

## **Speech by Nils Ohrt from the unveiling of Claus Ørntoft's sculpture, Virkning (Effect)**

There it sits, the granite animal. Peaceful, folded into itself, thoughtful, almost vulnerable. It has fine, soft ears and a broad, good-natured head, but make no mistake.

The body is a bundle of pent-up energy. The muscles swell under the skin, the back is as broad as a barn door, the hind legs are enormous, and the manner in which the beast is crouched, is a coiled spring of terrifying strength.

The animal is thus a mixture of vulnerability and strength, peacefulness and danger. And what kind of creature is it anyway? Well, it looks like a mixture between an ox, a bear, a lion and something else entirely. Maybe it is a thunder calf!

The surrounding lawn also gives a sense of the animal's strength and weight. Just like rings in water, the earth ripples out in concentric circles from the place where the beast is sitting.

It looks like the result of an impact, in which the mythic animal has hit the earth like a meteor, and when the unveiling of the sculpture takes place, as it does on September 11, it is impossible not to think of what such an impact can mean in a negative sense - both in the concrete sense as well as in the consciousness.

The animal is made out of granite, one of the most difficult stones that exist, and you would have to be pretty mad to make sculpting in granite your lifelong pursuit.

Thankfully, crazy people like this do exist. Although Claus doesn't deal with his monoliths alone any more.

In the past few years he has received increasingly larger commissions, and this is why he now works together with skilled Chinese stonemasons who work according to his models, although he does do the finishing himself.

It is not only granite, but also mythical animals that are Claus' passion. In this sense he is also a little mad, because instead of looking forward - in the conventional sense - he has gone back in history. He draws his inspiration from the Romanesque stonemasons and their baptism fonts and portals in granite, works that constitute the best pieces of art from our early Middle Ages.

Granite, the closed contour and the stylised rendition of nature is what Claus shares with these masters, but he is not a late born Master Goti, one of the Romanesque stonemasons that we know by name. But in spite of the Romanesque inspiration, Claus Ørntoft is a sculptor of our time, and even though there is much that unites him with his artistic forefathers, there is just as much that separates him from the old. In the words of Inger-Lise Kolstrup, he carries the genes of Goti, but Claus is not Goti.

Just like the old stone masters, Claus Ørntoft's sculptures are most often closed, compact forms, but where their works are bound to the architecture, Claus' are free sculptures in space. This was not something the old ones knew, or more rightly, they were not conscious of it.

The artist usually respects the closed form of the stone block, but has also started to let his figures wrest themselves out of them, precisely as an expression of a stronger contact between the figure and the space. Claus' work with the space is not limited to freestanding sculptures. He has a strong affinity for the interplay between the figure and the space, and has always thought the location into the environment during the planning of his projects.

His figures - one or several give thereby a direction or tension to any given space and other times he has the opportunity to design the space around the figures. This time it has happened with the concentric embankments in the lawn, and at the same time the beast in the middle is placed at an angle. The tight, tense figure thus takes possession of the entire lawn and gives it a direct, fan-shaped power. Grønningen's earlier, diffuse space has now obtained a clear structure, which helps to orientate us. And we know the importance of this from our relationships with our fellow human beings.

It is this consciousness and work with the space that primarily makes Claus Ørntoft into a modern artist and here in the sculpture in Grønningen by Egedal Church, other aspects of the modern enter in.

The embankments are a piece of land art, and the abstract spiral forms create a fine counterpoint to the figurative sculpture, which also has chunks of the circle within it. Amidst the figurative, the abstract is never far away with an artist like Claus Ørntoft.

But he is figurative and narrative too. The sculpture, in stone and earth - would like to talk with us. The mythical animal can also be touched and climbed upon, because it is made of one of the most durable materials that exist.

With Claus Ørntoft, the idiom and material are populist in the best meaning of the word - and this is also true of his work with the space. The artist's fellow human beings are always a central factor in his work.

What kind of story is he telling? Well, Claus is also a modern artist in this sense, because whilst the Romanesque artists worked with a defined symbolism with a Christian world view, then the modern artist's world view is subjective and ambiguous.

This is also true for the sculpture that we will unveil today. Here everyone can get out of the sculpture what he or she can. In any case, an introverted and powerful mythical animal of mysterious origin has landed on Grønningen next to Egedal church.

In the same way that it has set the lawn into movement, it will also in its own subtle but nevertheless powerful way move all of those who live and work in the area, but also people who come here to experience a sculpture by one of Denmark's leading sculptors.

It is an attraction that we are unveiling today and there are therefore several reasons to congratulate Fredensborg Municipality in general and Kokkedal in particular on a work, which will live up to its name in many ways.

*Translation from the Danish of a speech from the unveiling of Claus Ørntoft's sculpture, Virkning (Effect) on Groningen next to Egedal Church in Kokkedal, Denmark, Tuesday September 11, 2007, 4pm. Nils Ohrt*