

## **Unsure Certainties**

**By Frédéric Bonnet**

Martine Feipel and Jean Bechameil have developed rather the reputation as masters of illusion, but are they secret-keepers of the arcane arts , or perhaps rather more plausibly, just experts in the art of trompe l'oeil? Their peculiar craft is to coax the eye with semblances of sense and order, in order to unleash all the more unwitting confusion but moments later. In their work nothing is ever quite as it seems, each reading invites its immediate contradiction, leaving us in a carefully crafted state of perturbation.

A clapped out bus stranded upon a beach could be turned into a strange kind of attraction, paradoxical fossil of a not-so-distant past. Or immense architectural models executed in immaculate detail that seem to celebrate post-war utopian ideals of communal living but upon closer inspection serve only to betray their fragility and faults. Their oeuvre stakes its ground exactly where we least expect to find it; did you, for example, spot their sculptures subtly inserted into Lars von Trier's films? If not, look again!

With plenty of ploys and decoys up their sleeves, Feipel and Bechameil proceed ever-ready in their pursuit of the unexpected. Their refit of the Delvaux boutique plays a game between the hidden and the exposed, promising visitors surprises ripe for their discovery. Their strategy in whatever project they undertake, with whatever subject, image or place, is to offer a new perspective, a previously unseen angle and so it's tantamount to their practice that all the existing lines be blurred.

Site context is of particular importance to the artists as a generative force for the transformations-turned-traps that they spring-load as carefully for the body as for the mind. Their pavilion for Luxembourg at the 2011 Venice Biennale saw a former palazzo transformed into a teetering labyrinth, if not quite actually moving then certainly unstable. Their total reconfiguration of the spaces they occupy disturbs our sense of their reality with a penetrating vision of the disorientation of the modern world.

Something unusual is certainly at work here and it isn't quite supernatural. On the contrary, it's in all that's most tangible and visible that the experience becomes bizarre with this sensation of sudden immersion in a parallel world coinciding with our own through no logical cause. The question of logic is critical here for it's precisely when logic fails that we're able to view the world with fresh perspective. At such moments, we can reimagine what others would prefer remained ruled, bound and regulated (though of course, to first arrive at a clear definition of these terms is no mean feat in itself).

This world of *mise-en-scène* jostles through the hinterlands of the possible, never quite ready to depart completely its shores. It remains tethered to reality by the slightest of frayed threads where it can gently collapse into unburdened dream.

Martine Feipel and Jean Bechameil err somewhere between uncertainty and confusion, there where other readings of the world and the things that inhabit it can be fleetingly glimpsed.