

REVIEWS: EUROPE

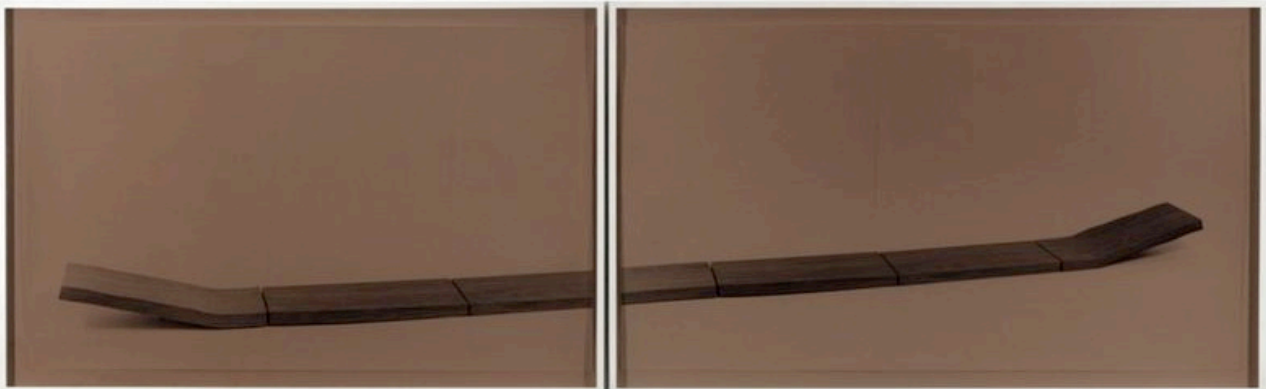
There is something both troubling and downright beguiling about Becky Beasley's morbid brand of minimalism. Full of whispered thresholds and blunt, stylised refusals, 'the undiscovered country' seems to lurk within everything the artist does. *Malamud*, the artist's solo exhibition at Office Baroque gallery, explores the funereal implications of the plank. Obscurely titled after the Jewish American writer Bernard Malamud, this exhibition consisted of sculptures and both found and personally authored photos.

The found photos – small black-and-white snapshots from the 1940s of suited men either crossing a small river on a wooden plank or fishing the plank, gone astray, out of the water with a stick – are the source of inspiration for this body of work. Seen in the charged context of the exhibition, they take on a contrived and uncanny air, as if, despite the fact that Beasley found them in a flea market, their consonance with her practice is too engrossingly good to be true.

From these photos came Beasley's own series of large silver gelatin prints, forensically entitled *Figure (Part III)*, *Figure (Part IV)*, etc (all works 2008). The prints feature flat, modular pieces of wood laid end to end in twos, threes and fours to form planks, photographed on blank grounds and framed inside tinted acrylic glass covers (in bureaucratic brown and hospital-green, both antiseptic). The images are accompanied by real-life plank counterparts in the space. Slightly bowed upward at the ends and often perfectly centred in the lower half of the image, the planks in the photos assume a sacramental significance, like altars divested of religious paraphernalia.

Becky Beasley
Malamud

Office Baroque Gallery, Antwerp
14 December – 31 January



This association is coupled with a more corporeal one of laid-out, disjointed cadavers; thus Hans Bellmer and his reconfigurable dolls insinuate themselves, adding an unexpected dose of macabre perversity to the mix. But if the spectre of Bellmer helps animate the fetishistic character of the planks, the plank sculptures themselves leaning up against the gallery walls bring into play the operative reference of John McCracken. Contrary to McCracken's lustrous and rectilinear sculptures, Beasley's matte planks, constructed with black American walnut veneer, curve away from the wall like partial parentheses or anthropomorphic spines. The planks, entitled *Plank 5*, *Plank 6*, etc. were created after the photos, save for a small, curved unit, which originally featured in Beasley's silver gelatin prints, and which is placed on the ground like a diminutive headstone.

The artist refers to these sculptures in the show's press release as 'fictions'. It is indeed not hard to see them as narrative structures in which the narrative has been sublimated by the mute, inscrutable eloquence of death. Despite their heavy reliance on art history, and therefore potentially anecdotal glibness (illustrating the death drive of minimalism), Beasley's sculptures and photos are too weird to be explained away by citation. Like the one series of wall sculptures in the show that explicitly references language, *Figure + Letter A-E*, consisting of a horizon line of black walnut hinged shelves, whose hinged parts hang down into evocations of some Semitic language, the work remains hauntingly inassimilable. *Chris Sharp*

Figure (Part III), 2008, selenium toned silver gelatin print, brown acrylic glass, double sheet version, dimensions variable, edition of 2. Photo: © Koen de Maal. Courtesy the artist and Office Baroque Gallery, Antwerp