

Speech by Lars Juel Thiis, partner in Cubo, Adjunct Professor at Aau and chairman of the Danish Arts Council
At the exhibition of “Three Lions and Nine Hearts” in the Vrå Art Building.

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to talk about Claus’s art.

I encountered Claus Ørntoft’s universe via his sketches. They captivated me in a way that I found very interesting - perhaps due to my background as an architect, because architects also need the drawing, the manual work, when we look for the solution to a given task. In spite of our digital world, the drawing is the most effective tool and it can trim away the superfluous and present the idea in its purest form, the precise message. Drawings can capture the most important things and filter away the unimportant - they are still an important medium for the creative artist, sketches are the necessary stages on the road.

In Claus’s drawings, we see this exposure of the most important characteristics of the sculpture, always focused with great power and often in one desired dynamic movement. The sketch was the movement, the movement the sculpture, so we became acquainted with the identity of the sculpture before we see it, its main characteristics, its physiognomy is only revealed clearly in the sketch, forced out by Claus’s beautiful and organic sign language. My fascination with Claus’s sketches also lies in a kind of admiration - tending to envy - because they often express a dynamic I frequently strive for in my own. As if one can sense the entire sketching process in a single drawing - both what comes before as well as what comes after. One can see a development, a movement towards the finished work.

Another key feature which dominates my experience of Claus Ørntoft’s sculptural world is the way in which the sculptures occupy the space and transform it permanently. At Nr. Uttrup Barracks, not by any stretch of the imagination interesting architecture, large, wolflike animals stand at the main entrance and create a liberating tension and dynamic in what is otherwise a monotonously efficient and tedious collection of buildings. But here, it is also as if the drab, closed buildings are given new life in contrast with the life and movement of the wolves. This is one of the most satisfying things to see when experiencing the positive and infectious effect that art can have in the public space.

To think that so much life can be contained in the heaviest granite. It brings to mind the mythical subject of the legendary giants, but its weightiness also makes me think of the stone churches of the Middle Ages. As an architect, one feels that it is entirely natural that the free art one brings into contact with the bound should also be able to enter into a dialogue and enrich. There must be a kind of dialogue between architecture and art, otherwise it becomes tedious. There must be a two-way conversation.

Architecture is unfortunately often privileged in that it usually comes first and art is placed into a given framework. And when the framework has been defined, the architect seldom welcomes something that will disrupt the autonomy and authority of the building. Claus’s sculptures do this - in the best possible way - both in Nr. Uttrup as well as in the garden at Marselisborg. Claus moves away from the axis created by Hack Kampmann’s palace, which stretches monumentally over the water. And it is an art to know how to place oneself. The garden becomes a better garden, the

palace a better palace. Claus's lions are on their way out to the woods, and in spite of their speed and their insistence, they are still imprisoned in the material, as if they leaped out of nature and froze in a thousandth of a second.

Despite their amorphousness, their indefinable breed, they have a presence, in their pure contact with the surface of the soil, despite their supernatural appearance, they become a part of everyday life. They are also a part of us, down to earth, among the guests in the garden. And yet, still this game of hide-and-seek - the sudden fossilisation of their physical bodies, they feel real but are never entirely real. There is a strange, abstract naturalness about Claus's animals, and this is one of the greatest qualities of art - challenging reality, asking new questions and providing surprising answers.

I often have reservations about the monumentality of sculpture in a given space, and it is probably the architect in me again, but I never have these reservations with Claus's live-affirming works. The sculpture lends value to the surrounding landscape or building that it transforms, and the surroundings become an integrated part of the site-specific work. This is why I am looking forward to the day when one of my buildings can be improved by one of Claus's artworks. This must be the essence, this inner, infectious life, this movement or process which Claus's figures always find themselves in. As if they are constantly on the move, and are taking us with them, come on, we need to go, out into the distance, out into the multiplicity of the world.

Thank you, and good luck with the show.