

Introduction

Nick Theobald & Emil Westman Hertz

An artistic dialogue across materials, time, and space

Emil Westman Hertz (1978–2016) was destined to become an outstanding Danish contemporary artist with his own unique approach to creating sculpture. His untimely death sadly put a sudden stop to his enrichment of Danish art. For several years, Horsens Kunstmuseum had wanted to present the universe of Emil Westman Hertz to their audience and managed to secure an exhibition agreement with the artist before his death in 2016. However, a memorial exhibition did not seem the right way forward, since Emil Westman Hertz's art is still very much alive and highly relevant.

A chance encounter in Copenhagen Airport one spring day in 2019 took us to Nick Theobald's (b.1986) studio at Metropolitan Avenue in Brooklyn, where we found exactly what we had been looking for. A young, talented artist able, on an equal footing, to enter into dialogue with Emil Westman Hertz and Horsens Kunstmuseum's large collection of works by the now deceased artist. The chance encounter seems, above all, to confirm the fact that you may find what you are looking for when you least expect it – which also, in very many ways, is consistent with Nick Theobald's artistic practice, which is characterised by tarot reading and the imperceptible forces of mind and intuition.

A key material in Emil Westman Hertz's artistic practice was nature: beeswax, giant hogweed, and various other materials from nature's inexhaustible universe. Beeswax was exactly what we saw in Nick Theobald's studio. A medium with a wholly unique life and energetic resonance. Using beeswax, Nick Theobald has, for the past fifteen years of his practice, created works that relate to both the course of nature and man's manipulation and influence on the otherwise unspoilt natural world.

In 2011 Horsens Kunstmuseum acquired its first sculpture, Sygeleje (Sickbed), from that same year by Emil Westman Hertz for its collection. Since then, a number of sculptural works, drawings, and prints have been added to the collection with a view to present the artistic issues the artist was

engaging with in his practice. The decision to specifically zero in on Emil Westman Hertz in relation to the museum collection was entirely due to his distinctive approach to visual art, which tallied with the museum's wish to present visual art that is not only innovative but also clearly incorporates elements of looking critically at our world. In the world of art, Emil Westman Hertz counts among the leading sculptors such as Ib Braase, Bjørn Nørgaard, and Martin Erik Andersen, not only in terms of Horsens Art Museum's extensive collections of works by these artists but in a Danish art-historical context generally. Emil Westman Hertz's artistic practice was very distinctive and marked by struggles, personal as well as artistic. The struggles found aesthetical and poetic expression in works which were, at once, light and laden with symbols. A balance that is clearly evident throughout Emil Westman Hertz's practice, where the lightness of the sculptural elements are countered by the almost uncannily oppressive themes. A similar artistic practice is also evident in Nick Theobald's works, where, at a first glance, the visual expression of the works appears light and poetic, but deeper scrutiny reveals an artist struggling with the world around him and with the inevitable transitoriness of life and the world.

The exhibition is designed on the basis of the museum's extensive collection of works by Emil Westman Hertz in dialogue with both old and newly-produced works by Nick Theobald. Some of the works are site-specific to Horsens Kunstmuseum. When Covid-19 paralysed the whole world for almost two years, we had to postpone several exhibitions, among them the dialogue exhibition featuring Emil Westman Hertz and Nick Theobald, which we are now finally able to present.

The dialogue exhibition between Emil Westman Hertz and Nick Theobald covers large parts of Horsens Kunstmuseum, presenting, for the first time, the museum's extensive collection of works by Emil Westman Hertz in dialogue with works created by Nick Theobald during over the past eight years. The exhibition was created during the period 2019–2023 in dialogue with Nick Theobald, Claus Hagedorn-Olsen, museum director, and Julie Horne Møller, curator.

Warm thanks to Nick Theobald for having most passionately taking up the challenge, and for a model collaboration over the past four years.

An exhibition like this could not be realised without substantial support from: Familien Hede Niensens Fond, Grosserer L.F. Foghts Fond, Augustinus Fonden, Knud Højgaards Fond, Insero Horsens, Toyota-Fonden, Overrettsagfører L. Zeuthens Mindelegat, 15. Juni Fonden, Beckett-Fonden, the Danish Arts Foundation, Francisco Costa and Michael Stipe.

Claus Hagedorn-Olsen & Julie Horne Møller