

Claus Ørntoft &
**THE HOUR OF
THE WOLVES**



A speech by Else Marie Bukdahl, Dr.phil., former Rector of the Danish Royal Academy of Art
At the opening of an exhibition in Gamvik, Finnmark, North of Norway, 2/8-2009

The prominent and original sculptor, Claus Ørntoft has since the middle of the 80's, undergone a striking artistic development. At an early point in time, he decided to work almost exclusively with one of the most contrary, but also very expressive materials. This material is granite. Both in his choice of material, as well as his idiom, he has created a fertile and unique connection between tradition and new departures and between the national and the international.

Danish Romanesque sculpture contains both characteristics and traces of influences from the contemporary European church art of the era. Many of our contemporary sculptors have discovered that it is both topical and relevant, but very few have attempted to recreate it in a contemporary and artistically persuasive manner. But Claus Ørntoft is aware that he lives in a changeable world, and has often asked himself the following question: How can we understand the world, how does it become clear to us and how can we sense it? Our world – as it is told in fairytales – is a troll mirror, which is broken into a thousand pieces and it is, in part, the role of the artist to collect them into a whole. It is precisely through his fertile imagination and his in-

tuition that Claus Ørntoft has succeeded in creating new wholes, a new artistic universe, peopled with lithe, fabled animals, who both be-

long in the world of reality as well as the realm of the imagination and appeal powerfully to our thoughts, imaginations and feelings.



CONTEMPLATIVE STRANDING I, L:360cm, red granite, Dead mans Creak, Ny Hellesund, Norway, 2002

Claus Ørntoft has also created large scale projects in the public space in Norway. They serve to heighten the profile of the location where they are situated as well becoming a landmark for the area. This is true of the 6 metre long fascinating sea creature, who swam into the town beach in Kristiansand. It lifts its head a little to look at us - dreamingly. It was named *The Dreamer* (2007), and looks like it has been shot through by rhythmic waves, which are echoed by the wave movements of the sea. It challenges our imagination, because we can't help but try to work out who it is and also because it is characterised by an artistically persuasive power.

You will get to know Claus Ørntoft's art here in Finnmark, in the most Northern part of Norway, through the fibreglass models for a project, which has been titled *The Hour of the Wolves*. They will be shown together with preparatory models for the project in bronze and lithographs which contain drawings of each element. Claus Ørntoft has been to China to find exactly the right granite blocks for the final version of *The Hour of the Wolves*. He has had part of the carving done out in the East. When he received the *Wolves* in Denmark, he



THE DREAMER, 600cm length, red granite, Bystranda, Kristiansand, Norway, 2004-2007

finished carving them, so that they have acquired even more suppleness and become even tighter and more lithe. One can only get an idea of the artistic quality of the project when one sees the finished *Wolves*, which have been sculpted in red granite. They were placed in the front square of building no. 8, in the Military barracks in Aalborg, Dk, which is an anonymous, regular building. The *Wolves* give this location a new identity and endow it with a powerful movement and a dynamic structure. But both the large preparatory models in fibreglass and the small models in bronze as well as the drawings provide a graphic, albeit not an adequate idea of the peculiarity of the *Wolves* and the passionate powers that they illustrate.

The four *Wolves* have the outline of a wolf, but they express first and foremost patterns of movement, which are so violent, that they – as the artist has expressed it himself – find themselves on the edge of gravity and thus reveal that there is a sequence in nature, which is so unpredictable and full of dynamism, that they explode our normal conception of the world. This is also the reason why Claus Ørntoft has first modelled and later carved them in such a manner that

the power within the animals is stretched close to breaking point.

One of the *Wolves* crouches – prepared for what appears to be a jumping action – and the other three are speeding away. They stretch out their legs – they are probably on their way to attack. In the sketches, which are characterised by Claus Ørntoft's powerful line, the *Wolves'* many quick changing patterns of movement are shown in a lucid manner, filled with life and intensity. The leaping *Wolves*, who in a very intense and richly expressive manner illustrate the essence of a fast and supple rhythm of movement, show that Claus Ørntoft has succeeded – through his materially rich idiom – to grasp the nuances and more comprehensive perspectives of our reality, which neither the word nor the digital media can show, and in some cases are not able to express at all. This is because the wolves don't just symbolise suppleness, they are it. They show us – graphically and simply – that there are violent forces in nature, which we – in our eternal attempts to control the world – are not able to dominate, but which at the same time, have their own special powers of fascination. It is this, which is alluded to in *Vølvens Spådom/*

Voluspá (The Prophecy of the Sibyls), where it is written: "The bands are torn and the wolves run" – precisely this sentence, which Claus Ørntoft has used as the overriding theme for his project.

Conclusion

Whether it is a case of sculptures or moveable installations in the public space, various artists – e.g. Claus Ørntoft – has been very aware that it is important that their works enrich and endow the surroundings that they are located in with new dimensions. But his works also show a visualisation of the point of view, which the French philosopher and Nobel prize winner Michael Serres has expressed as follows: *"It is important that the local does not block the global – it is important that the global does not destroy the local."* It is precisely in our times, where globalisation trends dominate cultural life and society, that it is important to remember that it is only through the interaction between the local and the global, the national and the international, that we can raise the standards both in art, culture and the rest of society.

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THE HOUR OF THE WOLVES, H: 110cm L: 240cm B: 75cm, red granite, Aalborg Barracks, Denmark 2008