

Opening Speech for Claydies, March 5, 2020

Dear Tine and Karen,
Dear Claydies,

You asked if I would give an opening speech, adding that: *It's perfectly fine if you don't feel like saying anything.* But I do. Because I think it's wonderful that we have Claydies!

Seven years ago, you presented a large-scale exhibition here at Officinet titled "*This Is Not A Joke.*" I acquired two pieces from that exhibition. This ceramic flower, which can also spray water. And this whoopee cushion, which, unfortunately, no longer makes sounds. Luckily, you still do, and once again in an unmistakably "Claydies-esque" way. The current exhibition, "*#Claydiesselfies,*" marks your 20th anniversary as the duo Claydies, and I admire your persistent desire and ability to: **stage scenes, present works, and challenge norms.**

With idea-based and conceptual craft, you have been trailblazers in renewing Danish craft and design. If you google "conceptual craft" (in Denmark, written in Danish), you appear at the very top. When I say you've helped renew the field, it's because craft, 20 years ago, struggled to stand as an independent art form in a modern world. But through uncompromising, conceptual craft, you created new forms of expression, revealed untapped potential, and contributed to bringing craft into the new millennium as a confident, re-established art form. You helped open the eyes of a new generation, showing how craft could be used both actively and performatively.

With your "hairstyle bowls," you danced into the new millennium, both here in Denmark and internationally. Naked and blindfolded, you sculpted complete porcelain coffee sets. Your works were conceptual and anything but "*True Feelings.*" I believe this has benefited the world of craft far more than any single hairstyle bowl or cream jug could explain. Individually and together, you've received artistic recognition and enjoyed popular—perhaps even commercial—successes, without ever compromising or catering to good taste. You are too boundary-pushing and unconventional for that. And of course, that's not without its challenges!

Now, it's been seven years since you last exhibited here. Since I mentioned the idea of "dividing waters," it brings to mind the Old Testament story of Pharaoh's dream about seven fat cows rising from the Nile, followed by seven lean cows, which devour the fat ones. Pharaoh turns to Joseph, who interprets the dream as a sign that seven prosperous years will be followed by seven lean ones, advising to save during the good years.

This might sound overly Old Testament-like and practical for the utterly un-practical actions of Claydies—so forgive me—but I imagine that you, too, through your 20 years of collaboration, have experienced both prosperous and lean times. So please take my little tangent as a great compliment and expression of admiration for how remarkably you've managed to "keep the ship afloat," staying true to one another and your shared vision.

A little over a year ago, when Designmuseum Denmark inaugurated its new plaza next door, you were among several significant contemporary craft artists and designers (Astrid Krogh, Jens Martin

Skibsted, Kasper Kjeldgaard, and Margrethe Odgaard) invited to exhibit in one of the new large outdoor display cases, welcoming visitors to the museum. You chose to reinterpret selected classic ceramic pieces from the museum's collection, enlarging and accentuating them, displaying them as a large still life on a violet cloth. This demonstrated that your conceptual and idea-based approach is neither fleeting nor superficial, but rather imbued with permanence and independent qualities. It was both a subdued and captivating contribution to the museum's new entrance.

And now, we are here at the opening of yet another Claydies endeavor: *"#Claydiesselfies."* In this exhibition, you address your ceramic objects in relation to selfie culture, Instagram, and social media. If there's one thing I'm not qualified to pontificate about, it's that. But just a little—and I'll come back to it.

As an old ceramicist, I am, first and foremost, thrilled to see just how much clay and ceramics can be used for and transformed into. Whether it's the deep-blue pleated dress vase, the "knitted" sweater vase, the masculine tank top, or the equally masculine teapots, it's all masterfully crafted. Almost virtuosic in craftsmanship. However, it's important to remember and understand that the idea and the concept always come first. This is something you are acutely aware of, and in your artistic work and installations, the idea and concept always take center stage. On this, you do not compromise. That's why you are Denmark's most significant and consistently conceptual ceramicists.

I believe many selfies will be taken and hope they will be posted and receive lots of likes. But already now, in my own simple way, I want to reassure and credit you by saying this: You were here before selfie sticks and Instagram. You've always been aware of presenting yourselves, staging yourselves, and investing yourselves—not to be confused with narcissism or self-promotion, but as necessary acts to express the most urgent and authentic ideas you could offer to us. I believe in that, and I gratefully accept it.

Dear Tine and Karen,
Dear Danish Craft Artists and Designers,
Esteemed audience,

It is wonderful that we have Claydies!