

Departure Belgium*

A conversation with *Magali* *Reus*

*Departure Belgium
is about a wandering
train travelling
between Portugal
and Belgium

text: FRANCISCO CORREIA



Hammock, 2021. Sand cast and hand painted aluminium, CNC'd and sprayed model board, powder coated, phosphated, sand blasted, blackened and copper welded stainless steel and mild steel, nuts and bolts, 128x82x61 cm. Courtesy: the artist, The Approach, London and Fons Welters, Amsterdam. Photography: Robert Glowacki

Magali Reus was born in Den Haag, The Netherlands, in 1981 and currently lives and works in London.

Her forthcoming solo exhibition at The Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, (USA) opens this May. Other forthcoming exhibitions include Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Ghent, (BE) this year and, in 2023, CAC Synagogue de Delme, (FR) and Museum Kurhaus Kleve, (DE). Some of her recent solo shows include *Shadow Tonics*, Fons Welters gallery, Amsterdam (2022); *As mist, description*, South London Gallery, London (2018); *Hot Cottons*, Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen (2017); *Night Plants*, Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, St. Gallen (2017); *Mustard*, The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2016); *Quarters*, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin (2016); *Spring for a Ground*, SculptureCenter, New York; *Particle of Inch*, The Hepworth Wakefield, Wakefield; *Halted Paves*, Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster (all 2015). Reus was shortlisted for the Hepworth Prize for Sculpture in 2018 and in 2015 was awarded the Prix de Rome. Her artist book *Knaves: Park Cities* was published by König and friends of the Museum Kurhaus & Koekoek-Haus Kleve e.V. in December 2021.

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I met up with Magali Reus on the eve of the opening of her exhibition *Shadow Tonics* at Fons Welters gallery, Amsterdam. There was some uncertainty as to whether the opening would take place due to pandemic restrictions. Besides the typical January cold, Amsterdam proved to be an inhospitable city, taking me back to the weird gloom and barrenness of Lisbon and Brussels in the first wave of lockdowns.

We walked around the exhibition as we made our introductions and Reus showed me the *Knaves* series, also from that first pandemic year, when she temporarily returned to her hometown to be with family. One day, following an afternoon walk, her mother excitedly reported that the local woodland was blooming with the fly agaric mushroom (the cartoonish, archetypal mushroom with its red cap and white spots). Reus began photographing the spectacle.

The *Knaves* series, partly presented at Galeria Nuno Centeno, Portugal, in 2021, shows Reus' singularly sculptural way of thinking. Even in a work apparently more focused on photography, the framing and mounting of the images are treated with the same reverence as the printed image itself, composed and manipulated by her own hand.

Mushrooms are depicted as if in a photoshoot, where the background is interwoven with fabricated natural motifs. It is an unconventional series compared to her better-known three-dimensional works. However, *Knaves* employs many methods of manipulating materials and reference points typical of Reus. The artist juggles possible meanings, constantly put to the test by context, composition and materials. Indeed, it is impressive to witness the dexterity with which Reus brings together different technologies to make objects and images that surprise and enthrall us. At the same time, they imply the typical familiarity of things we are used to living with.

Francisco Correia: Last time we met you said that language is an important element in your work. What role does it play?

Magali Reus: Yes, I'm interested in the language of objects and how an object translates itself for the viewer. This translation occurs sensually through means of association, which can be a register of familiarity, triggered in myriads of ways. Associations might register through colour, shape, scale, material, or construction, just to name a few.

Aside from this, I'm also interested in the emotive language of objects, which is less to do with viewing them passively but rather as active, more autonomous agents. This emotive language extends itself towards the viewer as a flirtation – an undressing of sorts – or as much more recondite. In an interview with Christina Lehnert about my most recent work *Knaves*, currently on show at Galerie Fons Welters in Amsterdam, I was asked about the relationship between the portrait photographs of fungi against a backdrop of used t-shirts. Christina wondered if I was consciously anthropomorphising the mushrooms. Part of what intrigues me about fungi in this new work is its mysterious withholding complexity and allure as (photographic) subjects. I strongly feel I wouldn't do the mushrooms' complexity any justice by anthropomorphising them.

In *Knaves*, the stage is set for the mushrooms to be glamourised by an exuberant combination of photographic effects, settings and display structures. I was thinking about sex and gendering. Mushrooms are sex organs: they are sometimes showy and seductive but this sex and gender is alien to our human ideas. Despite how I frame and characterise them, the mushrooms remain opaque, disobedient, agential, yet seductive. I'm increasingly interested in this surface tension.

FC: I was thinking that the familiarity you refer to might come from the feeling of knowing or having experienced the objects and imagery that you evoke. The series of locks, the Leaves series, the picnic table and even the portraits of mushrooms, the Knaves series, come swiftly to mind. Is it important for you that your work is able to return the viewer back to their own experience of being alive, therefore unveiling some form of intimacy?

MR: It's important to me that the work feels like it is, or can be a part of, our immanent lived world of experience one way or another – for an object or an idea not to feel like straight-up science fiction or psychedelia. To avoid this, I coax out relations between characteristics of objects and habitualised experiences, as well as physical bodies. Locks or, say, elements of a picnic table produce immediate associations and sensations.

FC: Do you believe that different materials tell different stories?

MR: Materials inevitably express by different degrees. An organic material such as wood may evoke a sense of

the unpredictable – the uncontrollable – through its non-homogenous surface. This material has grown, has lived, and has a duration: its lines, its holes and its knots are a formative history. Equally it withholds its incalculable futures, extending little control as to how it may respond to being shaped by extraneous sources over time.

In contrast, a composite modelboard is malleable: it has a duration, of course, and its construction of plastic dust, molecules blended and forcefully bound by an invisible gluey

medium, is highly toxic. Its material composition allows it to act and transfer determinately and seamlessly, much like a shapeshifter or a ghost, into numerous articulations.

FC: I can imagine that you're frequently asked about the relationship between the natural and the artificial within your practice. That relationship is very explicit in the show at Fons Welters. Is there an interest on the limits of this relationship, on reflecting how far we can manipulate and reconfigure nature?

MR: Yes, it's fascinating to me how humans are constantly reframing 'natural' worlds, often in the most bizarre, extreme and irresponsible manner. Take, for instance, the seedless grape. Why remove – that is, design out – a core element that poses no risk of choking? These types of actions or manifestations of reframing have seamlessly nestled into our lives and we no longer consider them strange or even have the knowledge of how they've been achieved.

The industrialisation of nature is historic and pervasive. It is *natural*. This is why I infer quotation marks on the word 'natural' above. Powerful and imaginative corporations will continue to confidently embed themselves into our private, natural worlds. Humanity is indistinguishable from bio-technological innovation. A fascination with non-human positions animates my work.

FC: You use multiple kinds of technology, sometimes even within the same work. What importance do you attribute to craft and how do you relate it with industrial processes?

MR: Craft introduces the element of human touch, skills and practice, which can, when countered to an obviously industrialised process, open a fabricated object up to connections with our physical bodies and imbue it with sentiment. By virtue of its connection to a more manually invested process of labour, craft introduces a singular, soft and subjective materiality.

FC: Is the exhibition moment part of your working process, in the sense that the work already embodies some sort of performative element that you aim to transmit to others, or does it have more to do with an inner will of realising something?

MR: The exhibition is a situation I work towards. And,

SWANANOAH E2
 SWISS AVE H6
 SYLVESTER ST H2,3
 SYRACUSE E7
 TABOR C7
 TALMADGE LN A4,5
 TANBARK B3
 TAOS RD E2
 TARSIS DR E7
 TEX OAK H2
 THACKERAY ST B-E4
 THEDFORD F2
 THORNBERRY D1
 THROCKMORTON ST G,H3,4
 THURSTON AVE F,G1
 TIBBS ST B,C4
 TIMBER TR C1
 TIMBERBROOK A7
 TOBIAN A6
 TOKALON DR G7
 TOM BRANIFF F2
 TOPSFIELD D7
 TOWN HILL E6,7
 TOWN NORTH E7
 TOWNS ST A6
 TOWNSEND DR B1
 TRAMMEL DR E,F7
 TRAVIS ST G,H4
 TREADWAY G1
 TREEHOUSE C6
 TROY SOUTH B,C7
 TRUESDELL A1
 TRUXTON D7
 TUCKER ST H7
 TULANE BLVD D,E4
 TULANE ST C,D4
 TULIP LN B4,5
 TURNER WY A4
 TURTLE CREEK BLVD E-H4,5
 TWIN HILLS AVE D6
 TWIN TRE F7

TYREE F2
 UNIVERSITY BLVD F3-7
 URSULA LN B3
 VADA DR F7
 VAGAS AVE H3
 VALDINA ST H2
 VALENCIA AVE H7
 VALLEY RIDGE RD C1,2
 VALLEYDALE A,B5,6
 VAN NESS ST D1
 VANCOUVER DR B1
 VANDELIA H3
 VANDELIA ST G2,3
 VANDERBILT AVE G5-7
 VASSAR DR E-F4
 VELASCO AVE G6-7
 VICKERY BLVD G5,6
 VICKSBURG ST H1
 VICTOR ST H6,7
 VICTORIA F2
 VIEWSIDE DR B7
 VILLAGE RIDGE A1
 VILLANOVA DR D4,5
 VINECREST DR B1
 VIRGINIA H5
 VISTA CREEK B7
 VISTA GATE B7
 VISTA OAKS B7
 VISTA VIEW B7
 VIVIAN H7
 WABASH CIR G7
 WADDELL F2
 WAGGONER C4,5
 WAKE FOREST E7
 WAKEFIELD ST D,E7
 WALDORF DR B1
 WALLING LN D,E7
 WALNUT HILL C1-5
 WANABE F1
 WANDER LN A5
 WANETA DR F3

WARWICK C1
 WATAUGA E2
 WATEKA DR F2,3
 WATSON C3,4
 WATT AVE H4
 WEBB KAY A7
 WEBSTER B1
 WEBSTER F2
 WEDGEWOOD D2
 WEEBURN DR A1
 WEISS E1
 WELCH DR A2
 WELDON ST H4,5
 WEMDON D1
 WENONAH DR F2,3
 WENTWOOD DR D4,5
 WEST BAY F7
 WEST CIR F7
 WEST SHORE DR G,H7
 WESTBROOK E7
 WESTCHESTER DR D-F4
 WESTLAKE AVE G7
 WESTMERE B4
 WESTMINSTER AVE E5
 WESTOVER C7
 WESTROCK B6
 WESTWAY AVE G3,4
 WESTWICK RD E,F4
 WHEELER G3
 WHITE ROCK H7
 WHITEHALL DR B1
 WHITEHILL ST E7
 WHITEHURST DR B7
 WHITLE LN A4
 WHITTENBURG B6
 WILADA DR D2
 WILBORN ST H3,4
 WILD VALLEY DR E7
 WILDGROVE AVE H7
 WILDWOOD RD E2
 WILLARD ST E5

WILLIAMSBURG C2
 WILLIAMSON F,G7
 WILLIAMSTOWN RD A3,4
 WILLIS AVE G5,6
 WILLOW GROVE RD C2
 WILLOW LN A2-4
 WILLOWDALE A6
 WILLOWRIDGE A1,2
 WINCHESTER ST D,E7
 WINDSOR PKWY F3,4
 WINDY CREST A7
 WINDY KNOLL B7
 WINDY TERRACE DR B7
 WINEVALE C7
 WINGATE E1
 WINSTEAD G7
 WINSTON D3
 WINSTON ST F5-7
 WONDERLAND TR B1
 WOOD AVE H7
 WOODBLUFF B7
 WOODBROOK B7
 WOODCREST F6,7
 WOODFIN DR D2
 WOODFORD DR C2
 WOODHURST B7
 WOODLAND DR D4,5
 WOODLEIGH C1
 WOODSHORE DR B6,7
 WOODTHRUSH C5
 WORCOLA ST F,G6
 WORTH ST H6,7
 WREN F2
 WYCHE G13
 WYCLIFF AVE G,H2-4
 WYLIE E1
 YALE BLVD F5,6
 YAMINI DR B4
 YOLANDA LN C3
 YORKSHIRE B4
 YOSEMITE F7

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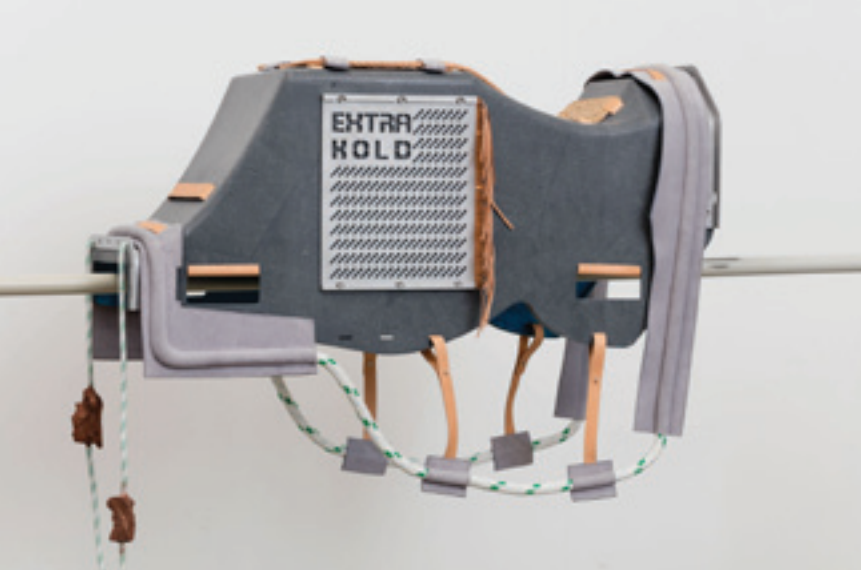


IN THE SUBURBAN YELLOW PAGES

The Natural Cl

Earthworms
 TOP SOI

g holes



(previous pages)
 Spread from *Park Cities: Knaves*,
 2021. Published by Verlag der
 Walther und Franz König, Köln and
 Freundeskreis Museum Kurhaus &
 Koekkoek-Haus Kleve e.V.

(left)
Propeller E.K. (detail), 2016.
 Courtesy: the artist and The
 Approach, London. Photography:
 Plastiques



(above)
Apricots (detail), 2021. Courtesy: the artist, The Approach, London
 and Fons Welters, Amsterdam. Photography: Robert Glowacki

(right)
Bonelight (Autumn Glory), 2020. Fibreglass and polyester resin,
 pigments, awning fabric, brushed stainless steel, sprayed UV
 printed resin, powder coated cast iron, carved stained wood, air
 brushed laser cut steel, nuts and bolts, 232x73x69 cm. Courtesy:
 the artist, The Approach, London and Fons Welters, Amsterdam.
 Photography: Lewis Roland



(above)
Parking (Bench Press), 2014. Fibreglass,
 polyester resin, pigments, laser cut and
 powder coated aluminium, steel springs,
 bungee cord, 57x182x49 cm. Courtesy:
 the artist and The Approach, London.
 Photography: Plastiques

(left)
Settings (Eclipse), 2021. Powder coated and
 airbrushed steel, aluminum, sprayed UV
 printed resin, acrylic, grub screws, 71x71x5
 cm. Courtesy: the artist, The Approach,
 London and Nuno Centeno, Porto.
 Photography: Mark Dalton

as you say, it can be a performative space where a body – maybe unfamiliar with my work – will acquaint itself with the objects of my brain and hand. At the start of the pandemic, just two weeks before the *Knaves* series was to be picked up for an exhibition at the Nasher Center, Dallas, I learnt that the show had to be postponed. The work had been produced for an intended physical space. It became an artist book titled *Knaves: Park Cities*, which appropriates the form of a telephone directory service. In this strange moment of isolation and frustration I was drawn to this printed object that is – or at least was – physically connected, a communications service manual dispersing thousands of things to many more individuals. I thought of it as a hijacking of the space in Dallas, one that was equally physical but actually accessible to me in the circumstances. I treated the printed matter it as if it were a physical space in which I could install the work as I saw fit, manipulating it to service the photographs while retaining its basic structure, content and characteristics. Within this neatly structured space, the images are sequenced without apparent logic – at random, disobedient – as mushrooms appear and reproduce in the natural world. The book, in the absence of the physical gallery, performs themes of the work itself.

FC: I have been asking this question to different artists: given the increasing awareness of how overproduction affects the planet's sustainability, do you believe that art should still operate nowadays within the realm of objects?

MR: Objects are so intrinsic to our worlds that I think excluding them from the discourse of art and art-making would be neglectful and ultimately turn them into taboo, which I don't believe is helpful. Assuming you're talking about material objects, over-production is a concern for the sustainability of the natural environment. That said, I'm confident that art, which may or may not use objects, can meaningfully address those larger questions and have an impact. //