



DK ↔ US

HERRUP
MUSEUM





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Henry Heerup, *Poesiens blå fugl* (*The Blue Bird of Poetry*), 1987, litografi, 31 X 24 cm, Heerup Museum



Gert Mathiesen, *Untitled (Uden titel)*, 2006,
akryl og linoleumstryk på papir, 57 × 38 cm, privateje





Gert Mathiesen, *Red Vessels, Flowering Trees*
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akryl på lærred, 212 × 382 cm, privateje



Henry Heerup, *Uden titel/Selvportræt med træ*
(*Untitled/Self-Portrait with a Tree*), 1974,
olie på masonit, 57,8 × 61,5 cm, privateje



Henry Heerup, *Selvportræt (Self-Portrait)*, 1971, olie på masonit, 57,8 × 61,5 cm, Heerup Museum

I sommeren 2016 bød Museum of Danish America gæsterne indenfor til de dristige, farverige og kæmpestore malerier af Gert Mathiesen. Hele gallerivægge var dækket af en fantasifuld blanding af dyr og mennesker. Tigre kiggede venligt frem bag træer. Blomstervaser tronedede på kvindehoveder. Flokke af fugle sad på blomstrende grene. Indimellem svømmede en fisk forbi. Og bag alle disse fugle, vaser og venlige rovdyr var der et kludetæppe af strålende farver, som lavede op på selv den kedeligste dag.

Som mange andre af de kunstnere, som Museum of Danish America har vist, repræsenterede Gert Mathiesen både danske og amerikanske erfaringer og kulturer. Hans uddannelse i Danmark gav ham en baggrund inden for håndværksmæssige teknikker i forskellige kunstneriske medier og et kulturelt miljø, som opmuntrede kreativ innovation. Hans rejser rundt på kloden opbyggede et internationalt vokabularium af stilarter og symboler. Da han havde bosat sig i USA, nød han at udfordre grænserne med hensyn til størrelse, materialer og visuel effekt. Den stil, der kom ud af det, er helt Gert Mathiesens egen.

Art by Gert Mathiesen var en af de mest udfordrende kunstudstillinger, vi har haft på Museum of Danish America. Nogle af billederne fyldte næsten pladsen helt ud og krævede nogle mere opfindsomme teknikker end den sædvanlige krog på væggen. Udskåret linoleum ville krølle og bøje i stedet for at sidde pænt ind til væggen. Og logistikken med at transportere adskillige kæmpestore værker ud til vores museum krævede hele familiens medvirken; Gerts søn Jonathan kørte dem fra New York til Iowa.

Udstillingen udfordrede også de sædvanlige forestillinger om, hvad de besøgende i vores landlige lokalsamfund i Elk Horn ville finde, selv om det ikke var den første udstilling af samtidskunst på museet. De var umulige at overse. De var det første, man så, når man kom ind i museumsbygningen. De var sjove. De var legende.

Det var et privilegium at få lov til at introducere Gert Mathiesen for vores gæster og derefter sende hans værker videre til andre byer i USA. Ud fra vores erfaringer er vi sikre på, at hans værker vil blive ved med at vække glæde, både på siderne i denne bog og i hjem og gallerier over hele verden.

INSPIRE JOY

US

In the summer of 2016 the Museum of Danish America welcomed visitors with the bold, bright, and oversized canvases of Gert Mathiesen. Entire gallery walls were covered with a whimsical array of creatures and characters. Tigers peered benignly between trees. Flower vases perched on women's heads. Flocks of birds roosted on flowering tree branches. The occasional fish swam by. And behind all of these birds, flower vases and friendly carnivores, a patchwork of vibrant colors that brightened the dullest day.

Like many of the artists featured by the Museum of Danish America, Gert Mathiesen represented both Danish and American experiences and cultures. His foundational years in Denmark gave him a background in the craft techniques of different artistic media, as well as a cultural environment that encouraged creative innovation. His travels around the globe built up an international vocabulary of styles and symbols. Upon settling in the United States, he enjoyed pushing the boundaries of size, materials, and visual impact. The resulting style is distinctly Gert Mathiesen.

Art by Gert Mathiesen was one of the most challenging art exhibits we installed at the Museum of Danish America. Some of the canvases nearly filled the available wall space, requiring more innovative techniques than the usual frame-on-a-wall-hook. Carved linoleum wanted to curl and bend instead of remaining politely against the wall. And even the logistics of transporting several large works to our museum required a full family effort; Gert's son, Jonathan, drove them from New York to Iowa.

The exhibition also challenged the assumptions of what visitors to our rural community of Elk Horn, Iowa, would find, though it was not the first exhibition of contemporary art at the museum. The Mathiesen pieces asserted themselves boldly into our visitors' experiences at the museum; they were impossible to ignore. They were the first things one saw when entering the museum building. They were fun. They were playful.

We were privileged to introduce Gert Mathiesen to our museum audience and then send his work to other communities in the United States. Based on our experience, we are confident that his work will continue to inspire joy, whether in the pages of this book or in homes and galleries around the world.





Gert Mathiesen, *Flowers (Blomster)*, 1998,
akryl på lærred, 138 × 94 cm, privateje



Henry Heerup, *Dansende pige* (Dancing Girl), 1953,
olie på lærred, 120 × 80 cm, Heerup Museum





NÅR FRIHEDEN FÅR VINGER

På toppen af sin kunstneriske karriere var den danske kunstner Henry Heerup (1907-93), med sine farverige og let genkendelige malerier, stærkt repræsenteret ikke alene i Danmark, men også på en række væsentlige udstillinger i USA.¹ Det var især udviklingen af det spontant abstrakte maleri under 2. Verdenskrig og kulminationen i kunstnersammenslutningen CoBrA, som gav genlyd i udlandet og bragte Heerup fra den nationale til den internationale kunstscene.

Den dansk-amerikanske kunstner Gert Mathiesen (1951-2013) valgte i 1986 at flytte sit kunstneriske virke til USA. "I første omgang flyttede jeg hertil, fordi min bror arbejdede herovre i shippingbranchen", forklarer Gert Mathiesen i 2007 til den danske journalist Flemming Riedel. "Og jeg kom hertil som en slags ferieophold i starten, men blev grebet af den særlige glød, som lever og ånder i det amerikanske miljø".² Troen på alles ret til fri udfoldelse var en væsentlig del af efterkrigstidens kunstmiljø i Danmark, som ikke mindst Heerup havde sat sit aftryk på, og som Gert Mathiesen som ung keramiker blev rundet af. I USA smeltede den nordiske frihedstrang hos Mathiesen sammen med den amerikanske drøm. "Det handler om det, amerikanerne kalder "How to dream big, but go on being little" – eller sagt på en anden måde: Om en form for ydmyghed og respekt for det man laver", forklarede han.³

Som kunstnere benytter såvel Henry Heerup som Gert Mathiesen det spontant abstrakte billedsprog, der blev udviklet af Heerup og hans kunstnerkolleger fra midten af 1930'erne og frem. Det spontant abstrakte er et bredt og åbent begreb, som peger på en særlig tilgang til skabelsen af kunst mere end på ligheder i de færdige værker. "Jeg ved sjældent, hvad jeg ender med, når jeg tager fat på et nyt billede. Nogle gange vokser det ligefrem frem af sig selv"⁴, forklarer Gert Mathiesen således om sin metode, og Heerup kunne supplere med; "Som jeg Blander Farver paa Paletten, Blander Jeg Motiver Paa Lærredet eller Masonit-Pladen... Jeg er Paa Opdagelsesrejse".⁵ Også farverne har hos de to kunstnere deres eget

liv. De klare og indbydende farver fungerer ofte som selvstændige elementer i billedet, og det er ikke ualmindeligt, at hele paletten kombineres i ét værk. Med en udbredt forkærlighed for stærke rød-grønne og orange-blå komplementærkontraster hos begge kunstnere er der skruet helt op for virkemidlerne.

Fra begyndelsen af 1970'erne til midt 80'erne blev Heerups kunst, ikke mindst hans store litografiske produktion, udbredt på alt fra skoler til museer i Danmark. Samtidig gjorde hans mere kommercielle produktion af Mors Dag platter, tedåser m.m. deres indtog i de danske hjem. Også Heerups udstillingsaktivitet i denne periode vil gøre de fleste forpustet. Hans malerier, stensulpturer, skraldemodeller og grafiske værker blev vist på mere end 50 udstillinger i årene 1972 til 1986 inkl. en solo udstilling på den prestigefyldte Venedig Biennale i 1972.⁶ Den store aktivitet tiltrak sig naturligvis også pressens opmærksomhed, og Heerup blev udråbt til Danmarks mest folkekære kunstner. Heerup ønskede at skabe kunst til folket og var samtidig om nogen den kunstneriske friheds vogter. Som han skrev i sine noter i 1944, er fri udfoldelse noget, man har i sig: "Det Er En Form For Liv og Lyst, En Livsytring. Sådan Er Det Også Med Kunsten".⁷ Med sin store integritet og insisteren på nøjsomhed og fri kunstneriske udfoldelse i sit udendørs værksted i Rødovre har Heerup haft stor betydning for flere generationer af unge kunstnere.

Visuelt er det karakteristisk, at begge kunstnere trods abstraktionen fastholder motivet og det genkendelige. Heerup kalder dette for "Motivets Magt"⁸ og peger dermed på forestillingsevnen afgørende betydning for kunsten; at vi som mennesker søger det genkendelige og fx får to prikker til at blive til øjne, der kigger på os. Gennem motivet indbyder Mathiesens og Heerups værker os som beskuerer til en refleksion, der balancerer mellem det personlige og det generelle. Vi genkender os selv og bliver genkendt. Vi kan i dialogen mellem de to kunstners værker med andre ord ane omridset af det, der har givet Heerups såvel som Mathiesens værker så stor gennemslagskraft. Det handler blandt andet om frihed for den enkelte inden for

rammerne af noget større. Ved at forfølge Mathiesens og Heerups motiver og fortællinger kan vi nærme os dette "fælles", den sammenhæng som deres kunst synes at tilbyde.

Både Heerup og Mathiesen udviklede et symbolsk billedsprog båret af forenklede betydningsladede motiver. I Heerups værker finder vi eksempelvis kaffekanden, tæppebankeren og nissen, mens vi hos Gert Mathiesen opdager krukken og tigreren som vedholdende motiver. Figurationerne har ofte et personligt afsæt, som når tigreren i Gerts værker stammer fra hans datters elskede bamse. Men gennem gentagelsen og forenklingen får motiverne hos begge kunstnere karakter af noget alment og generelt, som når kaffekanden hos Heerup optræder som et billede på et godt venskab med tid til at snakke over en god kop kaffe.

Heerup var livet igennem ret tydelig omkring de for ham mest afgørende inspirationskilder; naturen og historien, som også går igen hos Mathiesen. Særligt fugle og træer synes at være en fælles reference hos de to kunstnere, hvilket betyder, at netop disse motiver tilbyder sig som visuelle spor mellem Heerups og Mathiesens værker.

LIVETS TRÆ

Heerup og Mathiesen var begge reelt set bymennesker, hvis erfaring med natur kom fra æstetiske åndehuller af behersket natur, som vi kender det fra villahavens blomsterflor og parkens krogede træer. Naturen i deres værker er således hverken skræmmende eller fremmedgørende, men snarere velkendt og lige så uundgåelig som jorden under deres fødder. Naturen er et fælles fundament og en fælles referenceramme, der gør det muligt at gå fra det subjektive til det generelle og almene samtidig med, at det er forståeligt for mange. Træet er i den forbindelse et kendt symbol, som går igen i mange kulturers fortællinger; fra Livets Træ i kristendommen til de nordiske guders Ask Yggdrasil, der forbinder gudernes og menneskenes verden. Også i eventyr og folkefortællinger spiller træer ofte en central rolle.

I Heerups maleri *Drengen ved Ulvedalsegen* (s. 40), er det et særligt træ, der vises; nemlig den

krogede eg i Ulvedalen nord for København. Træet var genstand for Heerups første maleri og gentages i dette værk fra 1969. Heerup har i værket malet sig selv omsluttet af det næsten hule træ, som var det erindrings om en rituel kunstnerisk fødsel. Samtidig fortæller *Drengen ved Ulvedalsegen* om en tæt sammenhæng mellem menneske og natur i en mere generel forstand. Man kan også få associationer til eventyret *Fyrtøjet* af H. C. Andersen, hvor soldaten overtales til at kravle ned i det hule træ for at finde en stor skat.

I Gert Mathiesens linoleumstryk *Livets træ i purpur og gul* (s. 54) er træets stiliserede grene beboet af mennesker. Det er ikke et bestemt træ, men et velkendt symbol på familien; et stamtræ, hvis grene fortæller om slægtsled og sammenhænge. Både Heerup og Mathiesen omtaler ofte træet som livets træ, og de forbinder sig gennem dette motiv med de mange myter og betydninger, der gemmer sig i vores fælles erindring.

INSPIRATIONSFUGLEN

Fuglen spiller ligeledes en særlig rolle for begge kunstnere. Den kan ligge i en kurv på hovedet af en kvinde (s. 72), balancere på en stoleryg (s. 9) eller være landet direkte på kunstnerens hoved (s. 8). I 1943 skar Heerup linoleumstrykket *Intuition* (s. 31), der i markant sort-hvid enkelthed er et selvportræt med en tæt kontakt mellem mand og fugl, kunstneren og hans intuition. Fuglen bevarer med sin placering øverst oppe sit element af luft og himmel og peger derigennem på det immaterielle i kunsten: tankerne bag, følelserne der udtrykkes og inspirationen. Rollen som forbindelsesled mellem himmel og jord, tanke og krop, så Heerup som en parallel til kunstnerens rolle i samfundet. Fuglen i Heerups værker er således nært beslægtet med en række mytologiske væsener som nissen, enhjørningen og englen. Hvis man ser efter, finder man ofte Heerup, den kunstneriske friheds vogter, med en rød nissehue på hovedet.

Den fri fantasi fugl har en stærk kontrast i Gert Mathiesens *Selvportræt 1 – Pottemageren* (s. 36), hvor pottemagerens hoved er ubekvemt fastlåst i en lukket firkant. Det tredelte hovedværk

bestående af *Selvportræt – Pottemageren, Maleren* og *Den søde* (s. 36–38) rummer en særdeles kraftfuld fortælling om rollerne som håndværker og billedkunstner, mellem den bundne opgave og den frie udfoldelse. I de fleste af Mathiesens farverige værker har den frie fugl dog sat sig roligt til rette i livets træ (s. 102).

FORBINDELSEN TIL RØDDERNE

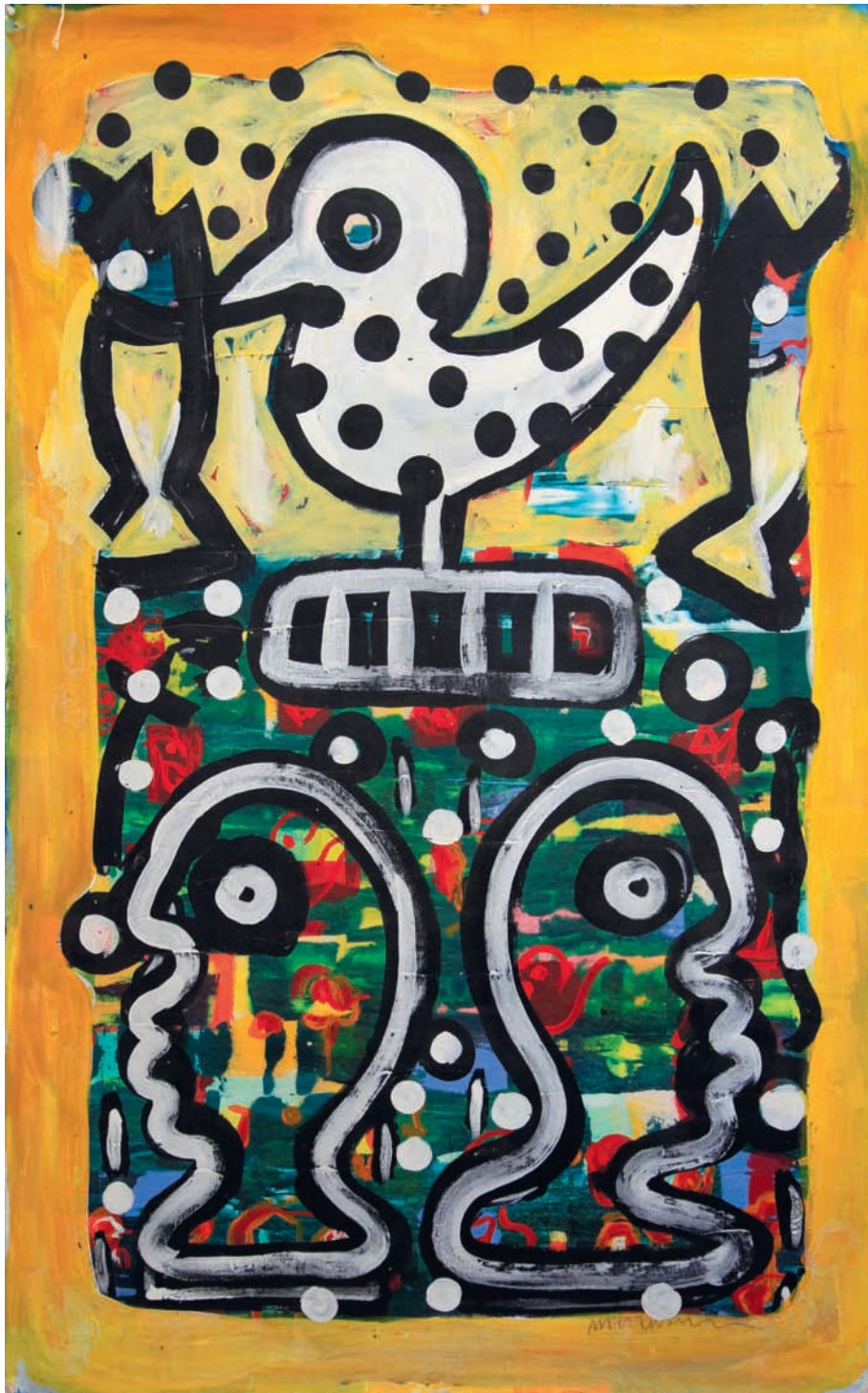
En anden vedholdende inspirationskilde hos Heerup var de oldnordiske billeder, som de er overleveret i vikingernes indgravninger af fx Jellingstenene samt i kalkmalerier i Nordens tidlige kristne kirker. Særligt under 2. Verdenskrig udviklede de danske kunstnere, med Heerup som forprop, en forkærlighed for de nordiske mønstre og motiver, der udgjorde et stærkt nationalt alternativ til de af nazisterne belastede klassiske græske og italienske motiver. Man kan i Heerups karakteristiske malestil spore inspirationen fra de runde og blødt forbundne former i vikingernes båndslang. Ofte er hans motiver desuden omkranset af en markant kontur, der lader de enkelte elementer i billedet fremstå lige betydningsfulde uden at isolere dem fra helhedens samlede fortælling. Det samme kunne man sige om Mathiesens udtryk. Forbindelsen mellem Heerups kunstneriske udtryk og folkekunsten blev bemærket i udlandet. I forbindelse med hans deltagelse i udstillingen *Danish Abstract Art* skrev Elisabeth Stevens i *Washington Post* (1964), at Heerup "maler med et barns styrke og renhed, og at hans billeder, skønt i slægt med folkekunst, er fuldstændig fri for den usikkerhed og skrøbelighed, der kendetegner mange moderne primitive".⁹

Henry Heerup og de kunstnere, han brød igennem med i 1930'erne, såsom Asger Jorn, Ejler Bille, Egill Jacobsen og Carl-Henning Pedersen, skabte en forbindelse mellem fortidens udtryk og samtidskunsten. Som keramikker og pottemager fra Kunsthåndværkerskolen i Kolding rejste Gert Mathiesen i en årrække fra værksted til værksted i store dele af Danmark og Europa og sugede til sig af overleveret og ofte ældgammel viden om lerets kunst. Det er oplagt, at han undervejs også har interesseret sig for særlige motiver. I sit eget

keramiske værksted i Hestemøllerstræde i Slagelse udformede han krukker og vaser med stiliserede figurer (s. 96), og i samme periode ser man disse vandre ind i hans tidlige linoleumstryk (s. 83) og senere over i maleriet.

For Heerup var det historiske afsæt en forankring af hans værker i en fælles historie og en vigtig legitimering af hans kunst som folkelig frem for elitær. I en af sine mere programmatisk tekst, *Al Kunst Bør Være Folkelig*, peger han netop på det keramiske håndværk, og især dekorationen af leret, som kunstens urgrund; "Derfor Har Vel Den "Folkelige Kunst" i Al Sin Enkelthed Ornamentet som Grundform"¹⁰. På steder er mønsteret og dekorationen en så integreret del af det kunstneriske udtryk som hos Heerup og Mathiesen. Med deres nordisk inspirerede malemåde og den stærke genkendelige symbolik tilbyder de ikke alene beskueren et genkendeligt og trygt rum for personlig refleksion. I en individualiseret tidsalder bidrager de samtidig til oplevelsen af noget, vi kan være fælles om, ved igen og igen at aktualisere afsættet i naturen og historien.

- 1 Heerup deltog bl.a. i udstillinger på Museum of Modern Art, NY (1950), Guggenheim museet, NY (1960), Lefebvre Gallery, NY (1964) samt Pittsburgh International udstillingerne (1958, 1961, 1964) og vandredstillingen *Danish Abstract Art* arrangeret af Kulturministeriet og vist på fem amerikanske museer inkl. Smithsonian museet.
- 2 Riedel, Flemming, *Dansk Kunstner i New York. Overraskende Billedeffekter*, Magasinet Kunst, Nr. 3, 2007, s. 17.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Heerup, *Køng Folkehøjskoles udstillingshæfte*, 1954. Her citeret fra Nielsen, Anni Lave, *Motivets Magt*, 2015, s. 244.
- 6 Se liste over Heerups udstillingsaktivitet i Nielsen, Anni Lave, *Motivets Magt*, 2015, s. 313–325.
- 7 Nielsen, Anni Lave, *Motivets Magt*, Heerup Museum, 2015, s. 10. Citat fra Heerup nedskrevet af venen Allan Daugaard Hansen.
- 8 Nielsen, A. L., *Motivets Magt (The Power of the Motif)*, 2015, Heerup Museum
- 9 Citat her fra Schade, Virtus, *Heerup*, Stig Vendelkærs Forlag, 1967, s. 126.
- 10 Heerup, Henry, *Al Kunst Bør Være Folkelig, Helhesten*, 2. årg. Hæfte 5–6, 1944.



Gert Mathiesen, *Seagull on Top of Heads (Måge ovenpå hoveder)*, 1998, olie på lærred, 152 × 98 cm, privateje



Henry Heerup, *Intuition (Intuition)*, 1943,
linoleumssnit, 17,8 × 17,5 cm, Heerup Museum

US

At the peak of his artistic career, with his colourful, easily recognizable paintings, the Danish artist Henry Heerup (1907-93) was highly visible not only in Denmark, but also in a number of important exhibitions in the United States.¹ It was particularly the development of Spontaneous Abstract painting during World War II and its culmination in the CoBrA group that struck a responsive chord abroad, launching Heerup's career on the international art scene.

In 1986, the Danish-American artist, Gert Mathiesen (1951-2013) decided to move to the United States. "I moved, because my brother worked there in the shipping industry", explained Gert Mathiesen in 2007 to the Danish journalist, Flemming Riedel. "And I first came here for a holiday, but then became captivated by the special glow of the American environment."² The belief in everyone's right to free expression was an important element in Denmark's post-war artistic environment. Heerup had made a major contribution to this and it helped shape Gert Mathiesen as a young artist. In the United States, Mathiesen's desire for freedom merged with the American dream. "It's all about the American saying, 'How to dream big, but go on being little' – or, to put it another way, about humility and respect for what you are doing," he explained.³

As artists, Henry Heerup and Gert Mathiesen both used the Spontaneous Abstract images, which Heerup and his colleagues had developed from the mid-1930s onwards. 'Spontaneous Abstract' is a wide-ranging, open term, which indicates a special approach to the creation of art rather than a similarity in the finished works. "I rarely know what I'll end up with, when I start on a new picture. Sometimes, it literally evolves by itself."⁴ This is how Gert Mathiesen described his method. Similarly, Heerup said: "As I Mix Colours on The Palette, I Mix Motifs On the Canvas or Masonit... I Am On A Journey Of Discovery."⁵ The colours in the works of the two artists also have their own life. The bright, inviting shades often serve as

independent elements in the picture, and it is not unusual for a single work to feature a combination of the entire palette.

From the early 1970s to the mid-1980s, Heerup's art, in particular his plethora of lithographic works, could be seen throughout Denmark: everywhere from schools to museums. Meanwhile, his more commercial products such as Mother's Day plates, tea caddies etc. became a feature in many Danish homes. During this period too, his exhibition activity would leave most people breathless. His paintings, stone carvings, junk sculptures and graphic works featured in more than fifty exhibitions between 1972 and 1986, including a solo exhibition at the prestigious Venice Biennale in 1972.⁶ It goes without saying that this impressive activity attracted the attention of the press, and Heerup was hailed as the darling of Denmark.

Heerup wanted to create art for the people. At the same time, more than anyone else, he was a defender of artistic freedom. As he wrote in his notes in 1944, free expression is something you have inside you: "It Is A Form Of Life And Desire, A Life Impulse. And The Same Applies To Art."⁷ With his great integrity and insistence on modesty and free artistic expression in his outdoor workshop in Rødovre, Heerup has had a huge influence on several generations of young artists.

In visual terms, despite abstraction, both artists retained the motif and recognizability. Heerup referred to this as *The Power of the Motif*⁸, thereby underlining the crucial importance of imagination in art. As humans, we look for what is recognizable, for example interpreting two dots as eyes looking at us. On the basis of the motif, the works of Mathiesen and Heerup invite viewers to reflect, balancing the personal and the general. We recognize ourselves and are recognized. In other words, in the dialogue between the works of the two artists, we can see the outline of what makes both Heerup's and Mathiesen's works so impactful. It is partly about the freedom of the individual within a much larger framework. By scrutinizing Mathiesen's and Heerup's motifs and narratives, their art shows us what we have 'in common'.

Heerup and Mathiesen both developed symbolic imagery, sustained by simplified motifs that are rich in meaning. Heerup's works, for example, feature the coffee pot, the carpet beater and the elf, while in Gert Mathiesen's works the jar and the tiger are recurring motifs. The figurations are often rooted in something personal. For example, Mathiesen's tiger originated from his daughter's beloved, stuffed teddy bear⁹. But through reiteration and simplification, the motifs of both Heerup and Mathiesen take on a general, universal aspect. For example, the coffee pot is an image of close friendship and a chat over a nice cup of coffee.

Throughout his life, Heerup focused on his most important sources of inspiration: nature and history. These are also prevalent in the works of Mathiesen. Birds and trees in particular seem to be a common reference for both artists, which means that these motifs provide visual connections between their works.

THE TREE OF LIFE

Heerup and Mathiesen were both basically urban. Their experience of nature was derived from aesthetic havens featuring controlled nature, such as flowers in the front gardens of houses and crooked trees in parks. Accordingly, in their works, nature is neither scary nor alienating, but familiar and as inescapable as the soil beneath their feet. Nature is a common foundation and a common frame of reference, on the basis of which it is possible to switch from subjectivity to universality, while at the same time being comprehensible. The tree is a powerful, unifying symbol, which features in stories in many cultures: from the tree of life in the Garden of Eden to the Ash Yggdrasil of the Norse gods, which connects the worlds of gods and humans. Trees often play a role in fairy tales and folk tales too.

Heerup's painting, *The Boy at the Ulvedal Oak* (p. 40), features a particular tree: the gnarled oak tree in Ulvedalen north of Copenhagen. The tree was the subject of Heerup's first painting and is repeated in this work from 1969. In the work, Heerup has painted himself encased by the almost hollow tree, as if it were the memory of a ritual artistic

birth. *The Boy at the Ulvedal Oak* also suggests a close connection between humankind and nature in a more general sense. For example, it evokes Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale, *The Tinderbox*, in which the soldier is persuaded to crawl into the hollow tree to find a valuable treasure.

In Gert Mathiesen's linocut, *Purple Yellow Tree of Life* (p. 54), the tree's stylised branches are inhabited by people. It is not a particular tree, but a well-known symbol of the family: a family tree whose branches reveal lineage and relationships. Both Heerup and Mathiesen often referred to the tree as the tree of life, thereby creating an association with the many myths and meanings concealed in our common memory.

THE BIRD OF INSPIRATION

The bird also plays a special role for both artists. It can be seen lying in a basket on a woman's head (p. 72), balancing on the back of a chair (p. 9) and sometimes it has landed directly on the artist's head (p. 8). In 1943, Heerup made the linocut, *Intuition* (p. 31), a strikingly simple black-and-white self-portrait featuring close contact between the man and the bird: the artist and his 'intuition'. Located as it is at the very top, the bird preserves its element of air and sky, thereby indicating the immaterial aspect of art: the thoughts that go into it, the feelings expressed and the inspiration. Heerup regarded the bird's role as a mediator between heaven and earth, thought and body, as a parallel to the role of the artist in society. Thus, in Heerup's works, the bird is closely related to a number of mythological beings such as the elf, the unicorn and the angel. If you look closely, you often find Heerup, the defender of artistic freedom, with a red elf's hat on his head.

The bird of free imagination also has a strong contrast in Gert Mathiesen's *Self-Portrait – The Potter* (p. 36), in which the potter's head is uncomfortably locked in a closed square. The major three-part work, *Self-Portrait – The Potter, The Painter and Sweet* (pp. 36-38) contains a very powerful story about the different roles of craftsman and visual artist, between the sheer slog

involved and free expression. However, in most of Mathiesen's colourful works, the bird of freedom has settled calmly in the tree of life (p. 102).

BACK TO OUR ROOTS

Another persistent source of inspiration for Heerup was Old Norse images: those that have survived through Viking engravings: for example, in the Jelling stones and the Nordic Region's early Christian churches.

Particularly during World War II, Danish artists, with Heerup as vanguard, developed an affection for Nordic patterns and motifs, which constituted a powerful local alternative to the classic Greek and Roman motifs that had been tainted by the Nazi regime. In Heerup's characteristic style of painting, we can see traces of inspiration from the round, soft, connected shapes in Viking interwoven ribbon ornamentation. In addition, his motifs are often encircled by a distinctive contour that invests the individual elements with equal importance, without isolating them from the overall narrative. The same could be said about Mathiesen's expression. The connection between Heerup's artistic expression and folk art was noticed abroad. When he took part in the US exhibition, *Danish Abstract Art*, Elisabeth Stevens wrote in the Washington Post (1964) that Heerup "paints with the strength and purity of a child, and that his pictures, although similar to folk art, are entirely free of the insecurity and fragility that characterize many of the modern primitive artists".

Henry Heerup and the artists, with whom he made his breakthrough in the 1930s, including Asger Jorn, Ejler Bille, Egill Jacobsen and Carl-Henning Pedersen, created a connection between the expression of the past and contemporary art. As a potter trained at Kunsthåndværkerskolen in Kolding, for a number of years Gert Mathiesen travelled from workshop to workshop throughout Europe, absorbing often-ancient knowledge about the art of clay that had been passed down through generations. It is quite clear that along the way he was also interested in particular motifs. In his own ceramic workshop in Hestemøllerstræde

in Slagelse, he designed jars and vases featuring stylised figures (p. 96) that also found their way into his early linocuts (s. 83) and later into the paintings. Like Heerup, Mathiesen was clearly fond of soft shapes and repetition, which almost become a pattern.

The historic basis of Heerup's works rooted them in a common story: most importantly, legitimizing his art as popular rather than elitist. In one of his more programmatic texts, *All Art Should Be Popular*, Heerup claimed that ceramic craftsmanship, particularly the decoration of the clay, was the primeval foundation of art: "This Is Probably Why 'Popular Art' In All Its Simplicity Has Ornament as its Basic Form".¹⁰ There are few places where pattern and decoration are such an integral part of artistic expression as in the works of Heerup and Mathiesen. With their Nordic-inspired style of painting and their powerful, recognizable symbolism, not only do they provide viewers with a familiar, safe space for personal reflection. In an age of individualism, they also contribute to the experience of something we can share in by repeatedly making topical their basis in nature and history.

- 1 Heerup took part in exhibitions at the New York Museum of Modern Art (1950), the Guggenheim (1960), the Lefebvre Gallery, New York (1964) as well as the Pittsburgh International (1958, 1961, 1964) and the travelling exhibition *Danish Abstract Art*. The latter was organized by the Danish Ministry of Culture and exhibited at five American museums including the Smithsonian.
- 2 Riedel, Flemming, *Dansk Kunstner i New York. Overraskende Billedeffekter*, Magasinet Kunst, No. 3, 2007, p. 17.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Heerup, Exhibition catalogue from Køng Folk High School, 1954. Quoted from Nielsen, Anni Lave, *The Power of the Motif*, 2015, s. 244.
- 6 See a list of Heerup's exhibition activities in Nielsen, Anni Lave, *The Power of the Motif*, 2015, pp. 313-325.
- 7 Nielsen, Anni Lave, *The Power of the Motif*, Heerup Museum 2015. p. 10. Quote from Heerup written down by his friend, Allan Daugaard Hansen.
- 8 Nielsen, A. L., *Motivets Magt (The Power of the Motif)*, 2015, Heerup Museum
- 9 Our translation of quote in Schade, Virtus, *Heerup*, Stig Vendelkærs Forlag, 1967, p. 126.
- 10 Heerup, Henry, *Al Kunst Bør Være Folkelig, Helhesten* Volume 2, Books 5-6, 1944.



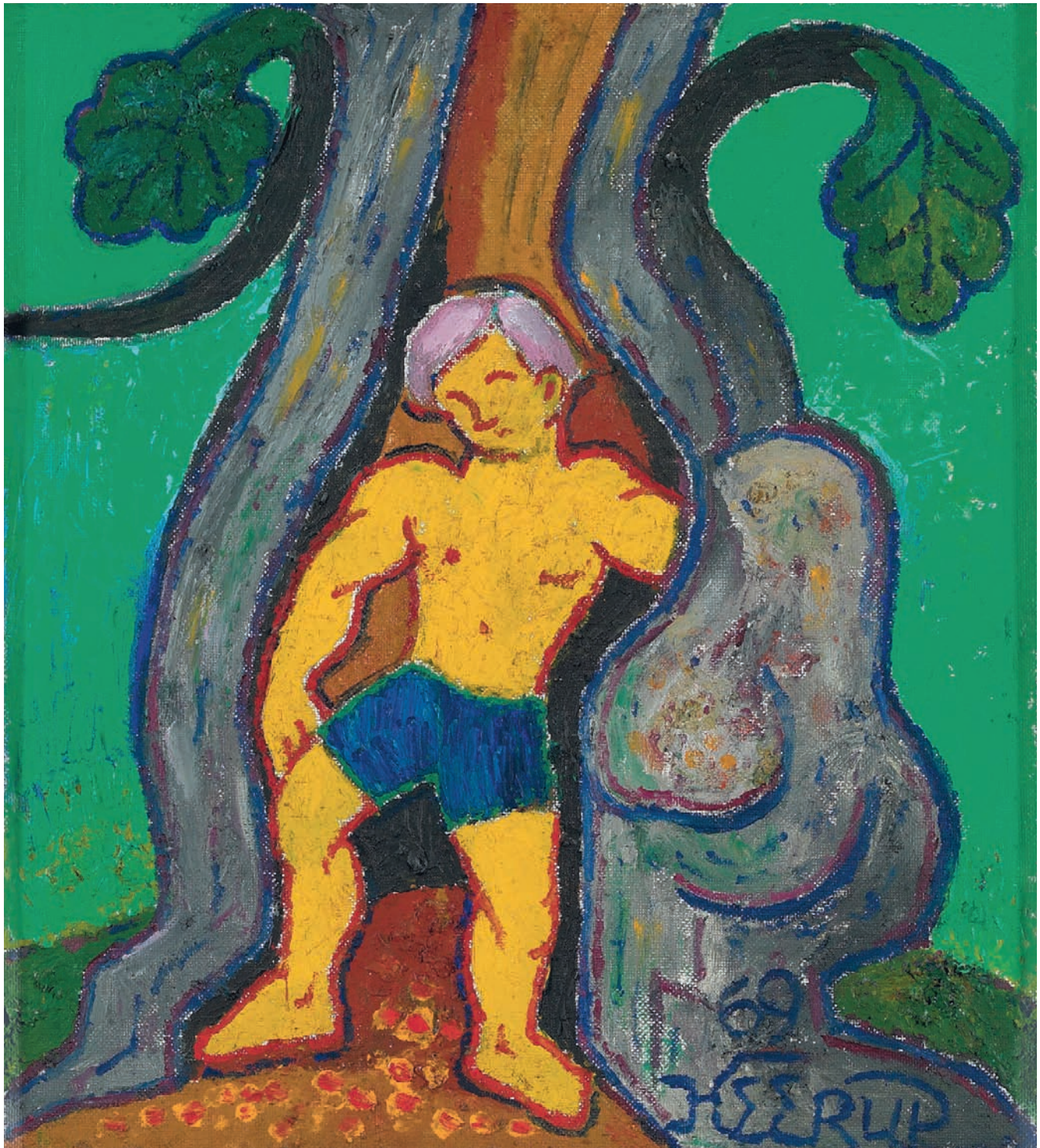
Gert Mathiesen, *Self-Portrait I – The Potter*
(*Selvportræt I – pottemageren*), 1991,
akryl på papir, 127 × 98 cm, privateje



Gert Mathiesen, *Self-Portrait II – The Painter*
(*Selvportræt II – Maleren*), 1991,
akryl på papir, 127 × 98 cm, privateje



Gert Mathiesen, *Self-Portrait III – Sweet*
(*Selvportræt III – Sød*), 1991,
akryl på papir, 127 × 98 cm, privateje



Henry Heerup, *Drengen ved Ulvedalsegen*
(*The Boy at the Ulvedal Oak*), 1969,
olie på masonit, 60 × 54 cm, Heerup Museum



Henry Heerup, *Selvportræt (Self-Portrait)*, 1956,
olie på masonit, 55 × 28 cm, Heerup Museum

EN DANSK-AMERIKANSK KUNSTNER

Gert Mathiesen
1951-2013

DK

For kunstneren Gert Mathiesen var livet en historie, der var værd at fortælle. Lige fra de keramiske værker, han lavede som ung mand, til de malerier og tryk i stor størrelse, han skabte som moden kunstner, fortalte Mathiesen sin historie med en intens og levende ærlighed, som genfindes i alle de værker, han efterlod sig.

Lige fra begyndelsen var Mathiesen kendt som en kreativ og fri ånd, en forsvarer for den lille mand, en person, som – uden at være uforskammet eller respektløs – ikke følte noget behov for at undskylde for, at han var anderledes.

Mathiesen levede sit liv med en lidenskab og en spontanitet, som de fleste mennesker kun kan drømme om. Han rejste verden rundt, ofte efter en pludselig indskydelse, og havde en arbejdsmoral som den mest ambitiøse stræber. Og som hans familie og enorme netværk af venner over hele kloden tydeligt husker, så gav han lige så meget i sine forhold til andre. Han delte utrætteligt ud af sin entusiasme og humor, brugte sin dybe intuition til at opmuntre andre og hjælpe, når det var nødvendigt, og var ikke bange for at give udtryk for ømhed og legesyge.

Mathiesen var en fremragende fortæller og kanaliserede disse egenskaber ud gennem sin kunst. Med et rigt visuelt sprog bestående af en stadig voksende mængde af symboler, et bredt spektrum af udtryksfulde farver og rytmiske mønstre, skaber hans kunst en fortælling, som giver beskueren mulighed for at opleve de syn, lyde og følelser, der inspirerede ham.

Mathiesens fødeby Esbjerg er en havneby ved Jyllands vestkyst og gav ham mange af de grundlæggende billeder og idéer, som ville dukke op i hans kunst gennem hele hans liv, især vand, fisk, blomster og skibe. Mathiesen var den yngste i en børneflokk på tre, der også omfattede en ældre bror og søster. Han blev født i marts 1951 og blev

opdraget af sin mor, efter at hans far, som var bager og konditor, blev syg og døde, da Mathiesen kun var ni år gammel. Tragisk nok havde familien før hans fødsel mistet tre børn, der døde af sygdom. Denne tidlige oplevelse af tab blev forstærket af hans forvirring og sorg over at blive sendt væk hjemmefra sammen med sine søskende for at bo hos nogle slægtninge under faderens sygdom og førte til, at Mathiesen hele livet igennem lagde stor vægt på familieband. Som dreng tilbragte han ofte meget tid nede i den travle havn blandt havnearbejderne, men fandt også trøst i den fredelige beskæftigelse med at fiske i de små vandløb i nærheden af sit hjem.

Mathiesens rejselyst blev tidligt vakt. Efter skoletiden, først på Boldesager Skole og så på Kunsthåndværkerskolen i Kolding, hvor han studerede keramik, tilbød hans mor en februardag at give ham en billet til Paris. Da han ikke fandt nogen forbedring dér, i forhold det kolde vejr og den mørke vinter, som han hadede derhjemme, besluttede han at fortsætte til Sydfrankrig. Her fandt han sol og sandstrande, en afslappende kombination, som han blev ved med at søge på alle kontinenter i hele sit liv.

Som en nysgerrig og ambitiøs ung kunstner med lyst til at rejse fandt Mathiesen en praktisk måde at fortsætte sin uddannelse på og ernære sig selv gennem en serie lærepladser og jobs i betydningsfulde keramikregioner i Europa og USA. I denne periode fik han og hans partner Lisbeth Tvede sønnen Jonathan. I begyndelsen af 1990'erne, hvor han begyndte at få succes med sin kunstnerkarriere, havde han opnået et omfattende teknisk repertoire gennem sin praktiske erfaring i keramikvirksomheder i Sydfrankrig, Höhr-Grenzhausen (Tyskland), Grottaglie (Italien), Royal Copenhagen (Danmark) og Martha's Vineyard (USA).

Efter at Mathiesen var flyttet til USA i 1986, åbnede han sit eget keramikværksted i Somers, New York, og i denne periode mødte han sin kommende hustru, kunstneren Pam Smilow. I årenes løb kom Mathiesen og Smilow til at arbejde sammen

i atelierer i The Schoolhouse i Croton Falls, New York, på Manhattan, i Chicago, i Berkeley, Californien og i Blue Hill, Maine.

Mathiesen holdt fast ved sin livslange vane med at arbejde forskellige steder i verden og planlagde regelmæssige besøg i Danmark om foråret, lige i tide til at se anemonerne blomstre og samarbejde med sin ven Lars Ahlstrand om nye printserier. Mathiesen rejste ofte ud til strande for at arbejde i nærheden af havet i lande som Portugal, Peru og Puerto Rico og skabe nye værker, ikke mindst et 350 cm langt linoleumssnit på bestilling fra et bageri i New York.

I de følgende to årtier førte hans samlede erfaringer som ægteemand og far, rejsende og eventyrer og som en skarp iagttagere kombineret med hans tekniske ekspertise og hans stærke energi til skabelsen af et unikt og betydningsfuldt oeuvre. Mathiesen eksperimenterede konstant, afprøvede nye idéer og skabte værker på lærred, papir, keramik og linoleum. Ofte samarbejdede han med Smilow og med Lars Ahlstrand, en barndomsven fra Danmark. Han fik inspiration fra den danske fotograf Jacob Holdt, fra kunstnerne i CoBrA-bevægelsen og fra det, han kaldte det "forunderlige" amerikanske liv. Han udstillede sine værker i gallerier og på censurerede udstillinger over hele verden, begyndte at blive indkøbt af museer og fik betydningsfulde bestillingsopgaver fra erhvervsvirksomheder. I dag findes Mathiesens værker i private samlinger over hele verden.

Smilow husker, at hendes mand Gert – kort før sin alt for tidlige død af en aneurisme under et besøg i Danmark i 2013 – vågnede op fra en livagtig drøm, hvor han så sig selv sidde ved et af de vandløb, hvor han havde fisket som dreng. Uden at tøve fulgte Mathiesen, tro mod sin spontane natur, sin drøm og bestilte samme dag en flybillet for at rejse hen og genfinde netop det sted, han havde kendt som dreng.

De opdagelsesrejser, en kunstner foretager, kan være konkrete rejser, eller de kan være drømme, men på den ene eller den anden måde frembringer de det rige materiale, som kunstneren skaber ud fra. Kunstneren Gert Mathiesen holdt aldrig op med at udforske verden, og idet han med en barnlig friskhed og en typisk dansk ligefremhed formidledede, hvad han syntes om det, han oplevede, var han sammen med sin kunst en person, der satte sit mærke på verden.





Gert Mathiesen, *Green Figures (Grønne figurer)*, u. år,
akryl på lærred, 115 × 228 cm, privateje



US

For artist Gert Mathiesen, life was a story worth telling. Beginning with the ceramics he produced as a young man and carrying through to the large scale paintings and prints he created as a mature artist, Mathiesen told his story with an intense and lively honesty that resonates throughout the body of work he left behind.

From the beginning, Mathiesen was known as a creative, independent spirit, a champion of the underdog, a person who without being rude or disrespectful did not feel the need to make excuses for being different.

Living life with passion and a spontaneity that most people can only dream of, Mathiesen traveled the world, often on the spur of the moment, and had a work ethic equal to the most driven type A personality imaginable. Yet, as family members and an immense network of friends around the globe vividly recall, he gave just as much to his relationships. He unflinchingly shared his enthusiasm and humor, used a deep intuition to encourage others and offer help when needed and wasn't afraid to express tenderness and playfulness.

An expert storyteller, Mathiesen channeled these qualities into his art. Through the use of a rich visual vocabulary consisting of an evolving cast of symbols, a wide spectrum of expressive color and rhythmic pattern, Mathiesen's art creates a narrative that gives the viewer the opportunity to join in and experience the sights, sounds and feelings that inspired him.

Mathiesen's home town of Esbjerg, Denmark, is a port city on the west coast of Jutland and provided him with many of the foundational images and ideas that would appear in his art throughout his life, especially water, fish, flowers and vessels. The youngest of three children including an older brother and sister, Mathiesen was born in March 1951 and was raised by his mother after his father, a commercial

baker and pastry chef, became ill and died when Mathiesen was only nine years old. Sadly, prior to Mathiesen's birth the family had lost three children to childhood illnesses. This early experience of loss was amplified by his confusion and misery at being sent away along with his siblings to stay with relatives during his father's illness and led to the high value Mathiesen placed on family bonds throughout his life. As a boy Mathiesen often spent time down on the bustling docks among the longshoremen, but also found solace in the quiet activity of fishing in the small streams near his home.

For Mathiesen, wanderlust struck early. After his school years, first at the Boldesager School and then at Design School Kolding where he studied ceramics, one February Mathiesen's mother offered to buy him a train ticket to Paris. Finding little relief there from the cold weather and dark winter days he disliked at home, he decided to continue on to the South of France. Here he found the sun and sandy beaches, a restorative combination that through the course of his life he would seek on continents all over the globe.

As an inquisitive and ambitious young artist with a penchant for travel, Mathiesen found a practical way to continue his education and fund his lifestyle through a series of apprenticeships and jobs in major ceramics regions in Europe and the United States. During this time he and his partner Lisbeth Tvede had their son Jonathan. By the early 1990's when he began to experience success in his fine arts career, he had acquired a vast technical repertoire through hands-on experience in production potteries in southern France; Höhr-Grenzhausen, Germany; Grottaglie, Italy; Royal Copenhagen in Denmark; and Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts.

After his move to the United States in 1986, Mathiesen opened his own ceramics studio in Somers, New York, and during this period met his future wife, artist Pam Smilow. Over the years, Mathiesen and Smilow would work together in studios at The Schoolhouse in Croton Falls, New York;

Manhattan; Chicago; Illinois; Berkeley; California; and Blue Hill, Maine. In 1993 their daughter Morgan was born. Mathiesen maintained his lifelong habit of working in various corners of the world, scheduling regular visits to Denmark in the spring, in time to see the anemones in bloom and to work with his friend Lars Ahlstrand to produce new collaborative print series. Mathiesen often traveled to beaches in order to work near the ocean in places such as Portugal, Peru and Puerto Rico to produce new works; notably a 12 foot linocut commissioned by a New York bakery.

Through the next two decades, the accumulation of his experiences as a husband and father, as a traveler and adventurer and as a keen observer melded with his technical expertise and his drive, resulted in Mathiesen's creation of a unique and important body of work. Mathiesen constantly experimented and tried new ideas, producing works on canvas, paper, ceramics and linoleum. He collaborated with his wife, Pam Smilow, and Lars Ahlstrand, a childhood friend from Denmark. He drew inspiration from Danish photographer Jacob Holdt, the artists of the CoBrA movement and from what he termed the 'weirdness' of American life. He exhibited his work in galleries and juried shows worldwide, began to be collected by museums and was awarded significant corporate commissions. Today Mathiesen's art is in many private collections all over the world.

Just before his untimely death of an aneurysm while traveling in Denmark in 2013, Smilow recalls her husband Gert waking from a vivid dream in which he saw himself sitting beside one of the streams where he had gone fishing as a boy. Without hesitation, Mathiesen, true to his spontaneous nature, followed that dream and booked a flight the next day to go to find the exact spot he had known as a child.

The explorations an artist makes may be literal journeys or may be dreams, but either way they provide the rich material from which the artist creates. Artist Gert Mathiesen never ceased his

exploration of the world, and in conveying with a childlike freshness and the characteristic Danish frankness how he felt about what he experienced, he, along with his art, was a presence which affected the world.





Gert Mathiesen, *Untitled (Uden titel)*, 2002,
akryl og linoleumstryk på papir, 112 × 77 cm, privateje



Gert Mathiesen, *Purple Yellow Tree of Life*
(*Livets træ i purpur og gul*), 2009,
linoleum og akryl på papir, 101 × 74 cm, privateje



Henry Heerup, *BallonOpstigning (Rising Balloon)*, 1967, litografi efter linoleumssnit, 61 × 68 cm, Heerup Museum



Gert Mathiesen, *Facebook (Facebook)*, 2012,
akryl på lærred, 178 × 197 cm, privateje





Henry Heerup, *Bidronningen* (Queen Bee), 1962,
litografi efter linoleumstryk, 60 × 36 cm, Heerup Museum



Gert Mathiesen, *Family, Green and Red (Familie grøn og rød)*, 1995, akryl og linoleumstryk på papir, 112,5 × 71 cm, privateje



Henry Heerup, *På Livsvejen* (*On the Road of Life*), ca. 1960, farvelagt linoleumssnit, 28,5 × 30,6 cm, Heerup Museum

EN ÆGTE KÆRLIGHEDS- HISTORIE OG ET NÆRT PARTNERSKAB

DK

Gert Mathiesen var en meget usædvanlig person. På mange måder var han umulig at sætte i bås. Han passede ikke ind i nogen af dem. Man kunne ikke engang kalde ham excentrisk. Dertil var han for rationel og metodisk. Han begrænsede sig ikke til traditionelle kunstnermaterialer, han kunne lide idéen om at skabe produkter ud fra sin kunst, og han ville ikke sættes op på en piedestal. Han beundrede folkekunstnere, børns kunst og folk, der lavede kunst ud fra deres dybeste instinkter. Han kunne godt lide det rå. Og når det kom til stykket, var han simpelthen ligeglad med, hvad andre syntes.

Vores liv sammen var en ægte kærlighedshistorie og et sandt partnerskab. At arbejde ved siden af ham i vores atelier var meget inspirerende, og jeg ved, at jeg ikke ville være blevet den kunstner, jeg er nu, uden Gerts indflydelse, og vice versa. Vores tilgange var imidlertid helt forskellige: Jeg malede intuitivt, og han skitserede som regel tingene. Jeg valgte nogle få farver til hvert billede, og Gert bredte sig ud over det hele, brugte masser af farver og erklærede ofte med stolthed, at han valgte dem, fordi de var "2. sortering", som han havde fået gratis af et malerfirma. Jeg arbejdede om dagen, og Gert var en natteravn. Jeg tog genveje, og Gert kunne lide hårdt arbejde. Jeg arbejdede i serier, og Gert kunne lide at udforske forskellige idéer, men hans kunst var altid helt igennem Gert. Sådan var hans kreative proces.

Gert elskede byen, men havde også brug for naturen. Så løsningen med at bo på Manhattan og rejse frem og tilbage til atelieret en times kørsel mod nord var helt perfekt. I en lang periode havde vi fælles atelier i en gammel, ombygget skolebygning, som også rummede et teater, og vi brugte det som sommerhus. Ofte endte Gert med at sidde sidst på eftermiddagen og fiske efter ørreder i den nærliggende å og kom så hjem til middag og en hel nats arbejde med at lave tryk på vores Charles Brant trykkemaskine (vores suverænt mest kostbare ejendel).

Eftersom vi var to kunstnere i familien, og ikke var særlig velhavende, måtte vi også være kreative med hensyn til at få noget at leve af. Da vi ofte rejste mellem Europa og USA, og mellem New York og Californien, var vi klar over, at vi var nødt til at indrette os praktisk: Vi malede med lærrederne sat fast på væggen med tegnestifter, rullede dem sammen så de var lette at transportere, og var åbne over for enhver ny måde at få vores kunst ud i verden på. Gert begrænsede ikke sig selv til kun at arbejde i atelieret – han kunne skabe kunst hvor som helst. Han søgte altid efter varmere steder, og hans sidste store linoleumsarbejde blev udskåret på stranden i Puerto Rico. Han hoppede på et fly med et stykke sammenrullet linoleum og vidste, at når det blev varmet af solen, ville det være "blødt som smør" at skære i, og han kunne sidde på sit yndlingssted: ved sit elskede hav.

US

Gert Mathiesen was a very unusual character. In many ways he defied boxes. He just didn't fit into any. Not even the eccentric box – he was too rational and methodical for that. He didn't limit himself to just traditional artist materials, he liked the idea of creating products from his art, and he didn't want to be put on a pedestal. He admired folk artists, children's art, and people who made art from the gut – he liked the rawness. And when it came down to it, he simply just didn't care what others thought.

Ours was a true love story and partnership. Working alongside of him in our studio was a real inspiration and I know I would not have become the artist I am now without Gert's influence and vice versa. Our approaches were quite different, however: I painted from intuition and he usually sketched things out. I picked a few colors for each painting. Gert was all over the map, using loads of colors, often proudly asserting that he chose them because they were “seconds” that he had gotten for free from the paint company. I worked during the day and Gert was a night owl... I took shortcuts, Gert liked heavy labor... I worked in series, Gert liked to explore different ideas but his art was always quintessential Gert. This was his creative process.

Gert loved the city but he also needed nature. So the solution of living in Manhattan and then commuting to the studio an hour north was a perfect solution. For a long time, we shared studio space in an old converted schoolhouse that also hosted a theater and we used it as our summer house. Many a late afternoon Gert would end up fishing for trout in the nearby stream, returning for dinner and a full night of work making prints on our Charles Brant printing press (our single most valuable asset).

Being two artists in a family, and not being independently wealthy, we had to be creative about how to make a living as well. Often going between

Europe and the United States, and New York to California, we knew we had to be practical: we painted with our canvases pushpinned to the wall, rolled them so they could be easily transportable, and were open to any novel way of getting our art out into the world. Gert didn't restrict himself to just working in the studio – he could make art anywhere. Always in pursuit of warmer temperatures, his last major large scale linoleum commission was carved on the beach in Puerto Rico. He hopped on a plane with a rolled up huge piece of linoleum, knowing that heated by the sun, it would cut “like butter” and he could be sitting at his favorite place: next to his beloved ocean.

DK Fra 2014 til 2018 var en række kunstværker af den afdøde dansk-amerikanske kunstner Gert Mathiesen og hans kunstneriske samarbejdspartner og hustru Pamela Smilow udstillet på det danske generalkonsulat i New York. De over 40 værker var præget af en veritabel eksplosion af farver, livlige organiske motiver og en livsbekræftende, fantasifuld frodighed og blev nydt og værdsat til fulde hver eneste dag af missionens personale og de over 4.500 årlige besøgende, og de understregede den både symbolske og reelle brobygning mellem danske og amerikanske kunstneriske traditioner, som er inkarneret i Mathiesen og Smilows oeuvre. Det er dejligt at se, hvordan arven fra dette udstillingsprojekt nu lever videre og udvides på Heerup Museum i Danmark.

US From 2014 to 2018, art work by the late Danish-American artist Gert Mathiesen and his artistic collaborator and wife Pam Smilow was exhibited at the official Chancellery of the Consulate General and Permanent Mission of Denmark to the UN in New York. With their veritable explosion of color, vividly organic motifs and life-affirming imaginative exuberance, the 40+ individual art works were thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated on a daily basis by the mission staff and more than 4,500 annual visitors, underscoring the symbolical and real-life bridging of Danish-American art traditions embodied by the Mathiesen-Smilow oeuvre. It is wonderful to see how the legacy of this exhibition venture is now continued and expanded at the Heerup Museum in Denmark.



Gert Mathiesen, *Tulips, Bear, Birds* (*Tulipaner, Bjørn, Fugle*), 2006, linoleumstryk og akryl på papir, 210 × 94 cm, privateje



Henry Heerup, *Kærlighedsankeret (Anchor of Love)*, 1974, litografi, 51,5 × 58,8 cm, Heerup Museum





Gert Mathiesen, *Black Light Series: Flowers, Woman and Vase*
(Sort lys serie: blomster, kvinde og vase), u. år, linoleum og akryl,
91,4 × 63,5 cm, privateje (se også cover)

DK Værket *Politihånd og Påfugl* har en helt særlig betydning for mig. Det er faktisk et værk, jeg har fået tatoveret. Man kan derfor sige, at det er et værk, som på den ene eller anden måde kommer til at være med mig resten af livet.

Dette linoleumstryk viser mange af de karakteristiske elementer, som man kan støde på i Heerups kunstnervirke. De bløde former, der altid er styret af en intuitiv hånd, som ved, hvor det hele ender, er ét af dem.

Former og figurer er næsten ved at vippe over til det ornamentale. Det er et af de andre kendetegn, der særligt skinner igennem i dette værk – brugen af modsætninger. Heerup har bl.a. placeret en politihånd og en påfugl sammen. To ting som er svære at finde en samhörighed i.

Ting, som ikke passer sammen, bliver alligevel samlet sammen. Man bliver nærmest tvunget til at følge den naivitet, der er til stede. Man prøver at forstå, hvad man kan få ud af et sådant skævt mix.

Det var primært derfor, jeg valgte at få Heerups *Politihånd og Påfugl* tatoveret. Værket viser en god del af, hvad kunst er god til og det, som jeg faldt for langt tilbage. Det kan foregå på overfladen, hvor linjer, streger og former kan være mere end nok. Men man kan også dykke ned og støde på ting, der har noget på hjertet.

US The work, *The Policeman's Hand and the Peacock* has a very special meaning for me. In fact, I have a tattoo of the work on my body. So in a way you could say it's a work that will accompany me for the rest of my life.

This linoleum print shows many of the elements that are so characteristic of Heerup's work. The use of soft shapes, always controlled by an intuitive hand that knows exactly where everything is heading, is one of them.

The shapes and figures almost border on ornamentation. Furthermore, Heerup has juxtaposed a policeman's hand and a peacock: two things that don't seem to have anything in common. His works often feature such contrasts between recognizable motifs and decorative details. You're almost forced to go along with the playful naivety of the work. You try to understand what such an off-the-wall mix is saying.

That was the main reason I chose to get a tattoo of Heerup's *The Policeman's Hand and the Peacock*. It's a great example of what art is good at and what I fell for a long time ago. It can be about the surface, where lines and shapes may be more than enough. But you can also dig deeper and encounter things that have something to say.



Henry Heerup, *Politi hånd og Påfugl*
(*The Policeman's Hand and the Peacock*), 1951,
linoleumstryk, 70,5 × 36,5 cm, Heerup Museum



Gert Mathiesen, *Power to the People (Magt til folket)*, 1995, træsnit og akryl på papir, 101 × 71 cm, privateje



Gert Mathiesen, *Vase with Animal Prints (Krukke med dyretryk)*, u. år,
akryl og linoleumstryk på papir, 112 × 76 cm, privateje





Henry Heerup, *Mozart Fantasi (Mozart Fantasy)*, 1955,
linoleumssnit, 61 × 173 cm, Heerup Museum





Gert Mathiesen, *Martha's Vineyard (Martha's Vineyard)*, 1994,
linoleumstryk, 76 × 57 cm, privateje



Gert Mathiesen, *Family II (Familien II)*, 1988, linoleumstryk,
76 × 57 cm, privateje

DK Den danske maler Gert Mathiesen er forfatter til visuelle historier. Mathiesen siger, at han ikke kan sige alt, hvad han gerne vil sige på engelsk, men han er meget veltalende på papir. Ved første øjekast kan hans billeder virke mørke og krævende, men hans stemme er følsom og oprigtig, humoristisk og dybtfølt. I sin dødsserie ønsker Mathiesen for eksempel, at vi skal være tapre og anerkende, at døden er en del af livet, at liv også er død.

Jeg tror ikke, Gert nogensinde var i tvivl om, at det var meningen, at han skulle bruge sit liv på at lave kunst. Jeg tror til gengæld, at han var (glædeligt) overrasket over at se, at hans kunst og hans palet udviklede sig, så den også omfattede blødere linjer og blidere farver. Ligesom kunstneren selv vedblev hans kunst med at være dristig og tankefuld, men den blev mindre insisterende og i højere grad en varm og gavmild invitation til at tænke grundigt over de personlige og indsigtfulde historier, han havde på hjertet.

US Danish painter Gert Mathiesen is an author of visual stories. Mathiesen says he cannot say all he wants to say in the way he wants in English, but he is very articulate on paper. At first look, his paintings may seem dark and demanding, but his voice is sensitive and sincere, humorous and heartfelt. For instance, in his death series, Mr. Mathiesen wants us to be brave, to acknowledge that death is part of life, that life is also death.

I don't think Gert ever had any doubt that he was meant to spend his life making art. I do think he was surprised (with delight) over the years by how his art and palette grew to also embrace softer lines and gentler color. Like the artist himself, his art continued to be bold and thoughtful, but became less of an insistence and more of a warm and generous invitation to consider and reconsider the personal and insightful stories he had to tell.



Gert Mathiesen in collaboration with Pamela Smilow,
Man and Bones (Mand og knogler), u. år,
linoleumstryk og collage på papir, 126 × 91 cm, privateje



Gert Mathiesen, *Boat Echo (Båd ekko)*, 2005,
træsnit og akryl på papir, 38,5 × 112 cm, privateje





Henry Heerup, *Tro, Haab og Kærlighed (Faith, Hope and Love)*, 1957, litografi på baggrund af linoleumssnit, 52 × 56 cm, Heerup Museum

DK Af en sørgemarch at være er dette billede meget lidt sørgmodigt. På typisk heerupsk facon er farverne stærke og den velafbalancerede komposition klar og letlæselig, med forenkede omrids der beskriver genstande, som snarere hører hjemme i en munter børnebog end i et billede, der skal minde folk om døden. Men dette er Heerup, som var mester i at skildre ting og mennesker legende og ligetil og samtidig fremkalde en stadig voksende række af dybere meninger, hvis vi ser nærmere efter.

Her er hans elskede cykel, stiliseret til et hjul og et symbol på livet med det allestedsnærværende hjerte ovenpå, mens en frit svævende klovnemaske ser på en siddende kat og dens killing. Den krumme hale spejler både hjulets runding og den gravsten, katten sidder på. Her kommer helt almindelige ting fra dagligdagen til live, fordi de repræsenterer dybt rodfæstede menneskelige ritualer, der markerer liv og død. Vekselvirkningen mellem bevægelse og stilstand, det overjordiske og det dagligdags, liv og død, er Heerups virkelige motiv og skaber en levende scene, som glæder både vores øjne og vores tanker, selv om det ved første øjekast handler om døden. Dette er Heerup i hans rette element.

US For a funeral procession, this image looks anything but sorrowful. In typical Heerup fashion, the colors are bright and the balanced composition clear and legible, with simplified contours describing objects more at home in a lighthearted children's storybook than an image memorializing death. But this is Heerup, who was a master at playfully presenting objects and people at face value at the same time that, if we look more closely, call forth an ever-expanding range of deeper meanings.

Here is his beloved bike, stylized into a wheel of life and symbol of fertility atop which sits the ubiquitous heart, while a disembodied jester mask looks upon a sitting black cat and its kitten. The curling tail mirrors the roundness of the wheel as well as the gravestone upon which it sits. Here mundane elements of everyday life come alive as they stand in for deep-seated human rituals marking life and death. The interplay between flux and stasis, otherworldly and mundane, and life and death is Heerup's true subject, conjuring a vibrant scene that delights our vision as well as our thoughts, even when the subject is, at first glance, about death. This is Heerup in his element.



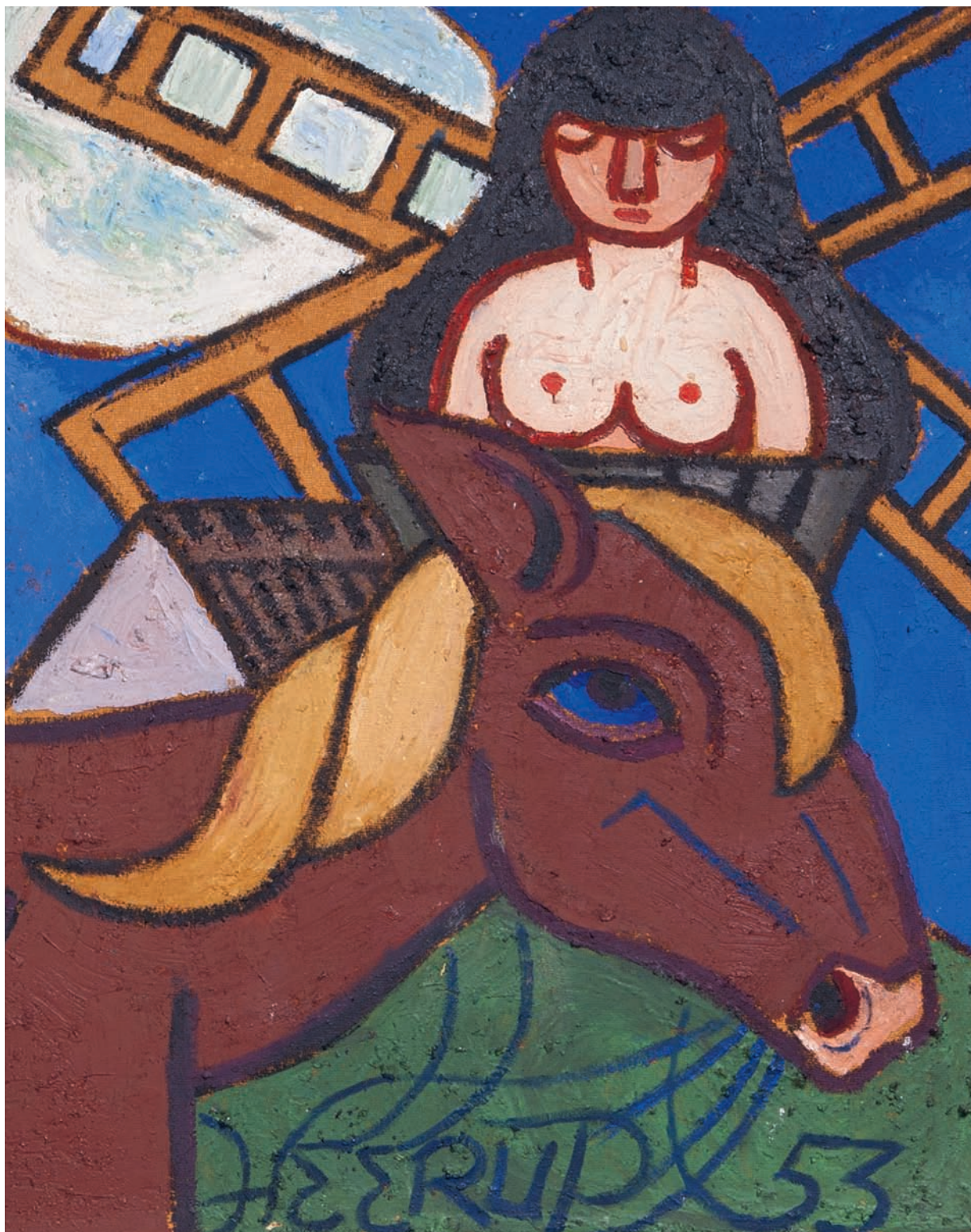
Henry Heerup, *Sørgemarch for Kat (Funeral Procession for Cat)*, 1977, olie på masonit, 146 × 146 cm, privateje



Henry Heerup, *Kat og bjørneklo (Cat and Hogweed)*, 1971,
olie på tøndelæg, 74 cm i diameter, Heerup Museum



Henry Heerup, *Uden titel (Rejse på hesteryg)*
Untitled (Journey on Horseback), 1953,
olie på masonit, 77 × 121 cm, Heerup Museum

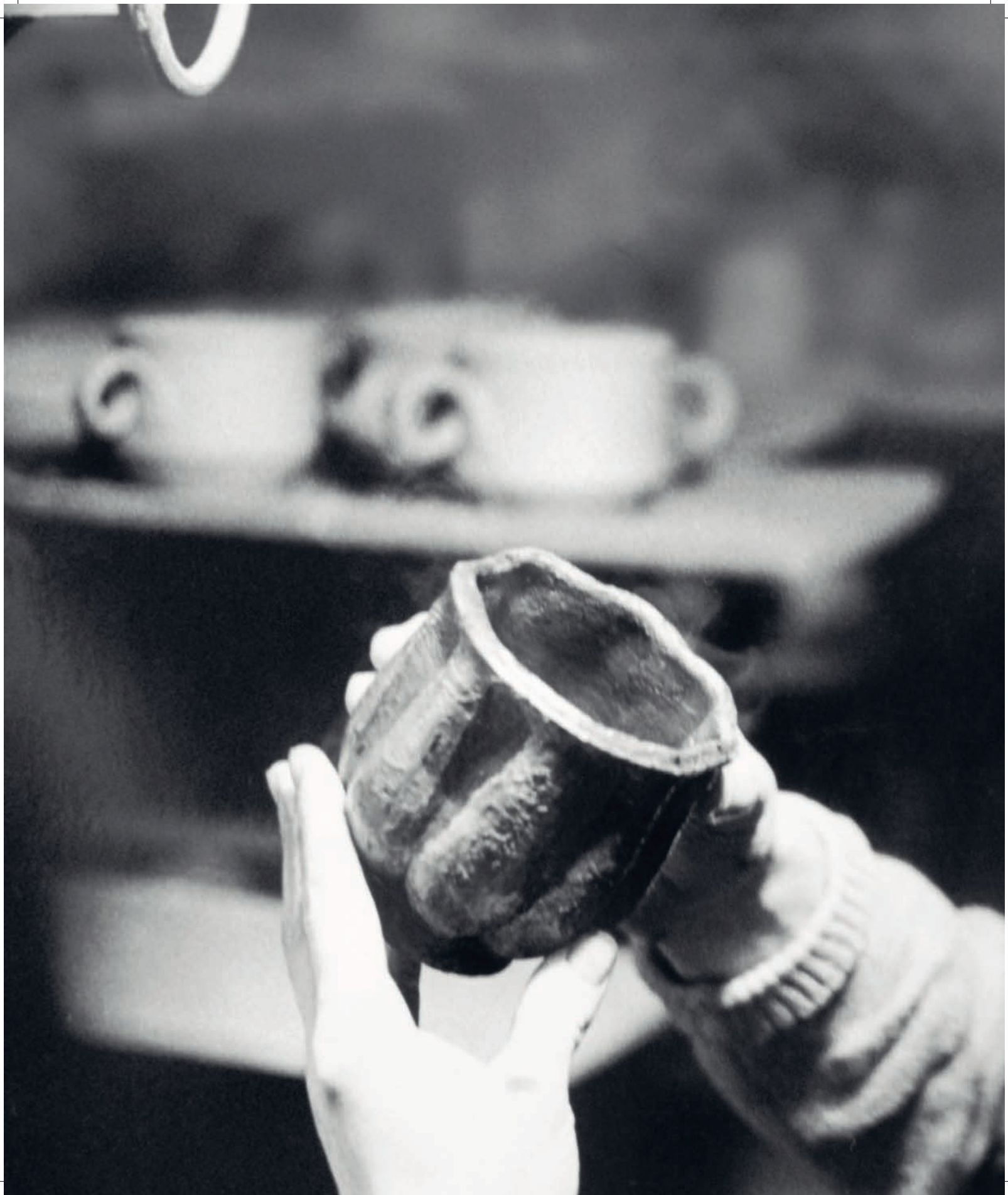




Gert Mathiesen: (ø.v.tv.) Stentøjskrukke med kvindefigurer, 1980, h. 20 cm
(ø.v.th.) Lertøjsfad, 1980, d. 33 cm
(nd.) To lertøjskrukker, 1978, h. 40 cm, privateje



Gert Mathiesen, Stentøjskrukke, 1980, h. ca. 50 cm, privateje





TIMELINE MATHIESEN

- 1951 Gert Mathiesen is raised as the youngest of three siblings living in Esbjerg on the West Coast of Denmark
- 1965-67 Apprenticeships with ceramicist Niels Hübschmann, Ole Pot Pedersen (for the Danish artist Bjørn Wiinblad) and ERNST Keramik. Meets Lisbeth Tvede-Jensen
- 1969 Studies ceramics at the Design School Kolding, Denmark
- 1971-73 Travels to Sweden, France and Italy to work with various ceramicists and study raku firing and other ceramic techniques and ceramic art history
- 1975 Jonathan Raku Mathiesen, son of Mathiesen and Tvede-Jensen, is born
- 1976-78 Sets up the ceramic company “Mathiesen & Tvede-Jensen” in an old brewery in Slagelse. Travels to Germany and France where he continues to explore different ceramic communities, including the region of Höhr-Grenzhausen, known for its salt glazing. Works on large clay vessels for “Den Permanente”, a collective design gallery in Copenhagen (1931-81)
- 1980 Gert’s artwork is included in “Kunstnernes Sommerudstilling 1980” in Tirstrup, Denmark
- 1983 Moves to Copenhagen, where he continues working in ceramics and explores printmaking, especially screenprinting
- 1986 Travels to New York to visit his older brother, Palle Mathiesen. Sets up a temporary studio on East 88th Street. Works as a production potter on Martha’s Vineyard
- 1987 Opens ceramics studio in Somers, New York. Meets New York painter Pamela Smilow and works in her studio at The Schoolhouse in Croton Falls
- 1988 Gert and Pamela move to New York and continue to work alongside each other
- 1991 Exhibits at Art Basel and in Kass Meridian Gallery at Chicago. Is selected for Honorable Mention Juried Exhibition at Southwest Texas University Gallery
- 1992 Marries Pamela Smilow. The following year, their daughter Morgan is born (1993)
- 1993 Gert works in his studio on East 64th Street and at The Schoolhouse in Croton Falls. Participates in multiple exhibitions in galleries in the US and Europe. In Denmark, he continuously exhibits in Galleri Liisberg, Hundested, Max Seidenfaden Gallery and Gallery Rasmus.
- 2008 -2012 Several major exhibitions. Included in curated SFMOMA Benefit Auction, San Francisco; Google, San Francisco; Gallery Untitled, Sedgewick, Maine; Elaine Horwitch Gallery, Scottsdale, Arizona; Espace Artum, Grimaud, France; Ann Kolb Gallery, East Hampton, New York; Vail Village Arts Gallery, Vail; Colorado Village Gallery, Scottsdale, Arizona; Chicago Art Source, Chicago, Illinois; Ombrins Art Association, Ombrins, France
- 2013 Gert dies unexpectedly of an aneurysm while visiting his sister, Hanne Mathiesen, in Copenhagen
- 2014 Exhibition with more than forty artworks at the Consulate General of Denmark and Danish Mission to the United Nations, New York (2014-18)
- 2016-18 Solo exhibitions at Museum of Danish America, Elk Horn, Iowa, and Scandinavian Heritage Foundation (Nordia House), Portland, Oregon



Gert Mathiesen, *Rust Tree of Life*, (*Rustfarvet livstræ*), 2012, akryl på lærred, 137,5 × 102 cm, privateje



Henry Heerup, *Bølge kysset* (*Wave Kiss*), 1987,
litografi, 47,3 × 46,8 cm, Heerup Museum



Henry Heerup, *Elskende par i Hjerteskov*
(*Lovers in the Forest of Hearts*), 1968,
litografi, 46 × 28 cm, Heerup Museum



Henry Heerup, *Frugtsommelighedsallegori*
(*Allegory of Conception*), 1977,
olie på lærred, 146 × 146 cm, privateje



Henry Heerup: (ø.v.tv.) Irma kaffe-dåse 1976
 (ø.th.) Irma the-dåse ca. 1965
 (nd.tv.) Figurgruppe, 1935, marmor, 23 × 19,5 cm
 (nd.th.) Morsdags Platte 1971, Royal Copenhagen



Henry Heerup, forlæg for porcelænsfigur
(ikke i produktion), u. år, privateje



TIDSLINJE HEERUP

1907	Henry Heerup bliver født og vokser op i arbejderkvarteret på Nørrebro, København	1961	Udstiller på Pittsburgh International, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, US
1927-32	Studerer på Det Kgl. Danske Kunstakademis Malerskole, København	1962	Repræsenterer sammen med Carl-Henning Pedersen Danmark på Venedig Biennalen
1933	Debuterer på Kunstnernes Efterårsudstilling. Bliver gift med Emilie Westh (1911-99)	1964	Deltager i udstillingen Salute to Denmark, Lefebvre Gallery, NY. Udstiller på Pittsburgh International, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, US
1934	Udstiller på Liniens udstilling på Charlottenborg. Sønnen Ole Heerup bliver født. Familien flytter til Vanløse	1964-65	Udstiller på Verdensudstillingen i New York og deltager i vandredstillingen Danish Abstract Art. A Danish Contribution to International Development in Art since 1933 i USA (arrangeret af the Smithsonian)
1935	Rejser til Jellingstenen og H. C. Andersens barndomshjem i Odense	1965	Udstiller på Sao Paulo Biennalen, Brasilien
1936	Udstiller på Venedig Biennalen. Datteren Nanna Heerup (gift Hertoft) bliver født	1966	Deltager i retrospektiv CoBrA udstilling på Boymans van Beuningen Museum i Rotterdam og på Louisiana, Humlebæk. Udstilling i Den Kongelige Porcelænsfabriks udsalg i København af keramiske arbejder udført på fabrikken samt malerier og skulpturer
1946	Bliver skilt fra Emilie Westh. Køber grunden på Kamstrupvej 96 i Rødovre. Den fungerer som arbejdsplads og atelier frem til hans død	1968	Udnævnes til Ridder af Dannebrog
1949	Med på CoBrA udstilling på Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam	1972	Udstiller som Danmarks repræsentant på Venedig Biennalen. Indvier skulpturhaven på Louisiana museet, Humlebæk
1950	Deltager i gruppeudstilling på Museum of Modern Art, NY	1987	80-årsdagen markeres i Galerie Gammel Strand og i Kunstforeningen i København. Hyldes med fakkeltog fra Thorvaldsens Museum til Kunstforeningen på Gammel Strand
1951	Med på CoBrA udstilling i Palais des Beaux Arts, Liège	1993	Heerup dør 85 år gammel og begravnes på Assistens Kirkegård, Nørrebro
1958	Udstiller på Pittsburgh International, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, US. Bliver gift med Marion Brock (1911-97). Bliver tildelt Eckersberg Medaljen	2000	Heerup Museum åbner
1959	Deltager i udstillingen Contemporary Danish Artists, Riverside Museum, NY		
1960	Deltager i Guggenheim udstillingen på Solomon R. Guggenheim museet, NY		



Gert Mathiesen in collaboration with Pam Smilow,
Animal Series on Mexican Bark Paper, 1990-2012,
Mixed media, 15,5 × 20 cm, privateje



Gert Mathiesen in collaboration with Pam Smilow,
Animal Series on Mexican Bark Paper, 1990-2012,
Mixed media, 15,5 × 20 cm, privateje





Gert Mathiesen, *Longer Boats: Wedding (Langbåde: bryllup)*, 2000, linoleumstryk og akryl på papir, 37,5 × 106 cm, privateje







Henry Heerup, *Bjørneklokvinde (Hogweed Woman)*, 1967,
olie på masonit, 48 × 80 cm, Heerup Museum



Gert Mathiesen, *Dæmoner* (Demons), 2010,
linoleumstryk og akryl på papir, 56 × 38 cm, privateje

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

TOVA BRANDT

Tova Brandt holds an MA in Early American Culture from the University of Delaware. She is the Albert Ravenholt Curator of Danish-American Culture at the Museum of Danish America, Iowa, where the exhibition *Art by Gert Mathiesen* was shown in 2016. Brandt has also served as curator at Vesterheim, The National Norwegian-American Museum in Decorah, Iowa.

MAIKEN TANDGAARD DERNO

Maiken Tandgaard Derno is Cultural Attaché and Head of Culture, Press and Public Diplomacy at the Consulate General of Denmark in New York and Permanent Mission of United Nations in New York City. She holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Copenhagen.

JENS-PETER BRASK

With 25 years of experience as an art collector and a background in graffiti and street-art, Jens-Peter Brask has an extensive knowledge of contemporary art. He publishes art books, works as an art advisor and curator and in recent years, has curated shows at the Heerup Museum, Galleri Tom Christoffersen and KUNSTEN Museum of Modern Art, Aalborg. Learn more at his website www.jenspeterbrask.com

KATIE KOROTZER

Katie Korotzer is a writer and artist based in the San Francisco Bay Area. Katie's regular column titled "In the Artist's Studio" can be read in *The Piedmont Exedra*. Visit Katie's website at www.katiekorotzer.net to learn more about her artwork.

PAMELA SMILOW

Pamela Smilow is a contemporary painter, currently living in New York City. She was married to Gert Mathiesen for over 25 years and often collaborated with him on art in addition to doing her own painting. Visit Pamela's website at www.pamelasmilow.com to learn more about Gert Mathiesen's life and art.

ANNI LAVE NIELSEN

Anni Lave Nielsen holds a Master of Arts in Visual Culture from the University of Copenhagen. Since 2007, she has served as director of the Heerup Museum; a one-man museum in Rødovre, Denmark, housing a unique collection of paintings, graphics, drawings and sculptures by Henry Heerup. She is the author of the books: *Power of the Motif* and *The Hardboiled Eggs of Nature – The Stone Art by Henry Heerup* and was editor of the anthology *Heerup and the Avant-Garde*.

KERRY GREAVES

Kerry Greaves, PhD, is a Novo Nordisk Foundation Mads Øvlisen Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Art History at the University of Copenhagen and External Lecturer in Art History at the Danish Institute for Study Abroad. She was the curator of *War Horses: Helhesten and the Danish Avant-Garde During World War II*, organized by the NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and the Carl-Henning Pedersen & Else Alfelts Museum, Herning, DK.

MERRILL GRINNELL

Merrill Grinnell is an art consultant from Connecticut, promoting both established and emerging artists. She is a writer whose articles about art and artists have appeared in numerous magazines worldwide. She is also a photographer in her own right whose black and white film images have been extensively exhibited and published.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It has been a long journey since Gert's sudden death in 2013 and there are a lot of people I would like to thank for their help in making this exhibition a reality and my dream come true: first of all, to Annette and Christian Liisberg of Gallery Liisberg for welcoming us into their gallery every year since 2006 and for initially introducing me to the Heerup Museum. To Anni Lave Nielsen, director of the Heerup Museum, who took a chance and believed in this project from day one; to my able assistant, Poliana Espirito Santo, for helping me every step of the way and for keeping me organized and focused; Maiken Tandgaard Derno, Cultural Attaché at the Consulate General of Denmark in New York, for hosting Gert's beautiful paintings for over 5 years and for connecting me to the Scandinavian-American community in the United States. To Hanne Mathiesen, Gert's older sister, for all your hard work on behalf of this show and all your love and support; to Lisbeth Tvede for her memories and archives, and of course to Morgan and Jonathan, the light of my life...

– Pam Smilow

I would like to thank Pamela Smilow, who has contributed to the catalogue and exhibition with great commitment, help and commendable human kindness and understanding. It has been my great wish for a long time now to show Heerup in an international context and I hope that this is just the first step on an exciting journey across the Atlantic. Many, many thanks to all the writers for their important and excellent contributions towards an understanding of Heerup and Mathiesen, which will be read in both Denmark and the United States. Congratulations to Rødovre Municipality for taking yet another exciting exhibition project under its wings with faith in art and culture's ability to create significant experiences for a great many people. The Augustinus Foundation has contributed with the necessary and vital financial support. THANK YOU.

– Anni Lave Nielsen

COLOPHON

DK-US Heerup & Mathiesen

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Cover front:

Gert Mathiesen, *Black Light Series:*

Woman, (Sort lys-serie: Kvinde), n. d.,

linocut, 91,4 × 63,5 cm,

Private collection (see also pp. 72-73).

Cover Back:

Henry Heerup, *Politihånd og Påfugl*

(*The Policeman's Hand and the Peacock*),

1951, linocut, 70,5 × 36,5 cm,

Heerup Museum.

Photo:

Thanks to photographer Michael Dam for his photos of artworks by Henry Heerup and to Pamela Smilow for photos of the artworks by Gert Mathiesen. Portraits of Gert are by Pamela Smilow (pp. 3, 19, 45, 51, 98, 119). Photos of Heerup are by Allan Daugaard Hansen (p. 4), Jacob Maarbjerg/Ritzau Scanpix (pp. 24-25), Allan Moe/Ritzau Scanpix (pp. 110-111), Paul Petersen/Ritzau Scanpix (p. 118).

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