaginations, our present and our uncertain futures are shaped. It comes as no surprise that it surfaces in my work – conceptually, materially and even logistically.



Magali Reus Ph Jules Moskovtchenko

Your works have been described as “meticulously handcrafted sculptural puzzles.” Could you tell us more about your technique and the artistic influences that guide you?

MR: In my mind a puzzle sets up a deliberate confusion in a work, played out by the artist taking on a rather elevated, superior or educational role towards the viewer who is then set the task to find ‘resolution’. There needn’t be a conclusion. I feel this kind of structure sets up **a power dynamic that I definitely want to avoid**. I hope my works provide an equal plane of access for encounters. I want to allow for myriad and plural interpretations rather than some predetermined singular ‘meaningful’ answer.

Your works on display at the Museo del Novecento, particularly the series “Clementine,” seem to play with the duality between familiar objects and their reimagined meanings. Can you explain how nostalgia for homemade food production intertwines with the reality of mass production and distribution?

MR: I can elaborate on this question endlessly from my own personal position. A recent essay written on my work by Filipa Ramos – published in a recent monograph titled *Red Roses* – articulates a response so well, and so comically I can’t resist

sharing it:

Bonne Maman's domestic appearance, with a lid that simulates a checked cotton cloth (the above-mentioned Vichy pattern) and a printed tag that mimics the handwriting of another era, alludes to a world made of domestic preserves, small-scale, inter-generational foraging across woods and common lands and recipe books passed across generations. In reality, the brand is a token of the industrialization of nature and instrumentalization of care, as it attests to how something as simple as a compote became the matter of a multinational business, and how its wrapping makes people oblivious to the stories they know too well and don't have time to think of, in a similar manner to how they don't have time to forage and make jams. When you buy a Bonne Maman jam, what you are buying is a fiction, a make-believe in which you are taken to a world where nurturing grannies wearing aprons stir mushy strawberries with their wooden spoons.

Filipa Ramos



Clementine (Tendon Shoots), 2023 | Photos: Eva Herzog

The Fondazione Arnaldo Pomodoro awarded you the sculpture prize, stating that your practice “opens up new perspectives on approaching the world around us.” Could you explain more about your research in this regard? What do you seek in everyday life and how do you act upon it?

MR: I'm not sure if I am really seeking, *as such*. Things often cross my path that leave me with a sense of intrigue and interest. My research process is very broad: I see a lot of art, books, museums, galleries, auctions, the web, and so on. And I encounter things when travelling and just generally in the streets and elsewhere on an everyday basis. I use photography to document these. I collect a lot of images, objects, fabrics, materials, and books.

Cumulatively, all of these things fill a kind of pool, somewhat catalogued, but more like a vast quanta of visual and written data. It would make no sense to anyone apart from myself. I use all of this material to draw from when making my work. Some of this matter sits there for years on end until it finds its way back into the world via the work. Whenever it feels appropriate or relevant within a given moment then they naturally nestle into place or they need to be manipulated, forged, wrestled into a certain position.

Through a kind of alchemical collision something wholly new and manifold emerges – something to ponder and which has a certain vibrant energy which can extend beyond the habitual or one’s immediate expectations.



Clementine (Out of Orbit), 2023 | Photos: Eva Herzog

How does it feel to exhibit in such an important venue for the city of Milan, which showcases some of the most important artists of the 20th-century Avant-garde? Can you share some behind-the-scenes stories of the exhibition and the works displayed?

MR: It’s a true honour, and it certainly came as a complete surprise for me to hear about the nomination. To then be awarded the prize was yet another fantastic surprise! At the **Museo del Novecento** I am showing a selection of six works from the *Clementines* series that you mentioned in your earlier question. These wall-mounted works will be shown atop and around a set of enlarged punctuations rendered by hand onto the museum’s walls. The punctuations themselves derive from a font I have newly developed, titled **KOOL**. The intention is that these punctuations create a sentence-like structure that loops the words into a dialogue with each other around the architectural space they inhabit, thereby connecting the 3 elements into a singular type of scripture – albeit in a rather abstract and perhaps non-literal or conclusive kind.

Let’s talk about the artist’s book that you are presenting on the occasion of the exhibition, created by Fondazione Arnaldo Pomodoro in collaboration with Lenz Press. We know that you started from the concept of waste, specifically focusing on the waste of red cabbage and then built a parallelism with the Latin alphabet. What was the creative process behind this project?

MR: Not so much waste but rather a form which emerged through slicing an existing vegetable structure: the red cabbage. I stumbled upon its calligraphic potential purely coincidentally. After having made myself lunch I noticed the small slivers left behind on my plate suggestively spelled out a word: ‘england’. It was extraordinary and

somehow full of significance. Like tea leaves left at the bottom of a mug. I documented the plate in order to remember the event, and it wasn't until a few years down the line that I decided I wanted to develop it into a font.



Clementine (Bandid), 2023 | Photos: Eva Herzog

I purchased a number of cabbages and sliced them into small slivers, searching through the heap for each typographical character and symbol. These were photographed. Then, using the photographs as a guide, I drew up the shapes and simplified each somewhat into three different colours (a dark purple, a lighter purple shade and finally a white 'flesh'). I converted these into graphic vector shapes on the computer. As you might imagine, the whole process took quite a while.

I wanted to find a conclusive way of marking the completion of the font and showcasing it. Naturally the **Type Specimen Book** (a format I had already been very interested in prior to this project) felt like the most appropriate visual template to explore the font. Formalised yet playful, it really has developed into a very unusual book, and in some ways could be perceived as more of a sculptural object.

The exhibition is open until June 30th.

Courtesy Fondazione Arnaldo Pomodoro, Magali Reus, Museo del Novecento



Words by [Giorgia Massari](#)