

About the artist

By Else Marie Bukdahl, Dr. Phil, former Rector of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Art

The visionary sculptor Claus Ørntoft has undergone an impressive artistic development since the mid 1980's. He decided early on to work first and foremost with an extremely unyielding, but also richly expressive material, granite. Both in his choice of material and language of form, he has created fruitful and distinctive connections between tradition and innovation and between the national and the international. ¹

Danish Romanesque sculpture of the Middle Ages contains both original characteristics as well as traces of influence from the European religious art of the era. Many contemporary sculptors have found it to have both a sense of presence and relevance, but only a few have succeeded in reinventing it in a contemporary and artistically convincing way. Claus Ørntoft has been able to do this with a very original power of expression. Sculpture Landscape (1986-1988) demonstrates this amply. He has placed the head of a ram and the head of a bull on two monumental stone blocks and given Grønnegade, a narrow street in Odense, a new profile. Because - as Grethe Grathwol describes it – "in addition to Grønnegade's more formal physical and spatial character, Claus Ørntoft has also incorporated the Square and interpreted it as a "social space". ² The two sculptures have the condensed expressive power and stringent composition of the art of the Romanesque stonemasons, but also appear to be independent artworks. ³

When one encounters Claus Ørntoft's sculptures in school playgrounds, in public places, out in nature or close to churches, one is constantly surprised by the degree to which they create a new identity for the spaces in which they are located. They inspire us to create new contexts in our lives, whilst establishing new parameters in our everyday lives and stimulating our creative activity.

On the broad steps of Hedegårds school in Ballerup, Claus Ørntoft has placed 180 cm long, two ton animals which bound down the steps. The animals are called Three Rovers (1999-2001) - perhaps because they are on their way to create surprising events. Each animal disrupts the symmetry of the steps in its own way, and as the art historian Birgit Jenvold expresses it: "They spread wild sparks in the functionalist amphiyard." ⁴ It was the first time that Claus Ørntoft worked intensively with visualizing movement and speed.

On a small, uninhabited island near Kristiansand in Norway, lies a large, fabulous beast which appears to be stranded. It is entitled Introverted Stranding (2002). It curls up and rests its large head on the seashore. It undoubtedly creates a new space in the deserted landscape and contributes to a new understanding and experience of the location. A six-meter-long, fascinating sea creature lies out at sea, alongside the city beach in Kristiansand in Norway. It is called The Dreamer (2007). It seems to be permeated with undulating rhythms, which correspond to the movements of the waves in the sea.

Hour of the Wolves (2009) has been placed on the forecourt in front of building no. 8 in Nørre Uttrup barracks in Aalborg, an anonymous, regular construction. "The Wolves" have bounded onto the monotonous

forecourt and marked it with a vigorous movement and a dynamic structure, giving it a new identity. The four animals have the silhouette of a wolf, but express, first and foremost, movements that are so extreme that they - as the artist puts it - seem to exist "at the boundaries of gravity" and thus reveal that there are processes in nature that are so unpredictable and dynamic that they shatter the normalised scheme of things. This is also why Claus Ørntoft first modelled and later chiselled them so that the power within the animals is stretched close to breaking point.

One of the wolves gathers its legs, preparing for a series of bounding actions - the other three are going at full speed. They stretch out their legs - they are probably preparing to attack. The "Wolves" do not symbolise suppleness or speed, they are it. They also illustrate, very intensely and expressively, the essence of a rapid and lithe pattern of movement. They demonstrate that Claus Ørntoft has, to a greater extent than previously, succeeded in getting granite to express very diverse patterns of movement. He develops these experiences further in a new, astonishing and artistically convincing way in his latest major project, Three Lions and Nine Hearts.

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