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Magali Reus On Like Scenery

30.10.22–
12.02.23

Magali Reus' solo exhibition *On Like Scenery* brings together new photographic and sculptural works alongside paintings selected and staged by the artist from Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens' collection.

Responding directly to the museum's pastoral setting, *On Like Scenery* deepens the artist's ongoing interest in transformation and how different spaces, symbols and objects determine specific situations.

An online interview with Magali Reus can be accessed via this QR-code.



Magali Reus. Photo: Jules Moskovtchenko

Magali Reus (1981, The Hague) lives and works in London. Reus' sculptures are the product of numerous production processes – 3D printing, powder coating, casting, weaving, carving – deployed without heed to standard fabrication practices.

Recent solo exhibitions include *A Sentence in Soil* at the Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas; *And Orchard* at François Ghebaly, Los Angeles; *Shadow Tonics* at Galerie Fons Welters; Amsterdam (all 2022). Other solo exhibitions include *As mist, description*, South London Gallery, London (2018); *Hot Cottons*, Bergen Kunsthall (2017); *Night Plants*, Kunstmuseum St. Gallen (2017); *Mustard*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (2016); *Quarters*, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin (2016); *Spring for a Ground*, SculptureCenter, New York; *Particle of Inch*, The Hepworth Wakefield; *Halted Paves*, Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster (all 2015). Magali Reus was shortlisted for the Hepworth Prize for Sculpture in 2018 and in 2015 was awarded the Dutch Prix de Rome.



ur Volumes

A breadboard, hand-carved in wood and scaled to the size of a dining table, is attached to a reel. At the coil's ending, the spray head nozzle is a rooster's head cast in aluminium with details in rubber.

The breadboard, a commonplace object during the Victorian era (1837–1901), was often adorned with symbols of harvest, bread, and Communion.

Magali Reus:

“There are many ways this work speaks to ideas, objects, concepts, tones, affects in other works displayed at MDD. The coiled hose, constructed in custom weave fabric, wrapped around its wooden spool, might unravel in a rotary movement, suggestive of a clockwise movement of time. This movement counters the linear standardisation of the tape measure. At the coil's end (or start, depending on how you approach it), the spray head, cast in aluminium, doubles as a rooster's head that hangs limply.

The rooster signals dawn breaking in the morning; its call cuts through the environment and has deep social meaning, predating the mechanical clock. Here, attached to the hose, it is an active agent encouraging uncoiling. This rooster is connected by the hose to a larger network: a weave, a water system, a digital or virtual web. As the rooster signals the dawn of a new day, so the hose plugs into a pressurised resource. Water is the elemental binding agent by which bread rises and thus each day begins.

I think of bread as a ‘building block’ or ‘brick’ of the Western table. The consumption

Our Volumes, 2022.
Photo: Eva Herzog

p.6-7:
Our Volumes (detail),
2022. Photo: Eva
Herzog





Landings

Reus began the series *Landings* in summer 2021 in her hometown of The Hague, photographing fruit and sliced cabbage against the backdrop of construction debris found in skip bins – heaped rubble, plaster dust, spent paint cans, and splintered floorboards. Reframed as surreal and enlarged fruit bowls, the containers twist the tradition of Low Country still life painting, inviting meditation on the incongruities of our relation to nature, artifice and ephemeral life.

The photographs are embedded into sculptural frames of powder-coated steel, layered on a reconstructed childhood painting of the artist. The steel frame contains letters and numbers welded onto its sides along with swatches of tarpaulin and twisted wire. These markings convey abbreviations of months and the miles travelled by the crop from its place of harvest to its place of documentation.

Magali Reus:

“*Landings* is a meditation on the selective manipulation of crops for particular traits. Not displayed in the common domestic fruit bowl, the exotic fruit and cabbage portrayed in these photographs find themselves positioned on a new surreal stage, documented among the debris of construction skips throughout the city. Shot in macro detail, the fruits are character portraits of sorts, that find themselves – sometimes exuberant, other times shy – posing among the refuse of renovated homes.

I was interested in the constructed image of nature, in this case the fruit bowl within our domestic spaces of consumption. Fruit pictured in *Landings* is subtended by global logistics networks of commerce: agricultural, geographical and financial markets are all integral (invisible) markers to the existence of a single piece of fruit in the transactional space of the supermarket.”

Landings (January, Anchor), 2022.
Photo: Eva Herzog





Landings (April, Contours) (detail), 2022. Photo: Eva Herzog



Landings (1351.7, Melba) (detail), 2022. Photo: Eva Herzog

Candlesticks

Reus' floor-based sculptural series *Candlesticks* consists of towering street lamps with open and oversized incandescent light bulbs. The bulb filaments form cursive English words, each spelling out different types of electrical illumination: 'halogen', 'fluorescent', and 'LED'. At their base, open chambers gestate oversized vegetables and fruits.

Magali Reus:

“A different script adorns the long posts holding these bulbs: numbers inscribed on the surface in hand-carved markings. Echoing lovers' carvings in the bark of trees, the romance of these inscriptions is in tension with quantitative measurements of agribusiness – sunlight hours for crop growing, average crop weight and sizes.

Below these markings, within the base of the lampposts, a cross-sectioned opening reveals an oversized fruit or vegetable in 3D-printed resin and pigmented plaster, sitting as if incubating in some futuristic growth chamber. In one, a scaled-up raspberry postures on an oversized picnic plate; in another we find an ear of corn. Part sanded white plaster and colourfully pigmented surface, the finish lends the produce the quality of a prototype, a product in development. In these works I was thinking about metabolism, energy, the passage of time, and the coursing lines of power that bring sustenance from the sun to our homes and our dinner tables.”

Candlesticks (Ultra-violet Fool), 2022.
Photo: Michał Brzezinski





Candlesticks (Sodium Relish) (detail), 2022. Photo: Michal Brzezinski



Candlesticks (Blacklight Tamatar) (detail), 2022. Photo: Michal Brzezinski



Candlesticks (Mercury Spice) (detail), 2022. Photo: Michal Brzezinski

What Grows

What Grows consists of three components: flexing tape measures constructed in welded and heat-forged steel, bags of substitute food produce rendered in sand, and aluminium sheet flower boxes containing domesticated plant species. These works measure space, as well as time, in the form of expiration dates and memorable dates of communal activities.

Magali Reus:

“The graphics found on the skins of the bags are of processed or ‘substitutional’ foods: for example, a powdery liquid milk substitute rendered as soft cheese. They are part of the make-up of our contemporary foodstuffs where innovative processes allow familiar natural products to slip into unconventional shapes. Sand as a material is grounding and the most basic component for a range of construction materials. It continues to be synthesised into innovative technical processes, let alone widely-used ancient mixes, and into many material configurations: concrete, brick, glass, and other synthetic compounds.

I am interested in the transformations that sand undergoes – its propensity. It’s alchemy. Where sand is conjured into many shapes through alchemical processes, a like trajectory awaits edible ingredients destined for consumption. These edibles manoeuvre the digestive tract but only after they’ve been transformed into the allure of a meal. The architecture of the domestic, the meal and lastly the body: they’re all containers encapsulating metabolic processes that find themselves in continuous flux.

What Grows (Flowers, Flowers) (detail), 2022. Photo: Eva Herzog

Returning to the sand, I was fascinated by the way the bags’ surfaces might be the same finish as their material substrate. Cut one through and it’s the same all the way. Whereas normally a weave, a plastic or a paper skin reassuringly holds the content, these bags’ skins and the material goods they purport to hold are deceptively one and the same.”





What Grows (Fresh Blooms) (detail), 2022. Photo: Eva Herzog



What Grows (Red Roses), 2022. Photo: Eva Herzog

Reus has selected five paintings from the Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens' collection and imbedded these in wooden cable reels. Frames removed, the fragile paintings have a sense of unboundedness, returning their natural subjects to the world.

Magali Reus:
 “The reels are positioned in a variety of orientations. Those that stand freely and upright echo *Our Volumes* at the exhibition's entry. Whereas the latter is affixed to the wall, the reels, with their cylindrical forms, could always be rolled away, stored even. I like this tension. As *Our Volumes* sets up the idea of Communion, the wooden cable reel as a display device invites conviviality, gathering and sociality around the paintings.

The reels are a surrogate frame. Both the reel and the frame are of wood worked in some way or another. Unlike frames, devices for separating the inside (the content) from the outside of the painting (the world), the wood of the reel is worked with little concern for ornament. Presenting the paintings unbounded and attached to a display device that suggests rotary movement is a way to open their content up to the setting around them. This lack of preciousness is interesting to me and I'm grateful to the museum for allowing me to do this. In turn, this invites reflection on the cultures of collecting that underpin the museum.”

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1 James Ensor
Stilleven met chinoiserieën
 1907
 Oil on canvas

Ensor found inexhaustible inspiration in the souvenir shop in Ostend run by his mother: shells, carnival masks and other curiosities regularly recur in his work. The artist continuously sought the blissful in the everyday with scant regard for the rules of the academy.

2 Louis Thévenet
De keuken
 1924
 Oil on canvas

Looking from the corridor of a residential house into a living room with the burning stove, a cat is the only living presence in the composition. Thévenet frequently painted mere traces of human activity. The painter is not only a meticulous observer, but also adds his own personal values to each piece of reality, creating a composition that tells a highly personal story.

3 Louis Thévenet
De rode kast
 1915
 Oil on canvas

Like most of Thévenet's paintings, *De rode kast* [The Red Cupboard] depicts an interior. On the cupboard, with a half-open drawer, are two cups, two bottles and two loaves of bread. A portrait of Christ hangs above the cupboard, next to a pan and a shopping bag draped over a frame. Two additional towels hang on the white-grey wall. Thévenet alludes to human activity without depicting it. We seem to be too late: the inhabitant has just left the scene.

4 Léon De Smet
Vaas met bloemen
 1935
 Oil on canvas

Léon De Smet was one of the few of his generation to remain committed to the techniques of impressionism. The bouquet in this painting is an explosion of colour and thickly applied paint. The artist's brush strokes animate the blue-green background. By depicting the common subject of the flower bouquet in such a vigorous manner, De Smet brings out the dynamic beauty that lies in everyday objects.

5 Léon De Smet
Interieur
 1940
 Oil on canvas

The painting offers a view of the artist's small, intimate world. In the back one catches a glimpse of the dining room table set in a white tablecloth on top of which a vase is positioned. De Smet often took his personal domestic environment as the subject for his paintings, proving a strong kinship with Louis Thévenet.

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