MAGNHILD ØEN **NORDAHL**

b. 1985, Ulstein, Norway. Lives and works in Bergen, Norway.

Imagine if every element in the world was made out the same string, only tied into different types of knots. Such was the mathematical theory of knots that emerged in the eighteenth century: one knot for lead, one for nitrogen, one for helium. In her 2014 project *Occupational Knots*, Magnhild Øen Nordahl used colored rope to represent those elements according to the theory. Beautiful, sculptural, and delicate, they hang from the wall like flowers left to dry. Even in the attempt to give form to pure knowledge, materials escape, act out, and produce something else as well. This "something else" is one definition of what art is—and Nordahl's art in particular. ▲ The mathematical knot theory, unlikely as it sounds, is not so far from the modern concept of DNA, and not so far either from the burgeoning field of 3D printing. For her series *Secret Support* (2019), Nordahl took the fundamental scaffold that is repeated endlessly when producing 3D-printed objects and translated the form into sculptures over a meter in height and made out of anodized aluminum tubes in luminous red, blue, orange, and green. These strange shapes, which look like a lighting truss or playground architecture, were dropped into the epic Norwegian landscape as if to make visible something that was already there. The design of the scaffolding is patented and may not be copied, so Nordahl had to reconstruct it manually from digital files. It is by such instances of irony, when the sheen of reality is ruptured and its underlying structure made clear, that Nordahl's work takes place. ▲ Technology is not developed in a vacuum; it has specific histories, and gaining knowledge of those histories allows us to understand why things are made the way they are. Through her research into 3D rendering programs, Nordahl came across the "Utah teapot," a computer-generated teapot from the mid-1970s, which has become ubiquitous as a test item in 3D modeling software. Just as *Secret Support* required a translation from file to physicality, in the video *How to Make a Utah Teapot* (2016), Nordahl asks an experienced ceramicist to craft the pot in clay. We watch her hands move deftly, securely, calmly. In an interview with Hans Carlsson, Nordahl said about the work: "I actually had to re-film some shots, and I could mix the new footage with the existing sound recording because she does things in exactly the same rhythm each time she makes the teapot." In Nordahl's work, translation is not a one-way street. She helps us to see when technology expands beyond its own boundaries, turning into art, as well as when human hands become so dexterous as to be mechanical. Both are equally impressive—perhaps merely different knots tied from the same string. ▲
KRISTIAN **VISTRUP MADSEN**

* 1
Secret Support #3, 2019, sculpture, anodized 20mm aluminum tube, 45 ¼ x 15 ¾ x 11 ¾ in. (115 x 40 x 30 cm). Installation view: Vevringutstillinga, Vevring, Norway, 2019

* 2
Trivial, Nontrivial, Impossible, 2014 (detail), aluminum, acrylic tubes, pear tree wood, steel, synthetic rope, cotton rope, pigmented concrete, carved linden, pine, 66 ⅞ x 24 ⅜ x 43 ¾ in. (170 x 62 x 111 cm). Installation view: *Occupational Knots*, Galleri Mejan, Stockholm, Sweden, 2014

* 3
Cylinder001, ChamferCylinder002, Teapot002, Square001, 2016, Styrofoam, epoxy, 46 ⅞ x 13 x 13 in. (119 x 33 x 33 cm); Styrofoam, pigment, plaster, 13 x 13 x 8 ⅜ in. (33 x 33 x 22 cm); porcelain, 4 x 5 ⅛ x 9 in. (10 x 13 x 23 cm); foam, textile, 15 ¾ x 15 ¾ x 15 ¾ in. (40 x 40 x 40 cm). Installation view: Hordaland Kunstsenter, Bergen, Norway, 2016

* 4
Occupational Knots, 2014, sculptures based on mathematical knot theory and Clifford Ashley's *Book of Knots*; rope, aluminum, acrylic tubes, steel, pear wood, pine, birch, stained LED-framed glass, Styrofoam, plaster, and more, dimensions variable. Installation view: *Occupational Knots*, Galleri Mejan, Stockholm, Sweden, 2014

* 5
The Frisbee Perspective, 2018, installation with sculptures and lamp, 5 sculptures in powder-coated steel, Styrofoam, and jesmonite: each 51 ⅛ x 23 ⅜ x 23 ⅜ in. (130 x 60 x 60 cm). Installation view: Sogn og Fjordane Art Museum, Førde, Norway, 2018. Collection Sogn og Fjordane Art Museum, Førde, Norway

* 6
7°, 2012, MDF, paint, 152 ¾ x 105 ⅛ x 31 ½ in. (388 x 267 x 80 cm). Installation view: Spatial Displacements, Tin Sheds Gallery, Sydney, Australia, 2012

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