



Emigrating monarch butterflies. Photo by Ida Rödén.

REMEMBERING BUTTERFLIES

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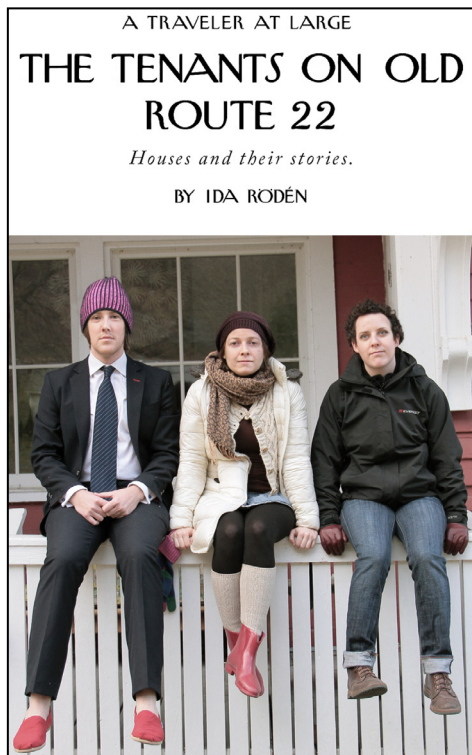
At 7:15 am on April 1, 2012, Margot Waltz was officially declared dead. As an artist and writer with a special interest for the well-known nature-loving lady, Ida Rödén decided to use the memory of Margot Waltz as a focal point in her latest installation piece, “Remembering Butterflies.” The centerpiece of the installation is a replica of a bush that is now planted by the recently deceased’s grave-stone. It was by this bush that Margot Waltz had experienced the overwhelming power of the monarch butterfly migration. Rödén, who had accompanied the butterfly lady on a number of excursions, has beautifully captured the breathtaking event in an article for the *American Butterflies*.

The tone in which these introductory lines are written might correspond to what Rödén would have liked this article to be written in. But as my interest in this piece is of a rather particular kind, I will approach it from a quite different angle.

Margot Waltz was invented on November 28, 2011, in the small hamlet of Wassaic, New York. In an article for the April 2012 issue of the *New Yorker*, Rödén writes that

it was through the tenants on Old Route 22 that she was initially introduced to Margot Waltz. Describing one of its tenants she writes, “One of the girls had the most unruly dark curls. Her lips were thin, her nose big, and her forehead was large and could easily be mistaken for a man’s. At first I took her for a reserved skeptic, but as she got a few drinks into her system she opened up and transformed into a hilarious goofball.” This is to some degree a description of the artist herself. Although some features seem to have been added—possibly extracted from the two people the artist stayed with during her New York stay. Through my analysis, I have come to conclude that Margot Waltz is not the only one that emerges from the artist’s imagination. The three tenants do as well. My own suspicion would be that the tenants were created as composites of the three actual tenants on Old Route 22—one of which would be Ida Rödén herself.

It is interesting how in the article she describes the locals’ reaction towards these residents: “There were all sorts of rumors concerning the relations between these three eccentrics. Some said they were polyamorists, leading a promiscuous lifestyle restricted to the three of them. Others said they were probably siblings. But with their awkward behavior and androgynous traits they were likely to come from a family with a socially unacceptable sexual lifestyle.” Being, in actuality, part of a group of three young



Part of spread from the April 2012 issue of the *New Yorker*. Photo by Lorella Paleni.

out-of-towners moving into a house in a small hamlet cannot be that far off from what she describes in the article. By describing their intersexual attributes, she once again indicates how her literary tenants are intricate composites of the actual residents in the Wassaic household.

Her new setting inspired Ida Röden to close the door behind herself and open another leading into a series of hermetically sealed imaginary worlds in which she and her two new housemates would live for the next two months. In the article, written from the perspective of an outsider, Röden writes, “The experience of being so close to these three strangers transformed into a dreamlike memory that I cannot seem to rid myself of. Today I can only rely on a series of portraits that I took during my stay.” These portraits are in fact part of the installation piece “Remembering Butterflies.” Looking at them closely I am quite confident that I can detect the facial features of the artist in each one of them. Her body can be seen in the image of the boyish girl with black curly hair; her hair and mouth in the second girl; and finally her eyes as well as nose in the character of the young man.

I have so far skipped out on one important element of the installation, namely the presence of a series of news clippings. These articles are all, in one way or

another, related to the life of Margot Waltz—the *New Yorker* article being one of them. As my belief in the reality of Margot Waltz has been of great concern to me, it was natural that I would do a quick checkup and see if I could find them in their original forms. And as suspected, I could not. The articles had either been revised from the original magazines, or—and a lot more likely—they were never part of a magazine to start with.

Both of these cases, the actual as well as the imaginary, reflect a life in which the inside has only a few channels open to the outside. It is especially interesting how Ida Röden, in her own invented version of the event, has sown a seed of doubt concerning the accuracy of the story. She writes, “Even though it can be disputed, Margot Waltz had become the closest to a real connection the three tenants had ever had since they moved into the house seven years earlier. For the longest time I assumed that Margot Waltz was nothing else but a figment of their imagination.” It is by including this section of the article that a form of understanding for the artists’ process and interest surfaces. Oscillating between being deceptive and informative, the whole installation is asking some fundamental questions regarding authorship and history writing.



“The second girl had the most striking choices of outfits. Other than that, I would say that her eyes were her most significant quality. They were narrow and lay deep in their sockets. She was obviously the one in command of the household. Even though she took a bit longer to get to know, she immediately earned my respect.”

Quote taken from the April 2012 issue of the *New Yorker*. Photo by Lorella Paleni.