

# BJØRN NØRGAARD

HORSENS ART MUSEUM



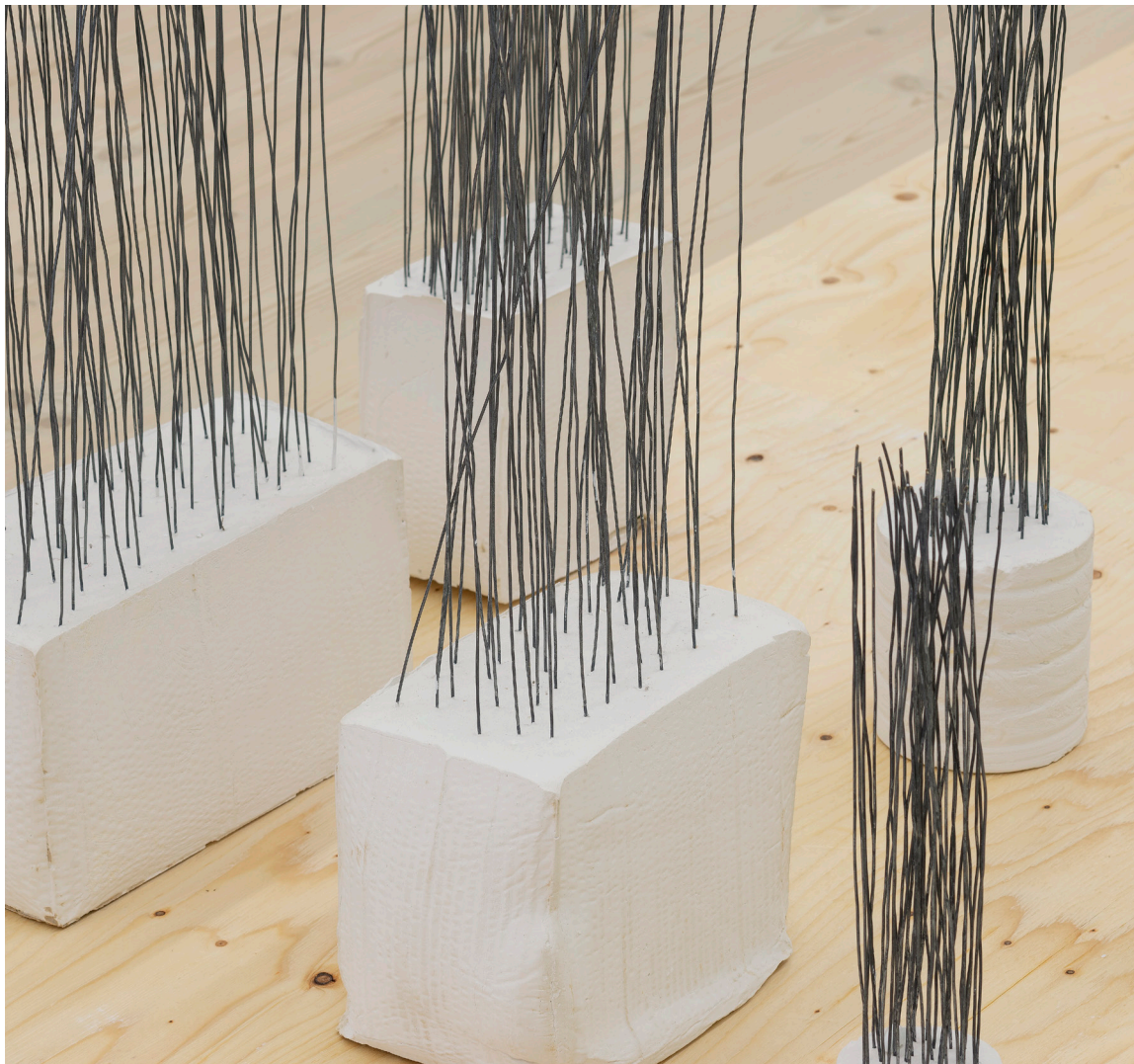
## Over half a century of artistic development

Bjørn Nørgaard (b. 1947) entered the art scene at a very young age in 1964, as a student at the legendary *The Experimental Art School* - in everyday speech the *Eks school*, where he came to work with artists such as Per Kirkeby, Poul Gernes, Peter Louis Jensen and many more. Since then Bjørn Nørgaard has, with more and more convincing strength, manifested himself in the art world with a wealth of ideas, scope and actions that makes his production completely remarkable. Bjørn Nørgaard is a sculptor, illustrator, ceramicist, filmmaker and action artist and was in the period 1985 to 1994 professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts' School of Sculptors. As an artist and human being, Bjørn Nørgaard creates platforms for democratic conversations and focuses on the world's different cultures.

At Horsens Art Museum, Bjørn Nørgaard's art holds a central place. The museum's collection of the artist's works starts from the 1960s up to 2020 and he has been on display at Horsens Art Museum several times - most recently in 2017, when the museum created a dialogue exhibition between artist and professor Tan Ping and Bjørn Nørgaard. The exhibition was based on the two artists' many years of collaboration and conversations in China, where Bjørn Nørgaard during many periods for the past 20 years has been working and teaching. With the current exhibition, Horsens Art Museum presents key works by Bjørn Nørgaard; *Angels and Beasts* (2014), *Case Matters* (2015), *Zodiacs* (2017), *Mrs. Yin & Mr. Yang* (2019) and finally the installation *Materia et Spiritus, Materia et Corpus, Materia et Frictio, Materia et Actio, Materia et Syntaksis* (2020), which thanks to the Augustinus Fonden and Slots- og Kulturstyrelsen have become part of Horsens Art Museums collection.

### *Case Matters, 2015*

The serial, sculptural studies are created by Bjørn Nørgaard for the first time back in 1967 in the exhibition *Sagforhold*, which was shown at the student exhibition at Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, where Bjørn Nørgaard was invited by Joseph Beuys, then professor of Monumental sculpture. Later that year, the work was shown at the Louisiana Museum of Art to the Association for Young Danish Art's 25th anniversary exhibition. The version presented in the exhibition at Horsens Art Museum was created in 2015.





In 1922, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* was published, a piece particularly important to the Experimental Art School. The work begins with the sentence; "*The world is everything that is the case*", from which it builds on to: "*What is the case, the fact, is the presence of matter*" and "*The matter is a combination of objects (entities, things)*" Based on these findings, Bjørn Nørgaard's sculptural demonstration is perceived as a manipulation of the world that can be changed by moving the interrelationships between things in space. "*The worldview that is built into the experimental happening in the art space is in line with the more political actions that Bjørn Nørgaard carries out in the same period in collaboration with friends in the context of the youth rebellion*" writes Tania Ørun in the book *The Experimental Sixties* from 2009. Back in the 1960s, actions serves as a method to get around the concept of the very artwork and the classical art genres in favor of an open and uncharted space for action. Here, the action becomes the starting point for interactions between the body and materials in the form of demonstrations. It opens up for an intuitive and conceptual space, where the materials are emptied of meaning and simply represent themselves.

The bodily investment makes the actions reminiscent of rituals. The interaction with the audience is toned down and the actor moves in his own artistic universe. One goal is to shift focus from the artists subjectivity to an objective plane, where the artist can be in a state of the present and with the art, but not as an identity. The actions also contain the outline of a course of practice that anyone and everyone can do after, and where the properties of the materials concretely co-determine the process and its results.

*Materia et Spiritus, Materia et Corpus, Materia et Frictio, Materia et Actio, Materia et Syntaksis, 2020*

With the installation *Materia et Spiritus, Materia et Corpus, Materia et Frictio, Materia et Actio, Materia et Syntaksis*, Bjørn Nørgaard rounds up his entire artistic career in one installation. The work is created from the materials clay, wax, plaster, felt, salt, soap, sand, copper, wood, glass, stone, tree stump, gold leaf, honey, metal lattice, mirrors, coffee cup, laptop, shoes, sardines, venus casting, an aquarium with live fish, telephone, rye bread, teddy bear, hammer and a stick. On the wall behind the installation, the artist has written an equation that should serve as a mathematical recipe for the work. The equation and the work show an open structure where the content can be varied endlessly. The equation therefore ends in the nature of things with an infinity sign. The accumulation of objects can be seen as an attempt to clarify the idea of non-verbal, material syntaxes and physical connections, which escape language and which, according to Bjørn Nørgaard, are even more real than the reality that exists within the language's own framework. The artwork can thus be regarded as a collection of a significant part of Bjørn Nørgaard's oeuvre in one artwork.



## *Zodiacs, 2017*

*Zodiacs* consists of 12 sculptures representing the Chinese zodiac signs. The figures originate from the Chinese astrological system and represent the Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Rooster, Dog and Pig. The sculptures are presented in a ring. The twelve zodiac signs are said to be of Buddhist origin. In Chinese thinking and tradition, we often see Confucius, Laozi and Buddhism in different combinations, thought into everyday life. Under communism, history, religion and tradition have been despised in the broadest sense, but in recent years it has been officially reintroduced as an identity-creating and unifying factor similar to the nationalist currents seen in the Western world. With the work, Bjørn Nørgaard relates to areas in Chinese and Western tradition, to discuss the “return” of history in modern times.

Bjørn Nørgaard was inspired for the work *Zodiacs* through several visits to the Dongyue Temple in Beijing, which he first experienced over 16 years ago. The temple, with its grotesque and violent sculptures of spirits, demons, executioners and several dead people awaiting their final judgment, reminded the artist of medieval European depictions of angels, demons and religious figures. Bjørn Nørgaard's many years in China have given him a great insight into how much the East and the West have in common in both values and hopes, but also how radically different cultures, and especially traditions that shape us, can be. The *Zodiacs* sculptures appear, both collectively and individually, as a Western interpretation of the sculptures of the Dongyue Temple, and with its more modern elements, such as a computer or a pistol, as a modeling of much older cultural symbols mixed with a modern twist. This means that the sculptures allow the viewer to interpret and enter into a dialogue with the work.



*Mrs. Yin & Mr. Yang, 2019*

Both *Zodiacs* and *Mrs. Yin & Mr. Yang* was exhibited at The Danish Cultural Center in Beijing with the exhibition *Lost in Perception* in 2019. The centerpiece of the exhibition was *Zodiacs*, where *Mrs. Yin & Mr. Yang* served as a gateway to the exhibition.

Together and individually, they form an artistic interpretation of the Dongyue characters to bring them into the modern world. The resulting apparent chaos of images and meanings, however, are not fixed visual interpretations of these figures from the Dongyue Temple, but leave the viewer room for their own interpretations. The sculptures can be seen as an attempt to articulate a new alphabet of forms consisting of both new and old, from which each of us can write our own sculptural sentences.

The title of the work refers to the Western nickname for the Taiji sign, which is often mistakenly described as the Yin Yang sign. The Taiji sign is one of the most famous symbols of Chinese philosophy, which is the epitome of the inherent duality of everything, ie opposites.

*Mrs. Yin & Mr. Yang* is kept in the same black and white color as the Taiji sign, and is in its design both opposites of each other, but also in a union each others whole. The recognizable division of a clearly defined black and white side, historically comes from one of the earliest meanings of Taiji, where yin is the shadow side and yang is the sunny side of a mountain, and where the ridge is Taiji, the whole of the mountain. The same division is seen in Bjørn Nørgaard's artistic adaptation of the Chinese Taiji, where the woman and the man each wear a shadow side and a sun side. A picture of how we as humans all live with dark and light sides of ourselves.

### ***Angels and Beasts, 2014***

*Angels and Beasts*, Virtues and Vices or Good and Evil. The 24 sculptures, of which 12 are white angels and 12 are black beasts, each represent the bright and dark sides of the human. "*Throughout life we meet both angels and beasts, within ourselves and outside ourselves, no matter how modern and enlightened we are. The sculptures (...) give in form and material an ambiguous picture of these thousands of choices the individual makes every day, every hour, every minute*" says Bjørn Nørgaard. The sculptures are actually models for the figures on the sculpture *The Needle Eye* for Ballerup Municipality, which here was made in patinated bronze, gilded and platinum-plated as an independent group of figures, an allegorical gathering as a form of meeting in an imaginary Order of Angels, all meeting to discuss the complexities between the saved and the damned human.