

CLAUS ØRNTOFT – CONTEMPORARY DANISH SCULPTURE

SAVAGE BEASTS WITH NORDIC–ROMANESQUE SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

INTRODUCTION BY BIRGIT JENVOLD

Claus Ørntoft (born 1959) is one of the most important sculptors in Denmark today. He works mainly in granite, based on Romanesque sculpture and an interest in the Nordic tradition. Ørntoft's study trip to Iceland, along with his discussions with the Danish painter Sven Havsteen-Mikkelsen (1912–99), were crucial influences on his artistic development.

Animals, humans and strange beasts virtually force their way out of the granite in movements that are both violent and at the same time repressed. Ørntoft's sculptures appear to be symbols of mythical, primordial force and physical strength, subdued to the point of breaking point by stringent shapes. The larger, more complex sculptures most often feature an asymmetrical balance, and a characteristic of these works is that they have a sense of inner equilibrium, in spite of and by virtue of this violent movement.

The public spaces that provide the venues for Ørntoft's sculptures convey the feeling of being attractive places – both architecturally and socially – in which to spend some time, as the works blend into their surroundings and make a distinct impression, irrespective of their size.

Ørntoft's drawings are also extremely convincing, and his distinctive compositions are created both as preparatory studies for his sculptures and as works in their own right.

Over the years, a considerable number of Ørntoft's sculptures have become accessible to the public, as both commissioned works and public and private purchases have been placed in locations frequented by many people. The sculptor's work and artistic development are found mainly in Denmark, but also in Greenland, Iceland and Norway.