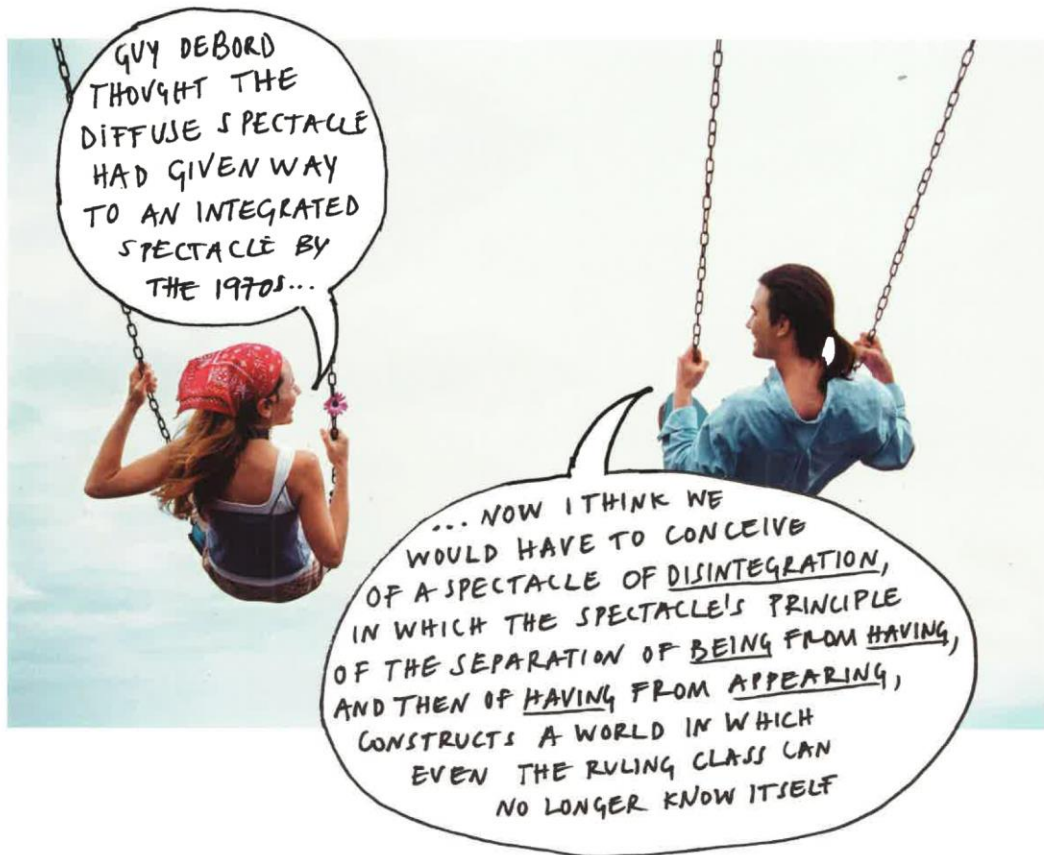


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Richard Deacon *Some Time*

Middelheim Museum, Antwerp 27 May – 24 September

When Sara Weyns returned from Tate Britain's Richard Deacon exhibition in 2014, she felt frustrated. Recently appointed director at Antwerp's Middelheim Museum, she knew her new home had an important Deacon sculpture in storage. But it was in horrifically bad shape. The wood was cracked and rotting, the whole object wrapped in plastic like a corpse washed up on the shore. She determined then and there (as she told me when I visited) to contact the artist and set about restoring *Never Mind*, the great polished beech lozenge that had been acquired by the museum in the year it was made, 1993. Three years later, a reinvigorated *Never Mind* is the peroration – and the largest work by some stretch – in a solo show by the venerable British artist that focuses fittingly on sculptural representations of process, transformation and temporal extension.

Some Time spreads 31 of Deacon's works throughout almost the entire expanse of the museum's 30-hectare park. A path that crosses the property leads past Henry Moore's *King and Queen* (1952–3), newly crowned with birdshit, and Erwin Wurm's *Misconceivable* (2010), a weirdly

plastic yacht, dangling precariously over the grand country house's moat in an image of pathetic masculinity, before reaching the first of several works in the show from Deacon's *Infinity* series (2001–06). Such series are an important part of the sculptor's work, and they seem to represent less the safe bet of repeating a hit, more something like the way American minimalist composer Tom Johnson writes musical notes: eking out every possible combination through a mathematical process of combinatorics. These cream cracker-like forms in stainless steel, blown up to the size of family dining tables, tease at a quasi-painterly flatness, extending through sequences of interconnected cogs in a machine without end or purpose.

Means of production are drawn into the aesthetics of Deacon's sculptures, with works like *Body of Thought #2* (1988), a knot of twisted ventilation shafts, and *Morning Assembly* (2008), an Escher-like form in mottled green ceramic and steel, leaving their rivets and seams proudly on display as testament to their processes of construction. But temporal passage comes into other works in more metaphorical ways. *I Remember (1)*

(2012) and *I Remember (3)* (2013) consist of long wooden struts that seem to bend and twist impossibly, against the inclinations of the material, but for Deacon, as the title suggests, the way the configuration of beams alters from one end to the other represents the passage of memory, rearranging the same elements with time (to me, they are evocative of flight paths or, more prosaically, a fistful of undercooked linguine).

At the end of the park, the freshly minted *Never Mind* looks justly proud, gleaming in the sunlight. No longer wood-beamed like the hull of a ship, its new aluminium form gives it the air of a UFO – a retrofuturist gesture that would have been almost unthinkable in 1993 but seems perfectly germane to the mid-2010s. But what's nicest about *Some Time* as a show is the way it brings into its purview, through a film on display in one of the garden's pavilions, a detailed book and other accompanying texts, what had previously been the dirty secret of sculpture parks the world over: the very fact that works do decay and need repairing, the reality of time passing – even for the supposedly 'permanent' world of sculpture. Robert Barry



Never Mind, 1993–2017, wood, stainless steel, epoxy, 310 × 765 × 300 cm. Courtesy the artist and Middelheim Museum, Antwerp