

We are travellers – throughout life – for the whole of our lives!

Reflections on visual artist, Vibeke Rønsbo's practice with a particular focus on the range of REMIND, BAG-AGE, and SKUFFESAGER (items from the drawer)

By Trine Rytter Andersen

Existential questions concerning our attachment to places, objects and each other are looked into by Vibeke Nørgaard Rønsbo via a diverse artistic language of form, intending to expose the complex birth of identity and its integration in materialistic culture and the awareness shared by human nature. Vibeke Nørgaard Rønsbo's art is founded on humanist values that point at the common responsibility we all bear for our shared future on this planet.

Today, we live in a fully digitalized world, in which, as the most natural thing, we use a computer when writing. Vibeke Nørgaard Rønsbo raises the question as to whether this adaption of digital media is connected to a loss of other values integrated in long-established technology. What does it actually mean to write by hand? Is the specific coordination between brain and hand supposed to be essential for our development as human beings? Does writing by hand have a significance for our way of reflecting upon ourselves and, in that way, our way of understanding the world? Do we lose something very important when we no longer write by hand? What is the mere process of writing about, and what does it mean for the individual not to be equipped with a fully developed personal writing style?

All these questions have been brought into focus and scrutinized in the large-scale art project, *REMIND*, in which Vibeke Nørgaard Rønsbo has been engaged since 2012. *REMIND* has materialized as a writing workshop and as an exchanging of letters in which handwriting is used. In this process, the importance of handwriting is made specific and put up for discussion, firstly among the participants and the artist herself, and later by the audience.

Particularly, the main object: *the gigantic "Flaskehals" (bottle message)*, has contributed to attracting attention to the project and to creating a dialogue between the artist and her audience. The artist succeeded in having this work of art funded and developed prior to the first official exposition that took place in *Aarhusbugten (The Bay of Aarhus)* in connection with *Sculpture by the Sea 2013*

REMIND points at time as being a crucial factor for our mere presence in the world: We need time to experience the world to reflect on ourselves in relation to this ; and the actual writing by hand insists on time and presence. So, the question is whether or not we will lose time and presence when converting to the keyboard? And whether or not the fine motor skills involved in writing by hand have a specific significance for our culture and identity? In other words, will it be a loss for future generations of adults that their writing

style is just as helpless and impersonal as that of 7-year-olds? Does this fact change our self-perception? Due to digitalization, we'll lose our familiarity with our hand-writing, and therefore, we can think about the consequences it might have, seen from a historical perspective; that future generation historians will not be able to read the hand-written sources of the past?

Vibeke Nørgaard Rønsbo has a preference for the objects and a special understanding of their symbolic value and thought-provoking nature. Here, the bottle message from *REMINDE* has a very central role, whereas her previous sculptural efforts point at the trunk and suit case as symbols of all the things we are dragging about with us for better or for worse. As an art exhibitor for the first time, at *Kunstnernes Påskeudstilling* (The Artists' Easter Exhibition) in 2011, she presented casts of old dented trunks and suitcases, which, in the meeting with the audience, appeared as being left behind in the exhibition room. By means of the the colour of alarm, red, and by appropriating the voice from DSB (The Danish Rail) kindly reminding the travellers to remember their luggage, a state of emergency is created. The audience is reminded of the reality of the daily round, and the threat of terror, which influences our conduct and line of thought.

In another project titled BAG-AGE (Luggage), we see groups of bags, suitcases and trunks: Sculptures cast in concrete appearing worn, grey and endlessly heavy and depressing, as if they were grieving for an untimely and fatal separation from their rightful owners. These scenarios call attention to a historical memory and reminds us of scenes from Holocaust as well as of today's flood of refugees on their ways to Europe. In this way, the past and the present are linked together, and questions concerning the fundamental human decency of our culture are brought up in an ominous way. Likewise, when trunks are found installed in public spaces: here they are lying about, partly buried as if on their ways to the surface with messages from the past – or the other way round, on their ways down to the earth to seal up the memory of a a tragic misanthropic present. The dialectics between memory and repression – conscious and unconscious – is put to the extreme by the heavy symbolic value of the trunks. Similarly, when appearing as chalk-white casts in paper, they pass on an alarming message by virtue of their sizable number, eerie beauty and wafer-thin frailty indicating lived life, expectations and dreams. Similarly, they appear completely lifeless, hollow, and alarmingly close to dust and eternal oblivion.

The consciousness of death runs as a present undercurrent in Vibeke Nørgaard Rønsbo's art, which seemingly wants to hold out a hand to touch the loss in order to make us aware of it. This tendency is also present in a number of works exposed at the exhibition *SKUFFESAGER* (Things from the drawer) at Odder Museum (*the Museum of Odder*) 2016. In spite of difference of form, the works all circle about the way the objects we collect, because they represent a sentimental value, are loaded with significance and memory, often related to people and occurrences from our past. In the artistic presentation and via the organization of the works in the art room, the awakening nature of the objects is made clear, and we realize how identity is formed through a dialogue with the objects we are surrounded by; a dialogue that is often wordless and unconscious. Of particular significance are the objects related to our close, deceased relatives, and to those pointing at areas of our lives that have our attention and love such as our children, our fiancés, special places, and Nature

Vibeke Nørgaard Rønsbo is closely bonded to her fellow human beings and to Nature. Her art seems to communicate the idea that we keep developing a fundamental understanding of how important such a bonding is for our mere existence and for our integrity as human beings as well as fellow human beings.

Her style of form is sometimes abstract, poetic and transient, at other times naturalistic, concrete and heavily symbolic. In this way, a field of tension between the conscious and the unconscious is created, a field in which the many aesthetic nuances of the objects are central as an investment, in terms of encouraging emotional polarity – rather than polarization in the spectator.

The artist uses the objects as catalysts for the spectator's thoughts and feelings that stimulate our self-perception and make us conscious of our relation to - and dependence of other people. In this way, Vibeke Nørgaard Rønsbo's art draws upon the heritage of the classic humanist tradition in order to, respectfully, insist on the idea that we, as a race, is only capable of surviving as long as we, in a joint effort, are ready to keep ourselves and each other in a sort of continuous and meaningful history based on roots in the past and shared aspirations that reach out for the future.

We are all travellers throughout life – for the whole of our lives! Vibeke Nørgaard Rønsbo shows us that identity is created through a complex interaction between the outside world, and that it materialises transversely to the past, the present and the future – and that, as a consequent, we are all nomades in a mental or a physical sense of the word - we are asylum seekers and refugees in our lives – AND we are attached to numerous finely woven strings relating us to each other for better and for worse, and holding us responsible for developing and refining our human decency in a constantly changeable world.