

# WHEN THE WIND BLOWS

MADDY ARKESTEYN



11<sup>TH</sup> APRIL UNTIL 23<sup>RD</sup> MAY 2013

# KITCHEN TABLE TALK BETWEEN ANNA LUYTEN AND MADDY ARKESTEYN

## REWRITTEN REALITY

Anna Luyten

We spent a couple of days at the kitchen table together. Maddy Arkesteyn, her husband Maarten Greve, with whom she has shared her life since they met at De Ateliers in Haarlem in 1989, and myself. We sat there just as we did so many times before, with good food and Westmalle Tripel beer. Maddy's latest macramé work hung behind the table. Above the desk was a photo from an earlier period. We leafed through books that inspire us. We discussed art and life.

maddy 'Someone should try and explain that aspect of friendship: the way people can share and feed a hunger for knowledge through each other.'

## SCULPTING FROM REALITY

At one in the afternoon, bouquets of beautiful flowers grace the market stalls. Once the market is over, they end up on the ground. Does that change their meaning?

maarten 'Yes, their purpose is different. They have no resale value anymore. Piles of flowers are scattered on the ground and eventually swept away. When things are taken out of their context, they change. Maddy, you once took pictures of this. These market images are a strong entrance to your work. They refer to your motives.'  
(15-7-2012)

maddy 'An artist, a philosopher, a writer, wants to free him or herself from stagnated structures. It's a way of showing that some concepts are temporary. It gives one a feeling of liberation. I have always called myself a sculptor. For me, sculpting is how I look at the world. It's a philosophical way of looking. It's a way of thinking about how things reveal themselves to us, the relationships and positions they take. Concepts are never isolated. Everything you think or perceive is relative to something else. This is also what I wanted to research in my philosophy study: the desire to lose oneself in order to begin again. Studying was not an intellectual game for me. It was an incapable existential necessity.'

## WAS IT LIKE THAT FROM THE BEGINNING?

Maddy 'In 1994 I made large floor pieces that were then described with the fashionable term 'installations'. But they weren't installations at all. In my work everything was positioned very precisely. An object couldn't be moved even five centimeters to the right or left without disrupting the piece. My first sculptures were very much about displaying and exhibiting within one and the same sculpture. I wanted to show things in such a way that it became clear that meaning is constructed in the way an object is displayed. I covered common objects, like a chair turned upside down, with plastic or netting. By doing so it was lifted from its own reality and thus became special in comparison to the other objects. I always wanted to make sculptures that had a kind of completeness to them...perhaps that's still what I want.'

Maarten was referring to a series of photographs you made in 2008. Eventually you chose sculpture again.

maddy 'Because sculpting is a physical activity, it can literally confuse your body. You can move through it, you can stand in it. That's the added value of sculpture.'

Your sculptures are not mimetic. They don't mimic an existing reality.

maddy 'I don't want to make anything that tries to look like something else. Because then it wrests significance from what you already know. That's too easy. Then you stop looking. I want to detach things from their common meaning. I want to show the other possibilities for what a thing could be. For example to liberate a chair from its "chairness".'

For Plato, art was merely a reflection of an idea. You turn that around: you remove that chair from its common idea. You let matter determine the idea by playing with the iconic layer.

maddy 'The objects I have used in order to make sculptures, be it a chair, a skateboard or a glue gun, I have employed because they are able to construct a particular narrative. However they all eventually got stuck in a cycle of self reference.'





Polyester bags, 2002-2006, Maddy Arkesteyn, installation view

#### RESEARCH INTO FEAR

maarten 'Do you remember Maddy, that piece with the plastic in front of the window in which you cut out a new window? It was one move, there was no way back. I think you are very good at that, cutting. You have never been afraid to cut.'  
(22-7-2012)

maddy 'I also made lots of hallways that you can't enter. Or tents you can't get close to. Things that expose themselves and as a consequence become sealed off from the world. In that time I read a lot of Witold Gombrowicz's<sup>1</sup> work, about the peculiarity of things.'

I found it beautiful that sometime ago you said, I am very proud of my work but I should have been less fearful.

maddy 'That fear is something – probably everyone has something like that – something that bothered and hampered me my whole life. But at the same time it was so strong that I had to investigate it; it gave me the strength to make things. I made my best work when I was mentally pretty confused. At that time I couldn't go

to a supermarket without feeling: someone is standing in front of me, I could knife him in the back. Someone is standing behind me, I could be knifed. I was physically aware of the vulnerability of the human body. In that time I was hyper-sensitive to the way in which people and objects were positioned in relation to each other. I was intensely conscious of the "choreographies" and conventions between objects and people.'

Perhaps fear is like a signal that you realize, as a human being, that there are different possible outcomes, that you accept that realization and allow many things to obtrude on you. Fear might be a form of courage.

maddy 'Yes, you can turn it around. I think that fear is actually a deep form of insight into reality. One has to be able to feel different possibilities, otherwise you can easily get locked up inside yourself. That's the reason why I make sculptures and why I say: I want to allow myself to lose myself in those sculptures. In that sense making sculptures is a matter of survival for me. In my macramé sculptures

I have allowed myself to let go. They were created in the period after my breast cancer and after the death of my father. In a philosophical way, I absorbed and processed these events into the work. Using macramé offered a new, optimistic direc-



foreground: Polyester bags, 2002-2006 | background: A *promise of hapiness*, 2008, photography analog print, from left to right: no. 15bis, no. 11, no. 19, Maddy Arkesteyn, installation view

tion in my work. Before that, I was much more reticent and heavy handed. I can't handle that anymore. It has always been important for me that a sculpture is self-reflective.

I can't stand sculptures made of heavy and unwieldy material. They're too dominant in their meaning and their materiality within space. Transparency is much more interesting. Transparent sculptures put themselves in perspective as objects in a space as well as reflecting on the space itself. You can literally see through them.'

There is also a lot of irony in that work.

maddy 'Macramé is often associated with plant hangers, with homely and feminine hobbies, with a kind of optimism against the odds. I wanted to commit an act of resistance adding irony to the decorative. I wanted to make it into something monumental and also to associate the work with Brancusi's impetus.'

Your macramé is somehow architectural. You create cathedrals with ropes, by letting yourself go.

maddy 'As an artist I need to lose myself in a sculpture. Then it becomes loose and free. That's when I find interesting solutions.'

But that loss, where do you find that? In the sculpture itself or in the act of knotting?

maddy 'The two go together. In any case it's in the act of making. During the process of making, you arrive at solutions you wouldn't otherwise think of. That's liberating. If you don't have that freedom to let yourself go then, you get stuck, at least I do.'



*A promise of happiness*, 2008, photography analog print, from left to right: no. 29, no. 13, no. 15, no. 5, no. 15bis, no. 11, Maddy Arkesteyn, installation view



#### A KIND OF ECRITURE AUTOMATIQUE?

maddy 'I suspect so. The decisions are made along the way, whilst you are working. Maybe there are some ideal images and relations in your mind, but they are very abstract. At a certain point you know, when this thing is in this place, it's right. You are actually seduced by something you already know.'

At the same time the handicraft gives you a kind of repetitive hold. The handicraft demands a certain kind of obedience towards the knot.

maddy 'It's also meditative. You allow yourself time to make decisions, time to look. Maybe also time to withdraw more from the world. That restriction has given me more freedom as a sculptor. And sometimes you have to be disobedient as well, and then you need to knot in more ropes. But because the Reef Knot is always a given, I don't need to think about other things.'

Like what for example?

maddy 'Materials, color, format. I have always envied painters who at least know a few things in advance about their work: it has to fit on a canvas and it will be made with paint.'

#### THE LONELINESS OF THINGS

Maarten 'Do you remember the composition of the artist's studio you made? I was your model, I lay on my stomach on the floor. Scales positioned on my back. Normally a person would stand on the scales. Behind my back was a cast of a body part. You added a glue gun. They were fragments which could be part of a story. It was not symbolism for symbolisms sake, but the rewriting of meaning.'  
(22-7-2012)

maddy 'Meaning should not be imposed. There are people who make a sculpture with a ladder and that ladder is supposed to refer to something celestial. I find that too literal, uninteresting actually. It limits your thinking. What it ought to do, is offer possibilities and be liberating.'

With your art you want to rewrite reality. But suddenly you have this unwanted growth in you; it messes up your life, it's as if there is something that is rewriting your reality.

maddy 'Identity is a construct. Sometimes you need to put aside what you have attained in order to carry on. That's very painful but it can also be a reason for making a big step forward.'



Makramee sculptures, 2010 - 2012, Maddy Arkesteyn, detail



*Makramee sculptures*, 2010 - 2012 (foreground) and *A promise of Happiness*, no. 4, Photography analog print, 2008 (background) , Maddy Arkesteyn, installation view

About your earlier work, you once said: 'I want to stage situations and let them coagulate into a thing, into an object. It's always about a unity that falls apart. Many of my works are still-lives that have been merged together, but in such an odd way that they make you think: "What is that?" And then they fall apart. Then the work dissects itself. It looks perfectly logical, as if it's always been this way, but when you look more carefully you find it contains elements that oppose each other. It's a bit like Brussels: still-lives that don't belong together. That was one of the reasons we came to live and work here. It's a city in a constant state of decay and resolve. Under the lee of Brussels you feel the loneliness of things.'

#### THE LONELINESS OF THINGS, WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT?

maddy 'Things have an apparent logic in the way they are connected to each other. But actually, all things exist by themselves. In fact everything is thrown back in on its self. I would like for someone who looks at my work to ask the question: "Where in fact am I? Here, amidst these things, in which layer do I find myself?"'

#### Footnote | Fussnote:

I Witold Marian Gombrowicz (\* 4. August 1904 in Małoszyce, Russia; † 25. Juli 1969 in Vence, France) was one of the most important polish writer of the 20th century. Since he was 34 he live in exile.



*Makramee sculptues*, 2010 – 2012, Maddy Arkesteyn, installation view



**Maddy Arkesteyn** | [www.maddyarkesteyn.com](http://www.maddyarkesteyn.com)

Maddy Arkesteyn 1966 born in Goirle (NL), January 17, 1966, died 2012 in Brussels (BE), August 29, 2012

#### *Ausbildung*

1984 – 1989 Academy for Visual Arts, Maastricht (NL)  
1989 – 1991 De Ateliers, Amsterdam (NL)  
2004 – 2009 Vrije Universiteit Brussel (BE) / Department of Philosophy and Moral Sciences, Bachelor and Master / Research and Paper: The connection between passion and loss of self-control. The loss of self-control as an ability and a way of understanding

#### *Solo Shows*

1994 CBK, Rotterdam (NL)  
1995 De Begane Grond, Utrecht (NL)  
Hooghuis, Arnhem (NL)  
1998 Exedra, Hilversum, (NL)  
1999 Stichting Plus Min, Renesse (NL)  
2000 Gallery Sabine Wachters, Brussels (BE)  
2001 Art Brussels, Exciting young artists, Gallery Sabine Wachters (BE)

Gallery Brigitte Schenk, Cologne (DE)

2003 Gallery Sabine Wachters, Knokke (BE)  
2004 Gallery Sabine Wachters, International Photo Festival Knokke-Heist (BE)  
2007 Gallery Sabine Wachters, International Photo Festival Knokke-Heist, (BE)  
Piers 101, In the space of the uncontrollable moment, the sense of freedom is tangible, Brussels (BE)  
2009 Gallery Sabine Wachters, International Photo Festival Knokke-Heist, (BE)  
2010 CEAC, Brancusi's Psychosis goes exotic, Xiamen University Art College, Xiamen (CN)

#### *Group Shows*

1993 Loods 6, Kracht van Heden, Fonds voor Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam (NL)  
1994 Art Transit, de Port à Port, Marseille (F), Fra Paleis voor Schone Kunsten, De Ateliers, Brussels, (BE) Belgium  
1996 Stedelijk Museum, Peiling 5, Amsterdam (NL)  
Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Unfold, Rotterdam (NL)  
1997 Schetsopdracht voor Het Bentwoud, Kunstgebouw, Rijswijk (NL)  
1998 Stichting KWI4, Imponderabilia, s Hertogenbosch (NL)  
1999 Banket 8, Maddy Arkesteyn and Charlotte Schleiffert, Archipel, Apeldoorn, (NL)

foreground: Polyester bags, 2002-2006 | background: *A promise of happiness*, 2008, photography analog print, from left to right: no. 5, no. 15bis, no. 11, no. 19, Maddy Arkesteyn, installation



- 2000 Museo laboratorio de Arte Contemporanea, Citta Sant Angelo (IT)  
Artissima, Turin, Gallery Sabine Wachters (IT)
- 2001 Arte Fiera, Bologna, Gallery Sabine Wachters (IT)
- 2002 Artis, Pre-fab, s Hertogenbosch (NL)
- 2003 TENT, Wormhole 3, Stepping out sometime else, Rotterdam (NL)
- 2004 Elephant, Chapter 2, Amsterdam (NL)  
Gallery Annie Gentils, Freundschaftsmaschine, Antwerp (BE)
- 2005 Gallery Sabine Wachters, Summertime, Knokke (BE)
- 2006 Gallery Sabine Wachters, Knokke (BE)
- 2007 Paulo Post Futurum, Breda's Museum, Breda (NL)
- 2008 Gallery Sabine Wachters, End of year accrochage, Knokke, (BE)
- 2009 Gallery Sabine Wachters, A promise of happiness, 16 photographs, Brussels (BE)
- 2011 Pictura, Maddy Arkesteyn and Charlotte Schleiffert, When the second voice does not occupy a stable position, Dordecht (NL)
- Publications and Articles*
- 1993 Catalogue Kracht van Heden - Fonds BKVB, B. Welters
- 1994 Catalogue Art Transit - de Port à Port, Marseille (F)  
Catalogue De Ateliers 1985-1993  
De Witte Raaf nr. 52, Koen Brams  
CBK Rotterdam solo catalogue
- 1995 Metropolis M / nr 2, Maddy Arkesteyn, D. van den Boogerd
- 1996 H.P.de Tijd / week 12, Expansiedrift, D. van den Boogerd  
Catalogue Peiling 5 – Stedelijk Museum  
Kunst, Kunst aus den Niederlanden, Jaap Bremer
- 1998 De Blauwe Kamer, speciale publicatie met betrekking tot Het Bentwoud  
Stichting KW14, catalogus Imponderabilia
- 1999 Acht Banketten in 1998, Het tiende jaar van Archipel, Apeldoorn  
Collect/Recollect, Rotterdam City Collection
- 2001 Kunstbeeld nr 4, Kunstbeurs Brussel; Maddy Arkesteyn, Christine Vuegen  
Knack nr 18, Kunstbeurs Brussel, Jan Braet  
TV – documentary by Cameo Media / UPC / Maddy Arkesteyn
- 2002 Argus, Brussel deze week, Sabine Wachters; Maddy Arkesteyn
- 2003 De Volkskrant, 26-03-03, Reis door het wormgat tussen strip en beelden-  
de kunst, Joost Pollmann
- 2004 Catalogue, 26ste Internationaal Fotofestival Knokke-Heist  
De Tijd, 21-04-04, Fotofestival Knokke, Bert Danckaert  
Denieuwe (Art et Amicitiae) 2004, jaargang 8, vreemdeling zijn, by Maddy Arkesteyn  
Catalogue, Internationaal Fotofestival Knokke-Heist
- 2007 Catalogue bij solo, selection of works 1995 - 2007, Eating, bathing,  
watching tv and making sculptures., text: Marc Van den Bossche (nl) (en)  
La libre Belgique, Poésie de la rue, Marie Pok

background: Polyester bag, 2002-2006 | background: *A promise of hapiness*, 2008, photography analog print, from left to right: no. 5, no. 15bis, no. 11, no. 19, Maddy Arkesteyn, installation view



- 2008 Artist editions, 12 positions for a blue / white / green plastic bag, Maddy Arkesteyn  
 Artist editions, A promise of happiness / sixteen photographs, Maddy Arkesteyn
- 2009 Artist editions, In the space of the uncontrollable moment, the sense of freedom is tangible, Maddy Arkesteyn  
 Agenda, Brussel deze week, 07-01-09, Tragische schoonheid, A promise of happiness, Yves De Vresse
- 2010 Common Talk Weekly, 13-10-2010, Brancusi's Psychosis visits Xiamen, Sophie Zhu  
 Xiamen Evening, 09-10-2010, The rope has thousands of knots, Huang Ya Hui  
 Haixia Living Newspaper Weekly, 21-10-2010, Maddy Arkesteyn, The red ropes and small carts from Xiamen is the material for her sculpture, Miranda Vibert  
 Intimations of Freedom, Brancusi's Psychosis Goes Exotic, Publication made during a residence at the Chinese European Art Center (CEAC) in Xiamen, China, text by Anna Luyten and Ilse van Rijn
- 2012 When the second voice does not occupy a stable position, text by Anna Luyten and Ilse van Rijn, Calcite Revolt (publisher)  
 Het verband tussen verlangen en controleverlies. Controleverlies als

vermogen en vorm van inzicht by Maddy Arkesteyn, master thesis written in 2009, Philosophy and Ethics at the Vrije Universiteit of Brussels, Calcite Revolt (publisher)

#### *Residencies*

- 1998 Moving Art Studio, Brussels (BE)  
 2003 Cucosa, Rotterdam (NL), TENT, Wormhole 3, Stepping out sometime else  
 2006 FLACC, Genk, (BE)  
 2010 Chinese European Art Center (CEAC), Xiamen (CN)

#### *Collections*

- Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (NL)  
 Boijmans van Beuningen Rotterdam (NL)  
 Museum of Modern Art Bologna (IT)  
 and private collections

*Makramee sculptures, 2010 - 2012, Maddy Arkesteyn, installation view*





*Makramee sculptures, 2010 - 2012, Maddy Arkesteyn, installation view*

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